



# **Food, Friends and Classes: Schools in English-Speaking Countries**

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**Food, Friends and Classes:**  
**Schools in English-Speaking Countries**  
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# FOREWORD

School is a pretty universal experience. Most children go to school, study similar subjects, complain about homework and tests, and make good friends. But schools are not exactly the same everywhere. There are small differences in the way that things are organized and named, even between English-speaking countries. This book will take you on a trip to schools in England, Ireland, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. There's the bell – let's go!

# WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE IN... ENGLAND

Liam Peach (UK)

## Primary School: Where it All Begins

Most children in England start school when they are four or five years old. The school system starts with primary school, where students stay until they are eleven years old. They learn many different subjects including maths, literacy<sup>1</sup>, science, design and technology, history, geography, art, music, physical education (P.E.) and religious education (R.E.)<sup>2</sup>. From 2010, all primary school children have to learn a foreign language, usually French, German, or Spanish. When I was at primary school we didn't learn foreign languages – that started at secondary school. Hopefully the new system will help British people to be better at foreign languages!

Primary school usually starts at nine o'clock in the morning and finishes at three. There is a morning break when students can go outside and play (or stay inside if it rains, which is quite often!), which lasts between 20–25 minutes depending on the school. Then there is a longer break in the afternoon for lunch which is usually 45–60 minutes. In most schools, it is possible to have a hot lunch in the school cafeteria or to bring a packed lunch<sup>3</sup> to school. It is funny to see British

**1 literacy** – reading and writing in English

**2 religious education** – learning about different beliefs in god or many gods

**3 packed lunch** – lunch prepared at home to be eaten later



schoolchildren walking to school in the morning, all carrying their brightly-coloured lunchboxes! Inside, you'll usually find sandwiches, a drink, a piece of fruit, a packet of crisps and maybe a yoghurt. Crisps are a national obsession<sup>4</sup> in Britain! They are very unhealthy but we all eat them. Popular flavours are salt and vinegar, cheese and onion and smoky bacon. Hot lunches often have a piece of meat, potatoes and vegetables, or something like pasta or curry. It is also possible to go home for lunch if you live near the school.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do Czech primary schools start and finish at the same times as the UK ones?
- When do Czech students begin learning foreign languages? Which ones are the most common?
- How are school lunches in the UK similar to or different from Czech school lunches?
- What are some typical crisp flavours in the Czech Republic? Does the Czech Republic have a national obsession with any food or drinks?

### Secondary School: Bigger, Scarier and More to Learn

Primary schools are often small schools just for the children from the surrounding area. After primary school, from the age of eleven, children start secondary school. Secondary schools are much bigger, there can be up to 1,000 students, and the children from all the surrounding primary schools go to one secondary school. It is a big change for the students to go from being big fish in a small pond<sup>5</sup> to little fish in a big pond!

Secondary school is a great time to meet lots of new people and to make new friends. Social groups often change a lot during the first couple of years of secondary school. Sometimes the great friends you had at primary school are quickly forgotten and replaced by new ones.

**4 national obsession** – something everyone in the country is very interested in

**5 pond** – small body of water, can be either natural or man-made

In addition, school seems to get a lot more serious. Primary school starts to look like a happy, simple time full of sunshine and games in comparison! At secondary school, there are heavy textbooks and so much homework! Also, the teachers become a lot scarier. Primary school teachers are generally kind, friendly and gentle people, but all of a sudden they are replaced by monsters! Secondary school teachers are there to teach you, not to be your friend. If you misbehave<sup>6</sup> in class, the consequences<sup>7</sup> are worse.

My scariest teacher was Mr Morgan, my new maths teacher. He was really old, really fat, really tall, and he could shout really loudly. He even made some of the students in his class cry! Luckily, I always managed to stay out of his way.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How many primary schools are in your town? How many secondary schools?
- Did your social group change much when you left primary school?
- What are the teachers like in Czech primary versus secondary schools?

### In the Classroom

At primary schools, children usually stay in the same classroom all day and have the same teacher for all of their subjects. Secondary school is very different. Students are put into a “tutor group” with a tutor room and a tutor – a teacher who is in charge of your tutor group. Students often have the same tutor for many years or even their whole time at school.

They go to their tutor room every morning and the tutor takes a register<sup>8</sup> to see who is and isn't there. They also tell the class any important information for the day. Then the first bell rings and students have to go to their first classroom. Students go to different classrooms for different lessons and are not always with the same classmates.

**6 to misbehave** – to act badly, not follow the rules

**7 consequences** – the result of another action, usually negative

**8 takes a register** – keeps a record of who is at school each day

Students are separated according to<sup>9</sup> their ability in some lessons. You might be in “upper” or “lower” French, for example. You can’t just sit with your best friend all day.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Are Czech schools divided into groups? Is there a teacher for each group?
- Who takes the register in your school? How often?
- Do you change classrooms for different subjects? Are you always with the same students?

### Favourite Subjects and Popular Sports

The subjects at secondary school are mostly the same as those at primary school, but there are also a few more. Science becomes more complicated and is often split into physics, chemistry and biology. In the past, students started to learn a foreign language at secondary school. At my school, we couldn’t choose which language we wanted to study; half of the students studied German and half of the students studied French. Students also start with lessons about citizenship<sup>10</sup> and get lessons about sex and relationships. Some schools also teach PSHE, which stands for personal, social and health education.

In P.E. we learn to play team sports such as football, rugby, cricket, basketball and volleyball for the boys. Girls play netball<sup>11</sup>, field hockey and volleyball. I have very strong memories of standing in a muddy<sup>12</sup> field in the pouring rain<sup>13</sup> trying to avoid the ball in rugby! Hockey in Britain is not the same as hockey in the Czech Republic. Here you play on ice with a puck, but in Britain hockey is usually played outdoors with a ball. It is not as brutal as ice hockey! In R.E. (religious education) we learn about the main religions in the UK, and students can visit different

<sup>9</sup> according to – the method or way something is organized

<sup>10</sup> citizenship – what it means to be from a country, its culture, society and government

<sup>11</sup> netball – a sport, usually played by girls or women, who throw a ball through a net at the top of a pole, similar to basketball

<sup>12</sup> muddy – wet, soft, dirty ground

<sup>13</sup> pouring rain – very heavy rain



places of worship: churches (for Christians), synagogues (for Jews), mosques (for Muslims), gurdwaras (for Sikhs) and Hindu temples.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the most common subjects in Czech secondary schools?
- Do you have sex and relationship classes in secondary school?
- Do you get to choose which language you study? If so, when do you make this choice?
- What sports are popular in Czech P.E. classes? Do boys and girls play the same or different sports?
- How do Czech students learn about religion? How many different places of worship are in your town?

## What to Wear (and What Not to Wear)

Of course, children have to wear a school uniform in the UK. At my primary school, boys wore black trousers or black shorts, a white shirt, and a red jumper with the school badge<sup>14</sup> on it. Our school badge was an oak tree and a squirrel<sup>15</sup>. Girls wore a red and white dress or black trousers with the red school jumper.

Secondary school comes with a new school uniform. At my secondary school, it was black or brown shoes (no trainers!), black trousers or a skirt for girls, a white shirt or blouse, a black v-necked jumper (not round-necked!), and worst of all, a school tie. Our school tie was red with white falcons<sup>16</sup> (the symbol of our school) on it, and it took a long time for me to learn how to tie it correctly. Girls were allowed to wear small earrings, but all other piercings were prohibited<sup>17</sup>. One boy had his nose pierced and he had to put a plaster over it every day! Many schools have a school blazer, which is a type of jacket, usually with the school badge on it.

