

## Open Evenings: Top Queries

Our Open Evenings in September are typically very well received indeed, in fact, turnout can be described as 'exceptional'. We hope that those who visit are able to seek answers to their questions.

Each year we receive emails from parents, praising the courtesy, manners and helpfulness of the boys who assist at our Open Evenings.

The following is a list of typical queries that senior staff receive. We hope that the responses are of use to others who similar queries.

**Query 1:** ***Do I have to put a school 'first' to gain a place at it? This is what some schools are telling me.***

**Answer:** The simple answer to this is 'no' and the Local Authority will confirm this. Despite this, we are aware that some schools almost insist that parents have to put their school as 'first' on the selection form to gain a place. Over the years, parents who have put Wirral Grammar School second have gained places. We fully understand that some parents would want to put our school second, especially if they are from Cheshire and are concerned about what could happen if their son did not reach the required standard. Equally, some parents choose to put our school first and then, if their son does not reach the standard, they will then contact their second preference school. The fact is, that many schools do have surplus places on account of reducing pupil numbers (a consequence of a falling birth rate). To get an idea of place availability at a school, you could try calling the school and asking if they have places available in current Year 7; this may give you some idea of the availability of places in the school. On 1<sup>st</sup> March, if you find out that your son met the standard, and you have been allocated another school, this will be because you have put that school first. If you want him to join Wirral Grammar School then you will need to contact us straightaway. Assuming that there are places still available your son could still be able to join our school. Please note that this would depend on place availability and the situation can be different from year to year.

**Query 2:** ***We live in some distance away from the school. Will we get a place or will the distance criteria work against us?***

**Answer:** Clearly, each year is different but in past years every boy who has wanted a place and has reached the standard has joined us. We have boys travelling in from as far afield as Helsby and Chester. New bus routes from Ellesmere Port, Sutton, Neston and Heswall reflect this. Admissions for 2011 were higher than usual (i.e. there were more pupils who met the standard and who wanted a place than there were places available). Unfortunately this meant that in 2011 the distance criteria did apply.

**Query 3: *I'm not sure that an 'all boys school' is right for my son. Is there evidence to support the benefits?***

Answer: There is now considerable evidence to show that teaching boys and girls separately is of benefit to both. Indeed, there are some mixed schools that have separate lessons for boys and girls. To find out more about the case for 'boys only education' we recommend that you read the article about this which can be found on our website home page.

**Query 4: *What is the Governing Body like at Wirral Grammar School?***

Answer: The Governors at Wirral Grammar School are very 'pupil centred' and strive to get the very best resources for the boys. Going through the process of selling some surplus land to raise £500,000 for investment in new resources is clear evidence of this. Governors also give advice and help out with school activities from time to time, for example, enterprise projects and assistance with university preparation. Our Governors offer constructive advice and support and they work with Mr Hazeldine, Headteacher to secure the best possible opportunities for the boys.

**Query 5: *Will Wirral Grammar School become an Academy?***

Answer: All 'outstanding' schools in the country have been invited to become 'Academies' and we know that many Grammar Schools across the country are in the process of converting. In March 2011 School Governors took the decision that the school is to convert to Academy status. We believe that there are positive resource implications in becoming an Academy; not so much in terms of extra money, but in terms of the flexibility with which resources can be used. In terms of day to day running, there will be very little change. In the 1990s Wirral Grammar School was a Grant Maintained School and becoming a Academy will be very similar to this. A significant number of Grammar Schools in the North West (in fact, most of them), have either converted or are in the process of converting to Academy status. To find out more about this, please refer to our Academy information which is available from the front page of the website.

**Query 6: *How will my child be looked after at Wirral Grammar School?***

Answer: Before boys arrive in Year 7 we find out as much as possible about them by visiting them in their primary school and meeting their Year 6 teachers. In the Summer Term, at the end of Year 6, all of our 'new boys' come to the school for an Activity Day. We also run a programme called 'Family Welcome' whereby families are able to come along after school to allow boys to meet each other; this is of particular benefit in situation where just one or two boys are coming from an individual primary school.

All boys are put into Tutor Groups and it will be the Form Tutor who looks after each boy on a day to day basis. Our peer support group provides each boy with additional support as boys who are in the senior school are linked to each of the lower school tutor groups. We have a Learning Mentor who is a member of our support staff. The role of the Learning Mentor is to offer extra assistance and support to boys who have any issues or concerns.

