

Minutes of the CATS information afternoon 5.12.2011 @ 2pm

Mrs Addis (CA) welcomed all attendees and opened the meeting. Each of the attendees was offered a CATS question booklet to peruse during the session.

CATS (Cognitive Abilities Tests) are tests done annually by the children in years 4, 5, and 6 during Assessment Week in October. The process was explained to the parents, and CA stated that parents were welcome to ask questions at any point.

There are 3 elements to the CATS, namely Verbal, Quantative, and Non-Verbal sections. The questions have multiple choice answers and the children must make a mark in a separate answer booklet, these are then sent off-site to be marked and the results are electronically sent back to school, to be given out to the parents. The children must get used to completing the booklets with their name, date of birth and answers in the correct boxes, in order that they can be accurately marked.

Verbal

The teacher gives the children specific instructions, an example and two practise questions and then they do the test. Firstly the Verbal Classification Test, which tests similarities in words and looks for patterns. The Sentence Completion (comprehension) section "Apples -----on trees" answer "grow" and then the Verbal Analogies Test, such as hot is to cold as wet is to "....." answer "dry".

Each element usually takes between 8 and 10 minutes. On the test days they would normally enjoy a more practical activity in the afternoon.

The children gradually build up an understanding of the test style, and it is very beneficial to the children to have "had a go" in year 4, so that it is not all new to them in years 5 and 6.

Quantative

This section involves no verbal skills, reading skills will not affect performance. Areas highlighted in this section could relate more to Maths, Science, Geography, and Economics. The Quantative and Verbal together will give an overall academic performance picture. There are 3 sections in this area Number Analogies, looking for patterns and following processes, Number Series, again identifying patterns in a series of numbers and Equation Building, looking at and understanding a combination of processes and calculations, this is a test for logic, and using the skills learnt. As this tests progress the questions get harder, the children may not get to the end, or they may get to the end but not be accurate.

Non-Verbal battery

Here there are no words or numbers, instead shapes are used. This section can identify areas such as Maths / Physics and Design. Children may score highly in this section if they have good spatial awareness.

There is a section on Figure Classification – looking for similarities in a series and variety of shapes, and designs, Figure Analogies the children look for patterns and what comes next in a sequence, and Figure Analysis – which looks at a shape with arrows to follow with dots on, and how the sequence and pattern is followed, and where the dots end up.

The Results

Each parent receives the score sheet for their child and an accompanying letter explaining how to interpret the information.

SAS – Standard Age Score. The score takes into account the age of the child, at the time they sat the test. The average for each age band on the test battery is a score 100, and the standard deviation is 15. Above 100 would be deemed to be doing well. The individual score sheet gives a visual band within which there is a specific mark, to annotate what the actual score is.

Percentile Rank by Age. This normally indicates the percentage of pupils in an age band, who obtained a standardised score at or below a particular score. This indicates where the child is placed nationally.

Stanine by Age. This is the standardised score scale comprising nine bands. These give a clear idea of where a pupils' ability lies within a broader band, rather than an exact score such as the SAS.

CA reminded all parents that here in school we celebrate every child's achievements, not just those tested by the CATS. There are many other areas which put together give an overall picture of each child.

CA emphasised as a parent we should look at a variety of sources of information. SATS a level of progress of 2 strands each year, are the children happy, thriving and keen to come to school? A CATS score of 110 – 115 is a good score and a higher level in the Verbal Reasoning Section would normally be a stronger indicator of the 11+ score. In Bucks 11+ is Verbal Reasoning, with a small element of numerical. How can parents help at home? Reading a variety of materials, books, newspapers etc to broaden vocabulary, which in turn improves comprehension. Also the Times Tables need to be learnt inside out!

Q – “How did the children feel during the process?” One child reported they felt petrified, the parent reassured the child and ultimately the child now knows what a more formal test experience is like.

Q – “How does school prepare the children for CATS and 11+?” Each year school has Assessment week, which becomes part of school life. The children get used to a formal test; they might be seated in a different way. The tests are done in a short sharp bursts to minimise the experience. Some children really thrive under these conditions, and really quite enjoy this type of test.

Ms Taylor (CT) from Inclusion Department added that they think very carefully about whether the CATS are the right thing for every child. Sometimes there are alternatives which are more suitable for a particular child. Some children really want to have a go, and would be encouraged to do so if appropriate.

Q “How much of a disadvantage is there for September / October birthdays?” CA responded – there is a specific formula which standardises the scores so that age is taken into consideration. At any age a child can get the maximum score.

Q “are the question books re-used?” Yes, each year the question books are re-used but the answer booklets are new.

Q “When are the CATS done, in relation to the 11+?” In year 6, there are two 11+ papers at the beginning of October and mid-October then they have Assessment week, for the CATS.

Q “When / how are the CATS used for an 11+ Appeal?” In the event of an Appeal the CATS scores for years 5 and 6 are reviewed, not usually the results for year 4.

Mrs Thomson (RT) interjected at this point to share some information about scores pre and post tutoring for 11+. There is evidence that tutoring makes very little difference to the scores for the children, and in some cases the 11+ score had deteriorated. The difference if any was marginal and certainly not significant. The Verbal Reasoning Score in years 5 and 6 should reflect (albeit not exactly) the score achieved in the 11+. The school prepares the children in many ways for the 11+, they do the CATS, they have familiarisation papers and practise papers.

As a parent you must do what you feel is the right thing for your child. Books are available from stationers or the IPS website; get your own material if you feel that's appropriate. The children should not be concerned about this aspect of school life; with self confidence children can achieve anything. RT reiterated that we don't use the language pass / fail, we as a school look at ways of encouraging the children to become ambitious learners, who think highly of themselves.

CA closed the meeting with an offer to meet individually with parents who had further or individual questions about their child.

Meeting closed at 3.00pm.