We never liked wearing our school uniforms, but the reasons behind them are actually quite good. The first idea is that everybody feels a “school spirit<sup>18</sup>”. The second reason is to stop bullying. If everybody wears the same clothes, then nobody can be made fun of<sup>19</sup> for wearing unfashionable clothes because everybody is wearing unfashionable clothes! Of course, many students try to make their uniform less unfashionable by customising<sup>20</sup> it somehow. Girls made their skirts shorter and boys wore their shirts outside their trousers, not tucked in. “Tuck that shirt in!” was a common phrase heard in our school. We would try to tie our ties in different ways, like making the thick part very small and the thin part very long, or by colouring the white falcons with black pen.

**14 school badge** – a picture or symbol for a specific school

**15 squirrel** – a small animal with a large tail that lives in the forest (*veverka*)

**16 falcon** – a large bird (*sokol*)

**17 prohibited** – not allowed; unacceptable

**18 school spirit** – being proud of your school; feeling like part of a group

**19 to make fun of** – to laugh at, or say rude or cruel things about someone

**20 to customise** – to change or modify something to the way you like

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do any Czech schools have uniforms?
- Does your school have a badge or symbol?
- Are any clothes, piercings, or other fashion choices prohibited at your school?

### School Rules: You're In Trouble Now!

At secondary school, there are different punishments<sup>21</sup> for students who misbehave. A very common type of punishment is called “lines”. If you have seen *The Simpsons*, you will know what this is. You have to write the same sentence many, many times. It can be on the blackboard, like Bart Simpson, or more commonly on a piece of paper. Your teacher could give you, 50, 100, 150, or even more lines. You have to write about what you did wrong, for example, “I must not run in school. I must not run in school. I must not run in school...” I remember having to write, “I must not forget my P.E. kit<sup>22</sup>” 100 times! It took a long time and gave me a horrible pain in my wrist<sup>23</sup>. When I gave it to my P.E. teacher the next day, he looked at it, said, “OK” and then ripped it into small pieces and threw it in the bin! I never forgot my P.E. kit again.

Another punishment is detention. This means you have to stay longer at school, for maybe an hour or more, while everybody else goes home. If you do something more serious, you might be suspended, which means you must stay at home for some time, or even expelled, which means you can never come back to that school again! This might sound nice, but it can cause many problems and you have to find a new school, which is not so easy.

**21 punishment** – having to do sth bad as a result of bad behaviour

**22 P.E. kit** – the things you need for P.E. class, usually clothes and shoes for different sports

**23 wrist** – the part of the body between your arm and hand (*zápěstí*)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What kind of punishments are common in Czech schools? What kind of behaviours are punished?
- Can students ever be suspended or expelled from Czech schools?

### It's Exam Time

At secondary school, you have to do a lot of exams which are important for your future. The most important exams are called GCSEs which students do when they are sixteen. GCSE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education. Most students do GCSEs in about 8–10 different subjects. English, maths and sciences are compulsory<sup>24</sup>, and then there are other exams in modern languages, history, geography, design and technology, ICT (internet and computer technology), art, drama, R.E., P.E., music, business studies, and other subjects. GCSEs are traditionally graded<sup>25</sup> from A\*–F (A\* is the best and F is the worst). To pass the subject, you need to get a grade between A\*–C.

At the moment, the age you can leave school depends on when you were born. If you were born before 1<sup>st</sup> September 1997, you can leave at 16. However, if you were born after this date you must now stay in some kind of training or education until you are 18. There are different educational options after the age of sixteen. Students can study for a diploma at a college which is more focused on getting practical experience and getting a job, or they can continue with academic study and do A-levels.

**24 compulsory** – required, everyone must do them

**25 graded** – evaluated, given a mark or score to show how well you did



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- At what age do Czech secondary school students do important exams?
- How many subjects do you do exams in? Which ones are compulsory?
- When can Czech students leave school? Can they also choose between practical education or academic studies? Do you think this is a good age to make this important decision?

### A-Levels, Sixth Form and University

A-levels are exams which students spend two years studying and preparing for at “sixth form<sup>26</sup>”. This could be a part of a secondary school or a separate sixth form college. Which A-levels you can study depends on what grades you got in your GCSEs. When I studied A-levels, my sixth form was part of my secondary school, but now that we were

**26 sixth form** – the years students spend studying for A-level exams

older than 16, things were very different. We didn't have to wear a uniform and we would be treated like adults! Or at least that is what they told us.

In reality it wasn't much different. We could wear our own clothes but there were still rules: no trainers, no jeans, no piercings, and some of the teachers still treated us like we were children. We did have our own sixth form centre<sup>27</sup> which was separate from the rest of the school with sofas and even a stereo! Students do their A-level exams when they are 18 and after that they are free to start working or to go to university.

Students usually do three or four A-levels in the subjects they are most interested in. They learn about these subjects for another two years in much more detail than at the GCSE level. Your choice of university depends on what A-level results you get. The best universities like Oxford or Cambridge require all A\*s to even have a chance to apply, but there are many universities which have many different entry requirements<sup>28</sup>.

Nowadays nearly everybody can go to university if they want, no matter what results they get in their A-levels. However, universities are not free in England and students have to borrow a lot of money – up to £9,000 (about 325,000 CZK) per year for the best schools – if they want to continue studying. Students can study for a Bachelor's degree, which takes three years, a Master's degree, which takes five years, or a PhD, which is usually seven or eight years.

Many students go to university in a different town to their home, so it is their first real taste of freedom and living away from their parents. It can be quite a crazy time, full of partying, especially in the first year! After university, however, most students have large debts<sup>29</sup> and it is necessary to get a job. This can be quite a shock after so many years of education, so some people like to take a break from all the studying by travelling or working for a charity organisation. Unfortunately though, you cannot avoid the world of work forever!

**27 sixth form centre** – an area for older students to relax and study

**28 entry requirements** – the minimum exam scores, age, and other factors to be accepted

**29 debts** – borrowed money that you must pay back

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do Czech schools have different rules for older students? Are they treated differently?
- What are the requirements to get into a Czech university?
- Do Czech students have to pay to go to Czech universities? How much does it cost? Can they borrow money to help with the expenses of being a student?
- How many years do the equivalent degrees take at Czech universities?

# WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE IN... IRELAND

Vince McCaffrey (Ireland)

## Primary School: From Simple to Serious

Two months before my fifth birthday, I was dressed in the dark grey trousers and royal blue jumper of Saint Patrick's National School for boys aged 4–12. Sporting<sup>30</sup> my Sunday shoes<sup>31</sup> and light-grey-and-wine-coloured tie, I enjoyed hearing everybody tell me how grand<sup>32</sup> I looked. Little did I know that I would be wearing a uniform for the next fourteen years.

My first years in primary school were called Junior Infants<sup>33</sup>, with a programme of arts and crafts, music, and story time from 9 am until 1 pm. Senior Infants brought more of the same.

In First Class, as I turned 7, we got down to business<sup>34</sup>. School hours were from 9 am until 3 pm, with a 15-minute break in the morning and an hour for lunch. We worked on “the four R’s” – reading, writing, and arithmetic (an old name for mathematics). In Ireland, religion<sup>35</sup> is

**30 sporting** – informal slang for “wearing”

**31 Sunday shoes** – formal shoes, often worn to church on Sundays

**32 grand** – really good; great

**33 infant** – another word for “baby”; also used for primary school children in BrE

**34 to get down to business** – to start doing something seriously, with your full attention

**35 religion** – the subject of god(s) and beliefs

the fourth R. Of course, we also had Gaelige (Irish), English, some history and geography, a little bit of arts and crafts and sadly, no music.

Primary school ended with a successful entrance exam for my next school, Árdcoil Rís.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you remember what you wore on your first day of school?
- In what year did your primary school start getting down to business?
- Did you study music in primary school? How did you feel about it?

## Secondary School: All About the Teachers

Árdcoil Rís Christian Brothers School for students aged 12–18 was a decent<sup>36</sup> secondary school, by most standards. In English, Árdcoil Rís means Rice Secondary School, which was named after Edmund Rice, founder of the Christian Brothers order. Pale grey with hints of<sup>37</sup> yellow and red were my new proud colours at Árdcoil Rís.

