

Independent Schools – What you need to know about Entrance Assessments

Understanding each individual child's educational needs

Don't be put off by the myth that children undergo an ordeal to gain a place at an independent school! It's simply not true. Independent schools have to assess children to be sure that they can meet each individual child's educational needs. They also need to determine *how* those needs can best be met. Be assured, the schools understand that parents, especially those of very young children (P1-P3), are often anxious about entrance tests, so they will make every effort to put you and your child at ease.

Younger children

Schools make the assessments for very young children (P1-P3) as much fun as possible. Toys are used to gain an understanding of each child's grasp of basic concepts and assessments are done in such a way that most young children aren't aware that they are being tested. To them, it's just play.

Older children

While some independent schools are academically selective, the majority are less so. Senior pupils usually sit an entrance test, often combined with an interview. Most schools will be able to give you literature that explains the nature of the assessment and what is likely to be involved. 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. The best advice, if you need any information or reassurance, is to speak to the school direct. Third party organisations that claim to prepare children for entrance tests at independent schools are, at best, at least one step removed from the admissions process and not a substitute for dialogue with the school itself.

Timescales

Most independent schools organise entrance assessments between January and March. Specific dates, which vary from school to school, are allocated for different age groups of children, so please check the dates with individual schools. Links to schools' websites can be found at www.scis.org.uk/schools where you can search for schools alphabetically, by type of school (e.g. Junior/Preparatory) or by geographic location.

Induction Days

If your child is offered a place, he or she is likely to be invited to attend an induction day, designed to calm any nerves. Induction days are often held in June, prior to the summer holiday. The format will vary from school to school and according to a child's age and stage. Usually, children are asked not to wear school uniforms, to encourage new and existing pupils to mix. New pupils are usually assigned a 'buddy' to look after them for the day and teambuilding activities are organised which also serve to break the ice and provide some fun. There is also likely to be an explanation of procedures and routines and perhaps a lesson to give new pupils a taste of school life. As well as taking a lead role in Induction Days, Guidance teams help children to settle in and oversee the care and welfare of pupils throughout their school life.

And finally...

Although independent schools prefer to receive applications by late December, they will accommodate applications later, provided places are available. Be aware that many schools are likely to have waiting lists, particularly for the key entry stages which tend to be ages 5 and 11 at day schools and ages 13 and 16 at boarding schools.

Further information can be found in a leaflet called "Independent Schools: a guide to the Admissions Process" at www.scis.org.uk/for-parents/entrance-procedures Enquiries can be made to Sarah Randell at Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) on 0131 220 2106 or to any individual school directly.

Scottish Council of Independent Schools
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