

Why do we have end of year tests?

End of year tests or exams can be built up to be more important than they really are. Teacher assessment, formed over months of working with a pupil and informed by numerous pieces of work, observations and interactions, is a far more reliable way of gauging pupil progress than one stand-alone test. Pupils are already assessed regularly at the end of topics to see what they have learned and what the next steps should be. Teachers do not need end of year exam results to know their pupils, making some people question why we have such exams at all.

At senior schools examinations are inescapable. The vast majority of our pupils will choose to sit GCSEs and so it is vital that we help them prepare. This can't happen by chance. Children need to be taught things like revision techniques, time management and how to answer different types of exam questions. They need opportunities to develop resilience and see mistakes as learning opportunities.

All this can be done at an age appropriate level. The work required to help children write engaging pieces of narrative in Year 8 begins in Reception with listening to simple, repetitive stories and writing basic sentences. So it is with exam preparation. Our youngest pupils can learn simple strategies to help them remember key information and utilise their skills. These strategies can then be developed and built upon year on year so that by Year 8 pupils are confident about how to revise and prepare productively.

It should also be noted that not all revision techniques work for all pupils. Children need a chance to go through the revision/testing/reflecting process to discover what works best for them and create a bespoke toolkit of techniques.

In addition, end of year tests and exams are not just an opportunity to assess what a pupil can remember. They are also a chance to see if they can apply their skills and knowledge to unfamiliar situations – a good way of testing what learning is truly embedded.

What do you do with the test/exam results?

End of year exam and test results are published in the final report, alongside the median. They provide useful information to teachers, parents and pupils about how well a pupil has met the end-of-year expectations for that academic year. However, they are only one metric of several used by teachers to assess each pupil's progress. Sometimes a standalone test does not give a fair reflection of a child's ability. If a child has dramatically over or underperformed, compared to ongoing teacher assessment, then this is taken into account. Children are certainly not put into sets based on their exam performance alone.

How can I support my child at home?

Parental support is vital if children are to achieve that of which they are capable. We want to ensure parents can help their children at home and be involved as they prepare for any assessments. However, the build up to exams and tests is not the only time parents should get involved in their child's learning. From next year, the 'Revision Resources' section of intranet will be rebranded the 'Learning Resources' section to help move the emphasis away from end of year assessments towards ongoing development of knowledge and skills.

End of year tests and exams can be a stressful experience, and not just for pupils. Whilst a certain amount of stress can bring out the best in people, too much is simply counterproductive. As already stated, exam results are just one metric which informs teacher assessment and so they need to be kept firmly in perspective.

Beginning revision too early runs the risk of putting too much emphasis on end of year tests. On the other hand we know that 'little and often' is a more successful revision method than last minute cramming. Cramming might make a difference in the short term but has been found to have limited impact in committing knowledge and skills to the long-term memory, which is key for real learning to take place. Therefore, structured revision will take place in school, in an age-appropriate way, and revision materials will be put on the school intranet. In the build up to end of year tests and exams, parents can best support their children by encouraging them to use the revision materials provided and helping them to remain calm and see the tests as a positive learning experience.

What about Boarders?

Boarders are well-looked after in the Boarding Houses, with age appropriate opportunities for revision and staff on hand to reassure them and help them feel prepared.

What are the expectations for each year group?

There is a world of difference between the more informal end of year tests in Year 3 and the Year 8 exam process with exams in the Centenary Hall and trial exams in the Lent Term. To reassure pupils and parents alike we want to make our expectations for each Year group clear.

Year	Expectations
3 and 4	End of year testing is deliberately down-played at this stage. The assessments are important, but there is no expectation that pupils carry out lots of revision at home. The tests take place in the week before half term and are preceded by a revision week at school. Simple suggestions for how parents can support their children will be put on the intranet in the lead up to the first test.
5	As in Years 3 and 4, assessments are called tests. The amount of prep pupils are set increases in Year 5, and this provides a good opportunity for teachers to give structured revision when appropriate. The tests are in the week before half term and are preceded by a revision week. Revision materials will be put on the intranet two weeks before the first test.
6	Year 6 builds on Year 5. Because the tests are after half term, there is more time for structured revision in school and prep. Revision materials will be on the intranet two weeks before half term. There is no expectation for pupils to spend the whole half term break revising. It can, however, be useful for pupils to use the break to remind themselves of what they have been learning and revising.
7	End of year tests are now called exams. Expectations increase in Year 7 as we look to prepare pupils for the demands of Year 8. Pupils will be assessed in all academic subjects. Structured revision will take place in school and revision materials will be set for prep as appropriate, as well as being available on the intranet. Their exams will take place after half term in their classrooms under exam conditions. The half term break should be used for some revision, whilst ensuring pupils return to school relaxed and refreshed.
8	Year 8 exams are significant. They draw a line under pupils' time at DCPS and are something of a rite of passage. As the papers are marked by DCS, the exams give those teachers in Years 9 and beyond a better understanding of each child's attainment. Because of all this, and because there is a significant volume of material to revise, we encourage pupils in Year 8 to begin revision in the Easter Holidays. Pupils should take ownership of their exam preparation by creating revision timetables and revising in their own time. Revision tips are on the intranet. In the Trinity Term lessons and preps will cover new content and give space for revision. Exams are in the week after half term and so half term needs to be a careful balance of relaxation and structured revision. We want all pupils to get to the end of the exam week knowing that they gave of their best.

How do I access the Intranet?

Visit the Dean Close website and scroll right to the bottom. Click on 'Parent Hub'. Select 'Secure Parent Portal' and enter your username and password. Click on 'School Information' and select 'Bookmarks and links'. Follow the link to the revision pages. Pupils can access the material much more easily. They need to go through the 'Staff and Pupil Hub'.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact Mr Gould (Academic Director): jgould@deanclose.org.uk