The curriculum<sup>38</sup> was an interesting change. New subjects like science and business studies awoke my curiosity<sup>39</sup>. Technical drawing was a new challenge. But the best thing about secondary school was that we had different teachers for different subjects. Looking back, I can say that most of them were quite forgettable, but I have strong memories of a very special few.

There was the inspirational English teacher, who was so passionate<sup>40</sup> about teaching literature. He was so animated and full of energy during class as he acted out roles from Shakespeare, or read poetry by Kavanagh, Wordsworth, or Yeats. We sometimes wondered whether he was going to explode with a heart attack when performing an angry scene from Shakespeare's King Lear.

**36 decent** – good enough, not great but not bad

**37 hints of** – a little bit of a colour, smell, or flavour

**38 curriculum** – all the subjects taught in one year or course

**39 awoke my curiosity** – made me interested in learning more

**40 passionate** – having strong feelings or emotions about sth

## IRELAND

There was the maths teacher – a distracted and absent-minded<sup>41</sup> farmer. His farm, near where I lived, had about a hundred cows. He regularly came to class late (with farmyard dirt on his clothes and shoes), and often forgot what our assignments<sup>42</sup> were or where in the course we actually were. But once he started teaching, we tried to follow the chalk<sup>43</sup> marks. He wrote solutions on the board like a painter moving across a canvas<sup>44</sup>. He was a mathematical thinker with a unique teaching style.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the differences between awful, decent, and great secondary schools? Make a list and decide which things are most and least important.
- Did your curriculum change from primary school to secondary school?
- Which teachers from your past do you remember most? Describe them to a partner.

### Favourite Subjects and Popular Sports

In Ireland, everyone studies Irish at both primary and secondary school. This means that pretty much<sup>45</sup> everybody speaks or at least understands some level of Irish. It is the first official language of the country.

After my Junior Certificate<sup>46</sup>, I made some choices about which subjects I wanted to study. I picked German over French, geography over physics and accounting, chemistry over economics and applied maths, and biology over history and business. These choices were my preferences<sup>47</sup>, and they didn't matter for my university prospects<sup>48</sup>.

- 41** distracted and absent-minded – unable to pay attention and forgets many things  
**42** assignment – a piece of work that you are told to do  
**43** chalk – white powder used to write on a blackboard  
**44** canvas – blank material before being painted  
**45** pretty much – informal for “almost”  
**46** Junior Certificate – state exams in Ireland  
**47** preference – feeling of liking one thing more than another  
**48** prospect – future possibility



Physical Education (P.E.) was part of both primary and secondary school education, and we learned just a few sports. P.E. in primary school usually meant some form of gymnastics. We also played indoor soccer, volleyball, and basketball. Of course, most boys just wanted to play soccer, but there was also Gaelic football (similar to football and rugby), hurling (a traditional Irish team sport played with a stick and ball), and rugby. Árdcoil was a “rugby school”. Those who didn't make the team (me included) often rode buses to go to matches and support the school team.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What languages can you study at your school?
- Do you agree with the author's choices of subjects? Which would you choose?
- What sports do students always want to play in your P.E. lessons?
- Does your school have any sports teams? Do students ever go to matches to support them?

## Church in Schools

Religion was a big part of schooling in Ireland. Lessons sometimes started with prayers<sup>49</sup>, and sometimes we sang hymns<sup>50</sup>. Priests visited the school regularly to test our knowledge, and we had rehearsals<sup>51</sup> for the church ceremony. There was also the dreaded<sup>52</sup> Confession, where we had to tell the priest all the bad things we had done. He forgave<sup>53</sup> us and told us how many times we should say the prayers “Our Father” and “Hail Mary”. Funnily, I could never remember any real sins<sup>54</sup>, and I couldn’t just say nothing, so I made some up<sup>55</sup>. I wonder, was that worse?

The Catholic church still has a central role in Irish education, but with growing immigrant communities bringing many different religions, this has become a controversial issue.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you think religion should be a part of education?
- Should schools teach one religion, all religions, or just the most popular in their country?

## What to Wear (and What Not to Wear)

Uniforms are a part of daily life for most Irish school children. They come in all kinds of dull<sup>56</sup> colours – grey, brown, navy, or wine. We got in trouble for not wearing the right clothes. Árdcoil had a pretty common dress code – no jeans, sportswear, runners<sup>57</sup>, or jewellery of any kind. Boy’s hair had to be long enough to be seen, but could be no longer than your ear.

**49 prayer** – speaking to a god

**50 hymns** – Christian songs

**51 rehearsal** – practice, usually for a performance

**52 dreaded** – terrible, the opposite of something you’re looking forward to

**53 to forgive** – to stop being angry, to say that past bad behaviour is okay now

**54 sin** – something against the rules of a religion

**55 to make sth up** – to invent sth, to tell a story that isn’t real

**56 dull** – not bright or interesting

**57 runners** – another name for trainers; sports shoes

In some ways, the uniform made life easy. We didn’t have to think about what to wear every day. But it was also a source of stress in the morning if you couldn’t find a clean shirt.

Most kids hated their uniform, and came up with all kinds of clever ways to customise their look. We started poking<sup>58</sup> our thumbs through the ends of our sleeves to create a sort of half-glove look. Some girls used to make their skirts as short as possible. I think they got in trouble for wearing them above the knee.

The problem with the uniform was that everyone in the city knew who you were. As our principal constantly reminded us, as long as we had that uniform on, we were representing the school. And ours was the best school in Ireland, he’d have you know<sup>59</sup>.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the benefits / downsides of wearing a school uniform?
- Do you feel that you are representing your school when you are in your city or town?

## School Rules: Try Not to Cry!

School discipline in Ireland used to be really tough<sup>60</sup>. My mother was a schoolteacher and at parent-teacher meetings, she gave the teachers her permission to slap<sup>61</sup> me if they needed to. Thankfully, I was not a troublemaker. Our good behaviour came from a culture of fear<sup>62</sup>. One German teacher would tell the class “I’ll make ye cry” (in Ireland people sometimes say “ye” for the plural second person). Some teachers called students an “amadán” (fool), and others just assigned us extra work.

Corporal punishment<sup>63</sup> became illegal in Ireland in 1982, but my Senior Infants teacher was traditional. She kept a *bata* (stick) on her

**58 to poke** – to push something with your finger or a pointed object

**59 he’d have you know** – he wants everyone to believe this; he says this often and to everyone

**60 tough** – hard, difficult, strict

**61 to slap** – to hit someone with an open hand

**62 culture of fear** – situation based on being afraid of bad things happening to you

**63 corporal punishment** – hitting or hurting someone instead of using words or extra work

desk, and it was her special treatment for serious offenders<sup>64</sup>. One day she caught me joking with a classmate, and I was called to the front of the class. “Stretch out your hand,” she said. I opened my left hand and closed my eyes. I heard the stick go through the air and then a loud “crack”. I bit my lip, trying not to cry out. Four cracks later, I was sent back to my seat quivering<sup>65</sup>, with my left hand held tightly under my right arm.

At Árdscóil, there were plenty of rules: no chewing gum, no earphones, no swearing<sup>66</sup>, no spitting<sup>67</sup>, no leaving school grounds within school hours, no talking during class, no cheating<sup>68</sup> during tests, no running in the corridors, and more that I can’t remember.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Is corporal punishment legal in the Czech Republic? Do you think it should be?**
- **Which rules from Irish schools are the same as your school? Which ones are different?**

### It’s Exam Time

On several different occasions, teachers told me, “This is the most important exam of your life.” The first was at 11 years of age, and it was an exam to enter secondary school. The next time was for the Junior Certificate at age 15, when I had state exams in English, Irish, maths, French, German, history, geography, science, and business studies. Then there was the Leaving Certificate at age 18 – and this was the one that actually mattered. Our teachers gave us a lot of stress about it, and lots of people really studied hard. I didn’t overdo<sup>69</sup> it, but for a few months before the exam, I had about four or five hours of additional studying for my Leaving Cert. Add that to six hours of classes, and those were busy days.

