

Dear Parents,

Following on from the talk that Mark Durston and I gave, I thought it would be useful to give you some notes and also a bit of jargon-busting.

Kindergarten to Prep School (Underlined text denotes glossary entry)

Most children start going to Nursery or Kindergarten when they are about 3 years old. Some start sooner, some start later.

In a British system school, these Early Years schools will follow the EYFS, which sets out what children should do at this extremely important point in their development.

Some schools may follow a Montessori system, some may be very traditional and some may focus more on play than on “academics”.

The best people to ask about the early years are the Kindergarten Heads.

Good prep schools belong to the IAPS. Prep school children are normally between the ages of 4 and 13, but some prep schools start later and other finish at 11, the end of Year 6. Prep schools offer excellent teaching in a wide range of subjects in small classes but their other great strength lies in the huge variety of activities that children can enjoy. All prep schools will talk about academic excellence and a broad, balanced curriculum and this is true of IAPS schools. They are not “old fashioned” schools and many prep schools will be using the very latest teaching resources and methods, leading the way in the best educational practice.

Specialist teaching starts in prep school and children are guided through their school careers, with the pace gradually increasing as they approach the end of their time in Year 8.

The curriculum is based on the British National Curriculum but goes much further. Older children will follow the Common Entrance syllabus. Most prep schools will also allow older children to experience the taking on of responsibilities and the chance to lead.

Transition from Prep to Secondary School and beyond

The majority of prep school children, at the end of Year 8, sit an exam called Common Entrance. Most children will be going to schools such as Peponi School, Hillcrest or UK public schools that require the children to sit this exam. Some schools, such as ISK, do not require the children to sit the exam but it gives the children and us a lot of very useful feedback.

Before they sit the exam, the Head will have written a Head’s report on each child. This carries as much weight if not more than the exam itself.

Some pupils will apply for awards to their secondary schools. Typically, tests take place between January and May in Year 8. Awards are given by senior schools for academic excellence, sport, drama, art, music, technology and what are called all-rounder awards. The number of awards, the value of the awards and the way in which they are examined varies from school to school.

In the British System, pupils go on to take several subjects at (I)GCSE when they are 16 (Year 11). Subjects such as English Language and Mathematics are considered to be very important for entry to many university courses and for many careers. After IGCSE the pupils then prepare for the AS exams at 17 (Year 12) and A2 exams at 18 (Year 13). The results of their performance in both of these sets of examinations will be combined to provide the candidate with an overall A Level grade in each subject. These grades will then be used for university entrance.

There are other exams that they may take at this stage as well, such as BMAT & UKCAT (both are British Medical School Aptitude Test and done prior to entry at the candidates school, Pre-U (A Pre-university course, designed by Cambridge University to be a little more challenging than A Level), or the American SAT (designed by the American universities to be an entrance aptitude test that is universal to all candidates). All of these are designed to be aptitude tests and university admissions departments use them for some areas of selection. They cannot be prepared for or

taught towards. Some schools will give guidance and appropriate practise. The most popular courses at the best universities will require candidates to have, typically, 3 A grades at A level.

In the International System, pupils take the International Baccalaureat at the age of 17 or 18.

This consists of 6 subjects (3 higher level and 3 standard level) chosen from different areas of the curriculum, an extended project and an exam in the theory of knowledge. Points are awarded out of a total of 45 and the most popular courses at the best universities will require 38 to 40 points with at least 6 or 7 points in the higher level subjects.

The variety of university courses is now quite broad. Pupils should choose their course first before considering the university. Once the course is chosen is much easier to make sensible decisions about the university and the country for higher education. Careers such as Medicine, Engineering, Architecture and more vocationally orientated professions will have specific courses for students to complete before entry to the profession will be considered: you cannot be a doctor without having studied Medicine. However, the options following academic courses can still be quite considerable. Many top managers and successful city brokers hold degrees in the Classics, History and Chemistry. What is important is that the pupil enjoys what they are going to study. There should always be a good, well-researched and soundly advised period of time before selection of degree courses begins. Sixth Forms commonly have a member or staff responsible for guiding pupils and families when the time comes.

Glossary of Terms

A Level

This is the combined score from the AS and A2 exams that a pupil sits in the British System in Years 12 and 13. Very good courses at very good universities will require three A grades.

