

School education in Scotland – A guide for refugees

How is school education provided in Scotland?

Scotland provides free school education for all children from the age of around 5 up to age 18. Young children will go to a primary school and older children go to a secondary school. Schools will vary in size but primary schools will normally be much smaller than secondary schools.

Education is the same for girls and boys. Where children need additional support to help them learn, this is provided by the school. For example, your child would get extra support if they speak little or no English, or if they have a health condition which affects how they learn. This support is a right and is set out in law. Most children with additional support needs will be educated in their local mainstream school but in some cases another school may be better equipped to meet their needs.

Children normally go to the primary or secondary school closest to them. You can find local schools by walking around your neighbourhood, contacting your health visitor or doctor, asking your neighbours, looking at local maps, visiting a local library or by visiting the 'my school' section on the Parentzone website – see <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/find-a-school>.

All local authorities (councils) will have lists of the schools in your area and can tell you which school your child would usually be expected to attend based on where you live. To make contact with a school you could visit the school office during school hours or contact the local authority: www.cosla.gov.uk/councils. The school will tell you what you need to do to enrol your child.

Local authorities have some denominational primary and secondary schools which are run in the same way as other education authority schools. The majority of denominational schools in Scotland are Roman Catholic.

When do children go to school?

Children usually start primary school when they are 5, although depending on when their birthday falls, some children start when they are 4. They start in Primary 1 and move up to the next class each year through to Primary 7. Children move up to secondary school automatically after primary school (aged 11 or 12 depending on when they started school). They can leave when they are 16 but most young people in Scotland stay on longer, until they are 17 or 18.

The length of the school day will depend on your local authority and whether your child goes to a primary or secondary school. A school day in primary school generally starts around 9am and finishes around 3pm. Secondary schools may start a little earlier and finish a little later. Some local authorities have slightly longer days from Monday to Thursday but are closed on Friday afternoons. You should check your local school's times.

The school year runs from August to June. School holidays vary slightly but all schools will have 4 main holidays: a long summer holiday of about 6 or 7 weeks from June to mid-August; a one or two week holiday in October; a winter holiday in December/January of around two weeks coinciding with Christmas and New Year; and a two week spring holiday in April. There will be some further days when your child will not go to school for other reasons, for example because of a local holiday, but you will be told about these days in advance. Children and young people are expected to attend every day the school is open and for the full school day, unless they are ill. If you need to keep your child off school for any reason, you must tell the school.

What do children study?

All children aged 3 to 18 in Scotland learn under Curriculum for Excellence. Curriculum for Excellence is all about bringing real life into the classroom. It is a creative and flexible curriculum which involves children, parents and teachers. Children learn in lots of different ways, for example through play and projects or by going on trips outside of school. Learning and teaching is organised around 8 subjects (also known as 'curriculum areas') which are:

Expressive arts
Health and wellbeing
Mathematics
Languages

Religious and moral education
Sciences
Social studies
Technologies

The importance of health and wellbeing

Good health and wellbeing is important to help your child learn and all school staff have a responsibility to look out for care and welfare needs. Schools will have policies and practice in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children. These may include anti-bullying strategies or supporting children and young people who are experiencing difficult times. If you or your child are unhappy or you need help with your child's learning, tell the school.

What else do I need to know?

Your child will attend school over lunchtime. Schools provide lunches to children, usually at a cost, or you can provide your child with a packed lunch. Parents can also take their child home for lunch and return them in the afternoon. Some children get free school lunches. Speak to your school to find out if your child is entitled to a free lunch.

Children are encouraged to wear a school uniform and each school will have its own uniform guidelines. Physical Education, known as PE, is also an important part of the school curriculum and your child will also need a PE kit. Uniforms and PE kits can usually be bought quite cheaply at supermarkets or from the school. If you need help to buy them, let the school know.

Parents are responsible for getting their children to school each day. Some children will get free transport, for example if they live a specific distance away from school. You should speak to your child's school for further information and to see if your child is entitled to free school transport. Schools provide information to parents in a school handbook, which they must make available to you.

What if my child is too young to attend school?

Children under school age in Scotland go to early learning and childcare settings (ELC). Places in early learning and childcare settings are free for all 3- and 4-year-olds and for some 2-year-olds.

The Scottish Families website is a good place to find out more. See www.scottishfamilies.gov.uk or visit your local library.

Useful websites

Parentzone Scotland - information for parents on a wide range of subjects, including a section called My School where parents can find information on schools in their area.

<https://education.gov.uk/parentzone>

<https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/my-school>

The National Parent Forum for Scotland - Information and resources for parents

www.npfs.org.uk

Scottish Families Information Service - Information for parents and carers of children and young people

www.scottishfamilies.gov.uk

Gathered Together - A pilot project to support parents from Ethnic and Cultural Minorities to become more involved in their children's education

www.gatheredtogether.bemis.org.uk

Enquire – The Scottish advice service for additional support for learning

www.enquire.org.uk

Scottish Government - Information about schooling in Scotland

www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools

Scottish Council/ Local Authority websites – Access to information about schools and schooling in your local area

www.cosla.gov.uk/councils

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