

A Parent's Guide to the 11-plus

(or “Your Child, the 11+ and You”)

How your child can achieve success in the exam by preparing sensibly; with you engaging with the system and overcoming the obstacles, working with your child and helping your child to maintain a good life balance; yet upholding ideals of education and social justice and not having to spend lots of money!

Third Edition

By

John Barber

The cover is using a graphic, I rather liked, from the Internet; artwork was by my son and words and colour scheme by me. I wondered how my dubious, fictional “hero”, Homer Simpson, might have reacted if his son, Bart, had announced he wanted to take the 11+? Somehow, I can see a lot of Homer in me and a bit of Bart in my son 😊

A Parent's Guide ... to the 11-plus by John Barber

“I want to go to a good school and to do well in my studies; that's why I want to pass the 11-plus. I know that I need to work hard; that's what I'm going to do. I would say to any child who wants it too - to go for it!”

Matthew Barber (aged 10) (on 02/03/09, he found his wish had been granted)

“Amusing, instructive, elliptical ...” **A Grammar School Head - about this book**

“Knowledge is power.” **Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626)**

“Readers produce leaders; there are too few of them.” **An African Pastor**

“If our mission is (rightly) to help our children realise their full potential, them going to grammar schools may or may not be part of the solution; but it will never be the whole solution!” **Two “Wise” Old Men**

“I would say to all parents, especially the pushy types, that you mustn't use the 11-plus as an excuse to live your life through your children.” **An Observer**

“Preparation and practice are key elements for passing practically every exam ever taken - why should the 11-plus be any different? ... my gripe is that parents, who expect to be informed of important things about their children's education, find that in the case of the 11-plus it often does not happen or happens too late ... I would much rather my son grew up possessing good character and in modest circumstances than with wealth and good educational attainments.” **The Author**

ISBN 978-0-9537306-2-9

First Edition: January 2009

Second Edition: August 2009

Third Edition: June 2010

Published by: John Barber, Southend, England

Printed by: Accent Printing, Southend, England

Copies obtainable from John Barber, 136 St. Luke's Rd., Southend, SS2 4AG

Telephone: 01702-616302, Email: jjandm.barber@blueyonder.co.uk

RRP £7.50 + £1.00 p&p

The author will be happy to receive and respond to enquiries concerning this book.

Copyright © John Barber 2009, 2010 - all rights reserved

Table of Contents

A Parent's Guide	2
Foreword.....	4
Opening Salvo	4
Personal Note.....	5
More Sound Bites	6
Approach	9
Warning	9
Preface to the First Edition.....	10
Preface to the Second and Third Editions	10
Acknowledgements	11
Dedication.....	11
Terms and Acronyms	12
Chapter 1: Making the Journey	13
Chapter 2: Exploding the Myths	21
Chapter 3: Preparing the Child.....	31
Chapter 4: Releasing the Resources	41
Chapter 5: Choosing the School.....	45
Chapter 6: Answering the Questions.....	49
Chapter 7: Revisiting the Tin	55
Verbal Reasoning Types	57
Appealing	59
Afterthoughts.....	61
Sally's Story	65
A Teacher's Perspective.....	66
Southend Context	67
Other Perspectives	68
Philosophical Musings	68
One Year On.....	70
The Comprehensive Dream.....	72
Having to Prepare With Little Time Left.....	75
Overview of the School Journey by Age	77
Useful Contacts	78
Closing Salvo.....	78
Quotations.....	79
Finally.....	80

“My main three priorities ... education, education, education” Tony Blair (1953-)

Foreword

We first heard from John Barber on our 11+ forum. After reading many of his posts, it was quite clear that he had thoroughly investigated what stood between his son and a place at grammar school. This book is the result of his investigations. I'm sure anybody preparing for the 11 plus exams would find it very useful.
Simon Stanbridge (Owner of the Chuckra website)

Opening Salvo

The 1944 Education Act enabled all children in the UK, for the first time, (freely) either to attend grammar schools (if “academically able” and passing the 11+) - to prepare them to be professionals and leaders in the nation, or secondary modern (or technical) schools (if not so “academically able”) - to prepare them to be useful citizens and to enter a trade. How good this system was, how judicious were the distinctions made, to what extent changes made since then were for the better, what changes now need to be made, how schools and society ought to interact, what schools should do and how they should do it, the purpose of education and the effectiveness of different schools, all remain controversial questions that attract widely differing responses. This book is not especially about debate. Its purpose is to support parents preparing their children for the 11+, not by providing all the answers but by empowering them to do what they need to do. Yet these difficult questions provide the context for this book and can not be ignored. It is nigh impossible for any author to tread a strictly neutral path, and here is no exception, especially given the nature of the material, but I do try to be balanced. I don't want be a “scare monger” or “trouble maker”, but I am beholden to present the pertinent facts, even if some pundits would rather I maintain the status quo. Thus equipped, parents can prepare their child as thoroughly as they feel fit. Every child deserves a decent education, yet there is little point preparing a child for the 11+ who will not respond to extra pressure or without the ability and attitude to profit from a grammar school education or whose needs are better served elsewhere. Moreover, you must decide how to guide your child, educationally and otherwise. My own list starts with good character and the associated virtues and includes normality and a well-rounded education. I will argue it is unwise and restrictive to focus just on passing exams (as some do) when there are great expanses of uncharted territory to explore and large fertile areas children's educational feet ought to be setting forth upon and we need to help them to fulfil their life's potential. This is a life-long process and one that will enormously enrich. The 11+ system tends to favour socially advantaged families but it should not deter any parent from helping their children to aspire toward educational excellence and achieve 11+ success.

Personal Note

Most of this book was written after my son sat his 11+ exam but before we knew whether or not he had passed and his preference to go to our local grammar school had been granted. This was a deliberate ploy to avoid accusations of painting a distorted picture, but a risky one too - how could I face my audience if my son had failed? I wondered during this period how I might reflect on my son's own 11+ journey and present my guide, along with its conclusions, in the light of the exam outcome - I believe it made little difference. It could have been different though if he had not passed. We may have then felt compelled to do more to compensate for him not going to a grammar school and maybe abandon this project altogether. I did not change the content, other than add quite a bit of new material and do my customary tinkering, after I knew. This book would not have been written if my son did not have his own 11+ ordeal, with my wife and I as active participants and, while I have tried to be objective, this was an important driving factor. Despite wanting to cast out from my mind the uncertainty, while waiting on the result, I knew it wouldn't be easy, having embarked on this writing project. Interestingly, my son was the calmest in the family even though he realised the importance and possible implications of the outcome (pass or fail) despite our doing our best to protect and reassure him. In the main, life did carry on normally and, despite our best intentions to keep up his studies at home (including my beloved "First Aid in English"), the work regime did reduce, not having the carrot of the 11+ exam before us - but the learning quest has continued! And so, at long last, we were put out of our proverbial agony. My son did pass and did so by a healthy margin (doing better in English and worse in Verbal Reasoning than expected). He will be going to our local grammar school - the outcome we wanted all along. A number of his friends didn't make it, even though some are as bright as he ... if only they had prepared better!? Now we know the result, a new chapter in his own journey has opened up. Soon he will be leaving primary school and he is looking forward to his new school, although we want him to make the most of the short time that is remaining at his primary school. When the 11+ results were announced, there were, no doubt, many parents who were relieved and delighted (like us) because their child had passed and others (maybe more in number) who were disappointed in the result and apprehensive as to what might lie ahead, even if resigned to the fact, because their child failed. We congratulate the children who passed and commiserate with the children who didn't, especially if they had expected to pass or worked hard. As well as prepare as best we can for the exam, we need to "hope for the best and prepare for the worst" regarding the aftermath. Intentionally, this book has a message of hope for everyone, regardless of the 11+ exam outcome.

More Sound Bites

“Having set about the task of preparing my son for the 11+ and writing this book, I continually asked myself the question: am I achieving the right balance, but I came to conclusion that for many bright children, preparing them in a proper way is the correct course of action because of what grammar schools offer that other schools don’t and because the system is what it is: i.e. to get into a grammar school children need to pass a challenging exam (maybe the most important exam they will ever take) and do so on a set day, with no second chance allowed. Given that all of this is true, and given my son’s situation, I felt compelled to take the appropriate action, with my son preparing thoroughly for the exam.” **The Author**

“As I further reflected on my subject and considered various feedback, it seemed to me that a number of aspects about this 11-plus business are often overlooked. Firstly, there is reluctance in certain quarters to expose our children to the possibility of failure and so miss out extending their learning horizons. Secondly, a culture exists where mediocrity is accepted rather than excellence aspired after. Thirdly, too often children are not persuaded to think outside the box, explore new ideas, be stretched to their limits and be encouraged to solve complex problems that require ingenuity and creativity as well as meticulous effort.” **The Author**

“The government said that parents would decide the future of the 11-plus and of the country's 164 remaining grammar schools and their associated secondary moderns. But ministers then invented a system so biased in favour of keeping the 11-plus that, one by one, local campaigns for its abolition were forced to give up the unequal struggle... So our children will still have to sit an 11-plus that takes no account of willingness to work, late development, language skills, different abilities in different subjects, or nerves or ill health on the day of the test. Everybody refers to a "fail" if a child is not selected for grammar school. The exam's divisiveness damages families and friendships. A Kent head teacher was right to describe it recently as evil.” **Disgruntled Labour Party Supporter (2000)**