**64 serious offenders** – people who do something really bad

**65 quivering** – shaking

**66 swearing** – saying bad words

**67 spitting** – sending liquid out of your mouth

**68 to cheat** – to break the rules or copy answers

**69 to overdo** – to do too much



Ireland uses a points system, so the school leaving exam is also the university entrance exam. Students are under pressure<sup>70</sup> to pass the exam and choose a university. We make about ten selections, in order of preference. Students are offered a course based on the number of applications for that course, and the students’ performance (points) in the exam. I was offered my first choice, and so at age 18, I set off<sup>71</sup> to Cork to study Applied Psychology.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **How is the Irish exam system similar or different from the Czech exam system?**
- **How much time do you plan to spend studying for your final exams?**
- **Is the Czech final exam also used as a university entrance exam?**
- **How many universities do most Czech students choose? What is the decision based on?**

**70 under pressure** – to feel stress from parents, teachers, responsibilities, etc.

**71 to set off** – to begin a journey

## Life at University

Cork was two hours from home, so it also meant looking for a flat. I moved into a converted garage<sup>72</sup> with an old schoolmate, who was studying biochemistry.

Today university in Ireland is state-funded<sup>73</sup>, and students pay an admission fee of around €3,000. I think it's a decent system, with good quality research and teaching.

In Cork, the main university faculties are Arts (Languages, Philosophy, Social Sciences), Natural Sciences, Medicine, Law, Engineering (Civil, Food, Mechanical, Electronic), and Finance. The university occupies<sup>74</sup> a large section of the city, and there are tens of thousands of students.

In any field, you can get a Bachelor's degree in three or four years, a Master's in five and a PhD in six or seven.

Psychology was part of Arts, and we had it pretty easy. Most days were short, and we were expected to spend time reading on our own. I enjoyed that freedom to live an easy life, and when the time came to submit<sup>75</sup> a paper, I made a huge effort, staying up for days to make the deadline<sup>76</sup>. My grades were usually good, so I could go back to the easy life of cafes, concerts, and sleeping late for a while longer.

By comparison my flatmate had eight-hour days, with laboratory assignments on top of a heavy class schedule, and struggled with frequent exams.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Where do Czech students usually live while at university?**
- **Are Czech universities state-funded? Do students have to pay any fees?**
- **Do you think that your university life will be more like the writer's or his flatmate's?**

**72 converted garage** – a space that used to be a garage but is now used as a living space

**73 state-funded** – the state pays for everything

**74 to occupy** – to take up space

**75 to submit** – to give to the right place

**76 deadline** – a time sth must be done by

# WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE IN... THE USA

Peppur Chambers (USA)

## Elementary School: On Our Own

On the first day of elementary school, five-year old children jump out of their parents' cars and run towards the school playground with backpacks that are as big as they are! Elementary school, also known as grade school or grammar school in the US, starts between 7:45 am and 8:30 am and finishes between 2:45 pm and 3:30 pm, depending on which state you live in. This is the first time many children are away from their parents for so long. On this first day of school, it is often the parents who have tears in their eyes and need a big hug because elementary school is a sign that their "baby" is growing up.

Children continue at the same school from kindergarten<sup>77</sup> at age five through fifth or sixth grade<sup>78</sup> at ages 10–11. They usually have the same teacher for the entire school year. Students study reading, writing, grammar, spelling, vocabulary, math, science and sometimes social studies<sup>79</sup> for older students. Students often change classrooms for specialty activities like arts and crafts, music, and of course gym class. Students are always excited about lunch and the most important "class":

**77 kindergarten** – the first official year of US schools; anything before this is called pre-school

**78 grade** – AmE for class or year at school

**79 social studies** – one class that includes geography, government, politics, history, etc.

recess<sup>80</sup>! After eating a typical lunch brought from home of a sandwich, juice box or cola, veggies or fruit, potato chips, cookies or candy and maybe a granola bar<sup>81</sup>, or an unhealthy school lunch like pizza and fries, kids run outside to the playground for a half hour to an hour.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How is the meaning of “grammar school” different in AmE and BrE?
- Are US elementary school hours similar to your elementary school?
- How old were the youngest and oldest children at your elementary school?
- What do you think about the typical US school lunch?
- Did you have recess in elementary school? If so, how long did it last?

### Junior High, Middle School and High School

There’s a photo of me in a mini-skirt on the steps of Lincoln Junior High School, with the boniest<sup>82</sup> knees and the longest legs ever. I was eleven and it was the first day of 7<sup>th</sup> grade. In Wisconsin, students go to junior high (7–9<sup>th</sup> grade); however, my niece and nephew in Arizona go to middle school (6<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> grade). After spending three years with the same people, it’s time to change buildings and students again for high school, which is either 9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade.

After elementary school, things get more serious. You’re in a new, bigger school, and there’s lots of homework, plus new subjects like algebra, geography, language studies, home economics<sup>83</sup>, shop classes<sup>84</sup> (wood, metal, or auto), and health where teachers use medical pictures and horror stories to scare students into not having sex. Students get a locker<sup>85</sup> to keep their books, jackets, and personal things. Some kids’ lockers are very messy and might explode with papers when opened.

**80 recess** – free time, usually spent on the playground

**81 granola bar** – a bar made from grains, nuts, dried fruit, and maybe sugar or honey

**82 bony** – very thin, so you can see the bones inside your body

**83 home economics** – includes cooking and sewing

**84 shop classes** – practical classes learning to use tools in a workshop

**85 locker** – metal cupboard with a lock



My locker mate<sup>86</sup> and I put up photos of movie stars and had a mirror to check for food in our braces<sup>87</sup>.

Students might join drama club, the debate team, cheerleading or try to become a junior varsity or varsity<sup>88</sup> athlete. In high school, there are also school dances each year like homecoming<sup>89</sup>, winter formal, or prom<sup>90</sup>. Things like deodorant, clothes and cool backpacks become super important because during these years, you become a... *teenager*!

**86 locker mate** – person with the locker next to yours

**87 braces** – metal on your teeth to keep them straight

**88 (junior) varsity** – varsity athletes are the most skilled players, usually older, while junior varsity (JV) teams are less-skilled and usually younger students

**89 homecoming** – autumn festival usually connected with an important American football game, when past students come home to visit their high school town

**90 prom** – final formal dance of your last year of high school

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- US students usually change schools three times – elementary school, junior high or middle school, and high school. What could be good or bad about this system?
- How many of the typical US subjects are available at your school?
- Do you have a locker at school? What would you like to use to decorate your locker?

### Sweating Over Subjects

Senior High School is the last stop before college<sup>91</sup>. From age 14 to 18, students are planning what courses and grade point averages<sup>92</sup> (GPA's) are needed to go to the school they want. Some students take Advanced Placement (AP) courses. These are special high school courses in English literature, languages, physics, economics, US and world history, or even music theory that help students prepare for exams. Students who pass these exams can receive university credit.

I liked the challenge of high school. I was able to take high-level French courses, which were inspired by a trip to Douai, France in junior high. I had an honors<sup>93</sup> English teacher who loved her red pen; if you had one single run-on sentence<sup>94</sup> in an entire class paper, she wrote a big red “F<sup>95</sup>” on your work. I also discovered that I was a bit of a mad scientist and loved cutting up worms<sup>96</sup> in biology. I also did well in psychology and economics, which led me to major in<sup>97</sup> Communications and Advertising in college. Sadly, it was also during high school where I accepted the dark truth that I am horrible at math.

