



DURSTON HOUSE

Headmaster's Senior School Introductory Talk 2022

An overview of the process when deciding on right Senior School
for your son



Introduction

Choosing the right senior school should seem pretty straight forward, but that is not always the case. It is a competitive process and can appear daunting. Myself and the team here at Durston House, are here to guide, support and assist in the process of choosing the right senior school for your son.

Senior School Information Overview:

- Common Pre-testing overview
- Deadlines for registration
- 11+ and 13+ entry
- Some next steps to consider
- Communication, support and partnership

The ISEB Common Pre-test

This involves an online assessment in Maths, English, Verbal and Non-Verbal reasoning. The tests are sat here at Durston House, during November of Year 6, typically in the second week back from half term.

The downside is that it requires parents to make choices at an earlier point than used to be the case, as well as meaning that boys to sit a potential plethora of tests at quite an early age. And what about the late developer? A common sentiment expressed from families who already have their sons in some of the most academic senior schools would be along the lines of 'if he had been tested at age 11 there's no way he would have been offered a place, but he has gone on to do very well indeed'. By way of reassurance, in fairness to senior school Registrars and Heads, they spend a great deal of time and energy in the admissions process, to do their best in ensuring the right fit. Reassuring words from the Head at Harrow: "We are not just looking for academic aptitude. Places go to those who have impressed us most in terms of ability, character, attitude and their potential to contribute and thrive here. This is why those interviews, as well as the current school's reference are crucial to a candidate's success" words echoed by many a senior school Head.

Many schools are now accepting children off the back of pre-testing and some are going as far as saying that the 13+ Common Entrance examination is no longer a barrier to entry, but rather a tool, which is

used to help decide which sets a boy will go into initially in Year 9. Thus still providing the motivation to reach their full potential in assessments in Year 8.

All education debates have two sides, and striking the correct balance is key. At Durston House we are unashamedly, academically ambitious for every boy here, throughout their time at the school. We are incredibly proud of their achievements and that they go on to flourish at the most highly selective schools in the country. We have a broad curriculum of a very high standard and know that the boys have the knowledge and skills to perform well in pre-tests. We also believe that putting too much emphasis on preparation can result in an anxious child. This has to be balanced with the correct level of preparation, so that the boys feel confident as they take on the different tests. We have introduced reasoning lessons from Year 3, continuing in Years 4, 5 and 6, interview and confidence coaching workshops in Year 6, along with individual interview practice in the run up to admissions interviews. The introduction of the Atom Learning platform has also been very helpful.

11+ and 13+ entry

One of the most significant changes is the amendment to the Parent Contract. Previously, if you decided that the 11+ or 7+ was the correct exit point for your son, you ran the risk of losing your place at Durston House the following September. An indication of 11+ entry to senior school was considered as you giving notice. Whilst I passionately believe in the benefits of staying to 13 and making the transfer from Year 8 to Year 9, and about 80% of boys at Durston do stay through to the end of Year 8, your son will not forfeit his place into Year 7, should you be considering 11+ and then you decide to stay at Durston. The one caveat, would be that if we had waiting lists into year 7 (we are oversubscribed into Year 5), it would be useful to flag up your intention sooner rather than later to help us with managing the Year 7 intake.

11+ entry

Traditionally, the age for girls to transfer to their senior school has been 11+, and a great many co-educational schools have adopted an 11+ entry, especially day schools. The main schools with a dedicated 11+ entry which attract our pupils are St Benedict's, although 13+ entry is also popular, Kew House and Latymer Upper School. For 11+ schools the closing date for registrations is normally at the end of October in Year 6, prior to sitting the entrance examinations. Registering in good time is important, and those details are included in the information document which is on the website. Once you have registered, your son will be invited to sit the entrance examinations for the chosen school, usually in December or January of Year 6. The assessments usually consist of an English paper in two parts – Reading comprehension and composition, a Mathematics paper and reasoning papers in Verbal Reasoning and Non-Verbal Reasoning. Most schools do not publish past papers, but may have sample papers available. The 11+ route can be hugely competitive. Popular schools will find a great many pupils applying from outside the independent sector, often highly tutored, competing for limited spaces. If successful in the examination, then this is usually followed by a one-to-one interview with a senior member of staff, before an offer of a place is made. Interviews vary considerably between schools, often involving questions about the pupils' interests and some academic questions, reading a poem, maths problems or spelling a number of words, even asking a dilemma or ethics based question. All schools tend to publish their results by the middle of February, then expect firm acceptances within a couple of weeks. Most schools also operate waiting lists and pupils can be moved off this on to the firm list as offers start to be rejected or accepted.