“The academic rigours imposed by grammar schools suit a minority of pupils. It is wrong to push those who are not up for this and besides what right has anyone to make academic achievement the be all and end all of education or suggest that somehow grammar school kids are better.” **A Grammar School Teacher**

“The only education I’m interested in is that which will help me to live a good life and to be able to support my family.” **A Relative of the Author**

“Whether we like it or not, we live in a competitive world that we cannot avoid, and the 11-plus is part of that competitive system.” **An Observer**

“From what I can make out, there are children that miss out in life later on because of their parent’s obsession with getting them through the 11-plus ahead of all other considerations and those who, after they get to grammar school as a result of having been groomed to pass the exam despite not having the ability or interest to do well there, then find themselves out of their depth and they end up struggling or they disengage from school life and learning.” **An Observer**

“It is not just those families whose children fail to get into grammar schools that suffer anxiety symptoms, but there are many parents whose children get allocated schools they don’t want their children to go to - how bad those schools are, we may not know for sure, but the point is: parents lack the confidence that those schools will be good for their children.” **An Observer**

“While we do our best for the children who come to us, we recognise that different children have different needs and may be better suited to different schools - it is all a matter of horses for courses.” **A Head of a Non-Selective Secondary School**

“I believe not only will my son receive a superior education and be stretched if he goes to a grammar school but he will also be taught in a disciplined manner, where manners are reinforced such that his cultural heritage will be underpinned rather than undermined.” **A Muslim Asian Mother**

“I find it difficult to come to terms with, as does my son, the fact that when he goes to his secondary school he finds teachers are not respected by the children and education is not valued by the parents. What can I do, knowing that where I come from the opposite is true?” **A Black African Father**

“Parents get worked up over the 11-plus and this can have a detrimental effect on their children. They need to get a right perspective.” **A Primary School Teacher**

“The problem with the 11-plus system as it stands is that it favours the better off families who know how to prepare their children and have the school and money to help. Those of us who are not so well off often get left behind.” **A Parent**

“I am convinced children who prepare thoroughly for the 11-plus are more likely to go to a grammar school than those who don’t; regrettably no-one told us about the 11-plus until we had to start to choose the secondary school for our daughter. She failed the exam even though she had the ability to pass.” **A Parent**

“I couldn’t help noticing the percentage of South Asian boys in my son’s grammar school is higher compared with that in the area it serves. It leads me to conclude that while white British parents tend to expect things to be given them on a plate; many South Asian parents are prepared to fight for a good education.” **A Parent**

“Children need confidence to tackle new situations and intellectual challenges. Many pupils I work with are bright and have achieved well in school. They have not always had to "try hard" or puzzle deeply over a concept. This can be a new learning experience for them and one in which not all of them are comfortable. They have never really "failed" before. The challenge as a parent / tutor / helper is to offer the support that enables them to be a more confident pupil by the end of the 11+ preparations and test. In life we all know of adults who may not be highly academic but due to their confidence have succeeded. I think that the 11+ can help children's confidence if approached in a positive way.” **An 11-plus Tutor**

“Our family was not well off or particularly privileged; we had to work hard for everything we got. We had no regret in making our children’s education a priority, investing in this and helping them gain grammar school places. We were very happy with the education they got there.” **A Grammar School Governor**

“My boy went to our local comprehensive school. He liked it there and got on, and he has turned out to be alright. We have no regrets.” **A Local Businessman**

“We do what we can to ensure that all our schools provide a decent standard of education and that the system in operation is fair for all. We recognise that our good heads and schools differ in character and approach and we see this as a positive thing. We are proud of the achievements of our schools evidenced by the fact our school leavers do better than the national average in terms of exam success and in getting jobs when they leave school.” **A LEA Spokesperson**

“The 11+ exam is an important juncture in the lives of thousands of children across the UK. The current system is not fair which is why we have started an initiative to give everybody, regardless of their background, the same access to 11+ preparation materials. This is a huge step towards levelling the playing field and making the 11 plus exam a fair contest ...Being in the 11 plus arena it's sometimes easy to forget that there are many parents out there who are actually not aware that other students are practising so intensely for the 11 plus exams. Even if money is no object, finding the good practice materials from the plethora available is becoming more and more challenging ...Believe me, the current system is not a test of intelligence or suitability to attend a Grammar School. It is about how quickly a child can perform a specific set of question types. We have seen - how can I say this - less bright children pass the 11 plus exams simply because they have practised and practised the question types likely to appear in the 11 plus exam. Don't fall into the trap of thinking your child will pass easily because 'He is bright' or 'She is top of the class'. It doesn't always work that way!”
(From the Chuckra Website - <http://www.chuckra.co.uk/educational/>)

The previous statement isn't exactly the author's position, but it isn't far from it. Irrespective of what anyone thinks, if we have children with 11+ aspirations, we do need to wake up to the fact that, however gifted our child happens to be or however good the primary school is that they attend, we need to be proactive.

Approach

1. Helping your child to live a harmonious and happy life
2. Taking control of and responsibility for your child's education
3. Aspiring towards excellence and adopting excellent principles
4. Giving your child a multi-faceted learning and life experience
5. Working diligently alongside your child throughout the process
6. Carrying out your duties for your child - specifically educational
7. Using effectively some of the low cost resources that are available
8. Developing your child's character and in the gaining of wisdom
9. Advancing values that help toward a society that is just and fair
10. Learning the lessons needed and you learning from your mistakes
11. Doing what it takes (if your child has the ability and wants to) and
12. Leaving no stone unturned in getting your child through the exam

Warning

This book will tell you a lot of what (in the author's opinion) you need to know (rather than expect to hear) and if you study its contents it will stretch your mind, prick your conscience, challenge your prejudices, raise alarm bells, suggest a change in direction and will certainly take you outside of your comfort zone. Some of what it says may seem subversive and anti-establishment. Although intended to present a clear, direct message, it does not offer simplistic solutions! The book is serious and provocative and crammed with details. The wisdom presented is for any parent with 11+ concerns. While aiming to help parents get their children through the 11+, it is relatively light on tips for answering exam questions as that is not the author's forte and, besides, there are great resources (referred to) that do cover exam content. But it does touch on many complex issues around education. It tries to present facts accurately and accommodate different perspectives. There is a debate to be had and many sides to consider, and some of these may conflict. Undoubtedly, the main thrust of the book reflects the opinions, pre-occupations and experiences of the author and there will no doubt be some who disagree with some of the emphases given and views expressed and hold other valid view points. Lastly, while much of the content of this book may seem heavy going, there are lighter parts in it 🧠 ... so while readers 📖 need to put their thinking caps 🧢 on, it is hoped too they can see the funny side 😊 as well and will get the balance ⚖️ right.

Preface to the First Edition

This book is “*a parent’s guide to the 11-plus*” and it is about “*how your child can achieve success in the exam by preparing sensibly; with you engaging with the system and overcoming the obstacles, working with your child and helping your child to maintain a good life balance; yet upholding ideals of education and social justice and not having to spend lots of money!*” It is a strange and divisive quirk of the British education system that each year a significant number of 10 and 11 year olds sit the 11+ exam, attempting to secure, against stiff competition, a place at a grammar school. This book may not prevent the grief sometimes experienced, nor lessen the hard work needed, by those parents and children intent on achieving exam success, but it will empower them to make sensible and informed decisions. This is a “warts and all” guide with a radical edge. The path a parent and child need to tread may have many twists and turns and set backs, as well as rewards, on the way, and while the journey might seem hard going and perplexing at times, when the path suddenly forks off in different directions, the destination is worth getting to. I have tried to measure my comments, realising it is important to say what needs to be said yet refrain from being too critical and avoid creating unnecessary barriers. I have tried to write circumspectly yet, inevitably, my views and values have influenced what I have written. I have tried to distinguish indisputable fact from personal opinion and respect those readers who hold differing, yet just as valid, beliefs. Notwithstanding, it is likely that we share many common concerns, the main one being that we want our children to do well educationally and recognise the need to be fully “engaged” in order to make it so.

Preface to the Second and Third Editions

One of the nice things for an author who has further bites of the cherry is it gives an opportunity to correct mistakes and add further pearls of wisdom or incorporate new flashes of inspiration, which I have done, and as a result the book has grown in these subsequent editions. I am grateful for the encouragement of well wishers and for constructive feedback, which I have sought to address. In places I have tried to moderate my tone, sharpen up my points and beef up the content where appropriate. I suspect even this is not the end of it as there will always be more aspects and angles to explore, but sometimes one has to say “enough is enough” and “publish and be damned”. As I write, we have just had a new government with different ideas about education to the previous one. How sweeping will be the changes to the education system, it is hard to predict but, in releasing the latest edition, I have increasingly been exercised by the notion that the 11+ is a small part of what needs considering when we support our children with their education.

