

The examination for entrance to S2

Towards the end of the January of the year of admission, pupils applying for S2 come to the school to sit the entrance tests. These start shortly after 9.30 and are over by about 12.45. The morning will be divided up, so that children have the opportunity to get some fresh air between the tests, and also to have a drink and a biscuit, which we will provide.

We suggest that children should come for the examination dressed as for a normal day at school. They should bring with them pencils, rubbers, rulers and so on.

The examination will be supervised by experienced teachers, who will of course be as helpful as possible. They will explain to the children that not everyone will be able to answer all the questions and that, faced with a question they find really difficult, children should put down whatever answer they can and then move on to something else. Because many children of this age are not familiar with formal tests of this sort, it may be helpful if you explain to your child that the teachers will not be able to assist them with questions they find hard. We do appreciate that this is the opposite of children's day-to-day experience in the classroom.

The examination is in three parts: there will be a Verbal Reasoning Test and tests in English and Mathematics.

The format of the examination

We do not issue examples of past entrance examination papers. Detailed information about the format and content of the tests is, however, printed below.

Verbal Reasoning

The purpose of the Verbal Reasoning Test is to obtain a reliable measure of the children's general reasoning ability. It lasts for 45 minutes, during which the children must answer as many questions as possible. It can best be described as a series of puzzles and you may find it helpful to explain to your child that it is not the sort of thing that anyone is likely to come across during their normal lessons in primary school.

English

The English paper lasts for one hour and is divided into two parts. Part One is a Close Reading exercise on which the children should spend approximately forty minutes. Part Two is a composition taking approximately twenty minutes to complete.

The requirements of both parts of the examination paper will be explained to the children before they start the examination and after forty minutes they will be reminded that they should now be moving on to the composition. They will also be reminded of the time five minutes before the end of the examination.

The **Close Reading** exercise is a passage of some 600-700 words, chosen from a work of good quality fiction readily accessible to children of this age group. They are advised to read the passage slowly and carefully before tackling the questions which follow.

Most questions direct them to a particular paragraph which is clearly numbered; they should reread that paragraph before answering the question. Some of the answers will simply require one or two words; others will involve writing at some length. The wording of the question will make it clear which type of response is expected.

Some questions specifically ask for the answer to be expressed *in your own words*. Here the children should try to ensure that they do not simply repeat the words used in the passage. In other questions where there is no mention of using their own words, straight quotation from the passage is acceptable, although should the same idea be expressed in their own words full credit will be given.

Each question has the number of marks awarded clearly marked – between 1 and 5 marks. Children should tailor their answers to suit the number of marks. For example, a 3-mark question will require 3 points to be found from the relevant part of the passage.

The first few questions are intentionally simple to help the children relax and make them feel able to cope with the examination. All questions are of the kinds and formats children will be well used to in their own schools when tackling close reading exercises for learning and National Testing purposes. They will be asked to locate the main points in a text, identify subsidiary ideas, explain the meanings of some words and comment on the simpler aspects of the writer's craft.

The following short extracts, with questions, are not intended as practice Close Reading exam papers, but as examples of the standard of passage and types of question children are likely to encounter at various ages. Please do note that these extracts are very significantly shorter than those used in the examination itself and that there will be more questions to answer than are included in these examples.

For entrance to S2:

Patsy is with a group of actors, taking a small part in their play. In rehearsal she has been very good, but now it comes to the first performance...

- 1 'Come on, be lucky!' Jenny suddenly said. 'We're nearly on!'
- 2 'Yes.' She'd been stupid, letting her mind wander like that. She'd nearly missed it. She took two or three fluttering, butterfly breaths. Before she knew it, Jenny was gone. She was on, and her voice was ringing round the hall. Patsy waited. Then out of nowhere her cue came. No, not yet! She thought. They'd cut a chunk out, hadn't they?

- 3 Without thinking she pushed herself on to the stage. She walked out to where she'd been told to stand. There was a sudden silence. Bob had just said something, she was aware of that, and then there was the silence. Hold on! Was it down to her so quickly? Help, what did she have to say? Her spotlight was on. At least she was remembering to look into that. But thinking about the spotlight was only one of the different levels she'd been on before. Before she'd been with Tracey, with Patsy watching what she was doing. She could remember that. But now, she was only Patsy. She wasn't Tracey at all. She wasn't acting. She wasn't anything...
- 4 Patsy froze solid. All at once her mind was as void as boundless snow. She was struck rigid. She had words to say, but she hadn't the first idea what they were. Wasn't she supposed to be Jenny's little girl? Yes, she was - and now she couldn't even remember her name.

