

# Critically discuss and evaluate the statement that “Education is compulsory, but school is not”

In this essay I will be addressing and evaluating the statement that “education is compulsory but school is not”. The typical idea of ‘school’ for most parents in the United Kingdom involves your child starting nursery at the age of about 3, moving onto primary school (possibly on the same plot of land as the nursery) when they turn 5 then starting secondary school at age 11. This is what I believe is meant in this statement when the word school is being used. Education is something that is so often made synonymous with our typical idea of school but this is simply not the case. I am going to examine methods of education other than school and critically evaluate what it means to be involved in education. I will use this information to then make clear the differences between school and education and how there are choices for parents and children if it is clear to either of them that school is not something that works well for that particular child. Every child is different and should be treated as such and something that I would like to explore is the idea that perhaps school is not always the right path for a child – even if that path leads the child to finish school with pretty good grades they may not have left with a good education. As well as this, I am going to look into what some philosophers, primarily Bertrand Russell, have to say about education as I believe it would be a nice way to relate this essay to the Theology side of my degree.

## What is Meant by Compulsory Education in the United Kingdom?

The compulsory age for education in Wales and Scotland is between 5 and 16, for England it is between 5 and 18 as once you have completed secondary school it is required that you either stay on for further education at your school or a college, take on an apprenticeship or attend a part-time form of education (A levels/ college/ an apprenticeship) while undertaking at least 20 hours a week of voluntary work. In Northern Ireland, the compulsory starting age for education is 4, but the leaving age is still 16.<sup>1</sup> It is also very common, but not compulsory, for children to begin nursery in all regions of the United Kingdom. This starts between the ages of 2 and 3 and then leads into reception in the following September.

While attending a typical primary or secondary school is not compulsory in the United Kingdom, it is however still mandatory that every child attending a local authority maintained school completes and follows the National Curriculum (or the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland). The National Curriculum consists of four ‘Key Stages’. These are as follows:

- Key Stage 1 – Age 5-7
- Key Stage 2 – Age 7-11
- Key Stage 3 – Age 11-14
- Key Stage 5 – Age 14-16

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<sup>1</sup> United Kingdom Government, School Leaving Age (2020) <<https://www.gov.uk/know-when-you-can-leave-school>>

(Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence is very similar)

And then within each Key Stage, there are compulsory subjects which must be taught at the local authority maintained schools. These subjects at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are: maths, English, music, history, science, design technology, art and design, physical education, computing, ancient and modern foreign languages (Key Stage 2 only) and geography. It is also a requirement that schools offer and teach religious education but if a parent chooses to, they may take their child out of this class. In Key Stage 3 the selection of compulsory subjects is almost identical but children in this stage must also study citizenship and are only required to study modern foreign languages. As well as the optional subject of religious education, schools must also provide sex education but this is also optional and parents may remove their child from that class too.<sup>2</sup> Key Stage 4 is typically the year in which children begin working toward their GCSE awards, in which many are optional, and because of this the amount of compulsory subjects decreases quite heavily; English, maths and science are all compulsory core subjects but students must also take part in computing, physical education and citizenship. The same rules apply for religious education and sex education in Key Stage 4 as they did in previous Key Stages.<sup>3</sup> The information that I have just provided is for England, it is similar in other regions of the United Kingdom but there are some differences, for example in Wales, you must study Welsh as a secondary language (only applicable to English speaking schools).

Academies, private schools, home schools and any other type of school which is not funded by the local authority may be allowed to not use the National Curriculum but they still must ensure that children receive the same quality of education that they would receive in a typical British school.

### What are Some ways to Educate Other than at School Throughout Britain?

Firstly, I will look at faith schools:

Catholic schools in the UK typically claim that they will accept an admission from any child but where there is an abundance of students attempting to attend the Catholic school they will begin to allow the attendance of children based on certain oversubscription criteria. This criteria differs from school to school. Here is an example of oversubscription criteria for Christ The King Catholic Primary School in Cardiff (this list goes in order of priority):

1. Baptised Catholic children who are in care or have previously been in care
2. Baptised Catholic children with a sibling who will be attending the school in the next academic year
3. Baptised Catholic children who reside within Parishes of Christ the King and St Brigid with St Paul
4. Baptised Catholic children who reside in the Parish of St Teilo with Our Lady of Lourdes
5. Baptised Catholic children who do not fall into any of the above categories who reside in Cardiff
6. Baptised Catholic children who do not reside in Cardiff
7. Non-baptised children who are in care or have previously been in care
8. Non-baptised children who have a sibling that attends the school

