



## British schools welcome American children

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8/2/2006 –**RAF MILDENHALL, England** -- The children of U.S. Air Force families are welcome to use the English free state school system, under the same conditions that the British use them.

Americans tend to put their younger children into British schools, while the older children go the American high school on base. This country's college system is very different, and the American high school is better able to prepare American teenagers for their own system.

Families stationed at RAF Mildenhall have a choice of sending their children to the Department of Defense Dependents' Schools on RAFs Lakenheath and Feltwell, or sending them to a British school. Very few families actually live on RAF Mildenhall as there are so few housing units, so the majority of our people live in the surrounding villages.

If you occupy housing on nearby RAF Lakenheath, as many families assigned to Mildenhall do, British schools prefer Americans use the DoD schools on the base. Children here start full-time free state schooling a year earlier than in the United States, in the term in which they become 5 years old.

In Suffolk and Cambridgeshire counties, children tend to leave primary school at age 9 and move to middle school until they reach 13, when they'll go on to high school. In Norfolk, children usually stay at primary school until 11, when they move straight up to high school.

The British school year is divided into three terms, autumn, spring and summer. The weather doesn't permit us to have our children underfoot for three months every summer, so the longest holiday is the six-week summer break.

The children go back to school for the start of the new academic year in the first week of September for three months. They then have a three-week Christmas break. Afterward, they return to school for three months until the three-week Easter break, then go back into school for the final term, which ends in the long summer break.

In addition, each term is broken in the middle by a one-week half-term holiday. It sounds complicated, but works out in practice. Children have six weeks in school, one week out, six weeks in, three weeks out, and so on until the summer break.

The school day typically begins at 9 a.m. and continues until around 3 p.m. The lunch break lasts from noon to 1:30 p.m., and the children have a choice of going home or British schools welcome American children staying for a hot lunch provided by the school for a small daily charge. They may take a packed lunch if they prefer, but parents are asked to observe the school's guideline on the contents of the lunch. Morning and afternoon school sessions are broken up by a 15-minute playtime.

Primary schools no longer insist on the strict dress code of yesteryear, but they do like a certain uniformity of dress. They may ask for children to wear a grey skirt or pants, and perhaps a blue sweatshirt and white shirt. In the summer, students may be required to wear a t-shirt with the school emblem on it. School uniforms can also be bought from schools and many shops on the economy, such as local supermarkets.

Local schools finish for the summer July 21 and open again Sept. 4. They don't have administrative staff in place during the vacation, as American schools do.

For those who are newly arrived and anxious to put children in British schools, call the relevant education office for the county in which you live: Suffolk at 01284-352121; Norfolk at 01603-222593; and Cambridgeshire at 01223-717916. Their hours are 9 a. m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Tell them you're here with the U.S. Air Force, based at RAF Mildenhall, and give them your address including post code. They will send an admission form for each school-age child. Fill that out and return it to the education office.

Every address in England comes into a particular school's catchment area, and that will be the school to which children are allocated, provided there is space. The schools cannot vary the government's regulations on class sizes.

If the school is full, they'll try to find space in the next nearest school. The majority of Air Force families have primary school aged children. Therefore, the nearer you live to the bases, the less room there is in the primary schools.