

Open Evenings 2010: Top Queries

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

Thanks to those who have sent emails to school, praising the courtesy, manners and helpfulness of the boys who attended our Open Evenings.

The following is a list of common queries that were received by senior staff. 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 will give you some idea of the availability of places in the school. On 1st 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 should still be able to join our school.

Query 2: ***We live in Cheshire, 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 recent 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.

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

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: A number of parents were asking about this, this year. 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. At present, we are taking our time to gather the full facts and assess the potential benefits. At Wirral Grammar School there would be little change in practice as we are already a 'Foundation School'. In arriving at our decision, Governors will want to secure the best possible future for the school. Becoming an 'Academy' would not change our school ethos. We would still be 'Wirra Grammar School', the process of selection would not be affected and our management routines would not be affected.

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. 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.

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 boys 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: *Are standards at Wirral Grammar School better than those of the independent sector?*

Answer: True comparisons are hard to make. Independent schools choose their own pupils to a greater degree and can present data in different ways. The fact that parents of pupils in local prep schools have chosen our school over a private one and parents have taken their boys out of private schools to join Wirral Grammar in recent years would suggest that there is a growing realisation that you don't need to pay for a badge of perceived quality for boys to get an outstanding education.

Query 14: *My son is in Year 5 and I have come to the Open Evening a year early, what happens next?*

Answer: We will be holding an Information Evening on 28th June 2011 when we will explain the whole process ahead of the Open Evening season in the Autumn Term. You are welcome to register an email address with the Admissions Manager, who will keep you informed of the next stages.

Finally, if you wish to find out more or if you require extra information about the admissions process, please do not hesitate to call.

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