



The Parent Guide

Useful facts and information about pre-tests, 11+ and 13+ entrance exams.



GALORE
PARK 

ISEB Independent Schools
Examinations Board

Dear Parent

Galore Park, in conjunction with the Independent Schools Examinations Board (ISEB), has created this easy-to-read guide for parents, containing useful facts and information about pre-tests, 11+ and 13+ entrance exams.

This guide provides information about the exams that your child is likely to take when applying for senior school. It also gives advice on how to support your child in their preparation for those exams. We hope you will find it a useful point of reference.



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Overview

When your child is applying for an independent senior school for entry at age 11 or 13, he/she may take a number of exams:

- 11+ exams
- Pre-tests
- 13+ exams
- Scholarship exams

The exams your child takes will depend on the senior schools for which your child applies. Deciding which schools to apply for should be a collaborative process between you, your child and your child's current school.

This will ensure you choose the best fit for your child. Try to find out as much as possible about the entry process for each of the schools for which your child is applying.

You might ask questions such as:

- How do we apply?
- When is the application deadline?
- What is the selection procedure?
- When are the entrance exams?
- What format are the exams in - are they written/oral/online?
- Which subjects will be examined? And at what level?

- Which exam will they sit (e.g. ISEB or school's own)?
- Will there be an interview?

You will be able to find the answers to these questions by contacting the senior school's admissions office, looking at the school's website, and by asking your child's current school. We also suggest you talk to your child's current school about the steps they are taking to prepare your child, and how you can help with that process.



What is Common Entrance?

- Common Entrance (often shortened to CE) is the name for the 11+ and 13+ exams provided by the Independent Schools Examinations Board (ISEB).
- The Common Entrance exams are created by ISEB and marked by the senior school for which the child has applied.
- The Common Entrance syllabuses and exams are renowned for being rigorous and challenging and providing a strong academic grounding in preparation for senior school.
- Independent schools which prepare children for Common Entrance follow the ISEB Common Entrance syllabuses.
- Common Entrance is strongly supported by many of the top independent prep and senior schools in the UK. ISEB publishes lists of the schools which use Common Entrance on their website: iseb.co.uk.



Pre-tests

There are various pre-tests on offer, including:

- ISEB Common Pre-Tests
- Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) pre-tests
- GL Assessment pre-tests
- UKiset pre-tests
- Individual school's own pre-tests.

All these tests have to be completed in a certain amount of time. Many of these tests are computerised and adaptive; this means that the tests adapt according to how many questions are answered correctly. The more correct answers given, the more demanding questions are offered to the child. The senior school will choose which of these pre-tests that they require.



What are the ISEB Common Pre-Tests?

ISEB Common Pre-Tests are a set of online, adaptive tests taken when your child is in Year 6 or Year 7 (age 10–12). The tests are taken either in the child's own school or at the senior school for which he or she is entered. If your child is offered a place after completing these tests, he or she will usually still be required to sit Common Entrance at 13+ examinations in Year 8.

How do I register my child for the ISEB Common Pre-Tests?

Parents do not need to register their child. Candidates are registered by the senior schools for which they have applied.



Which subjects are tested in the ISEB Common Pre-Tests?

English, mathematics, non-verbal reasoning and verbal reasoning.

When will my child take the ISEB Common Pre-Tests?

The ISEB Common Pre-Tests can be taken from 1 October to 30 June.

Who marks the ISEB Common Pre-Tests?

The tests are taken and marked online.

ISEB Common Pre-Tests overview

The parts of the Pre-Tests can be taken in any order and more than one part can be taken in a session. Children must, however, complete each part in one sitting.

Subject	Time	Contents
English	25 minutes	Online multiple choice tests which adapt to an individual child's ability level.
Mathematics	50 minutes	
Non-verbal reasoning	32 minutes	
Verbal reasoning	36 minutes	

Entrance exams at 11+

There are various 11+ exams for entrance to senior school at age 10 to 12. These include:

- ISEB Common Entrance at 11+
- Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) 11+
- National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) 11+
- GL Assessment 11+
- Moray House
- Grammar School 11+
- School's own 11+ exams.