Acknowledgements

Although what I am about to write are my own opinions, thoughts and findings, not just from theory but personal experience as well, I am also indebted to the many people who have contributed (often unwittingly) to the production of this book: Jacqui, a parent who was in a similar predicament to us, but had the fortitude and acumen to prepare her own children to do well in the exam and both wised us up and inspired us to do likewise with our son; Olga and Fatima, two ladies who at different times provided helpful teaching input concerning our son; Simon, who is responsible for the Chuckra website, for showing us parents how we can prepare our children for the 11+ and making such great resources freely available and marketing this book - also to those people who posted encouragingly in the forums of this website (in fact, the exchanges I had in those forums helped inspire and contributed toward the producing of this book); Michael, Lesley and Sally for their written contributions; Sandra, who proof read the text, extensively using her legendary “red pen” and others after her who have come up with the odd constructive comment; Accent Printing for printing this book with their customary cheerfulness and efficiency; the teachers at St. Mary’s C of E Primary School, who helped instil in our son many of the basics he needed to know for the 11+ and to maintain his innocence; those people (most I do not know) involved in administering the “system” for my area (Southend, Essex) and who did their best to help; professionals who gave feedback; friends and colleagues who supplied us with past papers and other help, along with their advice, insights and good wishes; Jolly, my wife, for her determination and pushing me to act in time in order to make a difference; and, most important of all, the usually willing and without even realising it guinea pig for trying out many of these ideas, our son, Matthew.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to those hardy parents (and in my experience it is usually the mother who takes the lead), especially if at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, but even to those who are better off and can afford to pay tutors, for these are the true, unsung heroes because they are dedicated, usually without ostentation and despite a lack of recognition, the loneliness of their task and how hard they have to work, to provide their children an excellent education; who may do a significant part of the teaching themselves, and who will readily scrimp and sacrifice to make it happen, including many of the readers of this book. In doing so, I must not forget the people who this book is meant to benefit - the children of readers who, sometime in the near future, expect to be taking the 11+ exam. I wish them well, in the exam but, more importantly, throughout their journey in life.

Terms and Acronyms

11-plus (or 11+): the popular name given to the examination, the passing of which determines whether a child is able to enter a selective school.

Academic: Relating to studies that are liberal or classical rather than technical or vocational and to scholarly performance; based on formal education.

BME: Black and Minority Ethnic - a term applied to those whose origin is not White, indigenous, British or anyone not classed as “White British”.

BODMAS: refers to the order in which arithmetical operations need to be performed: Brackets, Of, Division, Multiplication, Addition, Subtraction.

Catchment area: a defined geographical area served by a particular school.

Chuckra: name of a web based resource, frequently referred to in the text.

CSSE: Consortium of Selective Schools in Essex (administers the 11+ in Essex)

Education: learning of knowledge, information and skills throughout life.

KS2: Key Stage 2 - the stage in the national education curriculum children in junior schools are meant to be working towards (also KS1, KS3, KS4, KS5).

LEA: Local Education Authority

Level 4: the SATs level of attainment a child is expected / hoped to reach at the end of primary school (Level 5 exceeds this; Level 3 is below).

Non-Verbal Reasoning (NVR): refers to tests based on recognising patterns and relationships between abstract shapes and geometrical figures.

O-Levels: the exam once taken in Year 11, since replaced by GCSE’s.

Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education

SATs: Standard Assessment Tests

Social Justice: refers to the concept of a society in which justice is achieved in every aspect of society, rather than merely the administration of law.

Special Measures: status applied by Ofsted to schools that fail to provide an acceptable level of education and lack the leadership to make improvements.

UK: United Kingdom

Verbal Reasoning (VR): refers to tests of “intelligence” to provide an assessment of an individual's ability to think, reason, solve problems and apply knowledge in different ways - usually comprising word, number or code based problems.

Year 6: (once the final year of Junior School) - Year 1, 2, 3 etc. refers to the academic year in which the child has his or her 6th, 7th, 8th birthday etc.

Chapter 1: Making the Journey

There is a phrase that is used a lot these days, which goes something along the lines: “*it does exactly what it says on the tin*”. I would like to think the same could be said for this book and that it will help the reader to do exactly what it says on the cover. I would imagine you, dear reader, to be a parent of (or someone closely involved with) a child who, you anticipate, will sometime in the near future be sitting the 11+. You have decided that this is an exam you want your child to take and hopefully pass. Regardless of whether or not you approve of the 11+ and the grammar school system, you will be apprehensive about what might lie ahead, and you have decided you will do whatever it takes for your child to have the best possible education.

You want your child to succeed because better educational opportunities and career prospects are likely to open up if a grammar school place is secured and this might be harder to come by if your child were not to take the examination and were not to pass. You may feel your child will cope better with a grammar school culture and you are prepared for the extra demands placed on him or her. You may have limited means, although you would spend your last penny if it helps your child. It is likely you are not qualified to teach and it may be you only have modest educational attainments, but you value education and long to see high standards and good manners upheld and feel these would best be achieved in a school with excellent teaching and strong discipline. Without (I hope) wanting to be panicked or dismissive of the alternatives, you feel that grammar schools are more likely to fit this bill.

To achieve these goals, you feel you need to take control of your child’s education (because if you don’t, who else will and, if someone else were to take on this responsibility, they may not do it right), including doing much of the 11+ specific and the “filling in the gaps” educating yourself. If this is true, or even only some of it, then this book is for you. While aimed at those who teach their children themselves, you may still decide to employ tutors to prepare your child to take the 11+ and may be in the position, financially, to do so, but there are a number of things, set out below, you ought to be aware of. Non-parents with an interest in the 11+ may be helped by reading this book, given the relevance of the material. The best lessons in life are usually learned through painful personal experience but we can also learn from those who have something worth saying, who have the experience to back it up.

I trust you will weigh up what I have written and adapt those parts that apply to your child's particular needs and to your own circumstances, given these are unique. I also recognise that your own set of beliefs and approach may be different to mine, so you will need to make allowances. I cannot promise the advice given in this book on preparing for the 11+ will guarantee success for everyone who follows it. There are too many variables for that to happen, not least the ability and attitude of the child, including how he or she performs on the day of the exam. But you will be helping your child to mount an effective challenge for a place at a grammar school. Regardless of the outcome of the 11+ exam, you will have helped your child to deal confidently and competently with the competitive world that is out there and "to go for it".

Less than a year before my own son took his 11+ exam, I knew little about the 11+. I wrote most of this book while waiting, like many an anxious parent, to find out how he did in the exam. The outcome was important as it determined whether or not he went to a grammar school and our approach to his education over the next five years. While what I have written will be helpful to the parents of any child, in any area, who is taking the 11+, it is largely based on my experience with my child, in my area. While I did my best to prepare him well and remove most luck elements, and he is capable and deserved to pass because of his hard work, I dared not presume on the outcome. A few days before the exam, I stood with my son outside our local grammar school, observing the children coming out. I told him that while he needed to be humble, he should not feel intimidated or inferior, but that he did need to be ruthless and resolute when it came to tackling the exam.

To what extent this observation is true I cannot say, and is something this book will touch on but not explore to any great depth: there are children who should pass the 11+ and do pass; children who shouldn't pass and don't pass; children who shouldn't pass and do pass and a not insignificant number of children, on the wrong side of the 11+ pass-fail borderline, who would have benefited from attending a grammar school, but can't because of a dearth of places. There is not much you or I, or anyone else, can do about it, other than give our children every possible opportunity to achieve their full potential.

My own involvement with the 11+ began many years ago when I was a child living on a new council estate. As I recall, little fuss was made about the 11+ and I was unaware when I went to school that day I would be sitting the exam. I failed and went to a secondary modern school, although I did transfer

to a grammar school for Sixth Form studies. Most of my friends on that working class estate failed too, but two of them passed and excelled in their grammar school (although, sadly, not in later life). When my son announced he did not wish to go to the local comprehensive, mainly because he felt he might be picked on by some of the local children who went to that school, I decided I needed to find out what was needed in order for him to go to the local grammar school. Up to then, we let his primary school take the lead in educating, believing it had our son's best interests at heart and would take the necessary measures, even though we had strong views as to what education ought to be about. We did co-operate with the school though, by encouraging him to do well in his lessons, read his books, learn his spelling words, submit his homework on time, and understand the world and his cultural inheritance, including religious education and the Bible, which we felt was important.

The 11+ was not something we thought much about, and even less discussed, thinking the school would talk to us about this at the appropriate time (which never happened), but then our son made his announcement. Much later, we were told about the 11+ arrangements, but not by the school. It seemed to us that by then it would have been too late to adequately prepare, although fortunately we had made our own arrangements to prepare for the 11+ a few months prior to that. Our local comprehensive was deemed to be one of the better schools in the town although, as had happened with the next two nearest comprehensives, it too was to fail its Ofsted inspection. We tried to ignore the Chinese whispers going around the playground, when picking up our son from school or chatting to parents, about the different schools. Some made it quite clear what schools were favoured and what to avoid. This added to our wake up call. Much of what ensued, intimated in the remaining chapters, was to prepare our son in the hope he would go to the secondary school of our choice, but in any case to have a sound educational foundation.

