



The Hungarian  
education system



**All Children in Hungary from age 6-16 are obliged to attend  
compulsory education.**

Children between three and six can go to the kindergarten. The last year of kindergarten is compulsory.

Kindergarten! ... here I come!



Compulsory education begins with the obligatory pre-school year in kindergarten, usually at the age of 5. From age 6 to 16, school is mandatory for all Hungarians. Most children attend Free State schools. Private school charge fees but are subsidized by the state.

After finishing elementary school students can decide between three options: high school, vocational school or trade school. All Hungarians must complete 8 years of elementary school plus two more years in one of the above schools. To study at a Hungarian university or college you need a certification of secondary education.



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## Hungarian final examination

A few months before *Matura* (Baccalaureate) the final years' students place a picture of themselves and of their teachers on a wooden plate. These wooden plates are called "Readiness Signs" and are displayed in a shop window until the students have completed their exams.



*Matura* Balls are normally held in February. These Balls are then called "Ribbon Consecration" because the students have to wear a ribbon with the number of school years on the jacket in order to graduate and they have to wear their ribbon until the exams; otherwise they fail, so the legend goes.



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On the last school day (before the writing test) there is a final party at which the students sing traditional college songs, putting one hand on the shoulder of the next student.





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## Teaching styles

The official language in schools is Hungarian. However, there are schools where many ethnic and national minorities (e.g. German, Romanian, Slovenian, Serbian and Croatian minorities) may use their language as the main or second language in the classroom.

## Schools in Hungary

### Preschool, primary school and secondary school

Hungarians have to attend 10 years of compulsory education. After visiting a kindergarten/preschool children can start with the primary school.

Each child up to the age of 16 must attend the primary school which lasts eight years and is divided into a lower and an upper level. After the eight years of the primary school students must attend one of the secondary schools for at least 2 years .

After the reforms of 1989 Russian is no longer a compulsory language in schools and has tended to be replaced by English and German. The reforms have also expanded the rights of students and parents.





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### **Nursery school**

The kindergarten is the first stage of the Hungarian education system. Every child between three and six has the right to attend a nursery school. Attending the kindergarten from the age of five is compulsory. With a maximum of four hours a day, the children are supposed to be prepared for the demands of school.

### **Primary School**

Basic education in Hungary lasts usually eight (in some cases ten) years. The primary school is divided into a lower level (class 1-4) and an upper level (class 4-8). After finishing the eighth grade students can choose whether they want to switch to a high school or to a vocational school. Until age 16 students must attend basic education.





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### **School enrolment in Hungary**

Free compulsory education is guaranteed by law. However, private schools may set a tuition fee. Schools are required to take all children who live in their area but parents can choose any school for their children.

To enter the higher classes of high school, students must pass an examination. The standards for this examination are issued by the Ministry of Education.

### **Secondary School**

Until 1989 high school lasted only four years (from grade 9 to 12). Since then, there are high schools which teach students after the fourth grade of the primary school. The aim of visiting after the fourth grade is to teach students more intensively and prepare them for the university. There are also bilingual schools, in which students speak a foreign language up to 20 hours per week.

The final secondary-school examination takes place in three compulsory subjects (Mathematics, Hungarian and History) and two electives (Foreign Languages, Chemistry, Physics, Geography, Biology, etc.). Approx. 70% of high school graduates are admitted to higher education institutions.



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## Vocational School

In vocational schools students get a double qualification. After four years of school, students receive the *Matura* (which is a university entrance) and qualify as skilled workers.

Approximately one third of all primary school graduates choose a vocational school. To access the vocational school, students need to pass an exam.

An average week at a vocational school consists of 30 to 32 hours of classes per week. The course content includes approximately 50-60% general education, 20-30% professional theory and 20% working experience. Students complete work placements after the third and fourth grade.



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There are three types of vocational school:

- Technician training school (for mechanics, energy, biomechanics, etc.)
- Skilled-worker training school (for industry, agriculture, etc.)
- Middle vocational education school (including transport, postal services, trade, catering, etc.)

### **Trade school**

In trade schools students are trained to become skilled workers. They usually take three to four years and the theoretic content is very limited.

The professional schools can only take students for which they can provide a work placement. Either the school itself offers a work placement or it has concluded an agreement with a company that provides work placements for students. Students can also look for a work placement on their own.

The first year of theoretical and practical instruction takes place in the school environment. After that students can start their work placement. After a successful exam, graduates receive a certificate.

### **Special school**

Special schools provide tailored education for disabled and disadvantaged students of age 14 to 16. After two years of attending this





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school, students obtain a certificate confirming their graduation from the school.

### **Further education**

There are many opportunities for adults to return to education and gain further qualifications. It is possible to complete the following qualifications:

- elementary school
- The *Matura* (for adults with elementary school graduation)
- The *Matura* (for adults who are already skilled professional workers)
- Graduation from professional school
- Technician qualification (one or two years of additional training)

There are various other institutions that provide government-recognized qualifications. You can choose between independent fee-based educational institutions and many other community colleges. You can also gain qualification to study at a Hungarian university.



## School life

### Grades, enrolment and school-hours in Hungary

Most students attend Free State schools. Private educational institutions, which are maintained by private organizations, charge fees but receive more than 50% of their funding from government agencies.

Most public schools in Hungary have classes in the morning. There are no afternoon leisure activities offered for students. As the relationship between students tends to be very close, they usually spend most of their afternoons together.

### The Hungarian grades:

- 5 "excellent"
- 4 "good"
- 3 "satisfactory", literally "mediocre"
- 2 "adequate"
- 1 "unsatisfactory"

### Holiday in Hungary

In Hungary, students have two months of summer vacation. The school year begins in September and ends in June. Apart from the summer holidays there are approximately two weeks of vacation in winter and one week in the Easter period.



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## **Religious education**

Religious education in Hungarian state schools is voluntary and not compulsory.