Grades go from A to E (pass grades). U grade denotes a fail.

A2 Exams

The second half of A level. Many pupils will take 4 subjects at AS, then drop one subject for A2.

Academic Scholarship

An award given to a pupil for academic excellence. These are typically given at age 13 or 16. They are very competitive exams and the 13 plus papers at very selective schools will be at GCSE level and beyond.

All Rounder Award

An award given to a pupil who shows well above average talent in more than one area of the curriculum, typically academic achievement plus two other from sport, music, art or drama.

American System

Also known as the International System. The school curriculum followed by pupils in the USA and in other International schools around the world. Pupils follow the PYP and MYP and end up taking the IB.

AS Exams

The first half of A level. Many pupils will take 4 subjects at AS, then drop one subject for A2.

Awards

A generic term for scholarships, exhibitions and bursaries. Amounts vary from 5% to 50% of the fee. Awards are given to gifted and talented children who will bring a lot with them to their

senior school. The tests are very competitive and will vary from school to school. Some schools ask pupils to sit exam papers, some will require project work and others will require pupils to have an interview. Parents enter their children for these awards having consulted with the Head of the pupil's current school.

BCSK

The British Curriculum Schools of Kenya.

Members are: The Banda School; Braeburn Prep and Secondary; Braeburn Garden Estate Primary and Secondary Schools; Braeburn Mombasa Junior and Secondary; Braeside Junior and Secondary; Brookhouse Junior and Secondary; Greensteds Junior and Secondary; Hillcrest Prep and Secondary; Imani Primary and Secondary Schools; Kenton College; Nairobi Academy Prep and Secondary; Oshwal Academy Secondary; Pembroke House; Peponi House; Peponi Secondary; Premier Academy Secondary; Rusinga Primary School; St Andrew's Prep and Secondary.

Schools have to meet certain criteria before they can join.

BMAT

British Medical Aptitude Test

British National Curriculum / British System

The system used by schools in England (Wales and Scotland are slightly different). Pupils start in Reception at the age of rising 5. Year One starts when the children are 5. The school year runs from September 1st to August 31st. Children have to go to school until they are 16, at the end of Year 11.

The system is divided into Key Stages and pupils follow the British National Curriculum.

The main exams are GCSE at the end of Year 11, AS at the end of Year 12 and A2 at the end of Year 13.

There is a lot of information at <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/>.

Bursary

An award given to a pupil to attend a fee-paying school. This can be up to 100% of the fee and is means tested. Some Bursaries are linked to professions (clergy, medicine) and some are only open to children of former pupils. Not all schools give bursaries.

CE

See Common Entrance below.

COBIS

The Council of British International Schools. A body to which some British international schools belong. Schools have to meet certain criteria before they can join.

Common Entrance

An exam taken by pupils in British Independent Schools at the end of Year 6 (11 plus) or Year 8 (13 plus). The exam is set by the ISEB (see below) and is in the process of being changed to suit best practice in good schools.

Children in Year 6 taking the 11 plus papers have to do tests in English, Maths and Science.

Children in Year 8 taking the 13 plus papers have to take tests in English (two papers), Maths (two papers plus a mental test) and the three Sciences: Biology, Chemistry and Physics. There are optional papers in French, History, Geography, Religious Studies, Latin, (Classical) Greek, Spanish and German. The exams take place over three and half days in the first full week in June.

Despite the name, it's not Common and it's not really an Entrance exam. All children do the same set of papers (except for tiered papers in English, Maths, Science and Latin) but the papers are marked by the senior schools. Some senior schools give extensive feedback, with percentages, averages, separate marks for separate papers and notes from the markers. Some schools give grades and some just say “You've passed”. There is a mark scheme but you don't have to use it if you don't want to.

Most children have already gained their place at senior school before they sit the papers and not many senior schools are in a position to say No to a pupil. If a child does not get in to the school of their choice, it is probably because it is the wrong school for them. It could be the fault of the prep school for entering a child for too competitive a school but more often it is the case that the parents have been insistent on entering their child for a very academic school which is not suited to the child.

The Head's report, sent off at the same time as the CE papers, counts for a huge amount, in some cases more than the exam itself. This report reflects the whole child, not just what they can (or can't) do on a day in June. It mentions art, music, sport and qualities such as leadership, giving an all-round picture of the child.

