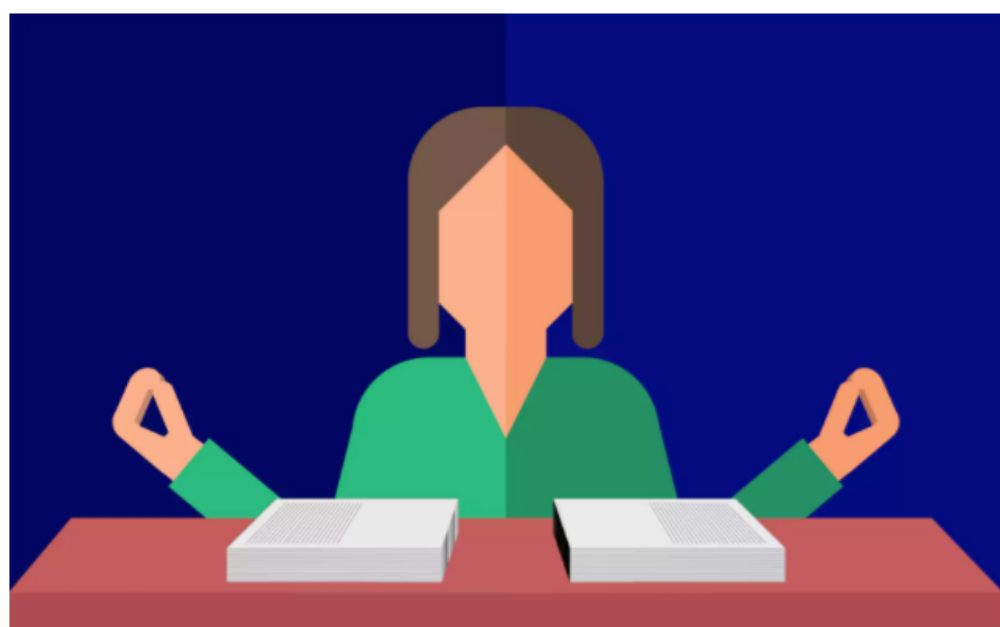


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Leading girls' schools scrap entrance exams amid mental health concerns

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A group of the country's leading girls' school are abolishing their entrance exam



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By **Camilla Turner**, EDUCATION EDITOR

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A group of the country's leading girls' school are abolishing their entrance exam amid fears that it is putting children's mental health at risk.

The North London Girls' School Consortium, which is made up of twelve independent day schools, will replace their exam papers with a one-hour long "bespoke cognitive ability" test that is far harder to prepare for.

The move is designed to protect ten and eleven-year-old children from the "dreadful" pressure that their parents subject them to, including endless hours of private tuition.

Lucy Elphinstone, headmistress of Francis Holland, Sloane Square, which is a member of the consortium said the move is in response to concerns about the wellbeing of children "arising from over-tutoring and the dreadful prepping towards the tests".

She told the *Tatler Schools Live* conference in Knightsbridge, London that the group of schools will instead select students on the basis of cognitive ability, verbal reasoning and interviews.



Ms Elphinstone, who has been headmistress at the £18,000-a-year school for five years, said that the verbal reasoning section of the old exam is the only part they want to retain.

"That's something the children are perfectly used to and you can't tutor for it," she said. "You can't sit a child down at £70 an hour and endlessly do verbal reasoning tests. These things are not tutorable for."

Ms Elphinstone added that the new forms of assessment will be "fairer" for children whose parents cannot afford expensive preparatory school fees or extensive private tuition.

"I think it will be much fairer to children who come from primary schools and who don't have access, for financial reasons, to tutoring. That is exactly where we want to get to," she said. "We want to see what a child's baseline potential and ability is, and cut through the ability of a parent to pay for tutoring."



Headteachers said they have been concerned about the increasing pressure children are put under
CREDIT: MANDY GODBEHEAR / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The consortium, which includes Notting Hill and Ealing High School, Queen's College and The Godolphin & Latymer School, said in a statement: "There will be no further written assessments at our Schools, and we will develop the creativity of our interview processes.

"With our junior school colleagues, we have a collective obligation to safeguard the mental health and wellbeing of all of our pupils and we are determined to do what we can to improve the selection process for these young children," they added.

Headteachers said they have been concerned about the increasing pressure children are put under amid the "scramble for places, parental expectations and cramming for tests both at school and from tutors".

Earlier this year a study revealed that almost a third of children have had private tuition, labelling it the "hidden secret" in an "educational arms race" that reinforces the advantages of richer children, according to the Sutton Trust.

Teenagers from wealthier families are twice as likely to have received additional help compared with their poorer classmates.

Meanwhile those from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to have had a tutor than white pupils, according to a report by the Sutton Trust, a social mobility think tank.

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