



'Common Entrance and beyond'

Information talk to Years' 4, 5, 6 and 7 Parents

January 17th 2012

Common Entrance is the name given to a common set of examination papers that are produced by the Independent Schools Examination Board (ISEB). These examinations are taken by the vast majority of children who are hoping to move on to independent secondary schools. There are Common Entrance papers for a move at 11+, 12+ or 13+. Girls tend to sit these examinations at 11+ whereas boys tend to sit them at 13+.

Pupils will sit the Common Entrance at their preparatory school but the papers are sent on to the secondary school of their choice to be marked. The 13+ Common Entrance papers for boys and coeducational secondary schools are taken over a period of four days beginning on the first Monday in June in their final year (Year 8).

At the moment the compulsory papers include two Mathematics papers, two English papers, a Science paper which comprises three sections – Biology, Physics and Chemistry, a Geography paper, History, RS and French paper. Latin and Spanish are optional. The French section of the examination includes an oral and a listening comprehension. Together with a mental arithmetic test these are taken approximately four weeks before the main bulk of the examinations. The Geography section requires a project which must be submitted by the middle of March and comprises 25% of the overall mark for the subject.

Since September 2003, in theory, there have been only three compulsory subjects; English, Science and Mathematics. In practice however the majority of independent secondary schools have demanded that their entry requirements involve the pupils taking all the papers as they have always done.

By the time the pupils sit Common Entrance they will have completed three full mocks and approximately eight full sets of examinations in the Senior School. They have considerable experience of examinations and the examination timetable by June of Year 8. There is a certain degree of differentiation contained within some of the papers. The school can enter children for different levels of difficulty in English, Mathematics and Latin. From September 2012 this will also apply to French. However some of the most competitive secondary independent schools demand that the pupils sit the most difficult level on all these papers.

As well as taking the examinations a comprehensive report on each pupil is sent to the school by the Headteacher and this forms part of the entrance process.

Although the Common Entrance papers are the same for all schools there is a variation in marking styles. Some schools are extremely strict with their marking, others less so. The general principle is that the more competitive the school, the stricter the marking becomes. In addition the most selective schools will set a higher average pass mark. This is often in the region of 65%

To some extent CE has less of an influence nowadays in determining the future school of any pupil. Most secondary independent schools, particularly the boarding schools, operate either a formal or an informal pre-Common Entrance testing procedure

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in January or February of Year 8. This is designed for possible borderline candidates so that there is much more time to reappraise the situation if things really are not right. If we felt that a pupil was a borderline candidate for a school we would recommend that he/she sit the pre-Common Entrance tests. However I would stress that not all schools adopt this process indeed some schools such as Westminster, Harrow, Eton, Winchester, Wellington and Rugby pre-select in Years 6 or 7 with VR tests and expect a specific pass mark in Common Entrance. Ultimately common sense and a full appreciation of the abilities of a pupil by the parents and the school should dictate a successful outcome. Girls' schools such as Wycombe Abbey, St Helen's, St Anne's, Royal Masonic, Northwood College and Piper's Corner have their main entry at 11 into Year 7 although there are also opportunities to join in Year 8 and Year 9. The girls sit Common Entrance in January of Year 6 with interviews during the Autumn term. The Common Entrance at 11 concentrates on the core subjects of English and Mathematics and Science together with verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests. However a number of schools that set their own examinations do not set a Science paper. There are a range of all girls' secondary schools that can be reached locally such as Berkhamsted, St. Mary's, Pipers' Corner, The Royal Masonic School, St. Helen's Northwood, Wycombe Abbey and Northwood College.

