



## Choosing a UK summer school

It is very important for a child's first experiences of learning English to be positive. Teachers, parents and agents should consider very carefully before choosing an English Language course for children and teenagers. The following may help.

1. Is the school Accredited by [The British Council](#)? Accreditation means that inspectors visit the school to examine the premises, teaching, food, welfare, standards of hygiene and safety, etc. This encourages excellence and ensures that children will be well taught and looked after. All schools which have been Accredited by The British Council are listed as '[Registered Providers](#)' by the UK government. UK student visas will be issued only for English Language courses given by 'Registered Providers'.
2. Is it a member of [English UK](#)? English UK describes itself as 'the world's leading language teaching association'. Membership is open only to schools that are Accredited by The British Council. Membership of English UK provides additional safeguards and benefits for students.
3. Is it residential? Consider carefully before choosing between a [residential or homestay](#) English Language course.
4. Is it multinational? The more nationalities the better, to encourage English speaking socially. Does the schools accept groups from any one country? Exactly how many students who **speak the same mother tongue** will be attending at the same time as your child? Speakers of Spanish or Arabic, for example, may come from more than one country.
5. What are the course dates? Do students arrive / depart weekly or all together at the beginning and end of courses? Weekly arrivals / departures are convenient but can also introduce instability into lessons and friendships. It's easier to structure courses with a proper beginning, middle and end when all students arrive and depart at the same time.
6. Where is the school and how will your child get there? Consider the logistics and cost.
7. Is the setting safe and secure? Do you want town or countryside? What do students do during free time?
8. How are students supervised? How many students are there for each qualified member of staff? Is medical help always available if needed? Is this included in the school's insurance?
9. Is the English teaching programme innovative and interesting? The children are on holiday: they are not likely to be interested by lessons that they could easily receive at home. Lessons should try to 'bridge the gap' between holiday and learning - eg. through the use of [out-of class projects](#) and [educational workshops](#). Is there a [course magazine](#) to

provide a focus for written work? Is there a networked IT suite for computer-based lessons and for email communication with home?

10. Are students grouped appropriately according to their age? Teenagers, for example, have very different needs and interests from younger children. What is the age range in lessons and in the accommodation? Are separate sports and activities organised for younger and older students? This is essential to ensure safety and to avoid discouraging younger children with unfair competition. Are separate excursions organised for younger and older children? Are there any adult students attending the school at the same time as your child? If so, how is a professional distance maintained between children / teenagers and adults?
11. If the school accepts young children (eg. 7 - 10 year olds) is there someone to look after them specifically - eg. to ensure they wash / change clothes regularly / get to activities on time? Do they have their own accommodation - washing facilities and bedrooms - separate from older students, so that they will feel secure and go to sleep at a sensible time? Is the teaching programme suitable for the youngest children? Does it include games, songs, crafts, etc? How does the school handle differences in age and ability? Classes should not contain students of widely differing ages.
12. Is the extra-curricular programme complete? Is there a swimming pool on site? Are there opportunities for the students to go horse riding, playing golf, etc? Are there alternatives to sport for the less athletically-minded? Are there varied and interesting places to visit locally?
13. Are there clear channels of communication and clear procedures for monitoring children's progress? Is there someone you can talk to at any time to find out how your child is getting on?
14. Are the children respected and listened to in the school? For example, is there a Student Council where they can give their views? Do they appraise their teachers? What is the school's policy on bullying?
15. What is the reputation of the school? How many students choose to return there? Is there a list of parents / teachers / agents who you can contact for a reference?

© Christopher Etchells  
English Country Schools, 2008  
[etchells@countryschools.co.uk](mailto:etchells@countryschools.co.uk)