The 11+ exams can cover English, maths, science, verbal reasoning and non-verbal reasoning, but the subjects tested will depend on the individual

senior school's requirements.

What is ISEB Common Entrance at 11+?

Common Entrance at 11+ is used by independent senior schools for entrance at age 11 or 12.

Which subjects are tested in ISEB Common Entrance at 11+?

English, mathematics and science.

When will my child take ISEB Common Entrance at 11+?

Common Entrance at 11+ can be taken in either the autumn term (November) or spring term (January) during Year 6. Most children take the January exam,

and many schools use the November papers for mock exams.

Who marks ISEB Common Entrance at 11+?

11+ exams are marked by the school for which the child has applied. ISEB provides a detailed mark scheme for senior schools.

ISEB states that senior schools should give a grade to the child for each subject (or in some cases for each paper within that subject) and grade boundaries for that year. This information is passed on to the junior/prep school that the child is currently attending.



ISEB Common Entrance at 11+ overview

Subject	No. of exams	Contents	Time
English	2	Paper 1: Comprehension Paper 2: Composition	45 minutes
Mathematics	1	Non-calculator paper covering: number, calculations, fractions, proportions and percentages, measures, shape and space, algebra, handling data	60 minutes
Science	1	Questions on biology, chemistry and physics	60 minutes

Entrance exams at 13+

Some senior schools set their own 13+ exams for entrance in Year 9, but many independent schools use ISEB Common Entrance at 13+.

What is ISEB Common Entrance at 13+?

Common Entrance at 13+ is used by senior schools as part of the process for assessing children for entry into their schools at age 13. Your child may be required to take ISEB Common Pre-Tests before taking Common Entrance at 13+.

Which subjects are tested in ISEB Common Entrance at 13+?

Children take exams in:

- Compulsory core subjects – English, mathematics and science

- Non-compulsory subjects – children can take papers in history, geography, religious studies, French, Classical Greek, Latin, Spanish and German.

Which syllabuses are tested in ISEB Common Entrance at 13+?

Common Entrance at 13+ tests the ISEB Common Entrance syllabuses. These are available on the ISEB website: iseb.co.uk.

Are there levels for ISEB Common Entrance at 13+?

In some subjects, papers are set at different levels. The level your child will take is decided by his/her senior school and the school for which he/she has applied.

Which ISEB Common Entrance at 13+ subjects have coursework?

Geography has coursework, and religious studies has optional coursework.

When will my child take ISEB Common Entrance at 13+?

Common Entrance at 13+ is taken in either the spring term (January) or, more commonly, the summer term (May/June) during Year 8. Papers are also produced in the autumn term (November), although these are generally used for mock exams.

Who marks ISEB Common Entrance at 13+?

The exams are marked by the school for which the child has applied. ISEB provides a detailed mark scheme for senior schools but senior schools set their own grading systems. ISEB states that senior schools should give a grade to the child for each subject (or in some cases for each paper within that subject) and grade boundaries for that year. This information is passed on to the junior/prep school which the child is currently attending.



