



How Long Do Children Have to Stay in School?

AN INFORMATION SHEET BY THE TRAVELLER MOVEMENT

NURSERY & PRE SCHOOL (AGE 3 MONTHS-4 YEARS)

There is no requirement for any child to attend a nursery school or pre-school. However, many parents find that nursery allows them to practice being away from their children before they go into reception class. Most importantly, attending nursery school helps your child become more sociable with other children and may help them settle in more easily when they begin primary school.

PRIMARY (AGE 4-11)

All children in the UK must be in education by their 5th birthday. Children usually start school in the September when they are 4 years old. This ensures that they begin the year with the rest of their class and are in school well before their 5th birthday.

SECONDARY (AGE 11-16)

All children in the UK must stay in education until the June of the year they turn 16. At the end of secondary school, all children will be offered the opportunity to take exams to demonstrate how much they have learned. For the most part, this is done in the form of GCSEs, but it can also be done using other qualifications or even a mixture of GCSEs and other qualifications.

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS & SPECIAL PROVISION

It's not always possible for children to keep up with the demands of mainstream school, so occasionally it may be necessary for your child to spend some time at a school that can better meet their needs and abilities. For more information, please visit [Learn More: Exclusions](#), or [Learn More: Special Education](#). When your child is aged between 5 and 16 years, they must still be in education, which includes alternative schools.

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COLLEGE & SIXTH FORM (AGE 16-18+)

After the age of 16, the rules about children in education change depending on where you live in the UK.

- In England: Children between the ages of 16 and 18 must either stay in full-time education (e.g., attend college), start an apprenticeship or traineeship, or spend 20 hours per week or more volunteering while in part-time education or training.
- In Wales: Children may leave education on the last day of June, provided they have turned 16 by this date.
- In Scotland: If a child turns 16 between 1st March and 30th September, they may leave education after 31st May of the same year.
- In Northern Ireland: Children who turn 16 during the school year (1st September to 31st July) may leave education after 30th June of the same year

UNIVERSITY (AGE 18+)

There is no legal requirement for anyone over the age of 18 to remain in education. However, individuals wishing to enter certain professions must attend university. For example, if your child wishes to become a doctor, nurse, teacher, or pursue many other professions, they must first attend university to access these careers.