

The examination for entrance to S3

Towards the end of the January of the year of admission, pupils applying for S3 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 pupils 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. For children applying for entrance to S1, the English and Mathematics tests will be set at two levels, depending on whether or not parents wish their child to be considered for a scholarship.

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 S3:

- 1 Martin sauntered down the lane, stifled by the heat cocooned beneath the high, dense hedgerows. Wasps and flies whirred past his head. A yellow-hammer pink-pinked behind him. Straight above, crawling across the dazzling blue, a speck of aeroplane spun its white spider thread.
- 2 His shirt clung uncomfortably to his oiled body. He glanced up the lane and down, and, seeing no one, tugged his shirt off and used it as a fly-whisk as he walked along. Usually he kept himself covered, too embarrassed by his scrawny build to show himself in public. Boys at school called him Needle.

- 3 Even without his shirt he was sweating by the time he reached the gateless opening in the hedge that led to the tower. And sure enough, there it was, looking just as it had in the morning. This time he noticed at once how coldly it stood and clearly outlined while all around grass and flowers and trees and rocks and even the pond at the floor of the tower shimmered in the haze. And while he looked, just as that morning, he felt a nerve-tingling strangeness. He tried to work out what the strangeness was and decided it was like knowing something was going to happen to you but not quite knowing what.

Reread Paragraph 1

- a) In your own words, explain how Martin walked if he *sauntered*. (2)
- b) Which word tells you that the hedgerows made the lane even hotter? (1)
- c) Which two words or phrases in this paragraph describe the sounds Martin heard? (2)
- d) a speck of aeroplane spun its spider thread
Using your own words, explain how the author uses the underlined words to make the aeroplane seem far away. (2)

Reread Paragraph 2

- e) Why does Martin look up and down the lane before taking off his shirt? (2)
- f) Why do you think he has to tug to get it off? (1)
- g) In your own words, explain why he usually keeps his shirt on even when the weather is hot. (2)
- h) How does he get on with the boys at his school? Explain what makes you think this. (3)

Reread Paragraph 3

- i) What did Martin notice about the tower that he had not noticed that morning? (1)
- a) Pick out two words which show the contrast between the tower and its surroundings. (2)
- k) In your own words, explain how Martin felt as he looked at the tower. (2)
- l) The author is trying to create a particular atmosphere in these opening paragraphs. Underline the word which you think best describes that atmosphere and then go on to explain why you chose it. You should refer to the text in your answer. (3)

threatening

relaxed

mysterious

lively

happy

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 S3:

Write about a time when you felt unsure about what was going to happen next. Describe the situation and at greater length explain your thoughts and feelings.

OR

Write about what you like to do on hot days in the summer. Describe where you like to be, what you do, and what you think about.

It is important that the children do their best to write careful and lively English. In particular, they should write in paragraphs where appropriate and spell and punctuate accurately. However, in general the examination has been set to help us to assess each child's potential rather than simply to measure what he or she has learned to date.

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.

Additional topics for S3 – see also the topics for S1 and S2, above

The extra topics which may be examined at this stage are – broadly speaking – those covered in *Maths in Action* Book 2 and part of Book 3.

Algebra: like terms, the distributive law, more equations, formulae.

Arithmetic: significant figures, square roots, scientific notation. Time-graphs.

Geometry: further polygons; similar figures and scale drawing. Areas and circumferences of circles (formulae provided).

Sample questions – S3

1 Solve the equation $4(x - 1) + 7 = 3x - 2$

2 A carton of juice contains $\frac{2}{5}$ litre. How many can be filled from a 20-litre tank?

3 (a) Calculate the area of a circle of diameter 4 cm.

(b) Calculate the diameter of a circle of circumference 21.98 cm. (Hint : it's a whole number.)

($A = \pi r^2$, $C = \pi d$, take π as 3.14)