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Schools & family

UK schools, your children's passports and citizenship, and help with childcare.

Build your free, personal move plan at **yourlandfall.com/plan**: five questions, and only the steps that apply to you.

General information, not personal tax, financial, legal or immigration advice.

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How do UK schools work for American families?

THE SHORT ANSWER

State schools are free, and places are allocated by your local council, mainly by where you live. Children are grouped by age into "years", which run from September, and start school younger than in the US. Private schools charge fees. Scotland's system is different again.

This guide covers England in most detail. Scotland's system is different. See schools in Scotland.

Ages and year groups

The school year runs from **September to July**, and children are grouped by their age on **September 1**.

UK (England)	Age during the year	Rough US equivalent
Reception	4–5	Pre-K / kindergarten
Years 1–6 (primary)	5–11	Kindergarten to 5th grade
Years 7–11 (secondary)	11–16	6th to 10th grade
Years 12–13 (sixth form)	16–18	11th and 12th grade

Children usually start **Reception** in the September after they turn four, a year earlier than many US kindergartens.

Exams

- **GCSEs** at the end of Year 11 (age 16), usually in 8–10 subjects.
- **A levels** in Years 12–13, usually in three subjects, which UK universities use for admission. Some schools offer the **International Baccalaureate** instead.

Getting a place

- **State schools are free.** Apply through your **local council**.
- Popular schools use criteria such as **distance from home**, siblings and sometimes faith. Where you live matters a great deal.

- There are fixed dates for September entry, but you can apply **“in year”** when you arrive. Councils usually want a UK address first.
- Check a school’s **Ofsted** inspection report and visit if you can.
- Some areas have **grammar schools**, selective state schools with an entrance test at age 10–11.

Private schools

Independent schools charge fees, which now include **VAT**. Confusingly, some of the oldest are called “public schools”. Many have their own entrance tests and waiting lists.

Thinking about US college?

UK qualifications are accepted by US colleges, but plan early: check what testing your target colleges want, keep track of extracurriculars, and look at schools with experience of US applications.

University fees

Whether your child pays “home” or international fees at a UK university depends on their **immigration status and residence history**, not just living here. Check this well before applications.

What to do next

Build your move plan and choose “A family with children” to add school steps.

How do citizenship and passports work for our children?

THE SHORT ANSWER

A child born in the UK to a US citizen parent can usually become a US citizen too, which you record through a Consular Report of Birth Abroad. Being born in the UK doesn't automatically make a child British unless a parent is British or settled at the time of birth, but children can often register as British later.

This is general information, not immigration advice. Citizenship depends on your family's exact circumstances.

US citizenship for a child born in the UK

A child born abroad to a **US citizen parent** is usually a US citizen at birth, as long as the parent meets **US physical presence or residence requirements** before the birth. These differ depending on whether one or both parents are US citizens.

To record it:

1. Apply for a **Consular Report of Birth Abroad (CRBA)** through the US Embassy in London. It's proof of US citizenship.
2. Apply for the child's **US passport**, usually at the same appointment.
3. Apply for a **Social Security number**. You'll need it to claim the US child tax credit.

For a passport for a child under 16, **both parents** usually need to give consent.

British citizenship for a child born in the UK

Being born in the UK doesn't automatically make a child British. A child born here **is British if, at the time of birth, a parent is**:

- a British citizen, or
- **settled** in the UK, for example with indefinite leave to remain.

If not, the child can often **register as British later**, for example once a parent becomes settled, or after living in the UK for their first ten years.

Children who move here with you

Children who aren't British usually come as **dependants** on a parent's visa. They may later be able to register as British, often around the time a parent naturalizes.

Dual nationality

The US and UK both allow it. A dual US–UK child should:

- **enter and leave the US on their US passport**
- have US tax filings if they ever have enough income, as for any US citizen

What to do next

See settlement and British citizenship, or build your move plan.

Can we get Child Benefit and help with childcare?

THE SHORT ANSWER

It depends on your immigration status. Most visas come with "no recourse to public funds", which usually rules out Child Benefit, although a British or settled partner may be able to claim it. Some childcare help depends on status and some doesn't. Families also often keep the US child tax credit by choosing the right way to avoid double tax.

Check eligibility carefully. Claiming a benefit you're not entitled to can affect future visa and settlement applications.

"No recourse to public funds"

Most UK visas carry a condition called **no recourse to public funds (NRPF)**. It means you can't claim most benefits, including **Child Benefit**. It changes once you get settled status.

Mixed families: if one partner is British or settled, that partner may be able to claim some benefits. Take advice first, because it can depend on the details.

Child Benefit

Where you're eligible, Child Benefit is a regular payment for each child. If either parent's income is above a set level, the **High Income Child Benefit Charge** claws some or all of it back through tax. Some families still register, because it can protect the non-earning parent's State Pension record.

Help with childcare

Help	Where	What to know
Funded hours for 3- and 4-year-olds	England	A universal entitlement that doesn't depend on parents' work
Extra funded hours for working parents	England	Depends on earnings and eligibility, so check immigration conditions
Tax-Free Childcare	UK-wide	Government top-up on childcare costs; check eligibility
Funded early learning and childcare	Scotland	Available for all 3- and 4-year-olds and some 2-year-olds
Funded childcare	Wales and Northern Ireland	Each has its own schemes

Check each scheme's eligibility on GOV.UK or your nation's site before you apply.

The US side: child tax credit

US citizens living abroad can still claim the **US child tax credit** for a child who has a **Social Security number**. How you avoid double tax matters. Families who use the foreign earned income exclusion generally lose the **refundable** part of the credit, which is one reason many use foreign tax credits instead. See how to avoid paying tax twice.

What to do next

Build your move plan and choose "A family with children".

About Landfall

Landfall helps Americans plan their move to the UK, with free move plans and guides that cover both countries. It's run by Leah Guevara from Edinburgh. Based in Scotland, covering the UK.

Members get dated reminders, templates, a community and time with Leah. When a step needs a qualified specialist, such as tax in both countries, investments or immigration, we say so plainly and can introduce you to people we trust. We're independent and never take a fee for introductions.

Your next step: build your free move plan at yourlandfall.com/plan, or see memberships at yourlandfall.com/membership

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Our guides are general information, not personal tax, financial, legal or immigration advice, and don't take account of your circumstances. Rules change: check the date of this edition and take advice before acting. We don't give immigration advice; we introduce you to regulated advisers.