As we weighed our options, it became apparent that either of our town's two grammar schools that serves boys would be obvious choices for our son's secondary education (providing he was accepted), because only these had the "wow" factor. They stood out from the others in terms of educational excellence and in realising our aspirations, a view confirmed by recent Ofsted reports. We felt he would be better off at a grammar school than elsewhere. Should he not obtain a place, the one faith (Catholic) school and our catchment comprehensive (we saw positives with both - more than we had

first thought) were our next two choices. Both schools, incidentally, operated a “grammar stream”. We didn’t feel being more identified with the “lower classes” of society should preclude our son from setting his sights high. We hoped he would and we wanted to help him achieve his goals. We realised we could not cocoon him or protect him from every undesirable element, existing not just in the comprehensives but in grammar schools too. We knew we could not live his life for him, even though at times we wished we could, and realised soon he would be making all his own decisions. Knowing him to be a bright boy, especially in maths (although he did struggle presenting his work), we felt the structure offered by grammar schools, and having a greater opportunity for educational excellence and diversity, would ideally suit him.

My own attitude to grammar schools was rather ambivalent and, to an extent, still is. While I liked the idea of centres of academic excellence and high all-round standards, I felt any system that meant a minority of children going to good schools, and consigned the majority to schools maybe not so good, had to be flawed. Among other things, it was socially divisive, favouring “better off” families (in terms of having more money, being more articulate and educationally aware, having access to better primary (or private) schools and paid tutors, etc.). Let’s make no bones about it; there are a lot of “clued up” parents out there who know how to work the system and secure an advantage over the rest (who often get left behind) and, whether we like it or not, it makes preparing for the exam so much more urgent if passing is the goal.

When we began looking at the possibility of our son going to the grammar school, I became aware of fear and snob attitudes among certain parents: “fear” because of what might happen if one’s child did not pass and “snob” in the sense of being better than those whose children did not attend grammar (or private) schools or looking down at those schools which serve the masses. I deliberately resolved to reject such sentiments and remain circumspect in my approach, while still committing my family to trying to get our son into grammar school, yet remaining determined to help the underdog, the disempowered living in our society, the very people who often miss out.

We were aware there could be no guarantee of our son gaining a grammar school place, given how oversubscribed applications were. With respect to our nearest grammar school, it is reckoned that only one in five applicants succeed in obtaining a place and, while it is possible to appeal, this is a last

resort and only a few appeals are successful. At the same time we realised we could maximise his chances by thorough preparation, including giving him a comprehensive grounding in basic maths and English and imparting the knowledge and techniques to be able to tackle all the exam questions. But we did not want him to just focus on exams and thus miss the rich diversity that comes from having a balanced education, involving social, aesthetic, physical, practical, cultural and spiritual elements, as well as academic ones.

We wanted him to become an educated man in the widest sense, striving for excellence, who serves both God and man, living a happy and balanced life, with good character and who is kind. We wanted him to “*walk with kings*” yet not “*lose the common touch*” and to encourage his natural curiosity so he would seek out the secrets of the universe. It was our desire that in growing up he would search for and know the truth and live his life accordingly, and that he would gain wisdom which, we believe, starts from a reverence of God, realising that many an “educated” person does not possess this gift. If I had a role model and precedent in mind, it was Daniel, the ancient Hebrew prophet. The Babylonian king, who took the Jews into exile, astutely realised some of the Hebrew boys, including Daniel, were bright and decided that they were well suited for positions in his government. He ensured they were well looked after, receiving the best education possible and learning all the “wisdom” of the day. Not only did Daniel excel in his class and later become a prominent and useful public servant but he was “*God’s servant first*” which, incidentally, is the motto of the faith school we visited.

Our approach to our son’s 11+ preparations reflected those concerns and very soon we discovered what our main mission (domestic) was going to be for the next six months. My wife’s doggedness that we do this, and my son’s keenness to go to the same grammar school I attended, sealed it. We were not going to be deterred. A veteran I may be, but “Superdad” I most certainly am not! I see myself more like Homer Simpson and my son as Bart, or perhaps, nearer to home, Roger the Dodger, a character in the Beano comic. Pass or fail, I don’t regret our decision to plan and implement a campaign, culminating in our son taking his 11+ with well placed confidence. Although the experience was, at times, painful and mistakes were made, overall it was positive, even though there were times when it seemed to have taken over our lives and certain other things had to be put on hold during that period. The important points about how we went about fulfilling the mission, of doing

what is written on the cover of this book, with ourselves thoroughly preparing our son for the 11+, without spending lots of money on tutors and other resources, is what the following chapters are all about (followed by a number of appendices dealing with specific points raised in this book):

Chapter 2: Exploding the Myths: there is a considerable amount of ignorance and misinformation and lack of shared information in that tiny part of the world in which the 11+ shebang sits. In this chapter, I try to expose the myths (and deal with the ignorance) and provide you with the plain facts.

Chapter 3: Preparing the Child: in this chapter, I try to respond to the challenge of what I have found in my own 11+ experience that I would want to pass on as being helpful to future generations of parents, who will be in the same boat as us when we were trying to prepare our child to take the exam.

Chapter 4: Releasing the Resources: there is an amazing amount of helpful resources (and some not so helpful) out there. In this chapter, I try to identify some of the better resources and describe the resources that we found or believe to be useful and how they might be used in preparing your child.

Chapter 5: Choosing the School: Maybe the biggest decision parents have to make on behalf of their child is what school to apply for. Even if you know what school you would like your child to attend, there then is the often vexed question of what alternatives to put down if that choice is not granted.

Chapter 6: Answering the Questions: Adopting a more pithy style, I try to answer some of the main questions arising while researching this book.

Chapter 7: Revisiting the Tin: Having tried to cover the ground suggested in the title, I recap and briefly summarise the points that have been made.

As a social entrepreneur, I can see a niche for a resource such as this. As a community worker, I relish the prospect of addressing issues that relate to social justice as well as coming up with some practical solutions. As a lover of learning, for reasons other than the utilitarian ones beloved of government, I delight in opening up the debate of what our children's education should be about. As a Christian activist, I am motivated to apply my faith in this particular area. As a parent, I am pleased to share my own experience with my own child. Whether writing this book turns out to be profitable remains to be seen, but that wasn't the point. To be able to put finger to keyboard on a

subject I feel passionate about, which had recently challenged me regarding what a good parent ought to be doing for his or her child, I found therapeutic; if people find it helpful, then that would be satisfying in itself, and if it contributes towards building a better, more just society, then even more so.

When we look at the 11+, it is important to maintain a right balance and not allow ourselves to be obsessed as some parents are. While we mustn't be over-protective, we must engender a wholesome home life. Our concerns ought to be about our children living fulfilled, well adjusted, good and happy lives, with an emphasis on our doing rather than our fretting. I wonder what outsiders might suppose when they perceive parents panicking over what needs to be done regarding their children's schooling, of which the 11+ experience forms a significant part, in particular what might happen if their children were to fail the 11+ and how to safeguard against it etc. They might think it all rather silly, even though we know those concerns are all too real and do need addressing. I would like this book to achieve a balance so that on one hand it practically addresses what needs to happen to help ensure your child ends up at the "right" school and, if not, he or she is prepared and, on the other, your child (and you, their parent) do get a life and become well rounded and balanced human beings - honest, compassionate and wise.

Parents have an important part to play, pivotal in fact, in their children's education and upbringing. But there comes a point where we must recognise we cannot live our lives, including our unfulfilled hopes, through our children, but we can do things that will help them to do well in life. I would like to think that when I am old and past it, my son will not have to bear my burdens and, even less, suffer because of my foibles, but he will be able to help relieve the burdens of others and live life to the full because he has the character and the equipment to do so and that I will have played my part, without pretension. While I do endeavour to teach and pass on right values (despite not always living up to them) to my son - and however good a school is, it is the parents who, in my view, should be the main ones passing on "good" values to their children - yet I know in the end he will adopt his own.

The 11+ preparation period is a relatively short one, but consideration needs to be given to the time before and the time after and to a wide variety and the large number of other activities in-between that affect our children's lives. In truth, when a child sits the 11+, he or she is still near to the beginning of the journey of life, with issues around the 11+ forming but a small part. This

book will try to touch on some these “rest of life” issues, and it is only by doing so that preparing for the 11+ can be seen as a worthwhile activity.

Regarding the actual content and format of the 11+ exam, this will vary, often quite significantly, according to school, and it would be an enormous undertaking to fully address this, and I have deliberately chosen not to do so in this book, particularly since there are resources, which this book refers to, that do this well. Do be aware that each school has its own exam and entrance criteria, although in some areas, such as my own, the selective schools have a common entrance test. Parents are advised to check out what happens in their own area. The test papers can include any from verbal reasoning, non-verbal reasoning, maths and English. Each paper lasts between half an hour and one hour and usually follows one after the other, with a short break in-between.

Before turning to what is needed in order to prepare for the 11+, I would like to wish all those who take the time read this book, in search of support and encouragement with the 11+ process, well. I don't want to overdo it by saying “good luck” as luck shouldn't play a part. It does of course, for there are many examples of children who ought to go to grammar school but don't make it. Sometimes they have not prepared sufficiently, not having adequate support in the home or primary school, and even if they have worked hard and are able, such outcomes are not uncommon. It is this and a frequent lack of confidence in the alternatives that rankles. This book shows how to make your own luck and maximise your child's chances of success by doing what I suggest, but it also tries to provide hope for those who don't pass the exam.