**91 college** – AmE for all university-level education

**92 grade point averages** – one number that tells how well you did in all classes together

**93 honors (classes)** – another word for advanced or high-level (classes)

**94 run-on sentence** – an incorrect sentence that should be divided into two sentences (e.g. *I have a brother his name is John.*)

**95 F** – the lowest mark in the US scale of A-F, stands for “fail”

**96 worms** – small, thin animals with no legs that live in the ground

**97 to major in** – AmE for studying a specific subject at university



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Does your school have advanced courses for high-level students? In which subjects?
- What are your best and worst subjects?

### What to Wear (and What Not to Wear)

In high school, we were not allowed to wear shorts – even in hot weather! We thought this was really stupid and we signed our names to petitions of protest<sup>98</sup>. We never won this battle with the administration. Girls wore mini-skirts instead, and the boys got very mad. One boy wore a mini-skirt and was immediately sent home.

I never went to a Catholic, all-girl or private school that required a uniform. Most public schools in the US don't have them, so I was lucky to wear what I wanted. We also had fun days to wear weird outfits like

**98 petition of protest** – paper with many names of people who disagree with sth

School Pride<sup>99</sup> Day (when we wore school colors), 1950's Day, Pajama Day or Reverse Day (when we wore clothes backwards or inside out). Some friends would also make their own Twin<sup>100</sup> Day and dress the same as one another.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Is there anything you're not allowed to wear to school?
- Do you have any special dress days?
- What would you wear for each of the days that the writer describes?

### School Rules: Don't Get Detention!

Rules change from school-to-school and teacher-to-teacher. In sixth grade, my homeroom<sup>101</sup> teacher had a rule that if a marble<sup>102</sup> hit the floor, it became his. I was a good player. One day, I had my big coffee can of different marbles on my desk. I sneezed<sup>103</sup> and the can crashed to the floor. There were marbles everywhere! I started to cry because I thought my marble-playing career was over! Luckily, the teacher felt sorry for me and returned my collection after a week without them.

In US high schools, each year has a name – 9<sup>th</sup> graders are freshmen, 10<sup>th</sup> are sophomores, 11<sup>th</sup> are juniors, and 12<sup>th</sup> are seniors. At my school, only seniors were allowed to leave campus<sup>104</sup> for lunch. As freshmen, we watched the cool kids drive off in their cars, packed<sup>105</sup> with friends, to buy French fries and Big Macs while we ate the soggy<sup>106</sup> burritos and cold peas from our school cafeteria. If you were caught sneaking off<sup>107</sup>, you had to stay after-school for detention<sup>108</sup>.

**99 pride** – a good feeling about something

**100 twin** – two babies born to the same mother on the same day

**101 homeroom** – first period of the day where teachers see who is at school and give any important information for the day

**102 marble** – small round glass ball

**103 to sneeze** – when air comes through your nose and mouth, usually from a cold or allergies

**104 campus** – the school buildings and area around them (fields, car park, etc.)

**105 packed** – extremely full

**106 soggy** – wet and soft, usually negative

**107 sneaking off** – leaving school without permission

**108 detention** – staying late after school for doing something wrong

I got detention only once, for a different reason. Mr. Clark had a huge sign in his history class: NO GUM! One day, after having Burger King onion rings<sup>109</sup> at lunch, I forgot to take the gum out of my mouth before class. *Whoosh*, I was sent to the principal's<sup>110</sup> office to receive my detention assignment.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Are you allowed to leave campus for lunch?
- Is the food at your school cafeteria better or worse than fast food?
- Have you ever gotten in trouble at school? What for? What was the punishment?

### It's Exam Time

Along with required high school courses and high GPA's, getting into the college of your choice is based on exams. Most schools require you to take official tests called the SAT, the ACT, or both for entry. Students who want to go to a university take these tests during their senior year, not as a part of the school curriculum. They are often held after school or on weekends and they cost nearly \$60 (almost 1,500 CZK) each.

As a 17-year old, I freaked out<sup>111</sup> during these stressful tests. My guidance counselor was speechless<sup>112</sup> when she saw how poorly I did on my ACT (although my SAT was a little better). Luckily, I had a very high GPA, was a great track and field<sup>113</sup> athlete and was student body<sup>114</sup> president. Many schools also look at extra-curricular activities<sup>115</sup> like being on the school newspaper or yearbook<sup>116</sup> staff, as well as being part of student government or other leadership organizations. Being involved in community, social, church or ethnic groups also helps. This strategy saved me!

**109 onion rings** – sliced onions covered in breadcrumbs and fried

**110 principal** – AmE for headmaster or person in charge of the school

**111 to freak out** – to be very emotional (nervous, stressed, angry, etc.)

**112 speechless** – so surprised that you can't speak

**113 track and field** – AmE for athletics

**114 student body** – all of the students at one school

**115 extra-curricular activities** – organized hobbies outside of classes such as sports, clubs, etc.

**116 yearbook** – a book with photos of all students and school activities from the past year

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What exams do you need to take to go to university?
- What are some strategies to not freak out before an exam?
- Are there any extra-curricular activities at your school?
- Do you have to do extra-curricular or community activities to get into Czech universities?

### The Price of University Life

Not everyone who wants to go to college has the opportunity. Higher education in the United States is very expensive. Most students have to take out a loan<sup>117</sup> to cover four years of education costs. Many parents hope and pray that their kids will be very talented in athletics or academics so that they will earn a scholarship<sup>118</sup>. This is why some parents push their children to do every sport, music, dance, art or math class from age four! State public schools are less expensive than private schools. For an “in-state<sup>119</sup>” school where you live, tuition can be \$9,000 (about 220,000 CZK) per year. If you go away to an “out-of-state” university, it can cost \$24,000 (almost 600,000 CZK) per year. Private schools on average are \$32,000 (about 775,000 CZK) per year and these prices often don’t include books, housing, food, or other living expenses.

I applied to three Wisconsin state universities because my friends were going there. I also applied to Northwestern University in Chicago and Georgetown University in Washington, DC because my brothers said they had great basketball teams. I also chose three smaller private universities because I liked the idea of smaller classes. Where did I go? Marquette in Wisconsin. Why? Because I got a track scholarship and it was closer to home.

**117 take out a loan** – borrow money from the bank or the government

**118 scholarship** – money for a university education, from the school itself or other organizations

**119 in-state** – in the same state as your home or residence

## WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE IN... CANADA

Liam Axe (Canada)

### Elementary School: The First Step

School in Canada begins with elementary school. Canadian kids start going to elementary school when they’re five years old, and finish when they’re between 11 and 13. The age that a child finishes elementary school depends on where they live, because every province in Canada has a slightly different school system.

In elementary school, kids study lots of different subjects, including math, science, art, music, social studies, and either English or French (or sometimes both). The school day is usually from 8:30 am to 3:00 pm, with an hour for lunch and two fifteen-minute breaks called recesses. These allow the kids to let off steam<sup>120</sup> between classes. During recess, kids go outside to play. At lunch, most kids eat their own packed lunch, and then they play outside or participate in clubs or organized activities. I was really lucky when I was a kid, because my school had its own little forest which we could play in and explore during breaks. It was amazing!

Many elementary schools have special graduation<sup>121</sup> ceremonies for the children when they finish, just like teenagers get after secondary

**120 let off steam** – move around and use energy after sitting and paying attention

**121 graduation** – when you complete your studies at a school

school. It's a really special moment for the kids, who are always very nervous and excited about moving up to the big leagues<sup>122</sup>!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How old were you when you finished elementary school?
- How do Czech students let off steam in elementary school?
- Are there any forests near your school? Can you go there during breaks?
- Did your primary school have a graduation ceremony?

### High School: Stress, Relax, and Celebrate

What happens after elementary school? It's different everywhere. It can even be different within the same city! In some places, kids go straight to high school when they're 13 or 14, and stay there until they finish when they're around 17. In other places, they go to middle school (also called junior high) for three years before they start high school.