Reread Paragraph 1

- a) Why, do you think, Jenny tells Patsy to be lucky? (1)

Reread Paragraph 2

- b) What does the phrase *two or three fluttering, butterfly breaths* tell you about how Patsy is feeling as she waits in the wings for her cue? (2)
- c) Why did Patsy think the actors on stage had missed out a chunk of the play? (1)

Reread Paragraph 3

- d) Why do you think the author chooses to write *she pushed herself on to the stage*? (2)
- e) What was Patsy's name in the play? (1)

Reread Paragraph 4

- f) In your own words, explain what the author is trying to tell you about Patsy when he writes *Patsy froze solid*. (2)
- g) Find one other phrase in this paragraph which means the same as *froze solid*. (1)
- h) In your own words, explain what you think is meant by *her mind was as void as boundless snow*. (2)
- i) What part was Patsy playing in the scene? (1)

Composition

The intention underlying this part of the paper is to give the children the opportunity to express their own ideas and experiences in the most effective way they can.

They will be given two options, of which they should choose only one. The topics are very broadly based on some of the ideas in the Close Reading passage in the hope that they offer every opportunity for the children to find a subject they are able to write about freely. Because they are being asked to produce a piece of personal writing, children should concentrate on using appropriate words to set the scene, and to describe their feelings and thoughts, as well as to describe the events.

The following sample topics are based on the Close Reading example given above:

For entrance to S2:

Write about a time when you felt scared. Describe the situation and at greater length explain your thoughts and feelings.

OR

Imagine you are Patsy in the passage you have just read, writing your diary after the performance is over. Give a full account of your experiences and your feelings. You should add imaginary details to the information which you find in the passage.

Mathematics

The Mathematics paper lasts 45 minutes. Children will be reminded of the time five minutes before the end of the examination. There are approximately 16 questions, of differing length and difficulty, and children are not allowed to use calculators in any part of the test. The number of marks available for each question will be clearly indicated.

The emphasis is on problem-solving rather than knowledge in itself: no child with a solid primary education should feel that he or she will be disadvantaged by a lack of specialised knowledge.

It is worth bearing in mind that children sometimes fail to do themselves justice because they do not write down any working: as a result, if their final answer is wrong they cannot be given any credit for their reasoning.

The topics with which children should be familiar at each stage are very much in line with the 5-14 National Guidelines : the list is meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive, and some sample questions follow.

Topics for all children applying for admission to the Senior School

Information handling

Graphs (bar, line), pie-charts and their interpretation.

Number, money and measurement

Whole numbers: the four rules (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division).

Decimals: the first two rules only, together with multiplication or division by a single digit.

Simple fractions: equivalence with decimals and with other fractions.

Percentages. Calculations with both British and foreign currencies and (simple) conversions.

Sequences: continue and describe; recognise simple functional relationships; solve simple equations.

Measure: standard metric units for length, weight, volume, area, and their relationships.

Time: use 24 hour clock and calculate time (in any units from years to seconds) between two events.

Perimeter: areas of squares and rectangles; volumes of cuboids and cubes.

Shape, position and movement

Bearings, co-ordinates, nets of simple solids, symmetry - rotational and bilateral.

Additional topics for S2 – see also the topics for S1, above

The extra topics which may be examined at this stage are – broadly speaking – those covered in *Maths in Action* Book 1. The *Maths in Action* series of books published by Nelson Blackie is very widely used in Scottish schools.

Negative numbers.

Elementary algebra (substitution, equation solving).

Multiplication and division of decimals.

Addition, subtraction and multiplication of fractions: percentage increase/decrease.

Tilings and symmetries: areas of triangles.

Harder and more sophisticated problem-solving.

Sample questions – S2

1 Evaluate

$$2\frac{4}{5} + 1\frac{1}{3}$$

- 2 The total cost of 2kg of carrots at 2x pence per kg and 3kg of potatoes at x pence per kg is £4.90. Find x.
- 3 Concorde's top speed is 2000 km per hour: it reduces its speed by 85% for landing. Calculate its landing speed.
- 4 Plot, on a diagram provided, the points A(1,2) B(7,2) C(7,5) and D(1,5). Join them in order. Draw AC and BD. What are the co-ordinates of the point E, where AC and BD meet? Calculate the areas of the triangles ABE and BCE. Explain why you would expect your two answers to be equal.