



KINGSBURY
EDUCATION

THE 11+ EXPERTS

21 TOP TIPS FOR 11+ SUCCESS

11+ preparation is best approached as a marathon, rather than a sprint. However, a really strong finish is very important too. The summer months and start of September really is the time to up the pace and push increasingly harder, up until the tests themselves.

1. Start early enough

Make sure your child starts their 11+ preparation early enough, with ample time to learn and improve (and don't leave it too late). This will also help keep stress levels as low as possible too. The summer/September is the time to practise, practise, practise and hone skills. By this time, hopefully children will have already spent weeks and months becoming familiar with the tests and know how to tackle each type of question they may encounter in the real thing.

2. Create a schedule and timetable (building up) – realistic but thorough

Just like exam revision, we recommend that you put in place a schedule and timetable of 11+ practice, coaching and tuition. This way, practice happens regularly, children know what to expect and important preparation is not missed. A good schedule or timetable, will also ensure that there is progression, working up towards the test morning itself; a progression in how often, how long and a timed element should be brought in and scores should be tracked in order to improve on them and eventually maintain them once they reach a high level. An effective schedule/timetable is often one that has been drawn up and agreed with the child, giving them a sense of ownership. Although clubs and hobbies are important, it is important to priorities at such an important educational crossroads.

3. Make sure your child is doing enough – practise, practise, practise

From experience, we have found that attitude and practise, practise, practise (once a child has been guided with good tuition) is key to success. Children who are motivated and driven can overtake and out-perform children who are not. Make sure your child is doing enough practice to ensure that they do as well as they possibly can. As the tests get closer and closer, the children should be practising for around an hour a day or doing a timed test per day.

4. Make sure each session is productive

Each practice session should be positive and productive. Make the most of each session by making sure your child is doing their very best and trying hard.

5. Track progress

Record, collate and track scores and the number of questions answered. It is a good idea to record an overall percentage and a percentage out of the questions that were answered. Each practice session should then be an opportunity to equal or better previous scores and a chance to answer more questions than last time. This works equally well for a whole test and/or a particular section such as the punctuation section in the English tests.

6. Practice sessions should be timed

Having seen the tests, you will understand that they are tough, not only in terms of the nature of the questions but also in the number of questions the children are required to answer. By giving children a certain time in which to answer a certain number of questions (eventually the whole test), they will increase their speed. Repetition of any skill leads to improvement.

7. Use the right practice materials

The children in Poole and Bournemouth should be working on English, Maths and Verbal Reasoning multiple choice papers. We recommend GL Assessment, Letts and CGP papers. Bond papers are not bad either and there are also some good apps and websites too. However, multiple choice test papers, completed using a pencil, is what the children will encounter in the real thing.

8. Help children understand what they will face and what they should expect from the 11+ tests

Talk your child through the schedule of the test morning, where it will be, how many children will be there and what it will look like. Naturally, they are sure to have their own worries and questions about it. We recommend attending Mock Test mornings to help manage expectations. Sometimes, anxiety is rooted in the unknown. Children often feel more relaxed and confident if they know what to expect and feel ready.

9. Get up early

During your child's revision schedule, get your child up bright and early. It will feel purposeful and often this is the best time to get started during the whole day. It also frees up the rest of the day.

10. Create a good practice environment

A dedicated and quiet room or part of a room where the chance of being disturbed is minimal and has no distractions is ideal. A child needs to know that it is a place where hard work happens.

11. Give your child the best possible chance to be productive and healthy

During the practice schedule, in the run up to the 11+ tests, sleep will be really important (and plenty of it). This means early nights. They may not like it necessarily but electronic devices should take a back seat during this time too. Healthy eating and keeping really well hydrated will be extremely beneficial too.

12. Don't shirk the tough stuff

Although it's tempting and confidence building for children to spend the majority of practice time on the papers and types of questions they feel they are good at, the reverse is actually the right thing to do. Children should not avoid and sidestep their weaknesses. They should concentrate on these areas in order to turn them into strengths. The 11+ tests reward solid and strong all-rounders.

13. Feed and water the rest too

Having made the above point, it's still important to keep the remainder ticking over. It's advisable to tackle Maths, English and Verbal reasoning (and every type of question within those papers) often and regularly.

14. Rewards

The carrot is invariably more effective than the stick! A consistent, clear and agreed reward system can be a very good way to help motivate children to work hard and maintain that hard work. Praise and constructive criticism work well too, of course.

15. Build in R&R and opportunities to 'let off steam'

This process is hard work and can feel pressurised. It's really important that children have downtime, rest, relaxation, chances to pursue their hobbies, see their friends, be children, 'let off some steam', exercise and get some fresh air and vitamin D.

16. Be mindful of pressure

Some pressure, can be useful to instil a sense of purposefulness. However, try to keep it positive. The 11+ system is an emotive and, at times, stressful subject. Try not to transfer or let your child see your stress and anxiety.

17. Show your child what they are aiming for

Take your child to see the grammar school they will be working so hard to try to get into, ideally before the summer, either at an open day or on an individual tour. Hopefully they will love it and will become more and more motivated to work hard. It will also make their goal feel more real and less abstract.

18. Don't let holidays disrupt good preparation

Although it may sound harsh, practice should be maintained during holidays, otherwise 2 weeks can be lost, progress halted and achievement can suffer. Take the materials with you and schedule in practise sessions.

19. Encourage good test technique

When practising, encourage your child to use good test techniques such as reading the questions carefully, checking answers and not spending too long on a question or set of questions (when they could be answering 15 other questions successfully in that time). The children have a 20% chance of getting a question right if they guess (they may be able to narrow down their options through a process of elimination too). Therefore, if they cannot answer a question/set of questions or run out of time they should have a guess rather than leave it blank. Leaving questions blank can also lead to them getting the remainder of their answers completely out of sync too.

20. Understand the challenge, the benefits and prepare yourself and your child for either outcome

The 11+ tests are tough and designed to identify the most 'able' children in the area (at that time). Remember, these tests do not define children or their prospects in life. Learning and progress is not linear. Children can learn and develop early, late and in spurts. In Poole and Bournemouth, it has never been more competitive and the grammar schools are extremely over-subscribed. Preparing for the 11+ tests will have a very positive impact on your child's learning, learning skills and attitude towards learning, whatever the outcome. Prepare yourself and your child for both of the two possible outcomes. Try to put a positive spin on both. The most important thing is that your child does their very best and you help them to do as well as they possibly can on the day.

21. Get professional help

If you remember learning to drive with your parents, it can help to understand why it can be like 'pulling teeth' when you try to help your child with 11+ papers. A tutor will bring with them their teaching skills and 11+ knowledge. Also, sometimes, when a child sits down with a tutor (rather than a parent) it can be like a 'switch has been flipped'. They get on and work hard straight away, for the whole lesson. It is hard to be both the tutor and the parent (and taxi driver and cleaner and nurse etc etc etc...).