In both middle school and high school, kids get more choice about what they want to study. This can make them feel more grown up but can also be quite scary sometimes! Luckily, all schools have guidance counselors<sup>123</sup>, who can give advice and support when students are feeling overwhelmed<sup>124</sup>.

The school day is usually shorter in high school than in elementary school. (Maybe because of all the extra homework!) Most students finish lessons at around 2:30 pm, but many kids join clubs and sport teams, which they participate in after school.

Of course, social life is very important for high school students. School dances are big events, and during breaks, groups of friends often just hang out<sup>125</sup> by their lockers and chat. A lot of Canadian teenagers start driving when they're 16, so it's also common to drive to places like Starbucks or McDonald's at lunchtime. At the end of every school year, students are given a yearbook with photos of all the students in it. They

**122 the big leagues** – a higher level; the word “leagues” comes from sports

**123 guidance counselor** – a school employee who helps with student problems

**124 overwhelmed** – when life feels too much to manage

**125 to hang out** – to spend time, not doing anything specific



give it to their friends to write messages in and keep it as a souvenir of the past year.

Graduating from high school is a really big event for young people in Canada. At the end of the year, the school has a formal graduation ceremony. The students who are graduating wear special robes<sup>126</sup> and are given their diplomas in front of their family and friends. They also have a huge party, which Americans call a “prom”, but most Canadians call “grad”. It's just like in the movies, with limousines, fancy gowns<sup>127</sup> and tuxedos<sup>128</sup>.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do older Czech students get more choice about what to study?
- Who can you talk to at your school if you're feeling overwhelmed?
- Where do students at your school like to hang out?
- The writer says the party is “just like in the movies”. What have you seen in films about prom or grad parties?

**126 robe** – long loose clothing worn for special ceremonies, or after a shower

**127 fancy gowns** – formal, very nice dresses

**128 tuxedo** – very formal black and white suit

## In the Classroom

Canada is a bilingual country, so there are both English-language and French-language schools in every province. Most students outside the province of Quebec study in English, but they usually have to do at least two years of French as well. Even so, many kids outside the francophone<sup>129</sup> province of Quebec can only speak English.

High school students usually study eight subjects. Some subjects are compulsory<sup>130</sup> and some are optional. When they begin high school, students have around six or seven compulsory subjects (such as English, French, math, science, social studies, IT, and PE) and one or two optional subjects, which are often related to technology or the arts. As students get older, there are fewer and fewer compulsory subjects, so they have more freedom to choose subjects that interest them. In the final few years of high school, a student could study auto repair and journalism along with typical subjects like math and biology.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do most Czech students speak a second language? Do you think they should?
- How many subjects do you study in one year?
- Which ones are compulsory and which are optional?

## What to Wear (and What Not to Wear)

Although schools in Canada generally don't have uniforms, most have got some kind of dress code<sup>131</sup>. Dress codes often forbid things like facial<sup>132</sup> piercings and t-shirts with offensive<sup>133</sup> words or pictures on them. Some schools have dress codes that say girls can't wear clothing that is too revealing<sup>134</sup>. However, a lot of Canadians think that this is sexist, so it's possible that this might change in the future!

**129 francophone** – speaking French as the official language

**130 compulsory** – all students must study it

**131 dress code** – the rules of what you can and can't wear

**132 facial** – on your face

**133 offensive** – rude; makes someone feel bad or angry

**134 revealing** – showing a lot of skin

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Does your school have a dress code? What kinds of clothes are forbidden?
- Do you think the dress code about revealing clothes is sexist? Why or why not?

## School Rules: Behave Yourself

School rules in Canada are quite typical. Things like fighting and vandalism are obviously not allowed at school. If a student is absent<sup>135</sup> they have to bring a note from their parents to explain why.

If a student breaks the rules, the school principal might call his or her parents, and the student might have to do something like write an essay or stay after school and pick up rubbish. I once got into trouble and I had to clean graffiti in the toilets every afternoon for a week. I behaved myself<sup>136</sup> after that.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you need to do if you are absent?
- What is the worst punishment you've experienced or heard of?

## It's Exam Time

In Canada, schools don't focus on exams as much as they do in some other countries. Students' grades are usually based on assignments and projects that they do over the whole year.

There are a few subjects that have big final exams though, including English (or French) in the final year of high school. But these exams usually count as only part of the final grade. When Canadian students apply for university, the university looks at the final grades for each subject, not just the exam results.

**135 absent** – not at school

**136 behave oneself** – behave well; not break the rules

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you think exams are a good way to measure students' knowledge?
- Which exams to Czech universities look at?

### University, Trade School, or Travel?

In Canada, there are lots of different options for studies after high school. Many young people take a year or two off to travel, or go to a technical school to learn a trade<sup>137</sup> like carpentry<sup>138</sup> or plumbing<sup>139</sup>. It's also quite common for people to start working straight away.

Young people who decide to go to university have two options. If they did well in high school, they might go straight to university. If not, they can go to a smaller university (sometimes called a 'community college') for a year or two and then transfer to a bigger university to finish their degree. An undergraduate degree<sup>140</sup> takes four years of full-time study, but most people take longer. Five years is normal. A friend of mine took eight years to finish!

University in Canada is cheaper than in the UK or America, but it's not free. It's common for students to get a loan from the government to pay for their tuition<sup>141</sup> and living costs. Almost everybody has a part-time job as well, which is another reason why it can take so long to finish. But many people think that working in a student job is part of the university experience. It can be a lot of fun, it's a good way to meet new people, and it's great preparation for life after university!

**137 trade** – a practical skill, often using your hands

**138 carpentry** – working with wood

**139 plumbing** – fixing sinks and toilets

**140 undergraduate degree** – bachelor's degree; graduate degrees include master's and doctorate (PhD)

**141 tuition** – price of attending school



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the benefits of university, trade school, or travelling right after high school?
- How long does an undergraduate degree take in the Czech Republic?
- Do most Czech students also have a job while studying? What kinds of jobs?

## WHAT SCHOOL IS LIKE IN... AUSTRALIA

William Cook (Australia)

### Primary School

In Australia you usually start school at the age of four or five at kindergarten, which lasts one or two years. Kindergarten is the best because you can just play games all day and you get to sleep for one hour every afternoon. After kindergarten, children go to primary school until the age of 12.

Australian primary schools have just one teacher for each class who teaches everything from maths to science for the entire year. As you can imagine, it is very important to get a good one or else your whole year is destroyed<sup>142</sup>!

One thing you can be sure about is that your food will be the worst. Sadly, in Australia parents don't believe that warm lunches are essential<sup>143</sup>. Australian parents usually just pack a piece of dry bread (okay it's not that bad) for their children's lunch, and they have to drink water from a tap in the bathroom. We had an hour each day for "lunchtime" but we did not have much to eat so instead of eating, we would just play sport and fun games.

<sup>142</sup> **destroyed** – really bad, ruined

<sup>143</sup> **essential** – necessary; very important



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you remember about the best and worst teachers at primary school?
- Did you have warm lunch in primary school? Do you think it's essential for students?

### Secondary School: Away from Home

Students in Australia are in secondary school by the time they become a teenager. Secondary school is very different from primary school; it is a lot more serious. Students have many different teachers and suddenly get lots of homework.

In my case, I went to a boarding school from the age of 14. At boarding school, you have to sleep at school and you only get to see your parents on holidays (and sometimes weekends). It is very difficult at first, and the change in lifestyle is a complete shock. In my first year of boarding school, the students were not even allowed to call their parents and could only contact them with a handwritten letter. If we

wanted to have a hot shower in the morning, we had to get up early to make a fire to heat up the water. We also had to go on several 10 km runs each week and hiking on the weekends.

