

Parents' Guide to Secondary School Transfer



Choosing the next school for your child

This process can seem fairly bewildering to many parents simply because of the huge amount of choice that there is in London and in the surrounding suburbs. Firstly some advice:

- Be realistic about your child's academic abilities and try to choose schools where they would be just above the middle of the ability range.
- Base your choices on what your child needs not on how prestigious schools sound.
- Do not be swayed by what other parents may or not be doing or where they may or may not be applying. Your child is an individual and you need to choose the right school for them which may not be the same as for someone else's child.

Timeline for 11+ entry

Year 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet with class teacher to discuss potential schools in relation to academic record• Draw up 'long list' of possible schools
Year 5: Autumn Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend open days of 'long list' schools. Most Open Days or Evenings tend to be in September-November (except the grammar school ones which are often in June)• Attend Information Evening in September where secondary school transfer issues will be discussed• If applying to grammar schools, consider if additional tuition is necessary
Year 5: Spring Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Based on most recent exam levels – make a shortlist of schools to apply to in the Autumn• Discuss with class teacher & Headmaster
Year 6: Autumn Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete and send in all application forms and supplementary information• Many state grammar school tests take place early in this term• Interviews for some independent schools will take place in December before examinations; some examinations can also take place at this time
Year 6 : Spring Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most independent school examinations take place in January with interviews following• Independent school results often tend to be given before the end of February but schools differ widely in how soon they respond• State school offer day is in March

Choosing potential schools

When you are compiling your 'long list' of schools to visit, start with the following questions:

- Do I want state or independent education?
- Do I have strong views about single-sex or mixed education?
- Does my child have the academic aptitude for a state grammar school (they need to be consistently scoring on the 8th and 9th stanine to stand a reasonable chance)
- Does my child have the academic aptitude for an academic secondary school e.g. Whitgift, Trinity or Old Palace?
- Does my child and our family fulfil the criteria for entry into a Catholic state School (regular mass attendance, date of Baptism & First Communion etc.)
- How far am I willing for my child to travel?

Secondary school Information Evening

This takes place on the same night as the Information Evening at the start of every academic year, and is open to Year 5 & 6 parents. The Headmaster will explain the transfer procedures in detail, including admissions criteria operated by many of the local schools. It is important that all upper junior parents attend.

Entry requirements for non-academically selective state schools

For voluntary aided schools such as Coloma, St. Philomena's and John Fisher, parents need to be aware of the admissions criteria for each school as these will vary greatly.

Three elements for transfer at 11+ to independent schools

- Examination
- Interview
- Reference from primary school

Whilst all three elements are important, most of the more 'academic' independent schools will only request references and hold interviews if a sufficiently high mark has been reached in the examination. Other independent schools will interview first and have a more rounded approach to selection.

Exam requirements

The format of the 11+ examination in both academically selective state schools (ie. grammar schools) and independent schools will differ. However they usually involve these elements in some form:

- English comprehension – reading a passage/passages and answering questions
- English composition – choosing from a set of topics and producing a set piece of writing
- Mathematics
- Verbal reasoning – a series of activities that test a child’s ability to use logic and also their vocabulary.
- Some schools include non-verbal reasoning which tests logic skills in non-verbal tasks e.g. using shapes/pictures); others may also have a science or CAT test.

English comprehension

This is a test of your child’s ability to read a 1-2 page text quickly and accurately and to answer a variety of questions. These questions test various skills:

- Retrieval of information
- Inference/deduction – the ability to read between the lines, to understand characters feelings and motives;
- Authorial technique: knowing how the writer of the text wants us to respond and the words, phrases and techniques they use to achieve this.
- Point/evidence/explanation: saying what you think about a text; giving reasons from the text to justify your answer and explaining how they go together.

How can you support?

Look at your child’s reading targets and see how they relate to the areas here. Encourage them to read for at least 20 minutes a day and check with your child’s teacher to make sure that their reading diet is challenging enough.

English writing

Children are usually given a selection of titles. They choose one and have between 25 and 45 minutes to produce a composition, depending on the exam. They need to show through this that they:

- Can produce a certain volume of writing in a given time e.g 1 A4 side in 30 minutes.
- Can structure a piece of work so that it has a clear beginning, middle and end and follows through logically.
- Can spell correctly and handwriting is clear and neat.
- Are able to use a variety of punctuation and use paragraphs appropriately.
- Have a range of vocabulary and are able to use interesting words and phrases in their writing.
- Are able to build up details of character and setting in a story or description or use persuasive techniques in a discussion piece.

How can you support?

Look at your child's writing targets and see how they relate to the areas here. Encourage them to set themselves time limits for written tasks at home and get them to do some timed writing tasks you set yourself. There is a list of titles given with this pack which give you a good idea of the various types of writing. All titles are taken from sample or real papers. Finally, all good writers are great readers – your child cannot do too much reading!

