

BE PREPARED (BUT NOT OVER-PREPARED)

Hundreds of Norfolk children are facing school interviews, scholarship or entrance exams over the next few weeks. How can they prepare, asks Jo Malone

IT'S all about ensuring children are well rested and know what to expect, say our Norfolk headteachers.

Private tutoring isn't top of the list, but practising past papers and being able to contribute fully to a conversation is useful.

Thinking about the questions they may be asked in an interview will help, but don't go overboard and over-prepare, says James Quick, head of Gresham's Prep at Holt.

"Over-rehearsing interview answers is actually a disadvantage. Schools don't want to hear what they've been told to say," he explains.

John Crofts, head at Glebe House School in Hunstanton, says preparations for interviews to build confidence and presentation skills include bringing in community leaders and professionals to talk with the eldest pupils in the run-up to senior school applications. "Chatting with someone from outside their immediate circle is a great way to create a dry run at how the all-important interview at their chosen senior schools might be."

Elizabeth Laffeaty-Sharpe, headteacher at Downham Prep, says that children practise non verbal and verbal reasoning in class and complete past papers for English and maths.

"I like to make sure that they have done every type of question that there is and are not going to get any surprises. I know it helps because our children come back and always say that there were some children there who cried because they didn't know what to do.

"You get children who get stuck on question two and look at that, worrying, for the next 40 minutes. If they know to move past that they can probably answer the next 47 questions," she advises.

Elizabeth adds it is essential not to make a big fuss about exams and interviews: "If you tell your child they have to do well and you don't know



John Crofts, head at Glebe House School, suggests pupils talk to people outside their usual circle to help prepare themselves for interviews

what will happen if they don't get in, or promise to buy them something if they do get in, it can make them so stressed it's counterproductive."

Parents need to consider that if a child doesn't get in to what they believe is the best school, it may not actually be the best school for that child.

Prepping a child hard for an exam and drilling them to talk self-assuredly about everything from current affairs to authors may land them a place, but maintaining that level of academia and confidence may be beyond a child's natural aptitude.

James Quick, head of Gresham's Prep, adds: "If they have to slog their guts out to get there, then they are probably going to struggle when they are there. It is no fun bumping along the bottom."

He added that many schools now test to try to find out a child's underlying ability and intelligence: "So however much mugging up you do, it won't help."

Martin Castle, headmaster of St Nicholas House Prep School and Nursery at North Walsham, stresses it is important to do your research.

"Heads often are a great source of information about which school or schools may be a good choice for an individual pupil," he says, adding that parents need to visit schools - and not just on open days. They should ask to speak to staff who teach the areas of the curriculum in which their child has strengths/interests. Don't discount a school without looking for yourself."

He says that a key element for pupils facing scholarship assessments is a degree of self-belief so that they are in the right frame of mind to tackle what, for most, will be a new and slightly scary situation.

"It is important that they understand that they can only do their best and try to enjoy the occasion." ♦

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Make sure your children are well rested and not hungry, and that they are relaxed for exams and interviews.

Arrive in good time, but not so early they have a long time to get over-anxious.

Teach them to look adults in the eye and to answer honestly.

Give them a huge hug before they go in, and remind them to be themselves.

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