While celebrating success is good, so is being sensitive. One should avoid triumphalism, realising the disappointment of some. Competition is often unavoidable and it is not always a bad thing. Moreover, it is part of the real world in which we live. This book is not about removing competition although it does argue for fairness and an education system that serves everyone well, which is not presently the case. There is no shame in failing the 11+, especially if your child has tried hard. You need to make that point and encourage your child, especially if he or she fails in the exam, realising there is so much more, to do and in life, and there will be other things to celebrate. I hope what I have included in this guide, as a synopsis of my own and others' experiences as parents, will help you to chart your own journey through rough seas to calmer waters and then safely onto your destination.

Chapter 2: Exploding the Myths

MYTH 1: The 11+ is meant for the children from “better off” families

While it is true that those children who succeed in the exam are often from those middle class families who value education and who support their children, pushing them to succeed and fighting their corner when the need arises, there are plenty of examples of children from more humble backgrounds passing the exam and then doing well at the grammar school and later on in life. My argument is if going to a grammar school is right for your child and he or she is likely to derive benefit as a consequence of going, then you need to work with your child and aim to ensure that it happens.

MYTH 2: To pass the 11+, you need to pay tutors to teach your child

There are families who employ tutors to prepare their children for the exam. Sometimes this begins a long time in advance and can be costly; such is the eagerness for success as well as fear of what the alternatives might be if the children don't go to grammar school. Here we see an unlevel playing field, especially if those children also go to good primary schools. But that should not deter you, for you can successfully teach your child, even if you are not qualified to teach, and at a minimal cost to yourself, other than your own time investment. I have been touched by parents who are not well off financially or possess notable teaching skills, yet have decided to do this. Yet I am sad that there are “bright” children, often from “socially excluded” families, who don't get the chance because their parents aren't “switched on”, don't know how to engage with the system or are too apathetic to make the effort. I would like to think this book will help redress this imbalance in the system.

MYTH 3: You do not need to prepare for the 11+ in order to pass it

For a minority of “bright” children that is true, especially if they are well taught in their primary schools and have parental support, for example in the doing of homework, reading activities and other encouragements. Pundits might suggest there is no need to prepare for the 11+, as the idea behind the exam is to test ability and knowledge, not how well a child has been coached in the art of passing this particular exam. While the ideal behind this thinking might be commended, the reality can't, for even when the examining boards try to produce tests that children cannot prepare for; the truth is that children who are groomed to pass the 11+ will improve their score as a result, leaving those who don't prepare as well at a disadvantage. Even for an educational

purist like myself, I can't stand by and ignore the opportunity to increase my child's chances of 11+ success, given the prize! There are things that can be done away from the school to help a child to pass the 11+ and, while some will not see it this way, it should not just be a matter of coaching for the 11+ but teaching to facilitate a wide range of learning, both in the lead up to the exam and in the aftermath, being built upon a strong maths and English base. The harsh reality is that many more people apply for a place at a grammar school than secure one and children need to prepare at a tender young age to have a good chance of success and, while preparing well for the 11+ is no guarantee for exam success, it will significantly increase the likelihood.

MYTH 4: A child failing the 11+ is consigned to a second class education

The reason why many parents wish their children to pass the 11+ is they believe their children will do better at grammar school than at an alternative. They feel by going to a non-selective school their child may not be stretched academically as the school has to cater for many more less motivated and less able children. Some parents, in a position to do so, spend a lot of money on 11+ tutors for that reason. There are many parents who are so concerned about these things that they will opt for private education if they regard the school (primary or secondary) offered by the State as not having high enough standards of education or discipline. While dissatisfaction with many schools in the State sector is widespread, how justified this view is, is another matter, and there is the complex quandary of deciding what is good and what isn't and, besides which, every child is different and may be suited to different schools. "Better" could be related to educational excellence, good manners and firm discipline. For many parents these are the things that really matter.

This "myth" cannot be discounted altogether because, regrettably, some schools are better than others. The gap between "good" schools (often grammar) and "bad" schools (often comprehensive) remains unacceptably wide. When we consider social justice, there are glaring cases of social injustice when the people who do worst out of this divide are the children of socially disadvantaged parents. Often not realised is the effect unchecked bad behaviour has on teachers. To teach excellent lessons to able children in a conducive environment can be rewarding, even if professionally demanding. The same might be said where less able children are involved. But to teach children in an environment subject to disruption or where apathy reigns, often instigated by those who do not wish to learn, who might get away with bad

behaviour, can be stressful and demoralising. No doubt this contributes to the widening gaps among schools. Sadly, often these issues remain unresolved.

There may be a downside to grammar schools, not always realised by those who see these as addressing their child's educational needs. Because of high academic expectations and hard work ethos, grammar schools are not for all, in particular those not academically inclined or lazy. Many children are not cut out for the academic rigours of grammar schools. Children may feel constrained having to conform to the "system" in order to fit in. There is evidence that the "bottom" children in grammar schools do worse than the "top" children in comprehensives. They may bear emotional scars as a result. Bad behaviour, including bullying, still goes on. There will be a narrower social mix (children having less exposure to rougher elements of society, lacking that understanding). Some important practical and social skills may not be taught (or valued) as well in grammar schools as elsewhere. Some grammar schools are poorly led. The "brighter" child may stand out more at a non-grammar school and be given extra attention. Some important aspects of education, e.g. vocational, aesthetic and spiritual might be better dealt with in non-grammar schools. If available, a faith school might provide a helpful spiritual dimension that grammars might not. There are some schools with a leaning toward business enterprise, creative arts or community involvement and encourage more of a social conscience. Importantly though, children, with good attitudes and good support at home, can and do thrive in non-selective schools and often these schools go out of their way to help those children, who want to do succeed, to achieve their educational goals. I believe there are as many good teachers in non-grammar schools as grammar.

I won't discount home schooling and empathise with parents who go down this route because they feel their educational aspirations for their child will not be satisfied in the schools available. Neither do I rule out private schools for those who can afford it. There is a well trodden path for children being privately educated if they cannot get into a grammar school. Yet, for most, those aren't options, so it is important to look positively at what is available, even when faced with the daunting prospect that the alternative is a failing comprehensive school. If your child does fail the 11+, while disappointing, it should not lead to despair, especially if you can compensate for what the school does not offer and build on what the school does offer. Helping your child find coping strategies and adaptation skills can contribute toward their

character development. You should only be aiming for your child to go to the grammar school if he or she has the ability and the desire to go there, not because you are fearful or disdainful of the alternatives. If your support, motives and plans for your child are not right, you will be disappointed.

MYTH 5: You can rely on primary schools to give you what you need

Sadly, this is often not the case; would that it was! Some primary schools are better than others, both in the overall education they provide and in the help they give preparing the children taking the 11+. In our case, while our child's primary school did provide a good educational experience, a happy learning environment, and it did well to maintain innocence, in our opinion, it did not do enough in Year 5 to help with our child's particular 11+ needs. Things got a little better in Year 6 (but by then it seemed rather too late), and the school did run a class before school started that enabled pupils to practise verbal reasoning questions and it also carried out a Mock assessment (although I suspect the motivation was to safeguard the school's position). While there were important gaps in what was taught, we were satisfied overall that it did teach the core curriculum well and this did support his 11+ preparation well but we were unimpressed with its SATs obsession toward the end.

However, we did become aware that our plans for our son, which revolved around success in the 11+ exam, were not entirely compatible with the school's program, and this did give rise to tensions. This was highlighted when maths homework was set which (it seemed to us) was not what our son needed at that time and, because of this, we told the school he would not be doing it. We were concerned our "maths savvy" son was ignorant of certain aspects of the 11+ maths requirement, and this with the exam then only a few weeks away! We felt we urgently needed to work to remedy that deficiency. While I would rather there had been an agreement with the school as to our son's educational priorities, such that school and home could complement one another, it did not happen. If I could have made a suggestion, it would have been for the school to lay on event soon after the previous 11+, which would involve the school, Year 5 parents and parents who have been through the "ordeal" themselves, where all these issues could have been aired, a consensus worked towards and joint individual action plans agreed.

I am frustrated that parents of able children, not tuned into 11+ arrangements and oblivious of the parents out there gaining an advantage by preparing their children, are let down by the professionals they trust, who bury their heads in

the sand by ignoring the fact that securing a place at a good secondary school is for a time their number one priority. It has been an eye opener to discover how schools that invest a great deal of time and resources preparing children for the 11+, including making it part of the teaching syllabus and arranging extra classes, differ markedly in approach from those other schools who do next to nothing. As a consequence, I tend nowadays not to trust anyone when it comes to something as important as my child's education. It is parents who must take the lion's share of the responsibility, but also gladly accepting the educational assistance that schools can offer, working with them yet jealously safeguarding their children's interest while furthering their education.

MYTH 6: It is almost impossible to discover what is involved

One of the pleasant surprises was our finding that all the information concerning the 11+ process is out there and other than making the exam coach-proof, i.e. a true test of ability and understanding, and more accessible through the state education system, everything possible is done to create a level playing field. Regarding the 11+ exam paper, the syllabus and format were clearly defined and the questions although challenging appeared to be a fair test of a child's understanding, although I didn't leave anything to chance and interpreted this more widely than needed. I found most of what is needed about choosing my child's secondary school and how the 11+ operates in my area quite easily. While able children of unsupportive parents may miss out, we felt, other than our not having all the support we might have hoped for from the schools, we had everything that is required to help our son.