Mathematics

Again, the tests vary in length and breadth of material but certain core skills are essential:

- Accuracy in calculation – addition, subtraction, long multiplication and division by one and two digit numbers.
- Ability to interpret questions and separate out the important information.
- Ability to tackle questions with more than one step methodically.
- Concept knowledge – this is covered through weekly topics in school.

How can you support?

Look at your child's writing targets and see how they relate to the areas here. Make sure they are improving in the areas on their target sheet which relate to the main concepts in mathematics. See how they are getting on in their Mental Maths/Maths Bond and look for patterns in errors (is it carelessness or are there some 'holes' in their concept knowledge? Raise things with the class teacher where appropriate.)

Verbal reasoning

This is the part of the test designed to measure raw potential and it is not designed to be taught. However there are elements which can be prepared:

- Verbal Reasoning relies heavily on a child's vocabulary – the best way to build this is through reading.
- It is also about the child's ability to spot patterns and sequences of letters or numbers and to crack codes.
- A lot of questions rely on alphabetical knowledge and alphabetical ordering.

How can you support?

Apart from Bond Papers and Sample Tests the best method is reading. Children improve through sheer force of practice, particularly in the logical/sequencing elements.

How the school prepares pupils for the examinations

- In lessons through set schemes e.g. Nelson for English and Heinemann for Maths. These cover the **key skills and concepts** that children need to grasp to tackle the exam.
- In lessons through Key Comprehension for English and Mental Maths and Bond Papers for Maths and Verbal Reasoning. These give practice in tackling **mixed questions** and in the **agility needed to move from one skill to another**. Children have some lessons in these areas – often they are set for homework and the teacher marks and works through corrections with the children.

- In Year 5 children can attend the Maths and Creative Writing lunchtime or after school clubs where they learn about and practise the skills required for the exam.
- In Years 5/6 children work on 11+ papers. These are usually done at home and marked as a class where the teacher will go through any difficulties.

Key resources

- Bond Papers (Exist for Maths, English, Verbal and Non-Verbal reasoning)
- Bond 10 Minute Tests
- Mental Maths (Books 1-7)
- Alpha Series tests
- CGP Revision Guides for Key Stage 2 SATs (cover all the main concepts) – buy online at www.cgp.co.uk
- Sample papers (some for specific schools can be obtained for download – use a Google Search for *11+ Sample Papers*)
- ISEB 11+ materials – can be bought through Galore Park Publishers. www.galorepark.co.uk

Tutors

Some parents engage a tutor in the year leading up to the 11+ examination. A tutor is able to focus on the particular difficulties a child may face in a subject or help develop specific exam skills in a one-to-one setting. Having a tutor is a personal choice and the school does not insist that parents should do so. Some parents are able to offer the same support and motivation themselves for 1-2 hours a week using the guidelines above and can do a wonderful job. However if you do decide to hire a tutor, speak to the class teacher about the specific areas they may want to concentrate on. We may also be able to provide information on local tutors, so please ask.

Interview

Different independent schools approach the interview in different ways. Some schools interview in groups, others individually. Some schools use the interview process as a way of getting to know candidates to see if they are likely to fit in well to school life and so questions are geared towards finding out their interests and personality. Some schools use the process as another tool for academic selection so are likely to ask more intellectual questions. In either scenario some key 'tips' apply:

- Make eye contact when you first meet the interviewer and keep using it.
- Avoid yes or no/one word answers – they want to hear from you!
- Be yourself – they won't be convinced by memorised/studied answers and it will probably count against you!

Previous interview questions that pupils have been asked:

- What do you enjoy most about school?
- What is your favourite subject and why?
- Which sports do you enjoy?

- Do you do any extra-curricular activities?
- Which period of history do you find most interesting?
- Tell me about what you do in your free time.
- Do you think it's important to study a language at school?
- Tell me about a country you find interesting.
- Tell me about a museum or historical place you have visited.
- Do you like art?
- Tell me about something you have read or heard in the news this week?
- Tell me about a performance you have been in.
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Reference

This is the part you don't have to organise! Independent schools request a reference which asks for information on the following things:

- Academic performance and potential
- Attitude to school and their studies
- Extra-curricular activities and non-academic talents: sports, drama, art etc.
- A summary of the child's character; relationships with others etc.

Make sure the school is aware of any extra-curricular activities your child does out of school which may be worth mentioning as part of the reference.

Finally

As a school we are here to help and support you as much as possible. However, the decisions need to be made by you and as parents you need to take the initiative in finding out the relevant information, filling in the paperwork and asking the important questions. Try to avoid using parental gossip as fact – what may be the case for one child or family will not necessarily apply to yours. Get your information from the secondary schools themselves – they all have excellent websites and are easy to contact. Also approach the class teacher or Headmaster when you need something or you are unsure – don't worry about how obvious it seems!