

Table 6

School structures, access, internal grouping and progression**Table 6.1 School structures**

This table indicates whether:

- there is a unitary system of schools catering for all students (comp)
- distinct school types for students of different educational aptitudes (select)
- or a mixed system offering both types of schools (mixed).

Even where the structure may be common for all, differentiated courses are usually offered, at least at upper secondary level to suit students' abilities and preferences.

	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
England	comp	mixed	mixed
Ireland	comp	comp	comp
Northern Ireland	comp	mixed	mixed
Scotland	comp	comp	comp
Wales	comp	comp	comp
France	comp	comp	select
• Germany	comp	select	select
Hungary	comp	select	select
Italy	comp	comp	select
Netherlands	comp	mixed	mixed
Spain	comp	comp	mixed
Sweden	comp	comp	comp
• Switzerland	comp	mixed	select
• Australia	comp	comp	comp
• Canada	comp	comp	comp
Japan	comp	comp	select
Korea	comp	comp	mixed
New Zealand	comp	comp	comp
Singapore	comp	comp	select
• South Africa	comp	comp	comp
• USA	comp	comp	comp

Notes

Northern Ireland	There has, until recently, been a selective system of secondary education, with children taking tests in the final year of primary education to determine selection for the post-primary phase. The last 'transfer tests' were taken in autumn 2008 for entry to post-primary education in September 2009. For 2011 entry, the Government provided a menu of recommended criteria that schools could choose to use and schools had to have regard to these. Schools are recommended not to use academic criteria but are not precluded from doing so.
Wales	The overwhelming majority of secondary schools in Wales are comprehensive schools. There are no grammar schools, that is schools which are wholly selective by academic ability or aptitude.
Canada	At one time, secondary schools were primarily academic and prepared students for university. Vocational and technical schools were often separate institutions. Although some of these still exist, most secondary schools are now composite and offer both academic and vocational courses.

Table 6.2 Access

This table indicates whether access to educational phases:

- is automatic (open)
- or subject to performance in school leaving certificates or other evidence of performance (cert).

In the case of higher education, this indicates whether holders of relevant upper secondary school certificates (e.g. *Baccalauréat* in France, *Abitur* in Germany, *VWO* in the Netherlands) have automatic right of access to higher education (open) or whether they have to meet additional selection criteria operated by higher education institutions (select).

	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Higher education
England	open	open	cert	select
Ireland	open	open	open	select
Northern Ireland	open	open/cert	cert	select
Scotland	open	open	cert	select
Wales	open	open	cert	select
France	open	open	open	open
• Germany	open	cert	cert	open
Hungary	cert	cert	cert	select
Italy	open	open	cert, age 14	open
Netherlands	open	cert	cert	open
Spain	open	open	cert, age 16	select
Sweden	open	n/a	cert, age 15/16	select
• Switzerland	open	cert	cert	open
• Australia	open	open	open	select
• Canada	open	open	cert	select
Japan	open	open	cert, age 15	select
Korea	open	open	cert, age 15 (open)	select
New Zealand	open	open	open	select
Singapore	open	cert	cert	select
• South Africa	open	open	cert, age 15	select
• USA	open	open	open	select

Notes

- Ireland** Although admission to higher education is 'open' students need high scores in the Leaving Certificate examinations to access places on the most sought after programmes.
- Northern Ireland** There has, until recently, been a selective system of secondary education, with children taking tests in the final year of primary education to determine selection for the post-primary phase. However, the last transfer tests were taken in autumn 2008 for entry in September 2009. For 2011 entry, the Government provided a menu of recommended criteria that schools could choose to use and schools had to have regard to these. Schools are recommended not to use academic criteria but are not precluded from doing so.
- France** The first year of upper secondary education is the final year of compulsory education, students therefore progress automatically.
- **Germany** In cases where children, aged six, are not thought ready to enter primary education, they may be obliged to spend some time in special preparatory classes.
- Hungary** A certificate confirming a child's attendance in kindergarten education is a pre-requisite for entry to compulsory education.
- Italy** Until the 2004/05 academic year, students took the primary school leaving examination at age 11. This was required for entry to lower secondary education. The examination has been discontinued as primary and lower secondary now form 'sub-divisions' of the first cycle of education in Italy.
- Sweden** Primary and lower secondary compulsory phase education is provided in one 'all-through' school (*grundskola*).
- **Switzerland** As in many countries, there are additional higher education entry requirements in certain subject areas, such as medical science, where there is a shortage of places for students.
- Japan** Students receive an elementary school leaving certificate, but progress automatically from their local elementary school to their local junior high school (at age12).
- Korea** Graduates of middle schools or the equivalent may enter high schools. Admission into high school used to be based on the grades of a selection examination, but there is increasing variance in the admissions process.
- **South Africa** Access to post-compulsory education (age 15+) is dependent on successful completion of lower secondary education and achievement of the General Education and Training (GET) certificate.