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<sup>2</sup> United Kingdom Government, The National Curriculum - Key Stage 1 and 2 (2020) <<https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/key-stage-1-and-2>>

<sup>3</sup> United Kingdom Government, The National Curriculum - Key Stage 3 and 4 (2020) <<https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/key-stage-3-and-4>>

9. Any other child whose parents are seeking a Catholic education for them<sup>4</sup>

This is just one example of the oversubscription criteria that a faith school can have. However, after reading through the booklet describing the different Catholic schools in Cardiff, it does seem very typical for these schools to put high priority on children in care. Voluntary controlled and voluntary aided faith schools must still follow the national curriculum.

The requirements to gain entry to the Cardiff Muslim Primary School seem to focus slightly more on nepotism than the aforementioned Catholic school, stating that its 3 oversubscription criteria are:

1. One or more of the child's siblings attend the school
2. The child's family has strong connections to the school
3. The child has been reported to have both good academic and behavioural attributes<sup>5</sup>

I do believe that this is likely the case as the Cardiff Muslim Primary School is privately funded whereas the Christ the King Catholic Primary School is not.

Faith schools have had to amend their oversubscription criteria requirements for September 2021 as many of them require attendance in the relevant services which have obviously been heavily disrupted this year due to places of worship being forced to close in order to conform to the Covid-19 guidelines.<sup>6</sup>

I am now going to look at some different types of academies:

Academies have quite a few differences that separate them from local authority maintained schools. They do, however, need to follow the same rules as local authority funded schools when it comes to admissions, special education needs and exclusions. Any school can become an academy and if a school is rated inadequate by Ofsted then they are required to become an academy. Some differences are that they have the freedom of not being required to follow the National Curriculum, they are also not required to employ or not employ people based on whether they have received Qualified Teacher Status or not.

Free schools are a type of academy that began in England in 2011, they are usually separate from the local authority and often funded by charitable organisations which means that they are free to use their own curriculum. They are also free for children to attend. They are quite disliked among many groups throughout the United Kingdom, including the National Union of Teachers which has described free schools as "not wanted or needed"<sup>7</sup> after undertaking a survey involving 1000 parents.

Next I will look at another type of academy, sponsored schools. These are schools which were previously maintained by the local authority that have failed Ofsted investigations and have been required to become an academy. They must be run by a sponsor approved by the government, due to their previous abilities.

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<sup>4</sup> Cardiff Council, Admission Policies for Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled (Faith) Schools and Whitchurch High (Foundation) School (2020) <<https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/ENG/resident/Schools-and-learning/Schools/Applying-for-a-school-place/Documents/Admission%20Policies.pdf>>

<sup>5</sup> Cardiff Muslim Primary School, Cardiff Muslim Primary School Admissions Policy (2019) <[https://cmpswales.org/docs/policies/Admissions\\_Policy.pdf](https://cmpswales.org/docs/policies/Admissions_Policy.pdf)>

<sup>6</sup> United Kingdom Government, Coronavirus (COVID-19): changes to faith school admission arrangements (2020) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-changes-to-faith-school-admission-arrangements>>

<sup>7</sup> BBC News, Free Schools 'not wanted' Say Teachers (2020) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-12099245>>

There are also converter academy schools which are former local authority maintained schools but rather than being forced into becoming an academy, they voluntarily chose to.

The final two types of academy are faith academies and cooperative academies.

Another type of schooling offered in the United Kingdom is a city technical college. This is a school that is targeted toward 11 plus year old children who have higher abilities in science, math and/or technology based work. They are based in urban areas and are separate from the local authority, nonetheless, they still follow the National Curriculum.<sup>8</sup>

State boarding schools are another type of education given in Britain. These schools provide education entirely free but charge a payment for a child to board there. It is most common for a state boarding school to be an academy but they can also be run by the local authority. These are becoming more popular recently with parents working during the week so being unable to provide adequate care for their child or due to breakdowns within family units. These schools have the freedom to be picky when it comes to who is allowed to enter, they may decide on exclusively single sex admittance or they could only allow children with specific academic qualities into the school.<sup>9</sup>

Private schools are a similar form of schooling to state boarding schools as they do very often offer housing to the students. However these schools do not receive funding from the government and the education costs for the child must come from a private source. They do not need to follow the National Curriculum but do need to be inspected regularly. These inspections do not need to be completed by Ofsted in every case, only in about 50% of British private schools, the rest of them will be inspected by either The Independent Schools Inspectorate or the School Inspection Service.

