

In Aberdeen, 16% of secondary school pupils and 14% of all school aged children are educated at the city's independent schools. What do independent schools in Aberdeen have to offer? Why do 3,500 families there choose an independent education for their children?

Parents say that the true measure of a school is whether their children are happy there. Research suggests there are three key reasons why independent schools are able to engage their pupils, which leads to a happy and fulfilling school life:

- 1. Development of the whole child**
- 2. Purposeful learning environment**
- 3. Quality of teaching**

Development of the whole child

Every independent school in Aberdeen offers something unique, but all share a common goal of encouraging each individual child to be all that they can be. Developing the individual talents of children gives them confidence in their abilities and motivation to succeed. This seems to be what parents “buy into”. At every age and stage, children enjoy a rich mix of learning opportunities, both in and outside the classroom. The curriculum is broad and there's a wide choice of activities and clubs to engage pupils – something to suit everyone. As pupils progress, they rise to new challenges, grow in confidence and make firm friendships.

Purposeful learning environment

The positive “can do” culture of independent schools in Aberdeen is almost tangible. The work environment is purposeful which means that pupils can learn without disruption. Visitors are welcome during term time so that they can see schools “at work”.

Quality of teaching

In Aberdeen, independent schools admit pupils of mixed abilities. The fact that all the schools produce consistently good exam results year after year suggests that the quality of teaching is high. Independent schools recruit committed teachers who also contribute to the wider life of the school – co-curricular activities, sports and outdoor education. This ensures that each school has a strong community and sense of belonging. Learning is an engaging experience for pupils with positive outcomes achieved. Independent schools enjoy the flexibility they have to enrich the curriculum to suit the needs of their pupils and there are many examples of innovative teaching in the independent sector. There are also sensible checks and balances and the national system of inspection ensures that pupils receive a consistent and balanced education.

Choice, diversity, excellence

Independent schools come in all shapes and sizes. The choice and diversity in Aberdeen is particularly rich. There's a Waldorf Steiner school, four "all-through" schools, a preparatory school and an international school that mainly serves the children of oil industry workers. All the schools admit day pupils, not boarders, and all have a nursery. There's one girls' school and the rest are coeducational. Although based in Angus, Lathallan School, which is "all-through", draws around half its pupils from Aberdeen and it has a small boarding house.

School	Age/Stage	School Roll	Nursery Provision
Aberdeen Waldorf School	3-16	around 100	from 3 years
Albyn	all through	around 700	from 3 months
Robert Gordon's College	all through	around 1600	from 4 years
St Margaret's School for Girls	all through	around 400	from 3 years
The Hamilton	preparatory	around 400	from 3 months
International School of Aberdeen	all through	around 450	from 3 years

Given the choice available, how do you choose the school that's right for your child? Around 3,500 children of mixed abilities from diverse social backgrounds are educated in Aberdeen's independent schools. Each school has its own distinctive, almost tangible ethos, which is why a visit is essential. It's the only way to gain a true sense of whether your child is likely to be happy there.

Curriculum and qualifications

Independent schools have a strong tradition of academic attainment, reflected in pupils' performance in public exams. All the independent schools in Aberdeen, with one exception, follow the Scottish curriculum with exams awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). SQA exams correspond to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in England and Wales and are recognised for entrance to all universities throughout the UK. The exception is the International School of Aberdeen which offers the International Baccalaureate (IB).

The IB is designed to develop a broad range of skills. Students take six subjects for two years and study English, Maths, Science, a language (ancient or modern) and a social subject. They follow a course in the Theory of Knowledge, undertake a programme of Creativity, Action and Service and write a 4000 word essay on a subject of their choice.

Examination abbreviations used, below

S	Standard Grade
I1	Intermediate 1
I2	Intermediate 2
H	Higher
AH	Advanced Higher
IB	International Baccalaureate

School	Qualifications offered
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Aberdeen Waldorf School	S
Albyn School	S, I1, I2, H, AH
International School of Aberdeen	IB
Robert Gordon's College	S, I2, H, AH
St Margaret's School for Girls	S, I1, I2, H, AH

Faith schools

In Aberdeen, there are no faith schools. All independent schools admit pupils of all faiths and none.

Boarding

There are no boarding schools in Aberdeen or Aberdeenshire. The closest are Lathallan in Montrose, Angus and Gordonstoun in Elgin, Moray.

Fact finding – websites, admissions packs, open days

School profiles, contact details and website links can be found at www.scis.org.uk where you can search for schools alphabetically, under "City of Aberdeen" or by type of school. Most schools' websites contain clear information about the admissions process. They also give fee details, payment terms and information about financial assistance that's available for families who are unable to afford the fees unaided.

We suggest you contact two or three schools to request an admissions pack and arrange a visit. Admissions packs usually give details about entrance procedures, test dates, induction days, fees and financial assistance. Open Days, usually held from September to November, are promoted on each school's website. The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) has two leaflets, available online, that are helpful: *A guide to the admissions process* and *Questions to consider when visiting a school*. Both are available at www.scis.org.uk/publications

Admissions deadlines

Given the demand for places at some independent schools in the city, parents are advised to make enquiries early – preferably a year in advance – although schools will be as accommodating as possible. The usual admissions cycle is outlined below, although dates should be checked with individual schools.

September to November	Open days
November to December	Application deadlines
January to March	Entrance tests
June	Induction days
August to September	Start of school year

Fees, meeting the cost, financial assistance

Average fees for secondary day schools are currently around £9,000. All independent schools in Aberdeen offer parents the convenience of monthly direct debit.

For most parents, affording an independent education requires careful financial planning and long-term commitment. The best advice, to ease the financial burden, is to plan ahead and to consult a fee-based Certified Financial Planner. In doing so, a financial plan will be devised for you, designed to generate sufficient funds to meet the cost of school fees over the period of your child's education, taking into account your current and future commitments and expenditure. This will give you confidence that you are receiving the best advice for your family's particular circumstances.

Fee assistance is provided by all independent schools in Aberdeen to enable children from lower income households to benefit. All schools welcome applications for Secondary pupils to attend and most have now extended their financial help to Primary children too. Awards are based on ability to pay, with priority given to those whose need is greatest. The level of support varies considerably, depending on a family's circumstances. Some children receive a free place (where 100% of the fees are met by the school) while others receive a smaller contribution. Useful information is provided in a leaflet, *Meeting the cost of school fees*, available www.scis.org.uk/publications

Information, advice and guidance about choosing an independent, fee-paying school in Aberdeen is available from the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) – the foremost authority on independent education in Scotland. Visit www.scis.org.uk or call 0131 220 2106.