Table 6.3 Internal grouping

This table indicates whether classes are generally defined by age or by ability in different subjects (set). In some cases, grouping by ability applies in some subjects only (age/set), or is introduced from a given class onwards (e.g. age/set Year [Yr] 4). In others, students are grouped both by age and the ability based pathway they have taken (age and set). Beyond the compulsory phase, there is considerable variation and students are most commonly grouped according to the courses they take.

	Primary	Lower secondary
England	age/set	age/set
Ireland	age	age/set
Northern Ireland	age/set	age/set
Scotland	age	age/set
Wales	age/set	age/set
France	age	age
• Germany	age	age and set
Hungary	age/set	age/set
Italy	age	age
Netherlands	age	age and set
Spain	age	age
Sweden	age	age, set at 12+
• Switzerland	age	set
• Australia	age	age/set
• Canada	age	age/set
Japan	age	age
Korea	age/set	age/set
New Zealand	age	age/set
Singapore	age, set at age 10	age and set
• South Africa	age	age
• USA	age/set	age/set

Notes

- Hungary** Classes are generally organised by age regardless of ability but, during lower secondary education, they may be organised by ability in different subjects. Decisions on class grouping are made by the school administration.
- Netherlands** Students in primary education may be grouped by ability in some schools; this procedure is quite rare, however, and students are usually grouped by age.
- **Australia** Teaching groups are generally organised by age. Setting may be practised in some subjects, such as mathematics, from year 7/8 (students age 12/13).
- Japan** Between 2014 and 2019, the Japanese Ministry of Education intends to move away from the policy of teaching in age groups in public elementary and junior high schools (age six to 15) towards teaching groups by ability.
- Korea** Classes are generally organised by age regardless of ability but, since the introduction of the Seventh National Curriculum, some grouping by ability has been introduced.
- New Zealand** Classes are generally grouped by age, but variations do occur with setting by ability for some subjects, such as mathematics and English, or grouping by band.
- **South Africa** Primary level teaching groups are normally organised by age. However, multi-grade classes do exist in areas with low population densities, especially in rural areas. Similar arrangements are also made during secondary education.
- **USA** In elementary schools, children are generally grouped by age with some banding within a class for certain subjects. Grouping by ability may take place in some schools.

Table 6.4 Progression within phases

This table indicates whether students automatically move to the next class (**open**) or whether this is subject to their achieving certain minimum standards (**perf**). In most countries where performance governs progression, the decision is made by all the teachers of the relevant class/year group and includes consultation with parents.

	Primary	Lower secondary
England	open	open
Ireland	open	open
Northern Ireland	open	open
Scotland	open	open
Wales	open	open
France	perf	perf
• Germany	perf	perf
Hungary	perf	perf
Italy	perf	perf
Netherlands	perf	perf
Spain	perf	perf
Sweden	open	perf
• Switzerland	perf	perf
• Australia	open	open
• Canada	open	open/perf
Japan	open	open
Korea	open	open
New Zealand	open	open
Singapore	open	perf
• South Africa	perf	perf
• USA	open/perf	open/perf

Notes

- France** Although automatic promotion is becoming the norm.
- Italy** Progression within primary education is generally open although there are some very rare exceptions.
- Singapore** Generally open in primary education, although some students may be asked to repeat the final year of primary education.
- Sweden** Students normally progress to a higher class. However, after consulting a child's parent, the headteacher may decide not to move a student up (or to transfer a child earlier than would be the norm).
- Spain** Although most students generally progress automatically from one school year to the next, children who do not meet the objectives for a given year do not automatically progress to the next year. Instead, they receive additional support to achieve the objectives before being allowed to move on. Generally, however, no child is held back for more than one year.
- **South Africa** Students in South Africa are expected to meet expected levels of performance to progress from one Grade to the next. To reduce the number of students repeating, a new assessment policy, moving the emphasis from year-end exams to continuous performance appraisals has been introduced. This provides struggling students with greater assistance. It is intended that students should not spend more than four years in each phase and should, as a rule, progress with their age group.

Sources/Further information

For more detailed information on the content of these tables - see the following sections and subsections of the full Archive.

Table 6.1 School structures

Education Structure (ages 3-19) ⇒ 3.2 Educational phases (ages 3 - 19)

Table 6.2 Access

Education Structure (ages 3-19) ⇒ 3.2 Educational phases (ages 3 - 19) ⇒ 3.2.x.1 Admissions criteria (depending on the phase of education being consulted)

Table 6.3 Internal grouping

Internal school organisation ⇒ Select a phase of education ⇒ 4.x.1 Organisation of teaching groups (depending on the phase of education being consulted)

Table 6.4 Progression within phases

Internal school organisation ⇒ Select a phase of education ⇒ 4.x.2 Student progression through the phase (depending on the phase of education being consulted)