

Transfer Arrangements 2010

Entrance Assessment

THORNHILL COLLEGE

Voluntary Grammar School

Enrolment: 1400

Admissions: 200

Thornhill College admits 200 children each year from approximately 37 feeder primary schools. The College has a unique blend of children from urban and rural areas and from across the full social spectrum. It is essential that we find a way of retaining the ethos of the school, and the Board of Governors will seek to do this in future whilst having due regard to the Minister for Education's proposed guidelines.

The Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE) set up a working party to examine the options for Catholic schools and this group reported back to the Commission on 9th March. All grammar schools were asked not to move forward with entrance assessments until this working party had made its recommendations and the Commission had completed its deliberations. On 30th March, the Commission released its agreed position and some of the main points are:

- All schools should move to an alternative form of transfer as soon as possible
- Catholic schools should operate in a spirit of interdependence and solidarity
- Post Primary Review Teams will seek to put in place the best possible arrangements for all young people
- All children should have access to a high quality Catholic education from 11-19
- All Catholic post primary schools should give full consideration to the guidelines on admissions criteria from the Minister.
- In the absence of a regulated system, an academic test may be appropriate in the short-term.

The Commission agreed that:

- More time is needed to develop alternative models of educational provision and methods of transfer which will operate in changing educational settings and in different areas.
- As current educational provision and demographic trends are so varied there will be no common pattern for provision across the Catholic managed sector.
- A "one size fits all" approach is not envisaged for all of Northern Ireland, rather the emphasis will be on high quality educational provision by each school and across local groups of schools to meet the needs of all pupils in the 11-19 age range.

The Board of Governors of Thornhill College:

- has given due regard to the Minister's guidance in the document, Transfer 2010;
- wants to retain a school for children aged 11 to 19;
- wants to retain the academic strengths of the school;
- wants to preserve the unique blend of children from across a wide area who currently attend the school.

Therefore, for the Year 8 intake in 2010, the Board of Governors of Thornhill College has decided to continue to include academic selection as one of the criteria used to admit children to their school. Thornhill College has worked with other schools to provide a suitable test.

All of the Catholic grammar schools in Northern Ireland have agreed to use a standardised assessment provided by GL Assessment, a company with over 25 years of experience in setting standardised tests. This test follows on from the Progress in English or Progress in Maths standardised testing schemes currently being used by many primary schools.

Entrance Assessment

- The Entrance Assessment will be a standardised test with English and Mathematics papers.
- Both the numeracy and literacy parts of the assessment reflect the content of the revised Key Stage 2 curriculum which is minimally prescribed, i.e. the curriculum that schools are required by legislation to teach is minimal and the extent of the curriculum is decided by each school.
- Both papers are multiple-choice assessments.
- Unlike the old Transfer Tests, children are not required to write, the possible answers are given below the question, and they choose the correct one and mark it on the answer sheet.
- Before beginning each paper the children will be taken through a short practice paper by the invigilator.
- The children will see the types of questions to be answered; they will attempt the practice questions and learn how they should mark their answers on the separate answer sheet.
- Between the papers, the children will have a break of up to 30 minutes and they will be given a healthy snack. The break will be long enough for the children to eat the snack and visit the toilets if they wish.
- The English assessment paper will be taken first and will last 50 minutes.
- The Mathematics assessment paper will be taken after the break and it will last 45 minutes.
- The answer sheet for each paper will be a separate OMR sheet to facilitate computerised marking.
- Assessment papers will be pre-printed with the child's details.
- All materials will be provided and children will not need to bring anything with them to the assessment.
- An Irish Medium assessment is being produced by the same personnel who worked for CCEA. This assessment will be available to children whose parents have requested it through the registration form.

- There will be no charge for parents who register children for the Entrance Assessment. All costs are being covered by the schools.

Preparing for the Entrance Assessment

- Thornhill College is not requesting any of its feeder primary schools to coach their children for the Entrance Assessment in any way which will distort the revised curriculum or prevent the school from meeting its legal obligation with regard to the curriculum.
- The Entrance Assessment is a special standardised test from GL Assessment which is designed to assess the numeracy and literacy abilities of the children within the age group for children within P.7 in November 2009.
- The assessment has been trialled to remove gender bias.
- The assessment will be age standardised to take account of the children taking the assessment. This is a positive adjustment with no child losing marks because of her age.
- Primary schools should adopt the same approach which they take when they are preparing the children to take other standardised tests such as Progress in English or Progress in Mathematics.
- To familiarise the children with the format of the test and the method of answering the multiple choice questions, GL Assessment will supply a sample paper for both English and Mathematics. This will not be a complete paper but there will be sufficient detail for familiarisation. It will be sent to primary schools when available and to parents in the registration pack.
- GL Assessment believes that the use of multiple practice papers before the standardised assessment can affect the outcomes of the paper and, in many cases, may not improve the score achieved by children.
- Primary schools should continue to teach English and Mathematics to their usual high standards.
- Since the Entrance Assessment is a standardised test which is designed to be taken by children across the whole assessment range, most children are not expected to be able to do all of the questions and this is one aspect of the test that children will need to realise in advance.
- The children will have the advantage that the answers are in multiple choice format and they will always be able to attempt to select an answer to every question from those offered on the question paper.
- A specification of the Entrance Assessment is being prepared by GL Assessment and will be made available to all primary schools.

Who should do the Entrance Assessment?

