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## Group of top girls' schools scraps the 11-plus because the exam puts too much stress on children

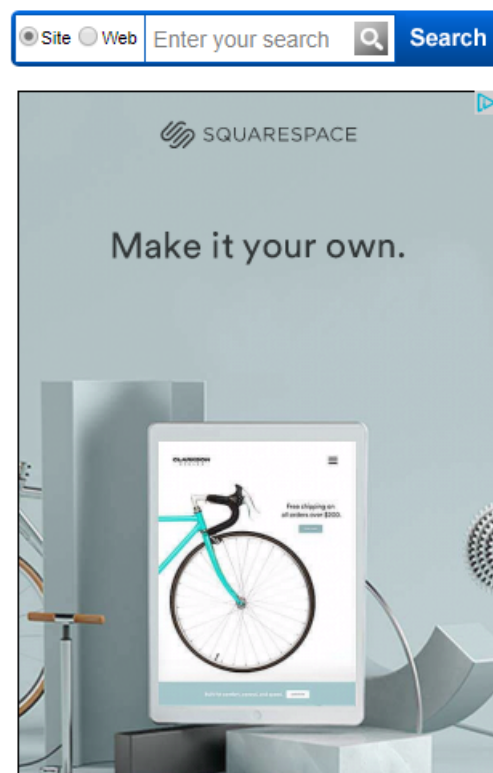
- The North London Independent Girls' Schools' Consortium has cut the exam
- Change will be introduced in 2019 and has been branded 'incredibly significant'
- Many parents pay for tuition get their sons and daughters through the 11-plus

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A group of the most elite girls' private schools in the country have announced they are scrapping the 11-plus because it puts too much stress on children.

The North London Independent Girls' Schools' Consortium is dropping its notoriously tough entrance exams in a bid to halt the 'dreadful prepping' and 'over-tutoring' that many applicants endure.



Concerns have long been raised that pushy parents in the capital are putting too much pressure on their daughters to perform well in the exams.

Many have been paying through the nose for private tutoring because they are so desperate for their child to win a place.



Francis Holland School in London's Sloane Square (pictured) is one of the group of top girls' schools that are dropping the 11-plus because it puts too much pressure on pupils

Lucy Elphinstone, headmistress at Francis Holland School in Sloane Square, which is part of the group, said the 'incredibly significant' change would come in from 2019.

She said: 'The consortium to which I belong... is so concerned about mental health of children arising from over-tutoring and the dreadful prepping for the tests that we are abolishing the 11-plus in our schools...'

'We are nailing our colours to the mast of children's wellbeing.'

The current 11-plus exams include a high-level maths test and a 'full written test', consisting of reading comprehension, creative writing and discursive writing.

The current 11-plus exams include a high-level maths test and a 'full written test', consisting of reading comprehension, creative writing and discursive writing.

Mrs Elphinstone said the 12 schools of the group will instead have a slimmed-down 'verbal reasoning' test, which would be 'tutor-proof'.

But the main focus will be on interviews with applicants, which schools hope will reveal their potential.

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The new test will take 45 minutes to an hour and will be similar to tests carried out internally by primary and prep schools, she said.

Speaking at the Tatler Schools Live conference in London, she said: 'It's something the children are perfectly used to and you can't tutor for it.'

'You can't sit a child down at £70-an-hour and endlessly do verbal reasoning tests.'

'These things are not tutorable for.'

She said the new tests would make admissions fairer to children who 'don't have access, for financial reasons, to tutoring'.

She added: '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 – which, though it might increase by two or three marks the score they'll get in the English paper, will do so much damage to the child's emotional well-being and mental health that it's completely a waste of time.'

Mrs Elphinstone said the interview process would aim to select those who are 'intelligent in different ways'.

'Our interviews will become more creative, more about finding the skills we are looking for, which is problem solving, critical thinking, social interaction, collaboration, creativity,' she added.

'So I'm certainly looking for the very sporty child, the music scholar, the wonderful artist, the child who is entrepreneurial.'

Francis Holland is the name given to two London sister schools – in Sloane Square and Regent's Park.

The other consortium schools are Notting Hill and Ealing High School, Queen's College, St. Helen's School, South Hampstead High School, Channing School, More House, Northwood College for Girls, Queen's Gate School, St James Senior Girls' School and The Godolphin & Latymer School.

The announcement comes following a national debate over use of the 11-plus in the state sector to select pupils for grammar schools.

Campaigners have said it means only parents with the ability to pay for tutoring have a chance of getting their child in.

Competition for London private schools is particularly fierce because of a growing places shortage in state secondaries across the city.

Parents who are unable to get their child into a good state school are often willing to pay for a private school, but this has in turn put pressure on places in the independent sector.