**THE CZECH SYSTEM OF EDUCATION**

|  |
| --- |
| School attendance in the Czech Republic is compulsory from the age of 6 to 15. Most children attend state schools, but there are also newly established private and church schools. Education at state schools up to 18 or 19 is free of charge but students at secondary schools have to pay for their textbooks. Private and church schools charge school fees. All schools are coeducational. Children in our school system do not wear uniforms. Handicapped children are educated separately.  The school year starts on 1st September and ends on 30th June of the following year. The school year is divided into two terms (September-January, February-June). A school day is different at different types of schools. The average number of lessons at a secondary school is around thirty a week, primary schools have fewer lessons, while specialised schools often have more. Classes begin between 8 and 8.15 and there are from 4 to 6 lessons in a row, followed by a lunch break, usually 45 minutes long, which is one period, and then afternoon classes. Afternoon classes end between 4 and 5 at the latest. Breaks between the lessons last from 5 to 15 minutes.  Pupils and students are evaluated by marks from 1 to 5, 1 is the best, 5 is the worst. Each term students get their school report with marks from both compulsory and elective subjects.  Education in our country includes these stages: pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary.  **Pre-school education** is provided by crèches for children up to 3 years of age and nursery schools for children aged 3 to 6. Not many children attend crèches but quite a lot of them attend kindergartens. At the age of 6 children start to attend **primary schools** and they stay there until 15. At the age of 15 the pupils transfer from primary to secondary schools. Some pupils, whose parents wish them to, can transfer to grammar schools at the age of 11 after they have passed an entrance examination.    At the age of 15 pupils can choose among a variety of **secondary schools:**  a) **grammar schools** with general and rather academic education which prepare students for university study,  b) **special schools** which include technical colleges, specialised in building, chemistry, engineering etc., business academies, agricultural schools, nursing schools, music and art schools which offer professional education and  c) **vocational schools** training would-be workers for practical jobs.    **Secondary education** usually lasts for 4 years and at grammar and specialised schools it is finished with a **school-leaving examination** which is required by all universities and colleges. This examination is taken in four subjects at grammar schools (Czech, a foreign language and two optional subjects chosen from foreign languages, science subjects or humanities) and in five or more subjects at specialised schools. The examination is held in May and is mostly oral except Czech language in which an essay is written about a month before. The oral part of the exam takes about two hours, half an hour for each subject. A student chooses one of 25 to 30 topics by drawing a number and after 15 minutes' preparation he/she speaks on the topic and solves given tasks. After the graduates have passed their school-leaving exam they receive the School-Leaving Certificate and they can apply for study at universities and colleges.  **Universities and colleges** provide tertiary education which lasts from 4 to 6 years. Each secondary school graduate can apply for as many universities and colleges as he/she likes but before he/she is accepted they have to pass an entrance examination in the subjects in which the university specialises. The examination consists of a written test and an interview.  Every large regional town in our country is a seat of a university or college now, but the oldest ones are the most renowned. Our oldest university is Charles University in Prague, founded by Charles IV in 1348 as the first Central and East European university. Other notable universities are Masaryk University in Brno, Palacký University in Olomouc and Purkyně University in Ustí nad Labem. Prague has also one of the two technical universities in our country (ČTU), the other one is in Brno.  Undergraduates can study a variety of subjects such as economics, foreign trade, architecture, law, journalism, the humanities, foreign languages, medicine, science, music, art, drama, engineering or computer science at various schools e.g. School of Economics or Architecture, Law, Medical or Science Faculty, Faculty of Journalism, Teachers' Training College, Art School, College of Agriculture, technical universities or polytechnics.  The university or college students can enrol at three-year courses for a **Bachelor’s Degree** or four and five-year courses for a **Master’s Degree**. Medicine usually takes 6 years. The university or college study is finished with a state examination and every undergraduate also has to write a thesis in order to receive a diploma in a certain field of study. The diploma is handed over at a graduation ceremony. **Doctoral Degrees** are awarded after other few years of study, which may be also individual, and completion of another thesis.  Full-time university students are expected to bear the expense of their tuition and they also have to pay for their accommodation and board. The students from distant places usually lodge at a hall of residence (dorm). Only a limited number of students get a grant or a scholarship.  For those who do not want to enter the university there are various types of two-year training courses such as for managers, businessmen, social workers, specialised nurses or language experts. |