Exhibition

Another name for a scholarship, but worth a bit less.

Extra Time

Some candidates are allowed extra time for exams if they have an educational psychologist's report that states that this would help them. Not all children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) will be given an allowance for extra time.

EYFS

Early Years Foundation Stage. This is the first stage of education in the British System. It covers the education and welfare of children below the age of 5 and the British Government has set standards against which all EYFS schools are judged.

GCSE

The General Certificate of Secondary Education. An exam taken (normally) at the end of Year 11. Many children will now take more than 9 subjects at GCSE. Pass grades range from G to A*, but there is a written agreement that anything below a C grade is not worth considering. Good universities would look for a child with at least 7 A* grades at GCSE. Not many people fail GCSE. (See also IGCSE below).

Grades and Year Groups

See Year 1 Year 2 etc below

HAT

History Aptitude Test

Head's Report

See under Common Entrance above.

Higher Level

3 papers at IB have to be taken at a higher level.

HMC

The Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference. An organisation to which the majority of the best British Public Schools belong. There is also an International section of the HMC. Schools have to meet certain criteria to join.

IAPS

The Independent Association of Prep Schools; formerly the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools. Founded in the 1890s when there was a dispute between prep schools and the MCC over the size of a cricket ball. The IAPS was incorporated and boys could use a 4 ¾ oz ball as opposed to the 5 ½ oz ball. (You couldn’t make it up, could you?).

Good Prep schools belong (or rather their Heads belong) to the IAPS. This ensures certain standards of quality with regard to teaching, learning and facilities, among others. The Kenyan IAPS schools are now a district in their own right, as opposed to being part of District O (for overseas). The Kenyan IAPS schools are: The Banda School; Braeburn Prep School; Braeburn Mombasa Junior School; Brookhouse Prep School; Hillcrest Prep School; Kenton College; Pembroke House School; Peponi House School; St Andrew’s Prep School.

IAPS is always pronounced Eye Ay Pee Ess, by the way, and never has full stop between the letters.

IB

See International Baccalaureat below.

IGCSE

The International version of the GCSE (see above), taken by students in Kenya and in any other country outside UK. Many of the most academic schools in the UK are switching to IGCSE as it is a more demanding exam that is very well put together.

Independent School

A school in the UK that is not part of the maintained sector, i.e. it is not run by the government or a local education authority. These schools charge fees and can offer a wider range of choices as they are not bound by legislation in the way that maintained sector schools are.

International Baccalaureat

A qualification taken by students in International School and now some British schools, at the end of the diploma program in an international school.

“This program is aimed at students between the ages of 16 and 19. The program includes six subject groups with three core parts. Students are assessed internally by teachers through oral exercises, presentations and performances and externally”.

Students study 6 subjects from different areas of the curriculum, three at a higher level and three at a standard level. There is also an essay and a paper on the theory of knowledge. Points are awarded out of a total of 45, good universities requiring 38 to 40 points.

Fans of the IB say that it gives a more all-round education. Detractors will point out that the subjects are not covered in as much depth as A level and that the IB, in forcing students to sit exams in subjects that they may not be strong at, makes it harder to gain a place at a first-choice university.

International System

The American education system, as followed by students in the USA and international schools world-wide. Students follow the Primary Years Program and Middle Years program, where the accent tends to be more on cross-curricular work, research and the acquisition of skills rather than a more knowledge-based system such as the British system.

IQ

Intelligence Quotient. A fairly useful predictor of performance, based on a normal distribution and a mean of 100. (See standardised tests below). A commonly-used test is the Stanford-Binet test. The test that is used by educational psychologists is called the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, or WISC for short. Some IQ tests have very limited use. Others, such as the WISC, are extremely useful.

ISEB

The Independent Schools Examinations Board. The body responsible for the production of Common Entrance and Common Academic Scholarship exam papers.

Key Stage One, Two etc

The British system is divided into Key Stages. KS1 ends at the end of Year 2. KS2 ends at the end of Year 6. KS3 ends at the end of Year 9 and KS4 ends at the end of Year 11, with the GCSE exam. At the end of each Key Stage, there are Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) which are rapidly falling out of favour with many schools. The SATs results are often used to compare schools against each other and as a result many schools ended up teaching to the test rather than doing what was actually the best for the children.

