



**BEESTON HALL SCHOOL**

**ADMISSION TO SENIOR  
SCHOOLS**

**A GUIDE**

## 1. What is Common Entrance?

- First external exam taken by children to help them qualify for their Senior School at end of Year 8
- Overseen by the Independent Schools' Examination Board (ISEB)
- ISEB made up of Prep. and Senior School Teachers
- Produces C.E. syllabi and 2 sets of exams:

**11+ entry** – mainly used by Girls' Boarding Schools (exams in 3 core subjects only [English, Maths & Science] & sometimes VR/NVR papers taken at the end of January in Year 6). This option is rarely taken at Beeston.

**13+ entry** – large number of schools both Boys and Co-educational and Girls' schools to admit pupils.



English, Maths, Biology, Chemistry, Physics,  
Modern Languages, Latin, History, Geography & RS



Tiered papers in some subjects e.g. Maths, Latin and Languages – decided by Senior Schools and Beeston.

- Papers sat at Prep. Schools in early June and sent off daily to be marked by Senior Schools (process takes four days)
- You can only sit C.E for one School.

The great majority of Senior Schools use C.E as the qualifying tool for entry. Winchester is an obvious exception.

## **2. What is the ideal timing of the whole school selection process?**

### **Birth – Year 3**

Only parents interested in Radley for their sons need to ensure that they are put down a.s.a.p. after birth to ensure a place is secured!

### **Year 4 (aged 8 to 9)**

Begin debate at home on what type of School might suit you and your child's needs:

- Day or Boarding?
- Co-Ed or Single Sex?
- Finding a School to suit several children in the family?

### **Year 5 (aged 9-10)**

- Visits to a few schools, initially by parents and later by children – if you're completely stuck at this early stage then see the HM!
- Familiarise yourselves with the options available and develop a broad early view. Consider: co-ed v. single sex, boarding v. day (some schools more flexible over boarding these days), geography, academic/all round, other children in family.
- Register for a couple if you really like them. This is a formal statement of interest. Avoid blanket registrations as this is a waste of money and not helpful to the Senior Schools.

### **Year 6 (aged 10-11)**

- Some final visits e.g. to see some houses.
- Make an appointment with the HM to discuss in full and then establish a short list and visit schools with your son/daughter.

- Eton pre-assess at this time in two cohorts (older pupils in the Michaelmas term, younger pupils in the Summer term)

### **Year 7 (aged 11-12)**

Some schools ask for deposits and pre-assess candidates e.g. Rugby, Uppingham and Harrow. By now we will have a good idea of child's academic ability and can advise accordingly.

- Deposits can be large (£1000+) and are only returned if a child fails to meet entry standards.
- Most people only need to pay one deposit unless there are good reasons to keep options open.
- We can enter children to sit C.E. for one school only (deadline for final decision is March in penultimate Year 8 term) but parents may still hold more than one conditional offer up to this point.
- Some schools send forms to Prep. Schools to check for any academic issues and to receive Ed. Psych. Reports.
- See the HM again for final decision-making if required.

### **Year 8 (aged 12-13)**

Most pupils should know by beginning of year where they are going so they can enjoy a settled final three terms at Beeston.

- Heads of Department also need to know what Schools they are going to for setting purposes.
- Some schools offer pre-C.E. assessment days for marginal candidates (e.g. Radley, Oundle, Stowe).
- School enters all Year 8 children for C.E. by 1st March in final year.

- Year 8 children taking C.E. will sit a full set of practice papers in November and mock C.E. papers in March in their final year.
- C.E. exams sat at Beeston in the Sports Hall in early June. Up to fourteen papers between Monday and Thursday.
- All results generally in by Thursday of following week. Bad news comes out on Monday or Tuesday.