ISEB Common Entrance at 13+ overview

Subject	Level	No. of exams	Overview	Time
13+ English	2	2 papers per level	Paper 1: Reading (literary prose) and writing (prose for a practical purpose) Paper 2: Reading (poetry) and writing (imaginative, descriptive or narrative)	Each 75 minutes
13+ Mathematics	3	3 papers per level	Paper: Non-calculator Paper: Calculator Paper: Mental arithmetic (one level for all)	60 minutes 60 minutes 30 minutes
13+ Science	2	Level 1: 1 Level 2: 3	Biology, chemistry and physics Paper: Biology Paper: Chemistry Paper: Physics	60 minutes Each 40 minutes
13+ History	1	1 paper	Evidence and essay questions	60 minutes
13+ Geography	1	1 paper and coursework	Location knowledge, Ordnance Survey map work and thematic studies Individual fieldwork enquiry to be submitted in addition	60 minutes
13+ Religious Studies	1	1 paper and optional coursework	Two syllabuses available for religious studies (chosen by school) Syllabus A paper: Old Testament, New Testament, World Religions and Contemporary Issues Syllabus B paper: Old Covenant, Jesus Christ and the Sacraments, and the Church	60 minutes or 40 minutes if coursework option completed
13+ French	2	2 papers and 1 speaking test per level	Paper: Reading and writing Paper: Listening Paper: Speaking	60 minutes 25 minutes 6 minutes
13+ German	1	2 papers and 1 speaking test per level	Paper: Reading and writing Paper: Listening Paper: Speaking	60 minutes 25 minutes 6 minutes
13+ Spanish	2	2 papers and 1 speaking test per level	Paper: Reading and writing Paper: Listening Paper: Speaking	60 minutes 25 minutes 6 minutes
13+ Classical Greek	2	1 paper per level	Comprehension, translation, syntax and non-linguistic studies	60 minutes
13+ Latin	3	1 paper per level	Comprehension, translation, syntax and non-linguistic studies	60 minutes



Scholarship exams

Some senior schools set their own exams for scholarship and/or bursary purposes, or they use ISEB Common Academic Scholarship Exams at 13+ to assess exceptional academic performance.

What are ISEB Common Academic Scholarship Exams (CASE)?

CASE are the scholarship exams set by ISEB. Common Academic Scholarship Exams are set at a higher level than Common Entrance at 13+ and can be taken by the most academically able children.

If your child takes CASE they may not be required to take the 13+ Common Entrance exams. This will be decided by the senior school. The decision as to whether your child is entered for CASE or 13+ Common Entrance

is decided by your child's current school and the senior school for which they are applying.

Which subjects can be tested in ISEB Common Academic Scholarship Exams?

Children can take CASE in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, religious studies, French and Latin.

When will my child take ISEB Common Academic Scholarship Exams?

The exams are taken in either the spring term (February) or, more commonly, the summer term (May) during Year 8.

Who marks ISEB Common Academic Scholarship Exams?

The papers are marked by the senior school for which the child has applied.

ISEB Common Academic Scholarship Exams overview

Subject	No. of exams	Overview	Time
CASE English	1 paper	Two or more unseen, thematically related passages with questions on content, style and structure	105 minutes
CASE Maths	1 paper	Questions are based on the Common Entrance syllabuses for each subject	90 minutes
CASE Science	1 paper	Three sections: biology, chemistry and physics	90 minutes
CASE History	1 paper	Unseen evidence question and choice of essay questions	60 minutes
CASE Geography	1 paper	Data response, essay and structured questions	60 minutes
CASE Religious Studies	1 paper	Questions are based on the religious studies Common Entrance syllabuses A & B	60 minutes
CASE French	2 papers and 1 oral per level	Paper: Reading and writing Paper: Listening Paper: Senior schools will conduct their own Speaking tests	60 minutes Approximately 30 minutes
CASE Latin	1 paper	Comprehension, translation, grammar and derivation	60 minutes

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YOU'VE CHOSEN THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL
NOW PASS THE EXAMS



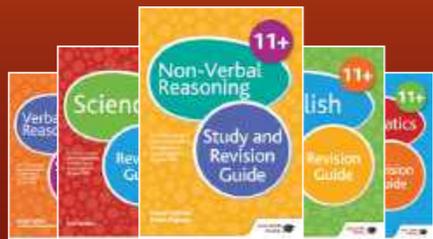
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11+ and Pre-Tests Revision Journey ▶

REVISION GUIDES

Consolidate revision and learn to understand the question types for all topics that could be tested in pre-tests and 11+ independent school entrance exams.