- The Entrance Assessment is designed to be taken by children within the specified age range and by all of the children in the full ability range.
- The grades will be assigned to all of the children who take the Entrance Assessment prepared by GL Assessment according to percentages used with the previous Transfer Test.
- This will mean that at least 38% of the children will be allocated Grade A and 7.5% of the children allocated to each of B1, B2, C1 and C2 grades. 32% of the children taking the Entrance Assessment will be allocated Grade D. It will not be possible to calculate the standardised scores needed to achieve a particular grade until the results are known after marking.
- The Entrance Assessment is different from the old Transfer Test in terms of how it tests the child's ability. It is closer to the standardised testing already carried out in primary schools and the results of these may be used to advise parents on whether to register their children for the Entrance Assessment.
- If in doubt, parents should be advised to register their children. It is expected that the Entrance Assessment should confirm the standardised results already available to schools from Progress in English and Maths standardised tests and the InCAS testing.

Location

- The Entrance Assessment will be on Saturday, 21st November 2009 and children can sit it in Lumen Christi College, St Columb's College or Thornhill College. The choice of examination venue is not related to the eventual choice of school.
- If a child, due to illness or any other special circumstance is unable to be present for the assessment on 21st November, the parents can apply to sit the Supplementary Assessment on 12th December 2009.
- The children will be asked to wear their primary school uniforms, though this request will not prohibit a child who attends a school which does not have a school uniform from registering for the test.
- Supervision of the children will be carried out by school personnel and external invigilators.
- The schools have a carefully prepared and agreed plan covering all of the time from the entrance to the exit of the children, including identification and their security.
- The schools recognise that we are coping with younger children but we will be building on our pastoral support for young pupils entering Year 8 and our extra-curricular programmes involving primary school pupils.
- We will be using our experience of managing hundreds of students at the same time for formal public examinations and our experience of managing the security associated with the delivery, administration and collection of examinations.
- All three schools will have trained medical staff available.
- All three schools are recognised assessment centres and are formally inspected at least once per year by the Joint Council for Qualifications.

- Children who need to leave the assessment room during the assessment, e.g. to go to toilet, will have to be supervised at all times. Additional time cannot be given to children leaving the room during the assessment papers.
- A record will be kept of every incident which occurs in the assessment room and may have disturbed the children. All incidents will be made available to the Chief Invigilator to verify any claims for Special Circumstances made by parents.
- A break will be given between the assessment papers and a healthy snack will be provided at the appropriate time outside of the assessment room. The children have the opportunity to visit the toilet facilities during the break.
- Any child with food allergies will be required to make this known in advance to the test centre by indicating details on Registration Form.
- Each Assessment Centre will have a number of exit points for children and their parents will be given advance notice of collection points.

Registration

- Any parents who would like their child to apply for admission to Lumen Christi, St Columb's College or Thornhill College must register for their child to take the Entrance Assessment.
- A registration form and guidance information will be made available to parents and will be on all three Colleges' websites on 18th May.
- Detailed guidance notes may be obtained by contacting any of the three Colleges.
- Registration will be acknowledged on receipt of the completed forms. In October each child will be sent an information card with all of the details about the examination, where to go and where he/she can be collected after the assessment.
- The child will bring the information card to the Assessment Centre on 21st November where he/she will have his/her details checked before being welcomed to their assessment room.
- Unlike the old Transfer Test, the assessment will have its own Access Arrangements available for children who need a reasonable adjustment made because of their particular needs. (Further detailed guidance on Access Arrangements will be available in the Registration Pack.)
- The registration period will be from 18th May until 18th September 2009.
- Advertisements will be placed in local and regional papers to inform everyone about the meetings and the arrangements.
- Information will also be available on our school website and parishes will be requested to carry information in their bulletins.
- All documentation in final print will be given to the primary schools and parents when it becomes available in mid-May.

Special Circumstances

- A claim can be made for Special Circumstances to ensure that consideration is given to a child with a temporary illness, injury or indisposition at the time of the assessment.
- If this temporary illness, injury or indisposition prevents the child from completing the test on 21st November then the parent can apply to have the child take the Supplementary Test on 12th December.
- Any claim for Special Circumstances must be registered with the Assessment Centre before 18th December using the appropriate form available from the centre. The claim must give all of the details of the difficulties experienced by the child.
- The parent must make the claim for the Special Circumstances by attaching the claim form to the Transfer Form in February 2010 when they go for their transfer interview with the primary school principal. Full documentary evidence from medical or other professional sources to support the claim must be provided with the claim form.
- Parents should request their primary school to supply all of the scores from standardised testing within Key Stage 2 including results from InCAS testing to give a clear indication of the ability of their child.
- The claim for Special Circumstances will be assessed by the Boards of Governors of the grammar schools when they are admitting children to their schools. The claim may result in the child's score/grade being upgraded.
- A claim for Special Circumstances cannot be made where Access Arrangements have been made for the same reason, e.g. a child with dyslexia may request and be given additional time for the assessment but cannot make a claim for Special Circumstances based on having dyslexia.
- Claims for Special Circumstances cannot be made retrospectively if an initial claim was not made by 18th December 2009.

Entrance Assessment Results

- The assessment will be marked by GL Assessment.
- GL Assessment will provide the results of the children who sat the tests at each test centre.
- The results provided for each child will consist of:
 - A grade, i.e. A, B1, B2, C1, C2 or D
 - The Standardised Age Score (SAS) for both English and Mathematics
 - The National Percentile Rank (NPR) for both English and Mathematics
 - The grade boundaries used to achieve each grade
- The assessment centres will print out the results for each child assessed and then post the results along with a *frequently asked questions* sheet to the parents of the children
- The results will be posted to parents on 5th February 2010