

# Coopersale Hall School



## Senior School Transition Information Booklet

September 2020

Year 5 is the right time to begin to think about the move to senior school and which schools might best suit your child. It is an exciting time, but also has its challenges as you look at the options and consider what your next steps might be. We hope this guide will be helpful as you begin the process of finding and applying for senior schools.

Of course, we are here to offer advice to parents and to help to prepare each and every pupil for the transition, so that they can feel confident and well-prepared for any exams or interviews they may have.

### **As a parent, where do you start?**

A good starting point is to think whether you are looking for a **state school** or an **independent school**.

### **State schools**

We are fortunate to have a number of excellent state schools in this area. Every year some parents will choose one of these for their child.

It is important to remember that you must apply for a state school by completing an application. There is a website to go to for all of the information you need for applying to a state school. You go to the website for the county in which you live. For most Coopersale Hall families, this will be either Essex or Herts:

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/apply-for-a-secondary-school-place>

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/schools-and-education/school-admissions/secondary-and-upper-schools/secondary-and-upper-school-places.aspx>

On the website will be helpful links; for example, to the secondary school admissions booklet which is an essential guide to applying and contains the application form.

The application form must be completed and submitted by parents.

- The application window opens in September of Year 6.
- All applications must be submitted by the date published on the website. This is usually 31 October.
- Currently you can select up to six schools.
- Details for the application process for grammar schools is also on this website and must be included in your six choices.
- There are some faith schools that parents can apply to if they fulfil the criteria:
  - The Davenant Foundation School in Loughton. Details are on the website
  - JCOSS (the Jewish Community Secondary School). Details are on the website
- You can apply to schools out of area; details of how to do this are on the website. This might include:
  - Dame Alice Owens
  - Henrietta Barnett Grammar School
- Some schools have selective entry for all or some pupils. For example:

- Grammar schools in Essex – parents need to register for a child to sit the 11+ exams at these academically selective schools. The dates will be on the admissions website.
- Leventhorpe School, Herts which has an optional musical aptitude test and offers a number of places to pupils who are talented musicians. Parents can find all the details on the school's website.
- The Anglo-European School prioritises pupils who have a second language. Parents can read the details on the website.
- State schools all have admissions policies which it is important to read in order to work out whether or not you meet the criteria for a place.

### **Independent schools**

Pupils from Coopersale Hall move onto a variety of excellent independent schools in Essex, Herts or London, and occasionally further afield. There is a wide choice of types of independent school in this area.

It is important for parents to remember that you have to make the applications to each of the independent schools you wish you apply to. This will involve paying a registration fee at each school. The school cannot do this on your behalf.

We will be asked to complete a 'Common Transfer Form' and a reference for your child, but we do not make the applications.

### **Questions to consider for Independent schools**

#### **Boarding or Day**

Are you looking for a day school or a boarding school? If you are considering boarding, there are two choices: a flexi-boarding arrangement where your child can board for some of the week or full boarding. Ask what proportion of pupils board from 11, so that you have an idea about how central boarding may be to school life.

Schools in our area that offer boarding include:

- Bishop's Stortford College
- Brentwood
- Felsted
- Haileybury
- New Hall
- Queenswood (girls only)
- St Edmund's College

Fees for boarding are considerably more than day fees. The details will be available on the websites for prospective parents.

Benefits of boarding include being able to have an immersive experience at school and to take a full part in the extra-curricular life of the school, particularly if the school is a long way from home.

Boarding arrangements are very much 'warmer' and more welcoming than they may have been in the past, and pastoral care is a priority. Boarders are usually in smaller dorms and they can decorate their area to personalise it and make it feel 'like home'.

The schools often provide a coach service which helps with the logistics of flexi-boarding.

### **Single sex or co-educational**

There are a range of opinions about the pros and cons of co-education where girls and boys learn together, single sex or 'diamond structure' schools where boys and girls are taught separately from 11-16, but are within the same school. There are only about 14 diamond structure independent schools in the country.

Take some time to think about what will be the best setting for your child, not just at 11, but also when they are an older teenager preparing for life beyond school.

Most of the Coopersale Hall pupils go onto mixed senior schools, but some choose single sex or diamond structure. Recent examples are:

- Diamond structure schools
  - Brentwood
  - Forest
  - New Hall
- Single-sex schools
  - Braeside (girls currently but phased co-ed from 2021)
  - City of London Girls' School
  - City of London Boys' School
  - Queenswood (girls)
- Popular co-education choices
  - Bancroft's
  - Bishop's Stortford College
  - Chigwell
  - Felsted
  - Haileybury
  - Saint Nicholas School
  - St Edmund's College

### **School Size**

Schools sizes vary enormously at senior level. Some schools are 'all-through' schools that include a junior school. There will be more than a thousand pupils at some of these. Some senior schools are much smaller. In what size of school would your child flourish best?

