

Independent Schools - a guide to the Admissions Process

Stage 1 : Admissions Information

You should request a prospectus and admissions pack from the schools that you wish to consider. Admissions packs usually contain details of open days; the application and entry process; school fees and payment terms and an application form. Many also include a recent newsletter to parents; the school magazine and a calendar of events and co-curricular activities.

Stage 2: Visiting Schools

Excluding holiday periods, you can make an appointment to see around a school at any mutually convenient time – just call the school’s Admissions Secretary or Registrar. Visiting during the school day is the best way to see the school “at work”. While you are welcome to visit during term time, schools also organise annual Open Mornings or Open Days, most commonly in late September, October and early November, to give prospective parents and pupils an opportunity to see what the school has to offer. Usually, there is a talk by the Head, to give an overview of the school, followed by tours around the various departments, where displays, activities and performances are organised. Visitors particularly enjoy being shown around by pupil guides, since they can hear what the school is like from the pupil’s perspective.

Stage 3: Application Deadlines

Generally speaking, applications for entry at the start of a new academic session in late August / early September should be received no later than the previous December, since testing is usually conducted between January and March. However, be aware that many schools have waiting lists, so early application is strongly recommended, especially for the most popular entry stages, such as Primary 1 and Senior 1. Some schools accept applications two or three years in advance. Please check application deadlines with individual schools.

Stage 4: Processing of the Application

After submitting your application the school will contact you to invite your child to an assessment. Most schools will be able to give you literature which explains the nature of the assessment, what is likely to be included, and what you can do to help prepare your child. In the case of exams for senior pupils, for example, there is likely to be a Maths paper, an English paper and perhaps one that tests reasoning. Some schools use national, standard tests, while others have developed their own form of assessment.

Stage 5: Entrance Assessments

Pupils are usually admitted to independent, fee-paying schools after an assessment, the form of which will vary depending on the age of your child. Some independent schools are academically selective while others – the majority – are less so. Senior pupils usually sit a formal entrance test or exam, often combined with an interview, while the assessments for younger children are more informal. Schools will try to put children (and their parents) at ease and, for the very young children, (e.g. Primary 1) to make the testing day fun! Entrance tests are conducted not to pass or fail applicants, but to gain an understanding of each child's educational needs, so that the school can assess how these can best be met.

Assessments for entrance at the start of a new academic session in late August or early September usually take place between January and March, but this will vary from school to school. Most schools have set dates for testing the different age groups of pupils, so you should check the dates with individual schools.

Stage 6: Induction Day

If your child is accepted to the school, they will usually be invited to attend an induction day, designed to calm any nerves they may have, before they become a pupil at the school. Induction days are often held in June, prior to the summer holiday, and the format will vary from school to school and according to the pupil's age. The example, below, illustrates an induction day for pupils starting school at Senior 1, although you should contact individual schools to ask how their induction days are organised.

Example of a Senior 1 induction day:

New pupils are invited to attend the school for a day, wearing home clothes. They are welcomed and a 'buddy' is assigned to look after them throughout the day. To break the ice, teambuilding activities are arranged which also provide an element of fun. Staff provide explanations about procedures and routines and new pupils also attend a lesson to give them a taste of school life.

The Admissions Cycle in summary

September – November	Open days
December	Application deadlines
January – March	Assessment tests
June	Induction days
August – September	Start of the academic session

Please check exact dates with individual schools.

Independent schools are always ready to welcome applications at all stages throughout the year and will be as accommodating as possible to families new to the area and to those changing school.

And finally...

The steps outlined, above, are intended to guide parents through the admissions process and to give an indication of what is likely to happen at each stage. As this will vary from school to school, you should not hesitate to contact the Admissions Secretary or Registrar in individual schools to ask any questions you may have.

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