

Big dresses, huge cars, smart suits and lots of fun ... What exactly is a school prom and how is it taking over from the school disco?

Proms are big news in Britain these days. A school prom is a formal party to celebrate an important date at school such as the end of secondary school or after completing school exams in Year 11 (aged 15–16) and in Year 13 (aged 17–18). Some pupils also have a school prom when they finish primary school. A secondary school prom often involves a big party, big dresses and huge cars.

Prom parties

Proms are held in June or July, around the end of exam time or the end of term. The idea is to have fun with your school friends and celebrate your time and achievements at school. Some schools hold a luxury party in a five-star hotel. Others have a more basic dinner in the school hall. The school can organise the prom or they can pay a professional organisation to arrange it. A prom organiser provides everything for the special event including the party location, balloons, food, music, cars and clothes.

Clothes and beauty

Young people like to dress up for their prom. Many teenagers wear school uniform in the UK but on prom night lots of girls swap their uniform for an elegant evening dress and high heels. Boys that are usually only seen in jeans and trainers when not at school dress up in a suit with a tie and smart shoes.

The right hairstyle and make-up are important too. Some beauty salons offer a special 'prom deal' which includes hair, make-up, eyelashes, nails and a spray tan. A tan is fashionable with both boys and girls.

Cars

Arriving at your prom by chauffeur-driven limousine is very popular! Other young people like to travel by truck or in large 4x4 vehicles. The party can start on the way to the dinner or dance. Part of the fun for some prom-goers is to drive around town in their best clothes and make sure that everyone sees them.

Two 16-year-old girls with a sense of humour arrived at their school prom in Somerset both dressed as Barbie. Did they arrive in a limo? No, they travelled in a more original style: their mothers made each girl a life-sized Barbie box and the friends arrived at the prom party in their boxes on the back of a trailer!

Money

The school prom is big business. According to a recent newspaper report the average prom costs parents over £200 per teenager. Many pay much, much more. The cost can include a ticket for the prom party (which is often a three-course dinner followed by dancing) as well as new clothes, shoes, a visit to the hairdressers, a spray tan and probably car hire.

Not all families have money to spend on their teenager's prom of course. How do less wealthy pupils find a way to look good at the school prom? Some teenagers work part-time to cover their prom expenses. Popular jobs include babysitting, shop work and working as a waiter or waitress.

An American tradition

Not long ago most British schools didn't have school proms. They probably had a simple school disco at the end of term. Now, more than 85 per cent of schools in Britain have a prom. However, the modern British school prom is not popular with some parents of teenagers. Many adults see the prom as an import from the USA. They say that American TV programmes and films such as 'High School Musical' have a big influence on their kids.