Special schools for children with special educational needs are also an alternative for appropriate children.

Then, on top of these arguably more formal methods of education other than at school, there is home schooling. This is a method that is typically – but not always – completed by the parent or parents of a child. When educating at home a parent does not have to follow the National Curriculum, but may choose to. There are many reasons in which a parent would choose to home school their child. Some of these reasons can include, the ability to defer from the National Curriculum due to religious, philosophical or personal beliefs or even because they have attempted to allow their child to participate in a community school but they could not get along with it, perhaps it allows more freedom for the parents to work around the hours of their career, or sometimes it is not the parents choice to educate from home as we have seen be the case over the whole of the United Kingdom during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

### What do Philosophers have to say?

Bertrand Russell was a British Philosopher who lived from 1872-1970. He was an advocate for the education of women but his real interest in education began when his children were born. He began taking a disliking to the traditional method of schooling but did not fully agree with any of the progressive methods that existed at the time. Russell's second wife Dora was in agreement with these ideas and she, along with her husband, created the Beacon Hill School. The main idea of the

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<sup>8</sup>FE Jobs, City Technical Colleges (2020) <<https://www.fejobs.com/city-technical-colleges>>.

<sup>9</sup> The Good Schools Guide, State Boarding Schools (2020) <<https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/choosing-a-school/state-schools/state-boarding-schools>>

Beacon Hill School was to attempt to “teach children to leave behind superstition and the irrational views of previous generations as they viewed them.”<sup>10</sup> The school was only around for 16 years and was primarily led by Dora Russell, rather than Bertrand but it appears to have left a lasting impact on the pupils that attended it. A quote from a former student says this which is a good first hand example of an education outside of school being highly beneficial to children as individuals:

“Dora encouraged us to question, to follow our curiosity ... into all sorts of highways & byways of phenomena of life; to speculate; to wonder...I remember sheer fascination and a sense of the infinity of the field of knowledge that was waiting to be explored”<sup>11</sup>

Even though it was Russell’s wife who was more involved in the Beacon Hill School than Bertrand was himself, he did still have strong opinions on education. He believed in a method of discipline that is very similar to that of Maria Montessori. He believes a child should have freedom in their discipline in order to avoid an aversion to education. Russell believes that “the ideal school is better than the ideal home”<sup>12</sup> and that religion should be totally separate from any educational method as he thinks that religion would discourage a child’s sense of reality, it seems that he believed a religious organisation running a school would be innately bias. He also believed that the responsibility over the education of a child should be taken on by both the parents and the state. Russell believed in there being a direct link to the way a child is educated and their level of mental health in the future and because of this, no child should be over-educated.

John Locke is another English philosopher who lived between 1632 and 1704. He was a highly proficient education philosopher during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. His main idea, in his work ‘Some Thoughts Concerning Education’ was that education is what makes a man. Which was contrasting to St Augustine’s idea that all men are defined by the original sin.

Aristotle believed that education should be given to people in order to allow them to begin thinking with reason, to form an ethical character and develop adequate skills and knowledge. He was an advocate for the ancient Greek idea of liberal arts.

In conclusion, education does not always mean school in the traditional sense. I personally believe that it is very important to take every form of education seriously and to not disregard them simply because it is not what you or your child experienced. It is so crucial to understand that each child is an individual person and should never be treated as an age group. I also believe that many parents have gained either a strong appreciation for teachers or a new inspiration for their own child after being forced into home schooling their child over the lockdown period.

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<sup>10</sup> Poem Hunter, Biography of Dora Russell (2020) <<https://www.poemhunter.com/dora-russell/biography/>>

<sup>11</sup> John Locke, Some Thoughts Concerning Education (Dublin, Ireland: , 1728).

<sup>12</sup> Malik Shawal, *Bertrand Russell View on Education* (2020) <<https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/education/bertrand-russell-view-on-education/69148#:~:text=According%20to%20Russell%2C%20education%20is,for%20good%20and%20creative%20citizenship.>>>

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