[FIND OUT MORE ▶](#)



WORKBOOKS



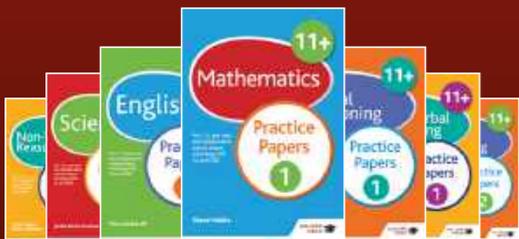
Increase confidence with practice of even more question variations, and apply knowledge learned in the Revision Guide.

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PRACTICE PAPERS

Perfect exam technique by practising with a variety of exam-paper styles under time pressure.

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EXAM PAPERS

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13+ Common Entrance Revision Journey ▶

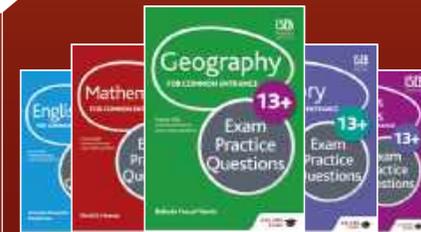
REVISION GUIDES

Consolidate knowledge and revisit content covered as part of the syllabus across all topics which could be tested at 13+ Common Entrance exams.

[FIND OUT MORE ▶](#)



EXAM PRACTICE QUESTIONS



Apply knowledge learned in the Revision Guide with a wealth of exam-style questions.

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EXAM PRACTICE ANSWERS

Check your answers and find out how to improve in weaker areas.

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EXAM PAPERS

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Entrance exams are an essential part of getting into many independent senior schools, and there is no denying it can be a stressful and emotional process. However, with mindful and well-planned preparation, you can make the whole experience easier and calmer for both yourself and your child.

This section is brought to you by Galore Park



Taking a mindful approach

Remember that the way you respond to this process will be reflected in your child. If you are calm, they are more likely to be calm. A mindful approach can help your child to keep some perspective and avoid getting overly stressed:

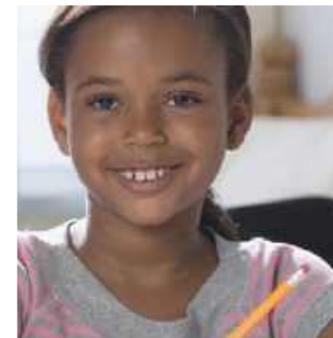
- Remind your child that the aim is to find the right school for them, and the tests and interviews are a part of that process. Not every school will be the perfect fit.
- Be realistic about balancing work and relaxation. An overtired, overworked child will perform far less effectively than a child who has had regular breaks and has enjoyed leisure activities in their spare time.
- Teach your child that making mistakes is part of the learning process. The journey to the entrance exams is exactly that – a journey. There will be ups and downs as they refine their exam techniques and subject-specific skills and knowledge. Do not allow your child to become too disheartened by mistakes they will inevitably make. Point out that if they already knew everything, they wouldn't need to go to school.
- Be encouraging. Especially when children are giving up their weekends or evenings to do revision, make sure they have something to look forward to afterwards, even if it's something as simple as their favourite snack.
- If you are visibly stressed or worried about the exams, your child will follow your example. Try to strike a balance between being ambitious and realistic as this will do wonders for your child's frame of mind.
- If your child does become over anxious, try to intervene early and talk about the bigger picture. Teach them some simple breathing techniques that can be used to help them relax when they are revising but can also be used if they panic in an exam.
- Pay attention to what your child likes and dislikes, what they find easy and what they find difficult. In this way you can build their confidence through their strengths and offer support (resources or extra lessons) for their weaker areas.

Gathering information

- Start to gather information about the exams and tests that your child will be expected to take as early as possible. Communicate with your child, their current school and the school you hope your child will go to.
- If your child attends a prep school, they are likely to cover all of the ISEB examination topics as part of the school curriculum and their school will help with much of the exam preparation, but a parent's practical and emotional support in addition to this is vital.
- If your child attends a state school, we recommend you contact your child's existing school, and the senior school that you wish to apply to and seek

advice about additional areas your child may need to cover to prepare for their entrance exams.

