



Changes to the ISEB Pre-Test

Written by Juliet Rolls, Founder of Cambridge Academic Tuition

I am a parent to four school aged children, tutor, qualified teacher and Founder of Cambridge Academic Tuition. In addition to preparing students for the ISEB Pre-Test I also have other teachers that I manage teaching all academic subjects to students from ages 3 to 18. All lessons are one to one and online and all teachers are UK qualified teachers.

We teach students from all around the world, many of whom have English as an additional language. Our students have been successful in being offered places at some of the most selective schools in the UK and globally. Students have been offered places at Eton, Harrow, Westminster, St Paul's Boys' School, St Paul's Girls' School, Wycombe Abbey, Cheltenham Ladies' College, Winchester, Hampton, Brighton College, Radley, Tonbridge, Dulwich College and King's College to name a few. We prepare students for entry at 4+, 7+, 8+, 10+, 11+, 13+ and 16+. Students can also be prepared for GCSE/IGCSE and A-Level/IB exams. Our students have often achieved the highest grade possible and we also have a fantastic record of students being offered academic scholarships.

I recently attended a webinar presented by Julia Martin, CEO of the Independent Schools Examination Board or ISEB, outlining the changes to the ISEB this year. She described the new tests as "transformative." The ISEB is Britain's oldest exam board. The format was updated in 2022.

The ISEB previously commissioned the test from GL assessment. The new provider is Century Tech which was founded in 2013 by Priya Lakhani OBE. Century Tech also runs a platform used by schools and parents with AI driven revision for English, maths and science.

There is a walkthrough practice test on the ISEB website which I would recommend to all students taking the test.

<https://iseb.eva.tech/walkthrough/>

Although the ISEB do not endorse any specific resources for preparation, I recommend Atom Learning to my students. Atom Learning has created mock tests which replicate the format and question style of the ISEB Pre-Test. I have partnered with Atom Learning since it was founded and was the first tutor globally to become a partner.

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Using my code CAMBRIDGE you can benefit from an exclusive discount. Most of my students sign up for the Exam Prep Plus package which allows unlimited mock tests. A standardised age score is given which we can use to guide parents as to which schools they should be aiming for and which areas are strongest or which need further practice.

To find out more visit

<http://atomlearning.co.uk/partners/CAMBRIDGE>

An alternative resource, which is very helpful, is Exam Papers Plus. See details below:

https://exampapersplus.co.uk/#a_aid=cambridgeacademic

The current timings for the test are:

Mathematics 40 minutes

English 40 minutes

Non-Verbal Reasoning (NVR) 30 minutes

Verbal Reasoning (VR) 25 minutes

Total length 2 hours and 15 minutes although it can vary according to your child's responses

The tests are adaptive and some pupils may not need the full length of the test. There is no set number of questions but it is likely there will be approximately 30 questions for mathematics, 50 questions for English, 36 questions for NVR and 30 questions for VR. This can vary according to the algorithm and the number of questions answered correctly. The results are given as a standardised age score where 100 is average and the maximum score is 142. Most selective schools will be looking for students with scores above 120 in all areas to secure a place. The results are sent directly to the schools that you have applied to.

The types of questions that could now appear now include:

Mathematics

1. Number and place value
2. Calculations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division)
3. Fractions, decimals and percentages
4. Measure
5. Geometry
6. Statistics

There are likely to be some problem-solving questions in addition to arithmetic and problems involving more than one area.

English

1. Reading comprehension – instead of one long passage which was previously the case, there are now 2 or 3 shorter passages. You do not need to click from page to page any more but can scroll through the text. The texts could be fiction, non-fiction or poetry. Types of question include retrieval, deduction, inference, vocabulary, summarising, literary devices and comparisons.

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2. Spelling, punctuation, grammar and vocabulary.

- Spelling – spelling patterns and common exception words
- Punctuation – how punctuation should be used
- Grammar – identifying parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, determiners, clauses, sentence structure, verb agreement and formal language.
- Vocabulary – word meanings, word families, prefixes and suffixes. There is no set word list so knowing as many words as possible is essential.

To test these topics there are 3 question types:

- Cloze sentences – you need to select the right word to complete the sentence.
- Shuffled sentences – you need to rearrange words to form a sentence and may be asked to select the extra word that is not needed. This question type was previously in VR.
- Find the mistake – with spelling, punctuation or grammar.

Non-Verbal Reasoning

Questions involving logic, critical thinking and problem solving with figures and diagrams are included. The questions included can vary each year so it is best to cover all possible types.

1. Non-Verbal Reasoning
 - Similarities and differences
 - Codes
 - Complete the diagram
2. Spatial Reasoning
 - 3D visualisation
 - 2D manipulation

Spatial reasoning is a new area for the ISEB Pre-Test and can include questions such as combining shapes.

Verbal Reasoning

Logic and comprehension skills are tested. There are letter, word and language questions which assess problem solving, trial and error and vocabulary knowledge.

1. Comprehension
2. Reasoning
3. Logic

For VR vocabulary and spelling are very important. Number related questions have now been removed from the VR test so all questions focus on words and letters. Other possible question types include: move two letters, missing letters, odd one out, connected words and related words. All questions are multiple choice requiring the student to select only one answer, for example for synonym questions you may need to select the pair of words that are closest in meaning.

Other new features

Parents must now register for the test rather than the senior school doing this so each child is only registered once even if you apply to multiple schools. Registration for the ISEB Pre-Test is free.

Improvements to accessibility for special needs such as changing the screen background colour and text size are now possible.

Scrap paper and a pencil can be used for all tests. This was previously only allowed for maths and VR. The working out and notes will not be marked. It is wise to make use of this feature as accuracy rather than speed will produce a higher standardised age score even if all of the questions are not completed. There are no example or specimen questions although parents can also use Century Tech in conjunction with Bond for extra practice online.

What is not changing

The tests can be taken in Year 6 or Year 7 and are online and adaptive. They are normally taken between October and June and can only be taken once in each academic year.

Once you have submitted your answer you cannot go back and change it or check through your answers at the end. You will not find out if the answer you selected is right or wrong.

There is a timer and progress bar so that you can see your progress in the test.

All questions are multiple choice and adaptive. The material covers up to the end of the Year 5 curriculum but on the higher-level questions content can be stretched beyond this.

The tests can be taken on two separate days or all on the same day.

Students with English as a Foreign Language may be allowed a bilingual dictionary and the test can be taken overseas. Students with additional needs may be allowed 25% extra time. It is usually taken at the student's current school.

Schools which use the ISEB Pre-Test

<https://www.iseb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Common-Pre-Tests-List-of-Senior-Schools-25.09.22.pdf>

How we can help

We are experts at preparing students for the ISEB Pre-Test, other school admission tests and school selection. It is very important to select the right school for your child that is matched to their academic ability. We can additionally provide this service of school selection which many parents have found helpful. It was great to hear from a parent this week that a student who I taught recently, who has now joined St Paul's Boys', wrote to me to say that her son, "...is loving it. It is exactly the right place for him."

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