This article covers the organisation of full-time compulsory secondary education, which provides education to students aged 11 to 16. It includes Key Stage 3 (11–14 years) and Key Stage 4 (14 –16 years).

Key Stage 3 is categorised as ISCED Level 2. Key Stage 4 is categorised as ISCED Level 3. Achievement at Key Stage 4 is categorised as ISCED Level 3 if five or more higher grade GCSEs are achieved.

The main focus is on general education. There is no separate vocational track, although students may take vocational / technical (applied) courses in Key Stage 4.

**Types of institutions**

Publicly funded secondary schools in England have many common features.

All are subject to the same accountability regime:

- inspection by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted)
- publication of performance indicators
- floor standards and the coasting school standard which may trigger external intervention if not met.

All are subject to the same regulation in key areas including:

- school admissions
- special educational needs.

All must provide:

- a balanced and broadly based curriculum which includes English, mathematics and science
- religious education and a daily act of collective worship
• impartial careers guidance, beginning in Year 8 (pupils aged 1 to 13)

• a programme leading to national, predominately the single subject General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications taken at age 16.

As well as these common features, there are significant differences between schools in terms of their legal framework and governance, and also with regard to characteristics such as religious character and admissions policies. These differences are set out in the following sections.

**Legal categories of school**

In terms of the legal framework, publicly funded schools in England (also referred to as ‘state schools’) fall into two categories.

**Maintained schools**

Maintained schools [11] are funded via the local authority [12] using grants from central government. Maintained schools are subdivided into:

- community schools [13]

- foundation schools [14] (including trust schools)

- voluntary schools (voluntary aided [15] and voluntary controlled [16]).

**Academies**

Academies [17] are attended by around two-thirds of secondary pupils (source: *Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics: January 2017* [18]), are independent of the local authority and have direct funding agreements with the Secretary of State [19]. Academies include:

- sponsored academies [20]

- converter academies [21]

- free schools [22]

- university technical colleges (UTCs) [23]

- studio schools [24].

For more information on these categories, see the article ‘Administration at Local and/or Institutional Level [25]’.

Beyond these two legal categories, a number of schools also have additional particular characteristics, as outlined below.
Schools with special characteristics

Faith schools

In January 2017, roughly a fifth of secondary schools in England were faith schools [26], which are designated as having a religious character. Most faith schools are designated as Roman Catholic or Church of England, but there is also a small number of Jewish, Muslim and Sikh schools and schools of other faiths (source: Table 2c in Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics: January 2017 [18]). Faith schools may teach their designated religion as part of the curriculum and may give priority in admissions to pupils of their faith where the school is oversubscribed, providing this does not conflict with other legislation. Religion may also be taken into account when employing staff.

Depending on the legal status of the school, the buildings may be owned by the religious organisation.

Schools that select by ability

The great majority of publicly funded secondary schools admit all students regardless of ability and, since 1998, the establishment of new schools with selective arrangements has been banned. However, schools which already had selective arrangements in place prior to 1997/8 are permitted to select pupils on the basis of high academic ability.

Grammar schools [27] select all or almost all pupils on the basis of academic ability. In January 2017, there were 163 grammar schools attended by around 5% of all secondary school pupils (source: Table 7c in Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics: January 2017 [18]). Grammar schools are not evenly distributed across the country. For example, the south east has the highest proportion of secondary pupils attending grammar schools, while there are no grammar schools in the north east. Further information is available in Grammar School Statistics [28] (House of Commons Library briefing, March 2017). See the subheading ‘Admission requirements and choice of school’ below for further information on grammar schools.

Some secondary schools may also select up to 10% of students based on aptitude in a particular subject. These schools must have had their selective arrangements in place in 2007/08 and must have used these arrangements for every subsequent year since. For further information, see the subheading ‘Selection by ability’ below.

In 2018, the Government launched the Selective Schools Expansion Fund (SSEF) [29] – capital funding to support the creation of additional school places in fully selective or partially selective schools. The fund is available for the 2018/19 school year.

Schools offering technical / employment specialisms

University technical colleges (UTCs) are technical schools for 14- to 19-year-olds. They are sponsored by a local university and employers and offer full-time courses. Each UTC has one or two technical specialisms focused on the needs of modern business, such as engineering, manufacturing, construction or bio-medical sciences. Students spend around 60% of their time on core academic subjects, and the rest learning specific technical skills. Many UTCs run longer term times and operate business hours to help prepare students for the world of work. In January 2017, there were 48 UTCs open across all areas of England (source: University Technical Colleges [30], House of Commons Library briefing, March 2017).

Studio schools cater for 14- to 19-year-old students of all abilities and follow a curriculum designed to give students employability skills, qualifications and work experience. They are open year-round with
a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. working day. In January 2017, there were 36 studio schools in England (note: this number only includes those studio schools which did not form part of other schools) (source: Table 2b in *Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics: January 2017* [31]).