Of course, in the beginning at boarding schools, you really miss your parents and the comfort of home. However, you get used to it and it's not all bad. One of the best things is that you spend a lot more time with your friends. Eventually they start to feel like your family. And although some boarding schools are single-sex schools<sup>144</sup>, mine was luckily co-educational<sup>145</sup> so there was lots of opportunity for romance.

Boarding schools might sound old-fashioned and cruel to children, but in Australia they are not viewed this way. They are much more common than they are in the Czech Republic. Parents who love their children very much send them to boarding schools because they believe that they provide a very good education.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **How would you feel about being far from your family during secondary school?**
- **What are the benefits and downsides of single-sex schools? How about co-educational schools?**
- **Did you experience any big shocks when you went from primary to secondary school?**

## Subjects

All of the states in Australia have their own form of state examinations. We usually take them when we are 17 or 18. The only compulsory subject is English, which means you have a lot of freedom to study things that you find interesting.

In my school (and many others in Australia) lots of students chose the International Baccalaureate program instead of the state examinations. This program can be much more difficult than the state program. Students must study one subject from each of the “six areas of knowledge”, which included English, a foreign language,

**144 single-sex schools** – all-boy or all-girl schools

**145 co-educational** – when boys and girls study together

a maths subject, a science subject, a humanities<sup>146</sup> subject, and an arts subject such as theatre or painting. We also had to write a 4,000-word essay, which takes a very long time. The International Baccalaureate program lasts for two years and is quite challenging, but is also internationally recognised<sup>147</sup>. This makes it a lot easier to be accepted into universities abroad.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Do Czech students have a choice about whether to take state exams?**
- **Name two possible classes from each of the six areas of knowledge.**
- **Which Australian path of study would you choose, state exam or International Baccalaureate? Why?**

## What to Wear (and What Not to Wear)

In most Australian schools, you have to wear a school uniform from the beginning of primary school. At my school, we always had to wear a blazer<sup>148</sup> and a tie, and if our shirts were not tucked in<sup>149</sup>, we would get into trouble. I tried to tell the teachers, “My father doesn’t believe that I should tuck my shirt in,” but this excuse did not work. The teachers also complained if the students did not cut their hair. One time a teacher was so angry that they called a hairdresser to come in at lunchtime and students with long hair were forced to have their hair cut!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Do you usually tuck your shirts in?**
- **Are there any rules about how you can wear your hair at your school?**
- **Do you think a student’s appearance affects how well they study? Why or why not?**

**146 humanities** – social sciences like history or psychology

**147 internationally recognised** – accepted as official by countries around the world

**148 blazer** – suit jacket

**149 tucked in** – with the shirt bottom inside the top of your trousers, not hanging loose

### School Rules: Don't Stand Too Close!

I don't recommend it, but I loved breaking the rules at school so I know a lot about discipline. In boarding school, there are lots of opportunities to get into trouble with your friends. As you probably know, the smart thing to do is not to get caught by your teacher. This was very important at my school because many of the teachers were very strict.

We had the obvious rules, such as no smoking and drinking alcohol, but there were some very strange ones, too, such as the "one-metre rule". This meant that a boy could not be within one metre of a girl at any time. As you can probably imagine, many boys and girls got punished for breaking this rule.

The most common punishment for breaking rules was that you had to get up very early in the morning (usually between 5:00–5:30am) for a 6 km run. This made the naughty<sup>150</sup> boys and girls the fittest students in the school. Obviously, if you did more serious things, you received more severe<sup>151</sup> punishments. One of the worst times of my life was when I was 'internally suspended<sup>152</sup>', which meant I was suspended, but I also could not go home. I had to sleep outside in a tent by myself for an entire week!

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Are there any rules about behaviour between boys and girls at your school?
- Do you think physical (e.g. running) or academic (e.g. extra homework) punishments are worse?
- What would you do if you were suspended from school?

### It's Exam Time

In most Australian states, everyone has to go to school between the ages of 5 or 6 years old until they are 17. However, only 75% of Australian students finish the final year of secondary education, which is called "year 12". The final examinations last about one month, usually when the students are 17–18 years old, and most students have six subjects.

<sup>150</sup> **naughty** – badly behaved

<sup>151</sup> **severe** – hard, not kind or gentle

<sup>152</sup> **suspended** – you cannot go to school or attend classes



To get into any of the top Australian universities, you need to have very good results from year 12. But if you are prepared to travel (sometimes to other states) you can usually do the course you want to do – unless it is law or medicine, which are difficult everywhere – at some university in Australia.

If you are a more practical than academic type of person, there are also many courses to become a plumber, carpenter, electrician, and so on without finishing secondary school. In Australia, these jobs are often very highly paid. It's nice to know you don't need to finish school or go to university to make a lot of money!

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think 25% of students don't finish year 12?
- Would you travel to another region of the Czech Republic to study the subject you want?
- Are Czech plumbers, carpenters and electricians highly paid?

### Universities: Good, But Not Free

The Australian tertiary system<sup>153</sup> is set up in a very similar way to England. You can be accepted into any course if your marks are good enough. However, the courses are not free. Students usually take a loan from the government to pay for their studies. This loan is gradually<sup>154</sup> paid back to the government when the students get a job. Unfortunately, university degrees in Australia are very expensive, between AU\$8,000–30,000 (about 140,000–535,000 CZK) per year, so you can spend a very long time paying back the government loan. The standard bachelor degrees are 3–4 years long, but usually people then do internships<sup>155</sup> in their field after finishing their study.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Would you get a university loan if you had to pay for it for the next 5 years? 10 years? 20 years?
- What are the alternatives to an expensive university degree?

<sup>153</sup> tertiary system – university-level education

<sup>154</sup> gradually – slowly over time

<sup>155</sup> internship – temporary work experience, usually low-paying or unpaid

## WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE IN... NEW ZEALAND

Jackie Fox (New Zealand)

### Primary School

In New Zealand, there are three school levels called primary, intermediate and high school. Children can start school at the age of five, though it is compulsory to start by the age of six. Starting school can be scary, so most kids attend “kindy” for a few years first. Kindy is short for kindergarten, and yes, we did take that word from the Germans!

At primary school, pupils have the same teacher and classroom for the whole year. The school year is from February to December and, just like in the UK, a school day is from 9 am to 3 pm. We also have a morning break, called play-lunch, and an hour for lunch. The school rings a bell at the beginning and end of breaks and the school day. The bells stop at high school because they think kids can tell the time by then (although it is still a problem for some!)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How would school be different if you went from February to December?
- Do your schools ring bells at the beginning and end of breaks?

## Food

In New Zealand, there are no school cafeterias serving hot lunches because food is not provided. Kids have to bring a packed lunch from home or buy something from the tuck-shop<sup>156</sup>. A typical packed lunch could be a sandwich (my favourite was Vegemite<sup>157</sup> and chips) an apple and lollies<sup>158</sup> if they're lucky. At the tuck-shop, there are usually lots of unhealthy options that kids love such as meat pies, muffins, packets of chips, and chocolate. Sushi is also common, as it's popular and inexpensive here. For parents who can't afford lunch for their kids there are charitable<sup>159</sup> programmes that give lunch, and even sometimes breakfast, to poorer children.

Once kids have finished eating, they are allowed to play. Some of the games from my day are still popular. These include hopscotch<sup>160</sup>, hand-clapping and chasing games. Of course, lots of kids are now playing games like Angry Birds and Candy Crush on phones and tablets instead.

After lunch the youngest children have "mat time" when they lie down on rubber mats and take a nap<sup>161</sup>. This gives the teachers a rest as well as the kids!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Would you prefer to bring food from home or eat food provided by your school?**
- **Are there any foods or snacks sold at your school? What kinds?**
- **What were some popular games when you were at primary school?**
- **Did your primary school have nap time?**

**156 tuck-shop** – school shop

**157 Vegemite** – a thick, salty, dark-coloured food often eaten on toast

**158 lollies** – sweets

**159 charitable** – helping people in need

**160 hopscotch** – a jumping game using squares drawn on the ground

**161 nap** – a short sleep

## In the Classroom

Sadly, mat time ends all too soon and then it is back to work. Students learn basic subjects such as maths, reading, writing and science. However, unlike in the UK, schools can decide whether or not to teach bible studies (what we call religious education), and parents can also choose to opt their child out<sup>162</sup>.