### **3. What are Pre-Tests/Pre-Assessments?**

- C.E. should technically be a qualifying exam, not a competitive one, i.e. by the time pupils reach Year 8 the number of candidates should match the number of places available and all are expected to pass. This occasionally can go wrong.
- How does a Senior School arrive at the correct number of pupils before C.E. is sat?
  - a) Through lots of communication between Prep. School Heads and Registrars.
  - b) In some cases through pre-assessment e.g. Harrow, Eton & Uppingham.
- Schools with large numbers of applications have devised systems of 'filtering out' candidates 2 or 3 years before entry (i.e. those who are not likely to pass C.E.).
- Some schools pre-test to give the impression they are very over-subscribed when in fact they are not! Some are - e.g. Eton has about 5 applications for each place.
- The precise structure of pre-testing takes slightly different forms from one school to another but they usually include:
  - a) A comprehensive reference sent from the HM.
  - b) An interview – possibly with a Housemaster.
  - c) IQ/Aptitude Tests – often computerised, e.g. devised by Durham University.
  - d) Written tests in Maths and English.
  - e) Verbal and Non Verbal Reasoning Tests.

Tests are generally devised so that Prep. Schools can't specifically prepare pupils for them.

- The outcome of these tests tend to fall into 3 categories:
  - a) Those offered 'conditional places' subject to passing C.E. in their final year.
  - b) A place on a Waiting List.
  - c) A rejection.

In this way the field is narrowed to represent more realistically the number of places available but parents still double-book and this causes problems.

- Girls' Boarding Schools opt for a slightly different approach – many will offer preview weekends held often as late as the Autumn Term of Year 8. These are a combination of academic tests, interviews and an experience of boarding. Parents and schools receive feedback as to whether it would be advisable to sit C.E. for that school or not.

#### **4. What is the pass mark for C.E?**

- A simple question but one without a simple answer.
- No standardised mark scheme. Each school has different views on what constitutes an 'A' etc.
- Most schools will give a guideline pass mark – in some cases they will specify marks in subjects.
- For example:

<b>School</b>	<b>C.E pass mark</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Ampleforth	50-55%	Will accept Level I Maths
Eton	65%+	Pre-assessed in Year 6. Level III in Maths & Latin preferred
Gresham's	50%+	Entry test in January of final year. Look for 50%+ across the board in C.E in June. Will accept Level I Maths
Harrow	65% average	60% minimum expected in English & Maths (from 2017)
Norwich School	55%+	Pre-assessed in January of final year to test suitability for C.E. in June
Oakham	55%	55% preferred in Eng/Maths/Sci.
Oundle	55%+	55%+ in core subjects
Radley	60%	Prefer Level III Maths
Rugby	55%+	Most get 60%+. Pre-assessed in October Year 7
St. Edward's, Oxford	55%+	55%+ in Eng./Maths/Sci. An ave. of 55% in other subjects
Stowe	55%+	50% minimum in Eng/Maths/Sci Level II papers
The Leys	-	Entry test in January of final year. C.E still taken in June
Tudor Hall	55% ideally	Pre-assessed March of Year 7
Uppingham	55%+	55%+ in core subjects. Pre-assessed Sept. Of Year 7

\*Core subjects: English/Maths/Science/French

- Schools will try hard to keep this requirement constant from one year to another and not to move the goal posts though there have been horror stories of schools failing large numbers in some years.
- It is not true to say that all pupils in a school asking for a high C.E. score will be brighter than those in a school whose pass mark is lower. Both schools are likely to have equally bright pupils at the top end of the ability range though absolute numbers will vary and the range of abilities will obviously be different.
- When selecting a school, the HM will sometimes suggest a school in which the child will find themselves in the middle of the ability range – enough people above them to keep them challenged whilst enough below to maintain their confidence and self esteem.
- Given the qualifying nature to C.E., if parents do select a school for which all are confident of success, then both pupils and parents alike can fully enjoy the last two years of Prep. School with the pupil participating fully in the broad curriculum.

## 5. What if they fail?

- They shouldn't if 'the system' works i.e. there is open, honest communication between parents, Prep. School and Senior School.
- Pre-testing by Senior Schools has reduced failures at C.E. but the schools which pre-test do still occasionally fail C.E. candidates.

- If a child does fail, early in the week after the papers are sat, the Senior School Head will contact RCG asking where their papers should be passed on to. However, there is no guarantee that another school (which is the parents' second choice) will be in a position to receive the papers if the first choice school turns him or her down.
- C.E. is not a shot in the dark but the culmination of a process which should have been closely monitored for more than a year.
- One final caveat is to do with the role of the Senior School Registrar. It is true that C.E. is intended to be a qualifying exam and not a competitive exam but Senior School Registrars have a devil of a job managing numbers to allow this to be the case. If they are too cautious empty beds will result. If they are not cautious enough then the cohort can be too large for the number of places and C.E. then becomes competitive at the margin i.e. if the last few candidates theoretically reach the pass mark, if there is no space, they will be turned down.