It was a refreshing experience to find everybody involved in the secondary transition and 11+ organisation acting in a professional and sympathetic way. They were helpful in sharing information and responding to questions. I thought the school open days and the arrangements on exam day were superb. I speak here for my own area, although it does have a lot in common with most other areas, for readers should bear in mind that the 11+ process, including the elements tested in the examination might vary widely from area to area. You therefore are advised to discover the precise requirements of the secondary selection process as it applies in your own area and not just rely on what has happened in previous years. You do need to allow for the moving the goalposts, as happened in 2008 in Kent, when it was decided in May to bring forward from the following January to September the 11+ exam date, thus significantly shortening the time children have to prepare.

For my own area, I found that the following system did operate reasonably well:

Early September: all parents are presented with a Local Education Authority (LEA) guide to secondary school transition, followed by a meeting arranged by the LEA - meant to (and did) address much of what we needed to know.

Late September and early October: parents have the opportunity to visit prospective secondary schools on their open days. Besides being informative occasions for discovering what each school was offering, it can be fun too.

Early November: this is when the deadline is set for parents to submit their secondary school choices, apply to take the 11+ (applying online worked well in both cases) and to make additional faith and specialist school applications.

Late November: children sit the 11+ exam at one of the “selective” schools (in our case, there were three consecutive papers with short breaks in-between).

Early March: parents find out what is their child’s 11+ result and allocated school.

Mid May: SATs tests take place (in our case, after a lot of coaching by the school).

Early September: the children start their secondary school - a new chapter begins!

MYTH 7: SATs and the 11+ are effectively the same thing

I used to be under the naive impression that SATs (Standard Assessment Tests) and the 11+ were the same and feel a bit miffed that the school added to that impression. I wish now that somehow the two could be combined, with entry to grammar schools based upon the outcome, providing it truly tests the children’s aptitude. This could be taken toward the end of Year 6 but allowing time to sort out secondary schools. One reason for my misapprehension was I recalled my “Year 6” days as the highlight of my own education experience - the creative juices flowed more than at any other time. The thought these days children have not one but two, in emphasis, quite different examinations to contend with, and do so with “clipped wings”, did not gel with this idyllic image. It is looking increasingly that SATs held at the end of KS2 may soon be a thing of the past!

When we started looking at the 11+ and SATs processes, I came to realise each form of testing was there to satisfy specific and conflicting agendas. The 11+ is essentially trying to ensure the brighter children go to grammar schools - whether or not entirely successful in that goal is another matter. SATs tests, as I understand it, were brought in to help raise standards in school. It helped to reinforce the core curriculum that all schools were meant to follow and it was a way to curb the radical agendas of “left” leaning authorities. Schools often pay attention to SATs results to present themselves in a good light when “league tables” are published. I regard aiming for good SATs scores as something worth doing, if for no other reason than that it provides a good base for the secondary school journey that is to follow, but it has to be of a much lower priority than aiming for 11+ success.

Aiming to meet SATs requirements also helps in the preparation for the 11+. By working toward SATs, a child is likely to cover much of the ground he or she needs for the 11+. Level 4, at the end of Year 6, is the level most pupils are expected to be working towards, although children who go grammar school would normally be expected to be achieving Level 5 (although many “Level 5” pupils still fail their 11+). Many schools, because they choose to concentrate on the majority who won’t be sitting the 11+, mixed ability teaching methods, political correctness and expediency, sake of appearance, lack of vision and laziness, do not look much beyond SATs, if indeed they do that. However, as many have found, getting good SATs results is not enough to ensure success in the 11+ exam. It is concerning that for many primary schools the standard of maths teaching is below what is needed to do well in the 11+ and to an extent the same is true with English too. Moreover, the 11+ takes place before SATs testing. For some it is up to nine months before and, even for the more far-sighted schools, there is likely to be material that is not adequately covered by the time the 11+ is taken. Finally, verbal (and non-verbal) reasoning is not covered by SATs, even though testing the child in this forms a substantial component of the overall 11+ score. The message is clear - we can’t just rely on a teaching program based around SATs. If the object is to pass the 11+, a complementary teaching program is also needed.

MYTH 8: There are no free or inexpensive 11+ resources out there

In fact there are lots of good resources out there, many free, and it is possible to teach your child well even if you are not “qualified” to do so. While it is true that past papers don’t come with much more than the answers, there is a lot of material that thoroughly explains approach and method needed. A Google search on the Internet will show an abundance of free resources you can use, some of it helpful, amidst other material you have to pay for (but can ignore). Sometimes there are self-help groups you can join that can support your child’s preparation, or why not form your own? I have found lots of “hand-me-down” past papers and guides from parents who have previously gone through the 11+ experience, and have gladly used these. We have accumulated many ourselves and will gladly hand these down to the next generation of parents wanting to teach their children the 11+. There are fairly inexpensive materials that can be obtained from stores such as W.H.Smiths and Waterstones. What about checking out the local library? And why not approach your child’s primary school? Finally, you may be able to get hold of past papers from the organisation that administers the 11+ in your area.

MYTH 9: 11+ preparation is mostly about going through past papers

Working through past papers (and going over the results) is an important part of the preparation but it should not be the main part. The emphasis, especially in the early days, should be on helping your child understand the basics and complementing what ought to be taking place on a daily basis in the schools, in order to build a solid foundation to take the exam. Things like possessing a good vocabulary and having an ability to do mental maths cannot be taught by doing past papers alone, for possessing those skills is the basis for 11+ success. My equal top three learning priorities were: firstly, understand words and their meanings and keep adding new words to the word knowledge pool - correct spelling, punctuation and grammar being an added bonus. Secondly, master number manipulation: doing numerical computations in one's head, quickly and accurately - for all manner of numbers and operations; fractions, decimals, significant places, percentages, negative, BODMAS rules etc., based on a complete times table mastery. All this needs to be applied logically to challenging text and complex numerical operations, as well as being able to make the connections. This is where verbal reasoning comes in. I made mastering the various verbal reasoning techniques my third priority.

When it comes to past papers, it is unlikely there will be much out there that follows precisely the same format as the papers which your child takes, especially in English. While you will want him or her to be comfortable with the format he or she will eventually have to deal with and not be confused by other formats, you should want to see that basic understanding. One of the criticisms often levelled at children who are coached to 11+ success is that because real understanding is lacking, he or she will struggle at the grammar school. While I understand that the objective must be first and foremost to secure that grammar school place, this also needs to be balanced with the child having a solid grasp of English and maths basics and tools to learn new things. I realise some will want to see a more pragmatic approach but if we set out firstly to educate, our efforts won't be in vain and the rest will follow.

MYTH 10: Education is all about passing exams, including the 11+

Some see exams as all-important and the gateway to a better life but education is about much more than passing exams. The 11+ may be the most important exam your child has to face and the first experience of the harsh, competitive world that is out there. If I could turn the clock back, I would pay closer attention to ensuring the “three R’s” (reading, writing and arithmetic)

and other learning activities are taught well and social, physical and practical skills, spiritual, moral and aesthetic awareness, cultural and artistic development are taken care of, from an earlier age, as well as discovering our world. There may be no exam for many of these learning outcomes. By paying attention to these things from the outset, that jolt to the system that comes with the prospect of preparing for the 11+ can be softened and all these activities can comfortably be taken in one's stride. We should also pay more attention to children want to learn yet are not adept at tackling exams.

MYTH 11: You need a grammar school education to succeed in life

While a grammar school can offer an excellent education for the (academically) brighter child, it provides no guarantee to getting a "good job" or having a fulfilled life. I know those who have been failures in life who did attend a grammar school and those who have been successes in life who did not, and how do we measure success anyway? People who "succeed" usually focus on what they have to do and make the most of whatever opportunity comes their way. A child with a good attitude and good support (at home and in school) can do well wherever he or she ends up. The issue becomes one of working with the hand (of cards) that life has dealt and making the most of them - that is the true test of character, and it is character what matters most. I would rather my child end up with a menial job and little money, yet have a good character and a fulfilled life, who is devoted to serving others than have a prestigious job and wealth, yet have a bad character and an unfulfilled life.

MYTH 12: Society would be better off if grammar schools are abolished

As I look at the national picture, I see pockets up and down the country where the 11+ system operates, having withstood all sorts of political onslaughts to get rid of grammar schools altogether. Despite all the changes that have gone on in our society, especially in the promotion of equality and diversity, the grammar school system has stood firm, even though some feel it stands out like a sore thumb because it favours the "better off". The system also, incidentally, favours a child born in Autumn over one born in Summer. The comprehensive experiment of the 1960's and 1970's has, in the main, not been the success the ideologists, social engineers and politicians from the left had hoped for. Grammar schools mostly remain beacons of educational excellence and comprehensives often underachieve as they have to deal with, and are distracted by, discipline problems that grammar schools, because of the nature of their clientele, mostly don't have to face (much to their relief).