Large schools often have extensive extra-curricular opportunities, and Saturday sports. This may appeal to you. Many smaller schools also offer impressive sports opportunities, so this is something to explore when visiting an open day.

Whilst a large school may appear to have a wealth of facilities, it is important to work out how much of this can be used by the younger seniors, and how much is prioritised for sixth formers or GCSE students.

Large schools suit some pupils very well indeed, but for others a smaller environment in which it is easier to make friends, and where pupils are quickly known as individuals, may be better.

## **Matching a school to your child's strengths and talents**

As parents we are all ambitious for our children. For some it will be in academic standards, others sports, music, drama or art. Look for a school which has opportunities for your child to continue to develop their talents.

Some pupils will benefit from a highly academically competitive environment, but this is not true for all children. Would your son or daughter do better in a slightly more nurturing school, where their self-confidence can grow over time.

## **Distance from home and travel**

Most senior pupils travel to school independently, even if they do not do so straight away. Independence is an important life skill, as is punctuality, so it can be a good thing for children to take responsibility for getting to and from school.

It is worth thinking about the distance from home to the schools you apply for and how long the journey times would be. If your child would be using public transport, how easy is the route and how long would it take at peak school times? Is this sustainable?

If you are using a school bus service, what times are pick-ups and drop-offs? The school day can sometimes be extremely long and your child may be waiting at school for some time before the journey home. Is this sustainable?

## **School fees**

Fees at senior schools may be considerably higher than at prep school, and up to 6 times higher for boarding.

Fewer financial scholarships are being offered by schools now. However, means-assessed bursaries are often available; details can always be found on the 'Admissions' part of the websites.

## **Entrance exams and entry requirements**

Senior schools can choose their own exam arrangements for 11+, and so the style of papers can vary significantly. Almost all schools also have an interview as part of the process; however, some schools interview all candidates and others only interview those who have passed the entrance exams.

## **The Exams**

- Candidates usually sit maths and English exams on site in the schools.
- Some schools include an online computerised test that may test reasoning skills and also reading and maths skills.
- A few schools take part in the ISEB Common Entrance exam for 11+.
- The content of the 11+ exams is based on the National Curriculum and the work that all children would have covered in Year 5 and the first part of Year 6, whichever type of school they attend.
- Most independent schools are looking for pupils who are confident with this material.

- Reasoning tests allow schools to see pupils' verbal and non-verbal problem-solving skills. They are usually given a standardised score. 100 is the average score on this scale: more academically competitive schools will be looking for scores of above 120.
- Please be aware that schools are not required to share the exam paper scores with you, and they will usually have a policy of not giving you any information about the percentages or standardised scores.

### **The Interview**

- Interviews carry more weight in some schools than others.
- They may be individual or held in pairs.
- They may include reading a short text and discussing it.
- They may include some problem solving questions so that the interviewer can explore how the pupil thinks.
- Pupils may be asked to bring an ice-breaker to help them feel more comfortable.
- Interviews provide an opportunity for the school to get to know your child personally.

### **The reference or 'Common Transfer Form'**

Senior schools will ask us for a reference. We will be asked for some assessment information based on their progress in school, as well as wider information about their skills, attributes and interests. We like to give lots of information about your child including:

- Responsibilities they have held
- Teams they have played in
- Times they have represented the school
- Significant awards they have won
- Oak-Tree Challenge successes
- Sports, Music or Drama achievements
- Extra-curricular involvement
- Interests and achievements outside school

### **11+ preparation at Coopersale Hall**

- From Year 3, we are ensuring that the curriculum, teaching and feedback enables our pupils to be well-prepared for their next steps when they leave Coopersale Hall.
- Preparation for entrance examinations begins in Year 5 in class and with homework.
- Examples might include essay titles taken from exam papers, or some problem-solving questions in Maths.
- Parent meetings are held in the summer term of Year 5 to discuss with you which schools might be a good fit for your child and which would be a good match for their strengths and abilities.
- Holiday tasks will be set over the summer to give opportunities to practice exam skills and to give the children some work to focus on during the long summer break.
- In Year 6 practice exam papers are given through the Autumn term up to the exam dates, most of which are usually in January.
- Pupils will be given a pack of 11+ practice papers to do over the term.
- Interview practice is held. Mrs Osborn and Mrs Belej, the Headmistress of Oaklands School, do the interviews.
- Pupils have 'mock 11+' practice in exam conditions, so that they can practise working to time in a formal exam set up in the hall.

- We will try to ensure your child is calm and confident about the entrance procedures. It is not good for children to become over anxious and their wellbeing is important to us.
- A few schools hold their entrance exams in November. If exams are scheduled early, we will offer a pre-term practice exam session, which is usually held the Friday before the start of term. New Hall and Haileybury usually have their exams in November.