**A SCHOOL, A CLASSROOM**

|  |
| --- |
| School buildings in our country look very similar, only their size differs depending on the number of pupils or students attending them. They are usually large buildings with a few floors, often with a sportsground attached. ln the basement or on the ground floor there are cloakrooms with students' lockers, a boiler room, a workshop, a school canteen, sometimes also a fitness centre, a snackbar, a caretaker’s flat or a gymnasium.  On the other floors there are usually long hallways with many doors leading to classrooms, teachers' offices, laboratories, a common room, the head's and deputy head's offices, the administrative office, a school library, a computer room and toilets. The hallways and staircases are decorated with pictures, flowers and there are also notice-boards, some cabinets and glasscases.  All classrooms in the Czech Republic are almost the same. There are large windows opposite the door, many of school desks and chairs with two aisles in between, a blackboard and a shelf with coloured and white chalk, a sponge and a cloth on the front wall, a teacher’s desk, a bookcase, a notice board, a few pictures and a portrait of the president, a wash-basin, a mirror, a thermometer and a waste-paper basket.  Subjects which need special equipment or aids are taught in special classrooms such as a chemistry, biology or physics laboratory, a music and an art room or a gymnasium. For teaching foreign languages a language lab is specially equipped with various audio-visual aids, such as maps, a tape or cassette recorder, a slide or overhead projector, a screen and a video. Some schools also have an assembly hall.  What is a lesson in a Czech school like? After the bell, when the teacher enters the room, the pupils or students stand up to greet him. He makes an entry in the class register, marks absent students and then he starts the lesson with revision of the previous lesson. He examines the pupils individually by asking them to come to the blackboard, they are asked to reckon, do an exercise, explain a problem, respond to teacher’s questions or sometimes the whole class takes a written test.  The performance of the students who excel is usually perfect, they are fluent and creative. Sometimes the performance is rather disappointing both for the teacher and the student alike. The reasons differ from not paying attention in class, not doing homework regularly and copying it in the break before the lesson, relying on one's pretty face, cutting classes and not working consistently and systematically to spoiling one's performance due to nervousness. The results range from excellent, very good, good, and satisfactory to failure.  After examination the teacher explains a new subject matter and practises it with exercises. Before the end of the lesson he sums up the topic and sets assignments for the next lesson. The teachers are supposed to follow the curriculum but they are free to choose textbooks for their students. Some students stay at school after school hours and take part in after-school activities such as singing in the choir, drama club, arts club, reciting club or games.) |

Primary Education

Education in the Czech Republic is compulsory from age 6 to age 15, and the first phase of this takes place at primary school. The curriculum is general academic. At the end of the period a primary school leaving certificate is awarded.

Middle Education

The second and final phase of basic school education takes place at general school or *gymnásium* which takes a further 4 years. The general academic curriculum continues. Upon completion a *vysvědčení*certificate is awarded.

Secondary Education

There are 2 main types of secondary schools in the Czech Republic, namely general and technical ones. The 1st category prepares students for university education. The 2ndis more technically focused. Both 6 year programs complete with a *maturitní zkouška / maturita*.

Vocational Education

As an alternative, students may attend secondary vocational / technical school instead for 3 to 4 years, where they may acquire specific professional skills. Depending on the nature of the program, they may be rewarded with a *výuční list*, after 3 years, or a vysvědčení o maturitní zkoušce after 4.

Tertiary Education

There are 3 tiers of tertiary education available in the Czech Republic. These are professional schools providing diplomas, non-university higher education institutions presenting undergraduate courses, and research universities educating through to doctoral level.  
  
Charles University in Prague is by far the oldest and most venerable, having been founded in 1348 as the first university in Central Europe. Its faculties include theology, law, medicine, arts & philosophy, science, mathematics & physics, education, social sciences, humanities, and physical education & sport.