**Geographical accessibility**

**Securing sufficient school places**

The Government’s 2017 *national projections* [32] for pupil numbers indicate that the secondary school population rose to 2.8 million in 2017 as the increased births from 2002 reach secondary school age. The secondary school population is projected to continue increasing before stabilising at 3.33 million by 2025.

Local authorities (LAs) [12] must respond to population growth and fluctuations in their local area in accordance with their statutory responsibility, under the *Education Act 1996* [33], for ensuring sufficient school places. For information on the school organisation strategies adopted by LAs, see the subheading ‘Geographical accessibility’ [34] in the article on the ‘Organisation of Primary Education’.

Local authorities are also responsible for organising education in an alternative provision [35] setting for pupils who have been excluded, are ill, or, for any other reason, are not able to attend mainstream education. Further information is available in the article on ‘Support Measures for Learners in Early Childhood and School Education’ [36].

**Home-school travel**

The *Statistical Digest of Rural England April 2018* [37] (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, DEFRA) [38] states that, in rural areas, the average minimum travel time to secondary schools accessible by public transport or walking is 29.5 (page 102). In contrast, the average minimum travel time to secondary schools accessible by car is 13.2 minutes. By comparison, in urban areas, the numbers are 15.2 and 9.3 respectively.

Local authorities have duties in respect of home to school travel arrangements under the *Education Act 1996* [39], as amended by the *Education and Inspections Act 2006* [40], and as set out in statutory guidance [41]. These include the duty to promote sustainable travel and transport, and to provide free transport for eligible children, who include:

- all pupils of compulsory school age aged under 8 if their nearest suitable school is beyond 2 miles (3.21km) and over 8 if their nearest suitable school is beyond 3 miles (4.8km)
- all children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school because of their mobility problems or because of associated health and safety issues related to their or disability
- all children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to the nearest suitable school because the nature of the route is deemed unsafe to walk
- pupils who are entitled to, or whose parents are in receipt of financial support in the form of the maximum amount of Working Tax Credit, if the school is: the nearest suitable school and is beyond two miles (if aged between 8-11); between 2 and 6 miles (if aged 11-16 and there are not 3 or more suitable nearer schools); between 2 and 15 miles and is the nearest school
preferred on the grounds of religion or belief (aged 11-16).

Local authorities also have discretionary powers to provide transport for children who do not meet the eligibility criteria.

**Admission requirements and choice of school**

Normally children transfer to secondary school at age 11.

**Responsibilities**

The admission authority is the body that determines the admissions policy for a particular school. Depending on the legal category of school, the admission authority may be the:

- school governing body [42]
- academy trust [43]
- local authority (LA) [12].

All admission authorities must comply with the School Admissions Code [44], statutory guidance made under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 [45] with the aim of ensuring that school places are allocated and offered in an open and fair way. They must ensure that their annual admission arrangements are clear and include the criteria which will be applied in the event of oversubscription.

Admissions are coordinated on an area basis by the LA. Parents have a statutory right to express an order of preference for at least three schools, including schools outside of the LA area where their child lives. All preferences are collated and parents subsequently receive an offer from the LA at the highest preference school at which a place is available. If a school is undersubscribed, all children who apply must be offered a place. All offers of secondary school places are made on ‘national offer day’ which is 1 March or the next working day.

**Oversubscription criteria**

Pupils with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan [46] (or a statement of special educational needs [47]) which names a particular school must be offered a place in that school.

Highest priority in oversubscription criteria must be given to looked after children [48] and previously looked after children.

Thereafter, oversubscription criteria are determined by the admission authority in accordance with the School Admissions Code [44]. The criteria used must be reasonable, clear, objective and procedurally fair and must comply with the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 [45], the Human Rights Act 1998 [49] and the Equality Act 2010 [50]. It is permissible under the Code for priority to be given to:

- children with siblings attending the school
- children who live closest to the school
• children attending ‘feeder’ primary schools

• children of staff employed at the school for more than two years

• children of staff who meet a skills shortage

• disadvantaged children who are eligible for the Pupil Premium [51].

A faith school [26] may give preference in its admission arrangements to members of a particular faith or denomination where the school is oversubscribed, providing this does not conflict with other legislation. Faith schools are encouraged to have admission arrangements which are inclusive of other faiths and reflect the general population of the local area. Academies [17] and free schools [22] with a religious character, where oversubscribed, are required to admit, as a minimum, 50% of their pupils without reference to faith. In May 2018, the Government announced the provision of funding for local authorities to create voluntary-aided [15] faith schools, which would be permitted to select all of their pupils on the grounds of faith.

Selection by ability

There is a general restriction on selection by ability and most publicly funded secondary schools admit pupils regardless of ability.