One subject the kids can't opt out of is spelling. As I'm sure you know, spelling in English is quite illogical<sup>163</sup>. Therefore it is important to drill<sup>164</sup> children in spelling a lot. I always did quite well, but now *komputrz hav mayed my speling terrible* (whoops – where's spell-check?). Thankfully computers are now a big part of education, so kids can sometimes check their spelling or look something up on Google if they need to.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Do parents have any control over what their children study?**
- **How often do you practice spelling in your English lessons?**
- **Do you do most of your schoolwork with computers or a pen and paper?**

## Intermediate School

Children start intermediate school at age 10 to 11. It is a separate school for only two years and is designed to be a transition period<sup>165</sup> before high school. Children have to make new friends and deal with new teachers and subjects. Although students continue to have the same class and teacher throughout the year for the core<sup>166</sup> subjects, there are also new subjects taught by other teachers. These include things like soft materials (e.g. sewing, knitting), hard materials (woodwork, metalwork), electronics and drama. Students do these subjects once or twice a week until they have done all of the ones taught at their school.

**162 to opt out** – to choose not to do something

**163 illogical** – doesn't make sense

**164 to drill** – to do repeated practice

**165 transition period** – a time of change

**166 core** – important, at the centre of a programme

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which of the new subjects sound most interesting to you?
- What are the core subjects at your school?

### High School

At high school, things change quite a lot again. You can always spot the junior students at high school because they have a shiny new uniform that is several sizes too big, a scared look on their faces, and an enormous<sup>167</sup> backpack. Usually the backpack is filled with so many textbooks the child has to walk on an angle<sup>168</sup> so they don't fall backwards!

High school students have a timetable for their subjects with about five one-hour classes a day. Each class is with a different teacher. In the morning, they have a "home room" where a teacher takes the roll<sup>169</sup>. Core subjects are English, maths, science, social studies and physical education (PE). Optional subjects are things like art, digital technology, Spanish and business studies.

There are a small percentage of single-sex high schools. Girls' schools will typically have a corresponding<sup>170</sup> boys' school located nearby, so there is a chance to mix socially for school dances and sports events. Personally, I went to a girls' school for a year and I hated it because it was not like real life (unless you live in a nunnery<sup>171</sup> or on most navy submarines!).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can you tell who the new students are at your school?
- Are there any all-boys or all-girls schools in your town? Would you like to attend one?

### Uniforms

Although schools can decide for themselves, most schools these days do require uniforms. Primary and intermediate schools have a coloured

**167 enormous** – extremely large

**168 on an angle** – not straight; leaning forward

**169 to take the roll** – see which students are present and missing

**170 corresponding** – connected to; related

**171 nunnery** – home for religious women of the church only



polo shirt<sup>172</sup> and a few different options for bottoms, like shorts, track pants<sup>173</sup> and skorts. What's a skort? It's a cross between a skirt and shorts! There are often summer and winter versions of the uniform with long sleeves instead of short. High school uniforms are a little bit smarter, with a nicer looking shirt and bottoms and option of a blazer.

**172 polo shirt** – t-shirt with a collar around the neck

**173 track pants** – sports trousers, also called tracksuit bottoms, similar to sweatpants

It is a rule in most primary and intermediate schools that children have to wear a sunhat to play outside. If they don't have a sunhat, they have to sit in the shade. This is because New Zealand has one of the highest skin-cancer rates in the world.

Schools that have uniforms will usually have several mufti days<sup>174</sup> throughout the year. These are often used to raise money for the school or a charity. Students are asked to bring a gold coin donation (this means \$1 or \$2 New Zealand dollars) for being allowed to wear mufti.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Did your primary school have any dress codes connected to weather?
- How does your school raise money for the school or charity?

### School Rules and Punishments

In New Zealand it is illegal for anyone to physically<sup>175</sup> punish a child – including parents. However, this wasn't always true. In the past, teachers would throw chalk at students who were talking and make those who swore<sup>176</sup> wash out their mouths with soap and water. The worst punishment was being hit by the cane<sup>177</sup> or the strap<sup>178</sup>.

I remember this very clearly. The brown leather strap was kept at the teacher's desk. Once my teacher called a boy to the front of the class and told him to hold out his hands. The teacher then slapped the strap hard across his palms<sup>179</sup>. The boy smiled and said it didn't hurt, but then the teacher told him to put his hands under water. Then it *really* hurt and the poor boy was trying not to cry. Thankfully, those days are long gone as physical punishment was banned in schools in 1990.

Nowadays, the rules are more relaxed and classrooms are fairly informal. For example there are often class discussions where you can call out your ideas (instead of raising your hand). Students can be a bit

**174 mufti day** – a day you can wear casual clothes

**175 physically** – related to the body

**176 to swear** – to say bad words

**177 cane** – a long piece of wood

**178 strap** – a long piece of fabric or leather

**179 palm** – the inside of your hand

cheeky<sup>180</sup> with their teachers and it is usually okay. When rules are broken, a teacher can shout at student, give them detention, or make them pick up rubbish. The worst punishment is to suspend or expel someone. This is generally for something quite serious like a physical attack or drug use at school.

Usually schools try to create discipline through peer-pressure<sup>181</sup> by putting students into “houses” (similar to *Harry Potter*), which can win or lose points for good or bad behaviour. Many schools have introduced a “late start Wednesday”. Classes start an hour later on Wednesdays to allow students more sleep and to hopefully make them less grumpy<sup>182</sup> in the morning.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What types of physical punishment should be allowed or banned in schools? Is any okay?
- Can Czech students be cheeky towards their teachers?
- Which day of the week would you prefer for a late start day? Why?

### Exam Time and Leaving School

Towards the end of high school, everyone is focused on the NCEA. This stands for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement. It counts credits throughout the last three years of school (years 11, 12 and 13). The credits are made up of class work, assignments and exams throughout the year. This means students are judged on more than the results of one set of exams at the end of the year. To get into university, students must achieve a certain level of the NCEA.

In New Zealand, high school students have the choice to leave at 16, but most students stay until they finish school at 17 or 18. Even if you do badly at school, you still graduate if you have attended all of your school years. However if you fail the NCEA, you have fewer options for what you can do after you leave school. If you don't want to go to university you can go to a Polytech (technical school), which is typically

**180 cheeky** – disrespectful in a playful way

**181 peer-pressure** – wanting your friends and classmates to like you

**182 grumpy** – in a bad mood

for more hands on work such as nursing or design. Others will try to get a job or apprenticeship<sup>183</sup> or they travel.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Would you prefer your school be judged on final state exams, or on all of your work through the years?**
- **At what age can Czech students stop attending school?**

### The Cost of University

For those who do want to go to university, they have to pay. A humanities degree (or Bachelor of Arts) takes three years full time, and costs about NZ\$6,000 a year (around 94,000 CZK). A medical degree is about NZ\$15,000 a year (235,000 CZK) and takes about six years. Most students get student loans and have a large debt at the end of their studies. Loans are interest-free<sup>184</sup>, but only if you stay in New Zealand. If you leave the country, the government starts charging interest on the loan. You can be sent to jail if you try to leave or return to the country if you haven't been paying off your loan. They take it very seriously!

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Would you take out a student loan if you couldn't leave the country?**
- **Do you know the punishment for not paying debts in the Czech Republic? If not, what should it be?**

**183 apprenticeship** – learning a skill from someone who does the job

**184 interest-free** – you don't have to pay any extra money each year