Registrars are trying to second-guess true intentions of many parents. The whole system relies on communication. There must be honesty between parents and Prep. Schools and transparency between Prep. School and Senior School. The sooner parents make final decisions the more certainty there is in the system and the less likelihood of failure as a result of over-subscription.

## 6. Academic Scholarships

- This is the alternative route into schools instead of C.E.
- Only pupils in the Scholarship Form can sit an academic award to their Senior School.
- Over the last few years most schools have reduced their value in order to provide more funding for Bursaries. Most are now worth a maximum of 10% of fees (see Schools' Websites). Scholarships are not the way to help fund children through Senior Schools in the way they used to be. Means tested Bursaries are available at most schools on application.
- There is a Common Academic Scholarship (CASE) set by ISEB but most Senior Schools choose to set their own papers – with a wide variety of styles and content.
- The papers are trying to test the ability to apply knowledge, the capability for lateral thinking etc.
- The decision as to which children should sit these is taken jointly by parents and the school at the end of the Summer term in Year 7. A place in the 'putative' scholarship form in Year 7 is not a guarantee of a place in the scholarship form in Year 8.
- Most parents make their choice of senior school using a wide variety of criteria and view the award of a scholarship as a bonus not as the major deciding factor (especially as they are generally not worth as much as they used to be).

- The exams are sat either in February, March or in May with candidates sitting the papers at their Senior school over the period of 3/4 days.

If a pupil fails to achieve an award they are normally at least offered a place without the need to sit C.E. In exceptional circumstances, if the scholarship papers were very poor, the Senior School may insist on a candidate sitting C.E, but this is unusual.

However, parents shouldn't see applying to sit a scholarship as an easy route around C.E as it is an extremely challenging academic arena and only suitable for those right at the top of academic tree.

### **Other types of Scholarships – Art, Drama, Music, Sports, All-rounder**

The range of awards varies widely from school to school and sometimes depends on the wealth of the school and the generosity of its benefactors. The information here is only a guide as each school has its own way of assessing scholarship candidates.

- **Art**: A portfolio is required to be compiled over two years together with a practical exam and interview which test drawing ability etc.
- **Drama**: Assessed through a combination of prepared pieces and tests of improvisation. Senior Schools often try to observe candidates in performance in plays at their Prep. School.
- **Music**: Many schools will require candidates to offer two instruments with **at least one** at Grade 5/6. Most

Directors of Music will be looking for natural musical talent rather than purely a level of achievement defined by music exams. There is a special protocol in applying for Music Scholarships (see the Director of Music).

- **Sports:** Many schools require candidates to have county/regional/national representation in **at least one** of the major sports.
- **All-Rounder or General Scholarships:** The precise format varies from school to school which often involve a test of leadership.

Preparation for some awards clearly takes place over a long period of time as candidates need to be identified reasonably early. Final decisions on who will take these scholarships are made at the beginning of Year 8.

Most of these scholarships are assessed in the Spring Term of Year 8. Success does not guarantee entry but it may help! At the vast majority of Senior Schools all candidates for awards other than academic have to sit and pass C.E in the normal way.

## 7. What next?

- Good communication with the HM is very important. He is in a unique position to give advice on Senior Schools, and has very close links with Heads and Registrars.
- The Master-of-Scholars & Director of Studies, and the Directors of Music, Art and Sport are all at hand to help/advise whenever they can.
- Talk to your friends and other parents of children already in Senior Schools but do not rely on 'dinner-party' gossip too

much! Always try to visit schools with an open mind and no pre-conceived agendas.

- Look at websites, prospectuses, and schools' guides.
- Trust your judgement and think what is right for your child and don't worry too much about where other parents/children are going!
- Focus on your child's strengths and select a school that will nurture and encourage your child to reach their potential, gain confidence and explore new interests. Critically, they need to be happy in their new environment.
- For further information about scholarships please ask for the booklet: *'Scholarships to Senior Schools'* (available from the office and it can be downloaded from the school's website).