In October each year, parents of new boys can come into school one afternoon to meet their son's form tutor. The purpose of this meeting is to check that all is well and raise any concerns that there may be at this early stage.

**Query 7: *How do you deal with bullying?***

Answer: Regrettably, bullying can be found in any school and for that matter, most work places too. At Wirral Grammar School we have a 'zero tolerance' approach. We aim to prevent it happening in the first place and if bullying does occur, then we take steps to stop it and deal with the perpetrator. We have an active pupil led 'Anti-bullying Committee' that meets regularly to promote anti-bullying awareness. Any boy who feels he is being bullied or made to feel unhappy by the actions of someone else is asked to report this quickly so that the concern can be addressed. We have a number of 'anti-bully boxes' around the school where boys can report their concerns anonymously. If you have a read of our Ofsted report for 2009 you will see that inspectors made some very nice comments about the quality of care and support.

**Query 8: *If my son does not reach the standard in the 11+, can he re-do the test?***

Answer: Our admission policy is clear about this. A boy can only be re-tested after 12 months have passed. This will mean that it is not until the Spring Term of Year 7 when a boy can be re-tested. Where a boy has not been tested before, for example, in the case of a family moving into the area, the testing can be done at anytime. Any parents who are moving into the area should contact the school to arrange this.

**Query 9: *Would tutoring for the 11+ be of assistance to my son?***

Answer: We do not recommend tutoring as the standard can vary greatly. It is also important to emphasise that it is not like preparing for a test that requires a body of knowledge; the test is one of aptitude. It is helpful for boys to have a go at sample test papers beforehand so that they are familiar with the style of questioning. Before the actual tests themselves, there are two practice tests which are designed to give the boys experience of taking the actual assessment. Practice 11+ papers can be obtained from book retailers and also 'on-line'. Parents are advised to note that the assessment takes the form of the Verbal Reasoning type.

**Query 10: *Can I come for a look around the school before making my decision?***

Answer: This is not a problem to us at all and parents are welcome to bring their sons for a look around the school. Our Sixth Form Prefect Team takes the lead in organising tours of the school. We do ask that parents discuss this with their primary school to find a time that would be most convenient as taking your son out of his primary school means that he will be missing important Year 6 lessons

**Query 11: *In choosing a school what should the main considerations be?***

Answer: In choosing a school, results are clearly important but so too is breadth of experience. At Wirral Grammar School we say the boys 'work hard' and 'play hard'. Extracurricular life is very important to us and we are very proud of the fact that over one third of all pupils are learning to play musical instruments and every weekend, over 180 boys are taking part in sports fixtures. Above all, parents need

to know that their sons will be happy at their choice of school and cared for and supported. Mr Hazeldine always tells parents that a boy who is happy at school, cared for and supported, is more likely to be successful.

**Query 12: *What happens to boys when they leave?***

**Answer:** The vast majority of pupils stay on and enter the Sixth Form and then go on to University. Our Sixth Form is both formal and 'traditional'. The Sixth Form is free from the distraction of common rooms, coffee bars etc. The environment is 'business like' and in keeping with the professional expectation that boys will experience (and promote!) in their future lives. Our approach works! The vast majority go on to selective universities. To give you an idea, typically, 85% will gain their first or second choice of a top university. Each year, approximately five or six go to Oxford or Cambridge, six or so will go on to Medical School and between ten to fifteen will go to Law Schools.

**Query 13: *What are the lunch-time arrangements?***

**Answer:** Boys are not permitted to leave the premises at lunch-time. We have an excellent catering service. In 2011 a new company, called 'Catering Academy' was successful in a tendering process. Our pupils report that there have been significant improvements and growing numbers choose to purchase meals. In September 2011 we are planning to introduce a cash-less purchasing system, this will allow parents to pay into an account 'on-line' and boys will be able to debit from this account as they pay for items. Boys are also welcome to bring packed lunches to school and we have specific areas set aside for pupils to sit down and eat. Picnic tables are situated around the school grounds and this permits pupils to eat outside when the weather is favourable. Lunch-times at Wirral Grammar are 60 minutes long providing ample time for boys to have a meal, play out or engage in extra-curricular activities.

