

A quarter of pupils at Edinburgh’s secondary schools are educated at the city’s independent schools – the highest proportion anywhere in the UK. What do independent schools have to offer? Why are almost 11,000 families in the capital choosing an independent education?

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 Edinburgh 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 Edinburgh’s independent schools 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

Edinburgh’s independent schools admit pupils of mixed abilities and produce consistently good exam results year after year, which suggests that the quality of teaching is high. The city’s 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, so how do you choose the one that's right for your child? Around 11,000 children of mixed abilities from diverse social backgrounds are educated at Edinburgh'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.

Most of the independent schools in Edinburgh and East Lothian are coeducational, although there are two girls' schools, Mary Erskine and St George's, and two boys' schools, Stewart's Melville and Merchiston. There's a huge variation in the size of independent schools in Edinburgh compared to other regions in Scotland – from 20 pupils up to 2300. In Edinburgh, the types of schools are more varied too – a mixture of prep/junior, secondary and "all through" schools which admit children from age 5 to 18. Half the schools have a nursery located on-site.

School / Location	Roll (circa)	Age / Stage	Nursery	Girls/Boys	Day/Boarding
Belhaven Hill, Dunbar, East Lothian	150	preparatory	No	Coed	Boarding/Day
Cargilfield, Barnton	300	preparatory	Yes	Coed	Day/Boarding
Clifton Hall, Newbridge	250	all through	Yes	Coed	Day
Compass, Haddington, East Lothian	130	preparatory	No	Coed	Day
Edinburgh Academy (central)	950	all through	Yes	Coed	Day
Edinburgh Rudolf Steiner, Colinton	250	all through	Yes	Coed	Day
Fettes College (central)	700	all through	No	Coed	Boarding/Day
George Heriot's School (central)	1600	all through	Yes	Coed	Day
George Watson's College, Colinton	2300	all through	Yes	Coed	Day
Loretto, Musselburgh, East Lothian	600	all through	No	Coed	Boarding/Day
Mary Erskine & Stewart's Melville Junior School (central)	1200	junior	Yes	Coed	Day/Boarding
Mary Erskine School, Ravelston	750	secondary	No	Girls	Day/Boarding
Merchiston Castle School, Colinton	450	secondary	No	Boys	Boarding/Day
Regius Christian School, Newcraighall	20	preparatory	No	Coed	Day
St George's School (central)	800	all through	Yes	Girls	Day/Boarding
St Mary's Music School (central)	80	secondary	No	Coed	Day/Boarding
Stewart's Melville College (central)	750	secondary	No	Boys	Day/Boarding

Curriculum and qualifications

Independent schools have a strong tradition of academic attainment, reflected in pupils' performance in public exams. Most independent schools in Edinburgh follow the Scottish curriculum and exams are 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. Some schools – usually the boarding schools – follow the English curriculum with GCSEs, AS and A levels awarded by different exam boards in England. A number of schools offer a combination of English AS and A Levels and Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers, based on what they believe provides the best course of study for their pupils. A small number of schools – just one in Edinburgh – now offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) although others are considering its merits. 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.

Scottish		English	
Access	Access Courses	GCSE	General Certificate of Education
S	Standard Grade	A	Advanced Level
I1	Intermediate 1	AS	Advanced Subsidiary Level
I2	Intermediate 2		
H	Higher	International	
AH	Advanced Higher	IB	International Baccalaureate

Below is a list of the qualifications offered by mainstream independent schools in Edinburgh and East Lothian.

School	Scottish	English	International
Clifton Hall School	S, I1, I2, H, AH		
Edinburgh Academy	H	GCSE, A	
Edinburgh Rudolf Steiner	I1, I2 H	GCSE, AS	
Fettes College		GCSE, A, AS	IB
George Heriot's School	S, I1 (Maths), I2, H, AH	A (Art)	
George Watson's College	S, I1, I2, H, AH	GCSE, AS, A	
Loretto	GCSE, A, AS		
The Mary Erskine School	I2, H, AH	AS & A (Art & Music)	
Merchiston Castle School	S, H	GCSE, A, AS	
St George's School	S, I1, I2, H, AH	GCSE, A, AS	
St Mary's Music School	S, I1, I2, H, AH	A & AS (Music)	
Stewart's Melville College	I2, H, AH	A & AS (Art & Music)	

Boarding and Day

There are four boarding schools in Edinburgh and East Lothian (i.e. schools where the proportion of boarders is higher than day pupils). They are Fettes, Merchiston, Loretto and Belhaven Hill. At boarding schools, a strong sense of community prevails and pupils make friendships that last a lifetime. Boarding schools provide “added value” in terms of after school activities and day pupils benefit too since they do everything the boarders do apart from sleep at the school! The Edinburgh day schools that admit boarders (Cargilfield, the Erskine Stewart’s Melville Schools, St George’s and St Mary’s Music School) have a smaller proportion of boarders. To accommodate different needs, weekly, flexi and full boarding is available at most schools.

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 “Edinburgh” 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

Edinburgh independent school fair

The Scotsman newspaper now holds an annual independent school fair at Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh, in September. In 2010, the date is Sunday 5 September. A number of the city’s independent schools plan to take an exhibition stand. The event also includes a workshop on *Meeting the Cost of School Fees* by SCIS and Turcan Connell.

Admissions deadlines and waiting lists

Given the demand for places at some independent schools in Edinburgh, parents are advised to make enquiries early to avoid waiting lists – at least a year in advance – although schools will be as accommodating as possible. Waiting lists are most likely at the key entry stages of Primary 1 and Secondary 1. 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 of Edinburgh's independent schools 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 of Edinburgh's independent schools to enable children from lower income households to benefit. Awards are based on ability to pay, with priority given to those whose need is greatest. Applications for Primary children are now welcomed by most of the capital's independent schools as well as applications for Secondary pupils. 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 or around Edinburgh 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.