- Ask the school to which your child is applying exactly which exam type, subjects and levels your child will be sitting. If your child is taking an ISEB exam you can familiarise yourself with the syllabuses by downloading them from iseb.co.uk.



Preparing your child for entrance exams

We encourage you to start working with your child at least a year before the exams. There is then time for your child to build familiarity and confidence, and for you to identify knowledge gaps and any areas where confidence is lacking. A little-but-often approach to revision helps to avoid stressful, last-minute cramming.



There are a number of ways in which you can help your child to prepare for all types of entrance exams:

Every day

Make sure school-set homework is completed well. This doesn't mean you have to do it with your child but, as it is likely to be relevant to the exams, make sure it is done to a high standard. Be ready to answer any questions your child might have.

Be wary, however, of giving your child too much help (or allowing a tutor to do so). It is important that both you and your child have a realistic picture of what they can do independently in order to set targets and fill gaps. Remember they will have to do the exam on their own.

Encourage your child to read daily. High-quality fiction and non-fiction texts will broaden their vocabulary, give them interesting books to talk about at interview and widen their general knowledge. Discuss the books your child reads with them and ask them probing questions about the characters, themes and what they like or dislike about the book. Encourage them to read beyond their usual tastes – if they always choose fantasy, help them choose some historical or science fiction, or an autobiography. This is particularly good preparation for English exams in which any type of text could arise.

Talk about the world – around the dinner table, in the car, on the sofa in the evening.

Watch the news together, read the paper, watch documentaries and talk about the events of the day. This is invaluable preparation for interviews as it will develop your child's conversational skills, enhance their thinking and questioning skills and expose them to a wide range of interesting topics. Being able to talk naturally and engagingly about a wide range of subjects is a great skill to have.



Weekends and holidays

- If you have more time at the weekend, you may choose to do some subject-specific extension work. Remember that the type of tasks you do will depend on how far away the exam is.
- When the exams are still months away, focus on specific skills which your child needs to practise, such as working out the meaning of unfamiliar words in English or calculating the angles in a triangle in maths. Your child's current school should be able to guide you as to what areas need the most work.
- As you get closer to the exam, focus on exam-type questions or past papers. You may start to introduce a timer to help your child

develop their exam skills. These are available on many school websites or your child's current school may provide them for revision.

Weekends are a great time to take learning beyond the written word and make day trips or museum visits. Choose places that fit with the topics your child is studying for their exams. For example:

- Places of historical or geographical relevance
- Shows or plays linked to authors or texts studied in English
- Places of worship for religious studies
- Other places that link to your own child's particular interests, which they

may like to talk about at interview, such as Bletchley Park if they are interested in maths or a Royal Institute Christmas Lecture if they are a keen scientist

- Even a train journey or a visit to the beach can provide inspiration for a piece of creative writing or give context for something your child may be asked to read. Non-study time is also very important.

Enjoying hobbies, sport, healthy food, time with friends and family, and having plenty of sleep is vital in making the study that follows effective.



How to revise well

Before revision

Find a calm, quiet, well-lit and ventilated space where your child won't be disturbed by noise, interruptions or distractions.

Ensure they have the right equipment:

- Textbooks and school books
- Notebooks or paper to practise and make notes

- Pens, including different colours and highlighters for note making
- Sticky notes for reminders, marking pages and covering answers for self-testing.

- Sit together and make a realistic timetable for revision.
- Don't let your child plan too much or too little. Help them to strike a balance.
- Alternate the subjects they like

the most or find the easiest with those subjects that they find harder or enjoy less.

- Include day trips, treats, family events, etc. on the planner too.

Discuss study priorities. Talk to your child about what they feel needs the most work – they will have had feedback from their teachers and you may be able to look at their work to see where to put the focus.

During revision

Work in short bursts. Sessions of 20–30 minutes with clear aims are far more productive than hours at a time when concentration will wane after a short time.

- Use revision materials that are made up of short units and break subjects down into clear topics or sections.

