

EDUCATION

Will your child get into the 'best' school?

BY LORRAE JADERBERG AND
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MANY PARENTS come to us wanting to know how to get their child into the "best" school. We recommend they start considering options by the end of year three.

At secondary level, the choices are: state, state selective and independent. For state schools, it's straightforward — you need to meet the admissions criteria. This often comes down to the distance you live from the school. For some though, particularly faith schools, it can be a pure lottery.

For state selective and independent schools, it's also simple — your child

needs to pass the entrance examination. Perhaps not so simple after all.

If considering the independent route, look for a school where your child will be happy but also one where they will thrive and reach their full academic potential. Speak to other parents and teachers at the prospective school; look at league tables, Ofsted reports and former pupils' university places. Visit on a typical working day.

Don't think purely in terms of academic level. Consider pastoral care as well. Some children like being big fish in small ponds, others prefer being small fish in big ponds. Each child is different, so think in terms of "best school for my child".

Be realistic. These schools have entrance exams and interviews. It is important to prepare your child. For many, this will mean some external support and tutoring. However, tutoring should be introduced only to enable



Tutoring will familiarise your child with the format of 11-plus entrance tests and equip them with exam strategy

the child to understand the exam requirements, learn any new curriculum required and showcase their best in the exams.

Tutoring is expensive and can be emotionally draining for parents and children. If a child is reaching their full potential but is not at the entrance-

exam level, we recommend not to sit these exams, not to be tutored and to look at alternative schools that would be more appropriate.

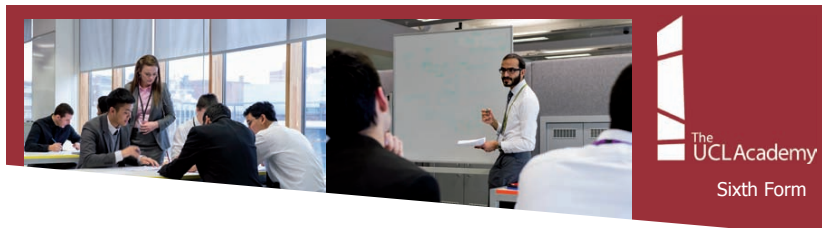
That said, many very bright children who go to state primary schools are unsuccessful in entrance exams due to lack of preparation, rather than ability. Curriculum areas examined are generally not taught in state schools until secondary level. To ensure children are ready for 11-plus exams, they will need outside specialist curriculum support and exam strategy preparation, practice and fine tuning.

Schools are keen to ensure they make offers to the "right" children for their school. So, what makes a Channing girl? What makes a UCS boy? Each school is different. We have asked many head teachers this question. Some prefer children to be stronger

in maths than English; for others, the reverse is true.

Many schools say they are looking for "bright, engaging, independent-thinking" students. That is why an interview forms part of their selection process. At some schools this can be a 20-minute session; for others, such as Highgate, it may be a half day, with only 50 per cent of exam candidates asked for interview and only 50 per cent of interviewees offered a place. Children need to be confident and prepared, show a genuine desire to go to this school and demonstrate via extra-curricular activities and hobbies that they can contribute fully to school life.

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Hi-tech homework your dog can't eat

TECHNOLOGY IS transforming the teaching of modern foreign languages, reports the Royal Masonic School in Rickmansworth. "Since the introduction of iPads last year, we have seen a number of benefits in the MFL department," says a spokesperson. "Apps such as Google Classroom and Google Drive have completely changed the way in which we set work and receive it from the pupils."

The school can now ask pupils to complete work on Google Drive, so that it is cloud-based — eliminating the need for handing in a piece of paper or exercise book. Teachers can see when pupils complete their work, so they can better judge the quality — they will know if it has been rushed. "We can also flag up any organisational problems, as we can see whether a pupil is about to miss a deadline," explains the

Royal Masonic. "Contact can be made with parents before the problem escalates and they can then keep an eye on their child's progress." When drafting an assignment, pupils are able to receive as much online feedback as they need to perfect their work.

One of the major issues in language learning which has been addressed by Google Classroom is that of speaking practice. It is difficult to create enough opportunities for pupils to speak in lessons but now speaking tasks can be set for homework. Pupils record their work and upload it, then listen to their peers' speaking work and learn from each other's mistakes.

Teachers are continually exploring how technology can best be used to support and enrich their pupils' learning. "At RMS, we are certainly enjoying getting to grips with the many different ways that this can be done in modern foreign languages."