**Query 14: *What do parents think about the school?***

**Answer:** This is best answered by looking at the findings of our Parent Surveys (please refer to the link about this on our school website). We carry out parent surveys at every Parents' Evening and collate the information. Parent perspectives feed into our development planning. Examples of where parents views have been given due consideration include: changes to the school timetable, the proposed conversion to Academy status, changes to our school meals service, improvements to our parents' evenings and our procedures for pupil induction. We are far from perfect but we hope that by maintaining an open and constructive dialogue with parents, we can address concerns and respond to suggestions in a positive manner.

**Query 15: *What does being a 'Business & Enterprise School' mean?***

**Answer:** The vast majority of schools across the country have a specialism of some kind (e.g. Performing Arts, Languages, Sport etc.). Our choice is 'Business & Enterprise'. This does not mean that every boy has to study Business Studies, although many choose to do so. For us, promoting 'enterprise' is an essential work and life skill. We encourage the boys to take a lead and engage in problem-solving and team-building activities. Examples of activities include: pupils choose the focus for the School Charity each year and organize all of the fund-raising projects; pupils

have set up a radio station that they manage and broadcast on at lunchtimes; in Year 7 all boys are given a £1 and are encouraged to work together to set up a mini-business by pooling their £1s. We also have our own versions of 'Dragon's Den' and 'The Apprentice'.

**Query 16:** ***Does my son need a lap top for school use?***

**Answer:** The world of ICT is ever changing and at Wirral Grammar School we have invested in an ICT infrastructure to cope flexibly with changing demands. Boys are able to access a wireless network in key areas of the school. In the Learning Resource Centre, pupils can borrow net books to use for school work. Some pupils bring net books to school and this tends to be older boys. Having access to ICT at home is becoming a growing necessity in all aspect of life and this is true of education. Parents should check that if their son is bringing a lap top of net book to school at any time, it is adequately insured.

**Query 17:** ***Do we have to give money to school fund etc?***

**Answer:** The answer is 'no'. In 2011 we introduced 'The Friends' Programme' where by parents are asked to donate just £10 a year by standing order. This pays for all of the nice 'extras', such as picnic tables, netbook computers for the library, subsidies for activity days and some school visits. Each year we run a prize draw for members of 'The Friends' Programme.' Members receive a small badge and a membership card. The programme remains entirely voluntary.

**Query 18:** ***Do you have football teams?***

**Answer:** Sorry to disappoint those who are keen footballers, but the answer is no. Some football takes place in inter-house games but it is not one of the main school competitive games. Ever since 1931, Rugby Union has been the main competitive game and this tradition continues. In the region of 180 boys play in rugby fixtures on Saturdays throughout the rugby season. Hockey has grown in popularity and in recent years we have been competing at national level. We also have teams that play basketball, cricket and handball. In Year 8 and 9 we arrange Outdoor Pursuits courses giving boys access to climbing, sailing, raft building, archery, surfing, sea kayaking, gorge walking and orienteering. There is no shortage of sports to get involved in and we place a strong emphasis on representation in sport.

**Query 19:** ***What scope is there to get involved in music?***

**Answer:** Music flourishes at Wirral Grammar School; in fact over one third of all pupils are actively involved in learning a musical instrument. We employ approximately 18 peripatetic teachers providing a tailored choice of tuition. Every term we hold a Music Concert involving up to 18 ensembles. In 2009, Ofsted inspectors described the quality of extra-curricular provision as 'the jewel in the crown'.

**Query 20:** ***Why are your exam results so good?***

**Answer:** Obviously we are a selective grammar school so you would expect results to be good. However, there is more to it than that. Over the past few years, standards

have risen from 'good' to 'outstanding'. At GCSE, typically more than 95% of pupils gain 5 or more GCSEs at Grade C and above. Well over half of all grades are A\* or A. In the new English Baccalaureate, for 2010 we were ranked among the top 100 schools in the UK. The key to high attainment is high expectation, careful monitoring and effective support. All pupils are issued with Challenge Grades and we work systematically towards achieving them.

Finally, if you wish to find out more or if you require extra information about the admissions process, please do not hesitate to call. Our web site contains further details and you can access our prospectus and parent hand book which both contain all that you need to know about Wirral Grammar.

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