- During breaks make sure your child has water, healthy snacks and fresh air if possible. Exercise also makes for a good break.

- During general revision, give your child help in understanding concepts and practising methods. However, make sure they have a chance to work by themselves as this is key for the exam.

- Timed practice papers and tests should be done independently to best replicate test conditions.

- Don't panic if your child finds something hard. Keep calm for their sake and explain that it's not that they don't understand it, they just don't understand it yet.

After revision

- Discuss the revision with your child, giving them another chance to go over things and ask questions. If they can explain a concept to you, they have a good chance of grasping it.

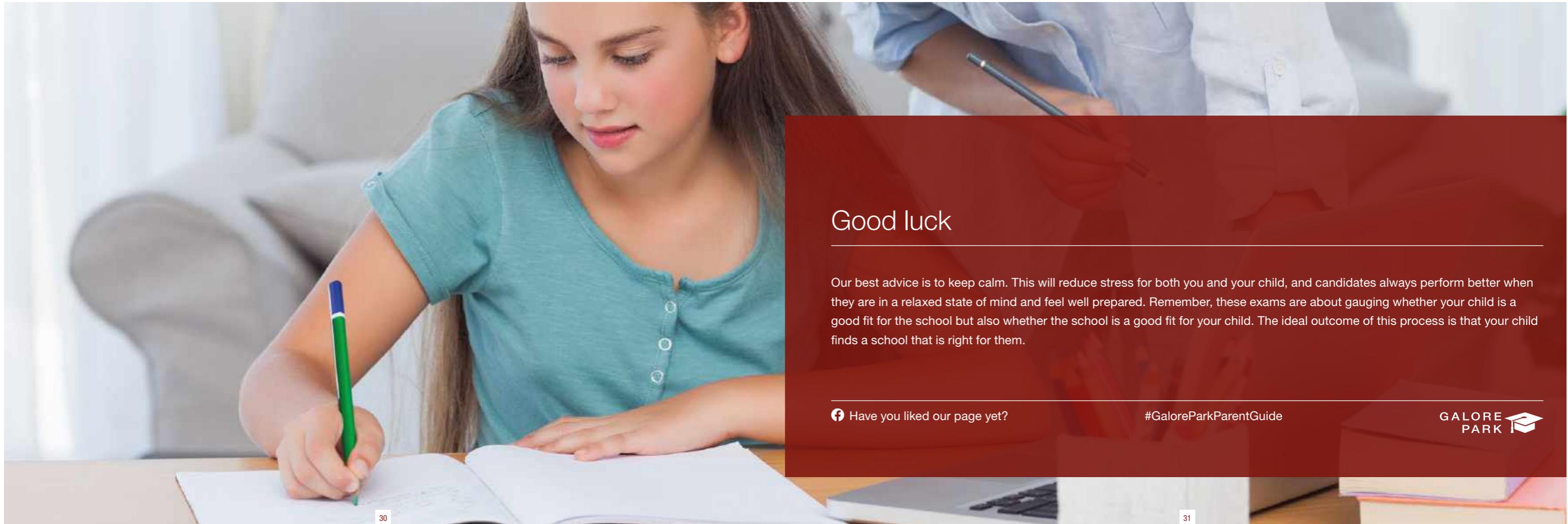
- After breaks, spend some time reviewing what has already been revised.

- If something is proving particularly difficult, encourage your child to talk to their teacher about it.

- Don't work too late into the evening. Early nights and relaxation at the end of a revision session are very important to keep the brain rested and working at its best.

- Each person learns differently and each subject requires different skills. There are many different approaches to revision so find what works best for your child in each subject.

These tips are inspired by [Study Skills, the complete guide to smart learning](#), published by [Galore Park](#).



Good luck

Our best advice is to keep calm. This will reduce stress for both you and your child, and candidates always perform better when they are in a relaxed state of mind and feel well prepared. Remember, these exams are about gauging whether your child is a good fit for the school but also whether the school is a good fit for your child. The ideal outcome of this process is that your child finds a school that is right for them.

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