Gayhurst has traditionally sent pupils to a very wide range of schools at 13. However there are schools that always remain popular. The two most popular independent day schools for boys are Merchant Taylor's at Northwood and Berkhamsted Collegiate in Berkhamsted itself. Merchant Taylor's operate their own examination system which is effectively a slightly more difficult version of Common Entrance. It takes place at the end of January and involves the boys sitting the same number of papers but at Merchant Taylor's rather than Gayhurst. Merchant Taylor's do not require the submission of a Geography project. For other schools the Geography project is submitted at the beginning of March. The field work study takes place in the Summer term of Year 7. The pupils work on their project in the holidays and thereafter the final draft is worked upon so that usually it is finished by the end of the Autumn term. It is important as it forms 25% of the total mark. In addition the French oral for Merchant Taylors is at the beginning of the Spring term and the RS paper is taken at the end of November. Much emphasis is placed on an interview which occurs in September and the boys are given advice on how to deal with this.

Berkhamsted tests for both boys and girls involve a single day rather than three. Unlike Merchant Taylor's successful pupils still sit the Common Entrance in June but this is for setting purposes. Gayhurst does have an arrangement with Berkhamsted that if boys are sitting for Merchant Taylors' with Berkhamsted as a reserve choice they will be allowed to sit on a separate day should the dates of the examinations clash. Winchester set their own entrance examination known as the, 'Election' which the boys take at the same time as Common Entrance. Again, it is a rather more difficult style of Common Entrance. It is still possible for pupils in Year 7 and 8 to be involved in what the county call the Late Transfer Process to the Grammar Schools. Nowadays this is entirely dependent on the availability of places and involves a standard county arranged testing process at the school selected. Places are few.

Scholarship is significantly more difficult than Common Entrance and is only really a suitable option for extremely able pupils. All secondary independent schools offer this examination and most set their own papers which vary in nature and

complexity. Depending on which group the secondary independent school falls into will also dictate the dates of the examinations, either February or May. We will advise parents if this is an appropriate avenue to pursue. Many schools also offer a range of scholarships in such areas as Art, Music, Sport and all-round ability. Once again we would advise parents if this is something they should consider.

The secondary independent schools will ask parents to confirm their choice of schools at different times. Boarding schools usually ask for a significant financial commitment in the Autumn term of Year 7. It is possible to leave registration at the competitive day schools until slightly later but clearly it is in the best interests of everybody to make a decision by the end of the Spring term in Year 7 at the latest.

In conclusion it would be fair to say that Common Entrance (and certainly scholarship which the candidates sit at the school of their choice) is a demanding examination but it does set the children well on the way towards GCSE indeed some of the papers are not dissimilar to GCSE papers (and scholarship is often beyond). However it is a very fair testing process and it should be a successful one. The pupils at Gayhurst are prepared for all the external examinations that I have mentioned regardless of the different timescales. For some pupils choosing certain schools, optional papers such as Latin and French are omitted. The timetable, roughly, is as follows:

Autumn/Spring Year 6: Pre-13+ selection process, Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Wellington and Westminster continuing into Year 7 for other schools such as Abingdon, St Edwards and Oundle. Some interviews for girls' schools.

January Year 6: 11+ Common Entrance and Scholarship for girls

May/June Year 7: Part mock CE examinations

Autumn Term Year 8: Registration with county of candidates for the 13+ (Late Transfer Process)

September Year 8: Interviews at Merchant Taylor's

Late November: Full mock CE (and Scholarship)

December Year 8: RS examination for Merchant Taylor's..

Early January: French oral for Merchant Taylor's

Late January: Merchant Taylor's/Berkhamsted entrance examinations, results available within ten days, acceptance of places required within fourteen days of the results

Early February: 13+ Examinations, results available within one month

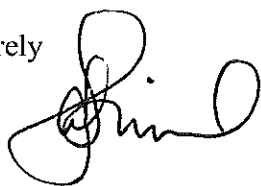
March: Geography project submissions for June CE, Final date for CE registration, Final mock CE, (and scholarship where appropriate) Group A Scholarships

May: French orals for June CE, Mental Arithmetic test, Group B Scholarships

June: Common Entrance, results available the following week, acceptance required within fourteen days

I hope this information is valuable to parents. Please feel free to contact the school with any queries I am more than happy to talk to parents about the suitability of any schools for their son/daughter.

Yours sincerely



Headmaster