13+ entry

Registration deadlines – the good news is that the earliest deadline is not until June of this year (2022) for families of pupils in Year 5 at the moment. For families in Year 4 there is a good 16 months to go, before decisions need to be made and deadlines met for registration. The main change to admissions over the past few years for 13+ entry has been the move to pre-testing in Year 6 for entry into Year 9. Traditionally pupils took the Common Entrance examination or scholarship papers in Year 8 for entry into Year 9. The majority of Independent senior schools have adopted pre-testing as the norm. Partly as a result of the competitive nature of entry, they are keen to know which families will be joining two years hence. The argument is also put that doubt for senior school admission is removed earlier, thus allowing prep schools to provide a clearer path through to their senior school, to focus on a more innovative curriculum in Years 7 and 8, free from the constraints of Common Entrance. Often criticised as being too formulaic, based on regurgitating memorised facts and not paying enough attention to the integration of essential skills and competencies into a rich knowledge based curriculum. I hold some sympathy for that view, although the ISEB have pro-actively looked at how to develop the curriculum offer for Years 7 and 8, to make it more relevant, so that pupils are even better prepared for their 16+ exams, whilst developing opportunities for exploring higher-order critical thinking and evaluation skills, collaboration and presentation skills and so on and so forth. To be clear our offering in Year 7 and 8 will continue to provide a highly academic, innovative, relevant and creative curriculum preparing pupils to excel when they move on to their chosen senior school. There is now also the opportunity to complete the equivalent of a sixth form extended essay module in Year 8, called the IPQ. Depending on the senior school destination, exams in Year 8 are tailored to the individual pupil and school they are destined for.

In addition, the opportunities to take on the myriad leadership roles and responsibilities as the boys move into the senior years - leading Vertical Groups, teams and choirs and within the orchestra is just some examples, and all benefit in preparing our boys not just for their chosen senior school, but for life.

Year 4 and beyond

So the process in Year 4. What to be considering? This is the time to begin thinking about Future Schools because families with aspirations to send their sons to St Pauls, registration opens in the January of Year 5, and will close towards the end of September (the beginning of Year 6). It is critically important to be aware of deadlines for registration to all schools including St Paul's.

Merchant Taylor's School is earliest school to close its registration in the Calendar. You will need to register by the end of June in Year 5. Current Year 5 are 2025 13+ entry and current Year 4 are 2026 13+ entry. During the second half of this term, Mr Stock will be arranging for another Senior Schools Information Evening, aimed for those in Year 5 with greater detail, regarding the admissions processes, preparation for each component of the pre-tests, and how we put together the references for boys to their chosen Senior Schools. Again, I refer you to the information document for specific details and dates of the Senior Schools.

Remember also that although we send several boys to St Paul's each year, this is a tradition that has been established by a significant number of parents opting for St Pauls each year. There are many schools, which may be far more suitable for your sons and also your family. I think it fair advice that you consider a number of schools and it is my intention to broaden the choice of outstanding senior schools for you to consider, including boarding schools. There are many exceptional boarding schools offering flexible weekly and full boarding within easy reach of West London and that offer an alternative to the London model. I spend a large amount of my time talking with Registrars, visiting senior schools and getting to know the profile and personality of each pupil, with the ambition of being able to give advice about which senior school would best suit your son. I should add here that the actual process of registering your son at a senior school has to be done by you as the parents – just good to state that so that we do not find ourselves in a position whereby a deadline is missed.

Year 8 destinations this year

St Paul's, Greshams, Shiplake, City of London, Hampton, Radley, St James' St Benedict's, Merchant Taylors', John Lyon, Westminster and Winchester. Other schools being actively considered also include Brighton College, Harrodian, Ibstock Place and Dulwich College and Haberdashers' Askes.

Choosing a school for your son at 10 or 11 years old, is so difficult, as you need to consider the fit of the school not only when he reaches 13, but also 16 or 17 years of age. Many other factors such as transport links, siblings and future plans of the school need to be taken into account. There really is a wealth of information out there, and I and the team here at Durston House will be doing our level best to keep right up to date with all that is going on in the senior school world. Durston is very highly regarded by the senior schools we send boys to and that is down to the calibre of your sons, and the work and time we spend in developing strong links with many senior schools.

Communication and updating us on your thoughts and progress through the admissions cycle

Following this meeting, I would encourage parents of year 5 to book a future schools meeting with me through Mrs Ferns. These meetings usually last about 30 minutes, where we can discuss your son's progress and where I can help give an indication of academically suitable schools that you might consider long-listing, if you haven't already done so the next stage will be to try to reduce that to a manageable number of schools. Most parents have three or four schools on their radar by the end of Year 5. For Year 5 parents many of you will have firmed up on your current intentions on the future schools you are considering. Please do not be alarmed when you receive a request from Mrs Ferns to indicate your current intentions, no deadlines have passed yet and it has been extremely difficult to visit senior schools until fairly recently. Now is the time to begin visiting schools again in person. I remind you that we also have Registrars visiting through the Zoom evenings straight after half term.

Communication and partnership are key words in navigating the vagaries of senior school admissions. We meet regularly, often daily, to discuss individual pupil progress, interview dates, examination arrangements, senior school updates and changes to Senior School admissions processes -- in order to ensure the boys are given the best possible chance of success.

A second form that Mrs Ferns will be sending – in the Summer Term of Year 5 is the Out-of-School Activities overview, which is an opportunity to provide us with an insight into any activities that your son engages in outside of school and which we can include in the reference. I am mindful that the boys already do a huge amount in school. This is not a request for you to enrol your son in every activity going. This is just to make sure we do not miss anything. We will make contact in the Autumn Term of Year 6 for any updates before we finalise the references.

This is still some time off for those of you in Year 4, but it all comes around rather quickly. The main focus currently is to consider long then short listing, due diligence, meetings with me, usually as your son moves into Year 5, and registering. Once in the process, please do keep us abreast of interview dates, schools you have registered for, offers and acceptances.





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