

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Most countries' education systems have had what you might call educational disasters, but, sadly, in many areas of certain countries these 'disasters' are still evident today. The English education system is unique due to the fact that there are still dozens of schools which are known as private schools and they perpetuate privilege and social division. Most countries have some private schools for the children of the wealthy; England is able to more than triple the average number globally. England has around 3,000 private schools and just under half a million children are educated at them whilst some nine million children are educated at state schools. The overwhelming majority of students at private schools also come from middle-class families.

The result of this system is evident and it has much English history embedded within it. The facts seem to speak for themselves. In the private system almost half the students go on to University, whilst in the state system only about eight per cent make it to further education. However, statistics such as these can be deceptive due to the fact that middle-class children do better at examinations than working class ones, and most of them stay on at school after 16. Private schools therefore have the advantage over state schools as they are entirely 'middle class', and this creates an environment of success where students work harder and apply themselves more diligently to their school work.

Private schools are extortionately expensive, being as much as £18,000 a year at somewhere such as Harrow or Eton, where Princes William and Harry attended, and at least £8,000 a year almost everywhere else. There are many parents who are not wealthy or even comfortably off but are willing to sacrifice a great deal in the cause of their children's schooling. It baffles many people as to why they need to spend such vast amounts when there are perfectly acceptable state schools that don't cost a penny. One father gave his reasoning for sending his son to a private school, 'If my son gets a five-percent-better chance of going to University then that may be the difference between success and failure.' It would seem to the average person that a £50,000 minimum total cost of second level education is a lot to pay for a five-percent-better chance. Most children, given the choice, would take the money and spend it on more enjoyable things rather than shelling it out on a school that is too posh for its own good.

However, some say that the real reason that parents fork out the cash is prejudice: they don't want their little kids mixing with the "workers", or picking up an undesirable accent. In addition to this, it wouldn't do if at the next dinner party all the guests were boasting about sending their kids to the same place where the son of the third cousin of Prince Charles is going, and you say your kid is going to the state school down the road, even if you could pocket the money for yourself instead, and, as a result, be able to serve the best Champagne with the smoked salmon and duck.

It is a fact, however, that at many of the best private schools, your money buys you something. One school, with 500 pupils, has 11 science laboratories; another school with 800 pupils, has 30 music practice rooms; another has 16 squash courts, and yet another has its own beach. Private schools spend £300 per pupil a year on investment in buildings and facilities; the state system spends less than £50. On books, the ratio is 3 to 1.

One of the things that your money buys which is difficult to quantify is the appearance of the school, the way it looks. Most private schools that you will find are set in beautiful, well-

kept country houses, with extensive grounds and gardens. In comparison with the state schools, they tend to look like castles, with the worst of the state schools looking like public lavatories, perhaps even tiled or covered in graffiti. Many may even have an architectural design that is just about on the level of an industrial shed.

Question 1-7

Choose the correct letter **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**.

1. The English educational system differs from the other ones because
 - A. it tries to make state and private equal.
 - B. more students are educated at private schools than state schools
 - C. it contributes to creating a class system within society.
 - D. it is more expensive to run
2. There are more private school children who go to university because
 - A. the lessons and teachers at the private schools are much better.
 - B. their parents often send their children to private schools
 - C. they have more teaching hours
 - D. the school create a successful environment.
3. A lot of parents often send their children to private schools
 - A. because they are not well-informed.
 - B. to show how much money they have to their friends
 - C. to increase their chances of succeeding in the university exams.
 - D. because of the better sports facilities.
4. It is suggested that some parents of children at private schools are
 - A. prejudiced and superficial.
 - B. more intelligent than those with children at state schools.
 - C. well-brought-up and cultivated.
 - D. overly protective.
5. Private school
 - A. always have their own beaches.
 - B. teach sports that state schools do not.
 - C. spend more money per student than state schools.
 - D. spend more money on hiring good teachers.
6. writer thinks that private-school buildings
 - A. are very attractive and luxurious.

B. generally do not look very nice.

C. are too big for the amount of students who attend the school.

D. are not built to suit student's needs.

7. In general, what do you think the writer's opinion of private schools is?

A. It isn't fair that those without money can't attend them.

B. They divide social classes but they offer better facilities and a more creative environment.

C. There is little difference between private and state schools.

D. They have the best teachers.

Questions 8-13

Complete the sentences below.

Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the passage for each answer.

The fact that there are so many private schools in England, in comparison to other countries, makes the English educational system **8**..... Most students in these schools are from **9**..... families. These students seem to do better at exams although statistics can be **10**..... One of the advantages of private schools is that they seem to provide students with a better, more positive environment that encourages them to **11**..... themselves to their school work with more enthusiasm. A lot of not very well-off parents make huge sacrifices for their children's **12**..... to help them go to respectable universities. Unfortunately, many state school buildings sometimes have the appearance of an industrial **13**..... .

Solution:

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| 1. C | 8. unique |
| 2. D | 9. middle-class |
| 3. C | 10. deceptive |
| 4. A | 11. apply |
| 5. C | 12. schooling |
| 6. A | 13. shed |
| 7. B | |