### **What are the timelines for applying and what should I do next?**

- Each school's website will have the details about how to register for 11+ and will give you dates and deadlines.
- You can register now for some schools, but be sure to indicate that you are looking for entry in September 2022.
- Dates for the 11+ open days and entrance exams are usually published in the summer term of Year 5 for entry in the September following Year 6.
- Prospectuses are all now available to view online. These are marketing tools, but they will give you a good idea about the key aspects of each school's offer.
- Websites offer a wealth of information.
- Visit open days – these are all 'virtual open days' online this year. It is easy to register and to join a virtual open day experience.
- Visit a school more than once, if you can. Ask for a personalised tour, so that you see beyond official open day and can see the school in action on a normal day. This can be very helpful.
- Involve your child in the process. They join senior schools as children at 11, but leave as young adults. It is important that your child is happy with the choices and can see themselves doing as well as they can academically and enjoying being a part of whichever senior school they join.
- There are many very good independent schools to choose from, but it is important to narrow down your choice to a maximum of four schools. Remember your son or daughter will be sitting exams at each of the schools; over stretching your child at this important point in their lives can be counter-productive.
- You will need to register with each of the schools you choose. Registration for all schools is now online.
- Normanhurst and Braeside in our group have seniors. You might like to consider an application to either of those schools if you would like to remain within the group. Both schools have excellent achievement at GCSE. In 2020 half of all grades at Normanhurst were A\*/A (grades 9-7) and over 40% were A\*/A (grades 7-9) at Braeside.

### **When will we hear if we are being offered a place?**

- Most schools publish their offers around February half-term, although the schools with exams in November, do so earlier. Offers will be sent to you in the post or by email.
- State school places are allocated in the first week of March. You may, therefore, wish to wait until after this date before accepting an independent school place, if you also have a state school that is your first choice.

- In the summer term most schools will offer taster days or induction days for the incoming seniors, so that the new pupils can meet each other, as well as some key members of staff.

### **Do we need to have a tutor?**

- Seniors schools do not say that parents should invest in a tutor. In fact, many independent schools make clear that the entrance exams will be based on work covered in the curriculum in Years 5 and 6, so tutoring for the tests is not a requirement.
- Questions in entrance exam papers change every year, and within English in particular, senior schools are putting in place measures to ensure that candidates cannot simply reproduce a pre-prepared essay. Likewise, interviews will not give more credit for a pre-prepared presentation, over an interesting and lively spontaneous conversation.
- If you do have a tutor, please would you talk to the Year 5 or Year 6 teacher about that so that we are aware.
- It is helpful for pupils to see sample papers and to practise questions, including writing in exam conditions to time. We ensure there are many opportunities for this practice in school. You do not need to find a tutor for exam practice.

### **How has Covid-19 affected 11+?**

- Schools have had to adjust their entrance exam procedures this year to take into account the lockdown, and the fact that many junior pupils were not able to attend school at all, as well as the current need for social distancing and Covid protection measures on site.
- Some have reduced the length of papers and the number of questions, others have moved to an online assessment for English and maths.
- Some are still hoping to have candidates on site but are planning to stagger the times.
- Interviews are being given more importance in the assessment process this year.
- Some schools are introducing online reasoning assessments which require no preparation. For some of these, pupils log onto the online exams in their current schools, while others are administering the exams on their senior school site.
- Some schools are preparing to have interviews on Zoom or Teams, so that pupils do not have to enter the school site.
- All of this may yet change in light of any further government guidance.
- We do not know at this stage whether there will be any impact on entrance exams for entry to Year 7 in 2022.



### **Some final thoughts**

- If you are not sure which schools to visit, there are some helpful websites which give you information about senior schools, including how far they are away from your home:  
[www.isbi.com](http://www.isbi.com)  
<https://www.isc.co.uk/schools/>
- Try not to become over anxious yourselves about the 11+ process. Panic can often set in – more for you than the children, who will be very used to exam papers.
- Keep calm and keep things as normal as possible. Try to keep some of the activities in place outside the school day which your children enjoy.
- Try not to compete with each other as parents. The most important thing to remember is that you find the right school for your child. Although there may well be schools that the year group considers 'preferable' or 'better', this does not mean that those schools are preferable or best for your child.
- It is good for your child to make new friends and widen their friendship circle. It won't matter if they go to a different school from their peers. It is all about the best fit for them.

Please ask me, Miss Barnard or Miss Leeks for any advice you need. We have all spent a good number of years working with senior school transition, and we are very happy to meet and talk with you.

We hope you and your children feel well-supported and well-informed throughout the senior school transition process.