The popularity of grammar schools can't be denied. Many families, despite living outside of the catchment area, still choose to send their child to a faraway grammar school. I was astounded to discover parents living as far away as Colchester sending their children to our town's (Southend) grammar schools, despite the travel inconvenience. Also, the entry criteria for the out of town children are significantly higher than for children resident in the town. Some would argue that the competition the 11+ engenders helps to raise standards and is a healthy thing, as is parental choice. I have argued repeatedly in this book for a level playing field and an end to the travesty where families who miss out on the 11+ are effectively faced with "Hobson's choice", especially if the school is underperforming.

Yet despite this and the prospect of facing the 11+ coming as a rude awakening to many families, an anomaly in the education system, taking it away from the ideals of purity and justice, I would be reluctant to abolish grammar schools, based upon my observation of a lowering of standards when that does happen. I also worry about the imposition of government and unhelpful trends I see in our national culture. In a strange way, the continuation of grammar schools and the parental choice that allows these to continue may be one way to counter these trends. I frankly doubt that what grammar schools offer children can be consistently replicated elsewhere and I would predict that the overall effect of scrapping them to be detrimental. Providing there is the political will and a societal demand (not yet clearly evident) it can still be possible to reconcile seemingly incompatible notions of fair competition, parental choice, excellent education and social justice.

We are where we are and the system is as it is. We shouldn't feel guilty about not being able to change it, or engaging with it, nor should we fear challenging it! Rather than speculate on what could or should be done, I suggest we be putting our efforts to serve our children's needs, and yet do so without compromising our values. I realise I lay myself open to accusations of hypocrisy here and I feel a bit like those recent New Labour Cabinet ministers who, despite their ideals, chose to send their children to the best schools. While I can entertain a system without grammar schools, I have yet to find one that is better. I might entertain becoming a martyr to many causes but getting rid of grammar schools is not one of them and, importantly, my child should not be made a martyr for my beliefs. You have to decide your approach, based on an appraisal of your situation and what you want for your child, and you need to be resolute. You might consider how best to find that balance between creating a just society, maintaining an excellent education ethos, and availing yourself of opportunities that afford. The author acknowledges that therein lays the tension but hopes this book will help empower you to make sound choices, yet also be a catalyst for changes that will be overall beneficial.

Chapter 3: Preparing the Child

LESSON 1: Know what you want to achieve and why

Be sure 11+ success is what you as a family (including your child) wants and will commit to and that there is a reasonable chance of passing. Think about what you want from the education system and what you want your child to achieve educationally and the values you would like to be instilled into your child. Preparing for the 11+ can be demanding (even though many would make light of those demands) and so does responding to the expectations of grammar schools. Be realistic about your child's abilities (your school's SATs assessment may be a good indicator). There is a tendency to think our child is brighter than is the case but we should only push if he or she is up to it and is prepared to do the work, and not out of fear or snobbish attitudes.

When choosing your child's secondary school, consider what best meets your child's needs: he or she may have a disability, be dyslexic, have a particular practical bent, possess certain gifts and interests that can better be developed elsewhere, have friends he or she wants to be with who would be going to the non grammar school, may not be "academic" and so on. Think carefully if going to the grammar school is right for your child. Don't be afraid though of making him or her aware of the possibilities because a child who wants to go will be motivated to pass his 11+, but do so sensitively and naturally. I recall some parents who took their Year 5 children to visit our local grammar school on its open day and, while not something I would recommend, I could see this was a way to make their child aware of how good grammar schools are, so he or she wants to go there. We applied for a grammar school place as it was right for our son; we were impressed; he wanted to go there; his temperament and talents meant he was suited to a more rigorous, regimented style of schooling and if he worked hard he had a good chance of getting in.

LESSON 2: When to start preparation

While it is a good idea to start early, it is never too late to start. At the start of Year 5 may be the optimum time to begin your 11+ campaign or even earlier providing you hang fire with the 11+ specific content. For those who want to start earlier, try to avoid child burn out and build on basics. Ensure your child has a good all round education and develops his or her interests and abilities, and good character. You should be doing this from an early age. Starting early gives you time to identify and work on weaknesses and for lessons to

sink in, whilst allowing for your child's normal education to continue and the full range of extra-curricular activities and outside interests, rather than having to cram the demands of the 11+ into a reduced time span, when there could be a tendency to panic and miss out educationally. If I had time, I would have taught more formal grammar and advanced vocabulary.

However, much can still be achieved in a shorter period, although the approach then needs to be carefully adapted according to the time available. Whilst I am particularly concentrating upon the 11+ process, I recommend the basic building blocks for learning should be putting in place right from the outset, in the reception class - things like reading, building up vocabulary, spelling lists, sentence construction, arithmetical operations, mental maths, times tables etc. - trying to comprehend the written word and understand maths principles. I should add there is no such thing as a perfect parent and, just because you have made mistakes and not done everything you could or should beforehand, this is not the time to wallow in guilt. Rather, you do what you can now and in the future to help your child, and do it out of love.

LESSON 3: How to study

We found that "little and often, regular and disciplined" is the best way to go and this ought to begin long before starting preparing for the 11+. This was something we found we had to work on as routine and discipline were not things that came naturally to us. When it came to preparing for the 11+, we found it helpful to draw up a time table and do regular sessions each day, at a set time and with clearly set out objectives and planned exercises. That is not to say that spontaneity was not accommodated. It was good to react to things going on at the time. We also discovered the importance of allowing plenty of time for sporting and social activities and just having fun and relaxation. Keeping to a regular routine helps, and so is trying to avoid disruptions. For us, it involved, particularly in the latter stages, an hourly session each day.

We opted for a regular slot, 7.15 - 8.15am, which suited us as a family, and two hours on Saturday morning, and it did include doing school homework and there was time each day outside these periods for private reading. Occasionally, we would do work after school if he fell behind, but tried to keep that time for rest and recreation, with bedtime at 8.30pm (except Saturdays). Understandably, other families will adopt other times, according to their preferences and circumstances. Although, it sounds obvious, it is important to have a quiet and comfortable learning environment, away from

distractions and with the necessary tools to hand, for example sharp pencils, rubber, ruler and paper, and not to forgetting a good dictionary in order drive home new word meanings. Sundays we kept free for that was the time when all the family were together, we could relax and be involved with our church. Again, other families have different routines, but “rest” days are important and so is providing the occasional treat and doing things together as a family.

LESSON 4: Working to achieve your goals

You need to find out how the 11+ operates in your area and what takes place on the day of the exam, in particular the sort of questions that are likely to be asked and the specific arrangements for taking the exam. I found from the plethora of information, accessible in the public domain, most of what I needed to know about the exam. Your child needs a good knowledge base, but this needs to relate to the sort of questions asked, which is why practise beforehand is important and also the need to instil a thorough understanding of the underlying concepts. The use of the word “carefully” in the instructions is important! Possibly more errors are due to carelessness than lack of knowledge. Your child should be aiming to complete the whole of each paper in the time allocated, ideally with time left at the end to go over the answers.

I liken the mentor/tutor’s role to that of the coach of an athlete whose sights is to compete in an Olympic final - start training several months beforehand and build up to ensure he or she can peak and perform at his or her best on the day, yet being protective in keeping one’s charge away from the hype and pressure. While I did worry when my son didn’t do as well as I had hoped in his practice papers and I couldn’t help feeling disappointed when he did underachieve, I took the view that these were further opportunities to learn and I should be looking for (and in fact did see) steady improvement over the longer period, especially in terms of acquiring the essential skills. I was also aware that he needed to be in the right frame of mind in order to perform.

LESSON 5: Have a plan of action and follow it

When planning, imagine a graph starting from when the 11+ preparation period begins. I suggest one (x) axis be the number of weeks to the 11+ date and the other (y) the amount of time spent on preparation. The curve steepens as the due date approaches, then flattens a little and, around three weeks before the exam, gently decreases. I would include the Summer and Autumn Half Term holidays. The early emphasis should be on English and maths basics and covering the verbal reasoning types, reaching a plateau when more

work is being done on exam practice (including doing (two say) full “mock exams”, under exam conditions) and then, nearer the date, the emphasis should be on covering weak areas and exam technique as well as setting aside time for revision and introducing more elements of fun. Some people may find it helpful to draw up a daily timetable and/or progress sheets, which would correlate with the graph. Whilst this is something we did not do, I can see the value of keeping lesson plans and records of marks obtained.

Throughout this period, get your child in the habit of reading; allowing if possible him or her to choose the book. Set aside private reading time each day, although it helps if that is what the child wants to do anyway. While I had in mind great children’s classics, like *Treasure Island*, my son preferred Alex Rider books which, while not quite my “cup of tea”, are well written. He read these with relish and on his own volition. Do keep hammering away at correct spelling and new vocabulary. Look out for creative ways in which this can be improved. Having conversations with my son when I included long and unfamiliar words and finding opportunities to use more difficult or challenging words in a light hearted way also helped. Also, if it is an issue (in our case it wasn't), ensure that sufficient practice of mental arithmetic is undertaken so he or she is comfortable with manipulating numbers, for that will make tackling most maths problems that much easier.