Grammar schools [27], however, select all or almost all pupils on the basis of their academic ability and generally operate their own entrance examinations. Only grammar schools which already had selective arrangements in place prior to the 1997/98 school year, and have used them every year since, are permitted to select pupils on the basis of high academic ability.

There are also some secondary schools which select up to 10% of pupils on the basis of ability or aptitude in a specialist subject. These schools must have had their selective arrangements in place since 2007/08 and must have used them every year since. The permitted subjects / specialisms are:

- PE / sports
- performing arts
- visual art
- modern foreign languages
- design and technology, and information technology.

Pupil ability banding is also a permitted form of selection used by some admission authorities to ensure that the intake for a school includes a proportionate spread of children of different abilities. Banding can be used to produce an intake that is representative of the full range of ability of applicants for the school; the range of ability of children in the local area; or the national ability range.

Tests for all forms of selection are determined by the admission authority but must be clear and objective, and give an accurate reflection of the child’s ability or aptitude, irrespective of sex, race, or
disability.

For summaries of recent policy developments on grammar schools, see:

- House of Commons Library briefing [52] on grammar school statistics (March 2017)
- House of Commons Library briefing [53] on recent policy developments on grammar schools (May 2018).

**Right of appeal**

Parents have a legal right of appeal if a place is not offered at the school of their choice. Statutory guidance is given in the *School Admission Appeals Code* [54].

**Reforms**

In March 2018, the Government launched a consultation on its *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper: Building stronger, more united communities* [55]. The strategy outlines the Government’s vision and proposed actions for building strong integrated communities. It includes changes which would affect the school admissions process, including:

- working with school admission authorities [56] to support increased diversity in schools’ intake, promote integration, and develop a range of different model admissions arrangements in ‘Integration Areas’ (local authority [12] areas selected as part of a new trial approach)

- increasing expectations on free schools [22] with regard to integration, and ensuring that the potential impact on the intake of neighbouring schools is thoroughly assessed before a new free school is approved.

The consultation will run until June 2018.

**Age levels and grouping of pupils/students**

A year group consists of all pupils whose birthdays fall within the same academic year, that is, between 1 September and 31 August.

Secondary schools cater for year groups and key stages as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>ISCED [2] Level</th>
<th>Key stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11-14 years</td>
<td>ISCED 2</td>
<td>3 Years 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-16 years</td>
<td>ISCED 3</td>
<td>4 Years 10 and 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Many secondary schools also have sixth forms which cater for 16- to 18/19-year-olds.

Classes are normally taught by a specialist teacher for each subject.

Teaching in secondary schools is typically organised on a mixed ability basis for some subjects. Grouping pupils by attainment is also common practice for some subjects, on the assumption that it is
possible to teach more effectively or more efficiently with a narrower range of attainment.

There are no official recommendations on maximum or minimum numbers of pupils in a class or group in lower secondary education.

**Organisation of the school year**

The organisation of the school year in secondary education is broadly the same as for primary education. See the subheading ‘Organisation of the school year’ [57] in the article on the ‘Organisation of Primary Education’.

**Organisation of the school day and week**

**Responsibilities**

The body responsible for making decisions on the organisation of the school day and week depends on the legal category of school:

- **Maintained schools** [11] are required to be open for a minimum of 380 half-day sessions each year, and for each school day to consist of two sessions divided by a break, in accordance with the Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999 [58], as amended. Within this framework, the school governing body [42] determines the length of the school day, including session times and breaks, taking into account the recommendation of the headteacher.

- **academy trust** [43] that determines the length of the school day, including session times and breaks, taking into account the recommendation of the headteacher.

  Secretary of State.

For further information, see the House of Commons Library briefing [59] on the school day and year (March 2016).

**Extended school day**

University technical colleges (UTCs) [23] typically have longer term times than secondary schools and operate business hours to help prepare students for the world of work. Similarly, studio schools [24] are open year-round with a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. working day.

Other schools can also extend the length of the school day to provide additional teaching time or time for extra-curricular activities. In the context of its stated intention to build character and resilience among students, In February 2017, the Government announced [60] that primary and secondary schools and sixth-form colleges [61] would receive funding in 2018 and 2019 to pay for facilities to support physical education, after-school activities and healthy eating.

Article last reviewed May 2018.
This question is for testing whether or not you are a human visitor and to prevent automated spam submissions.

What code is in the image? *
Enter the characters shown in the image.

Source URL:
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-general-lower-secondary-education-38_en

Links
[1] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#KeyStage
[8] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#FloorStandard
[12] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#LocalAuthority(LA)
[16] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#VoluntaryControlledSchool
[17] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#Academy
[19] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#SecretaryOfState
[21] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#ConverterAcademy
[22] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#FreeSchool
[23] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#UniversityTechnicalCollege(UTC)
[26] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#FaithSchool
[27] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-74_en#GrammarSchool
[28] https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN01398