LNAT

National Admissions Test for Law

Montessori

Montessori education (named after Dr Maria Montessori) emphasizes learning through all five senses, not just through listening, watching, or reading. Children in Montessori classes learn at their own, individual pace and according to their own choice of activities from hundreds of possibilities. A good Montessori school will have the full of specialist teaching resources that encourage multi-sensory learning.

Maintained sector

In the UK, a school that is run by the Government is said to be in the maintained sector.

MYP

The Middle Years Program.

“This program is designed for students between the ages of 11-16 years. The program focuses on five areas of interaction which are Approaches to learning, Community and Service, Human Ingenuity, Environment and Health & Social education”.

See International Schools above.

NVR

Non Verbal Reasoning. A NVR test will test a subject’s ability to work with things like patterns and shapes. It is part of an IQ test.

Prep School

Short for Preparatory School, the name dating back to the days when boys were prepared for their public schools. Prep schools cater for children up to the age of 13 and are by definition independent. Most of the best prep schools belong to the IAPS (see above).

Cambridge Pre-U

This is relatively new qualification that is being trialled by some schools. It is designed to be more demanding than A Level and arose from concerns about the changing standard of A Level. It has yet to receive any credit by the universities.

Public School

A term used in the UK to denote a fee-paying school for children up to 18 years of age. Strangely, all public schools in the UK are private but not all private schools are public schools. Many are boarding schools. The most famous UK schools (Eton, Winchester, Harrow) are public schools.

PYP

The Primary Years Program.

“Designed for students between the ages of 3 to 12. Five essential elements which are a part of this curriculum are Concepts, Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes and Action”.

See International Schools above.

QR

Quantitative Reasoning. Basically, it’s maths. A QR test would be part of an IQ test.

SAT

Scholastic Aptitude Test. This is an American test that is required to enter the American Universities.

SATs

Standard Attainment Test. See Key Stages above. Children in UK schools take these tests at the end of Key Stages One, Two and Three.

Scholarship

An award given to an outstanding pupil for entry to senior school. See Awards above.

Secondary School

A school that caters for children over the age of 11 (or 13 in many cases). Pupils at secondary school will be working toward GCSE, A level or the IB.

In the UK maintained sector, primary education is generally from age 5 to 11, secondary from 11 to 18 and tertiary is after 18.

Senior School

As for secondary school.

Standard Level

Three IB subjects are taken at standard level. See IB above.

Standardised Score

So that different people can be compared on a level playing field (metaphorically), it is useful to have a score that takes age into account. On some tests, you take the child’s “raw score” and match this against their age. This will give a standardised score, based on a normal distribution where the mean is 100 and the standard deviation is (usually) 15. This means that 95% of all scores would fall between a point two standard deviations below the mean and a similar point two standard deviations above the mean.

UKCAT

United Kingdom Clinic Aptitude Test. This is another test used by the British Medical Schools for entry to under-graduate medical degrees.

VR

Verbal Reasoning. Part of an IQ test (see above), where the subject’s ability to reason with verbal material is tested. This is the type where you get questions like “Toe is to Foot as Finger is to” And you have to supply the answer. (Which is Hand, by the way).

VR tests are often used to assess a child’s academic ability and are often used as pre-tests for very selective schools. The use of tests in this way is debatable.

Year 1 Year 2 etc

In the British System, a new academic year begins on September 1st. A child who is 5 on September 1st is said to be in Year 1. If you need to work it out, subtract 4 from the child’s age on September 1st and you will get the year that child will be in. So a child who is 15 on September 1st will be in Year 11. ($15-4=11$). A child who is 12 on September 1st will be in Year 8 ($12-4=8$). Very occasionally, a child who has a birthday in late August or early September may be in the “wrong” year group but as this can have quite serious implications, British Schools will normally insist that a child in the appropriate year group. Problems may arise when it comes to sport, where the age limits are set on September 1st. A boy in Year 8, say, who has already reached his 13th birthday by September 1st, would not be allowed to play in an Under 13 tournament).

The American / International schools work in Grades, not Years.

To go from British to American, take away one.

Year 2 = Grade 1

Year 3 = Grade 2 etc.

To go from International to British, add one.

1st Grade = Year 2

2nd Grade = Year 3 etc.