Allow time to do the homework that the school sets for your child, but only if it meets your educational goals, not just to keep the school happy. Should the school act in a bureaucratic manner with regard to your child, be prepared to fight his or her corner. Your child’s preparation is too precious to appease petty minds. You may need to regulate his or her extra-curricular activities for a short time. (We had to say no to our son being register monitor as it clashed with our teaching time). Ideally, you need to complement what the school does and work as partners in your child’s education. In hindsight, we should have been more supportive of the school when parental input was called for and encouraged our son more to become involved in after school clubs and other voluntary activities, as well as trying to understand what it was they were teaching and how he was doing. If you can, try to engage with the school so they know your concerns about the 11+, in the hope you can work together as far as it is practicable. The same can be said for private tutors, although here you have the option to hire and fire. I viewed anything that the school did that helped my son achieve his 11+ goals to be a bonus.

LESSON 6: Learn from others

Talk to other parents (something I probably did not do enough of), especially those who have been through the experience of preparing their children for the exam, to their children if appropriate, and anyone who can contribute. Find out their perspectives and suggestions as to the best way to proceed and learn from their successes and mistakes, but be careful not to be taken in by other peoples' agendas and prejudices and be mindful that their circumstances may not be the ones you are experiencing. Depending on your relationship with other parents, you may or may not be discussing 11+ matters, but it is unlikely you can avoid playground gossip altogether. There is a lot of good practice out there and you can draw upon loads of brilliant ideas but there will be other things that you discern that can safely be ignored. Remember that your child, your style and abilities as a teacher and your circumstances are unique and often there is no one right or wrong way to go about preparing for the 11+. You must do what suits you and, importantly, suits your child, according to the needs and situation in which you find yourself but always be prepared to learn from your mistakes and change things if that is called for.

LESSON 7: Keep a balanced perspective

You may come across many life and death issues but the 11+ is not one of them. It is important to remember that education is about far more than overcoming the 11+ hurdle. You are (or should be) your child's chief advocate, best educator and main mentor and role model and it is those areas you should pay particular attention to. Even so, the 11+ comes as a severe jolt in the lifelong learning experience. It is the one exam you most definitely want your child to pass and is one of the few exams where there is no second chance. The date set to sit the exam is unmoveable. You may therefore wish to work toward this, ahead of other considerations. Higher aspirations, such as truth, beauty, goodness, the whole person, the entire breadth of human experience, can still be worked toward though without jeopardising his or her exam prospects. I found the time spent preparing my son for the 11+ was a great opportunity to reinforce a grasp of the basic building bricks of learning.

Look for the positives from the 11+ experience and relish the opportunity to better understand, get to know, bond with your child (even though that ought to be something you are doing anyway) as well as teach. Although there was a feeling of anti-climax after my son's exam; as a result of preparing him for the 11+, I became more aware of the various learning possibilities, realising

there were many things I would like him to know (and he would also like to know) and that his educational horizons needed to be widened further. Rather than consider my job done, I resolved that I would continue to teach him, after a short break (which I did but not as much as anticipated). While the next milestone was SATs, and I wanted him to do well as it sets a good baseline for future learning, I would rather the enthusiasm, inquisitiveness and creative juices that he and children of his age possess be given full reign.

LESSON 8: Keep going despite the setbacks and don't be discouraged

Don't be deterred if you don't think you are up to it; some of the best support has come from parents of limited means or with modest educational attainment or (so they think) inadequate teaching acumen. Realise there really are no "hidden secrets" behind teaching 11+ material. Use the available resources and ask for help if you are not sure of anything. That doesn't necessarily mean you have to employ a tutor for the awkward bits, although that may be an option. I have found, for every aspect of the 11+ exam, there is "how to teach" help available, or people "who know", often at no extra cost. Discovering how to tackle new challenges with your child is often the best way to learn. There will be times when you are discouraged or feel like giving up, especially when your child fails to grasp something that seems so obvious, makes careless mistakes, or wanes in enthusiasm. While a good teacher should know all about patience, discipline, motivation and technique, there is no reason why you should not be able to acquire these skills. If you are serious about helping your child and prepared to recognise the limitations (his or hers - and your own) and learn yourself, you will, I feel sure, do fine.

LESSON 9: Resources

There are a lot of great resources out there to help your child to prepare for the 11+ and for life generally, including much that is free or inexpensive (this is covered more fully in the next chapter, "Realising the Resources"). Use them wisely as they will make your task that more manageable. Please do consider the safety aspects when placing your child in the care of another adult and pay attention to necessary checks and safeguards in this respect.

LESSON 10: Balanced learning

By all means, get your child to tackle past papers and support him or her in developing a good approach and technique, but also help him or her to understand the basics when it comes to English and maths. Acquiring that

basic understanding should be given higher priority than doing past papers, at least early on in the preparation. But when it comes to past papers, while you will want your child to undertake those that are in a similar format to those expected in the actual exam, tackling papers with a different format could be a good thing if it helps reinforce the basic understanding ideal. It is a good idea, time to time, to vary the tempo and style of the lessons and take time out for fun. I found it helpful to include two or three different activities in each one hour session. One reason for starting preparation early is you can experiment and find the approach that works best for your child, and cover what is needed in a systematic and thorough way.

Tip about doing past papers - don't start your child off doing past papers under exam conditions. Ease your child into this by tackling less demanding material and then the real thing without time constraints, doing sections to start, and after - full mock tests. All the time, review what has been done and see where improvements can be made.

The following is an example of (one hour-weekday, two hour-Saturday) lessons I did with my son about two months before the exam (the format and emphasis will change constantly throughout the preparation period). When calculating the cost of preparing for the exam, by far the biggest is likely to be your time. Although I needed to set aside the time for these activities, I did find during some of the time he was working, I could leave him alone and get on with my own activities.

Monday: Review today's spelling test, to be done later on at the school. Go over the results of the maths 11+ test paper, completed the Saturday before.

Tuesday: View a (Chuckra) video of one of the verbal reasoning "types" and let him do some online examples. Complete a maths exercise from his Key Stage Two Maths workbook, including going over concepts and answers.

Wednesday: Get him to read a chapter in his current reading book (which he is reading every day, usually in the evening) and discuss what is read, including going over new words. Complete an English exercise from his Key Stage Two English workbook, including reviewing concepts and answers.

Thursday: Introduce exercises from a Key Stage Three Algebra (often missed) work book. Complete the School English homework assignment for this week.

Friday: Do an online computer exercise on synonyms and antonyms (another week it is homophones). Do a short verbal reasoning test and go over the answers.

Saturday: Do a full 11+ English Test. Revise vocabulary. Take him to his weekly 11+ class (which was provided free of charge by volunteers at the local mosque).

Sunday: Free.

I found variety with combining seriousness and fun to be the best approach, but never losing sight of our goals. Having a computer, with broadband Internet access, can be a great boon. There is much on the World Wide Web that is useful and having access to on-line encyclopaedias and dictionaries can be helpful. I found it important to provide healthy distractions away from the learning. We also used the Summer holiday period to go over things that had yet to be fully grasped. Although that did include a two weeks break away from all work, we also spent around an hour each day on the other days doing 11+ related work, including going to a summer school, where he had the opportunity to practise and go over past papers. One of my own highlights, and a defining moment of the “campaign”, was taking my son away to the Lake District, and our climbing Cat Bells and Blencathara and canoeing in Derwentwater together, yet being able to fit in sessions where we did 11+ related learning activities. Since the exam followed shortly after the Autumn Half Term holiday, we did work then too, mixing study and play.

LESSON 11: Nail Verbal Reasoning

In the case of verbal reasoning, practising each of the 21 “types”, discussed in the verbal reasoning section of the “Chuckra” website, significantly helps to improve your child's score, and the free material available from that website, including videos that provide guidance for each type and questions, focusing on different types of verbal reasoning questions, is second to none. But do be aware of regional variations in the testing and prepare accordingly. I was pleased to find that the verbal reasoning questions in our actual exam were a subset of these “types”. Those resources should meet all your child’s verbal reasoning needs. Even if the website were not available, there still is a lot of suitable practice material out there, although usually at a small cost. It is ironic that Verbal (together with Non-Verbal) Reasoning or, as it was called in “my day”, Intelligence Tests, is meant to test that very thing and it is considered important because it is meant to be the main way of discovering the supposedly “intelligent” children that a grammar school education is designed to benefit. Whether or not that is what happened or is happening is immaterial for this discussion. Ironically, while innate intelligence is an important factor, practising (the questions) does make perfect (well nearly).

The subject most schools do little work on, verbal reasoning, forms a significant part of the 11+ score (half the marks in my own area). Schools, understandably, pay little attention to this as it is not part of the national

curriculum and there seems no obvious educational benefit. But in order to succeed in the 11+, a child needs to do well. We felt in our son's case, him doing well in verbal reasoning would not only boost his overall score but also help to compensate for his relative weakness in English. Most children do considerably improve their score by practising (as I discovered, in my son's case). One reason is they learn instinctively the smart techniques and spot the examiner's trickery. While having good numeracy and literacy skills help in tackling some verbal reasoning "types", the most significant way to improve is to practise verbal reasoning questions, including formulating an approach to the different types of questions that might be asked and, in the later stages, practice under timed conditions, including doing actual papers. It was a relief to discover that the Chuckra papers were not so markedly different to the one my child would have to take and, if anything, they were a little harder.

LESSON 12: Get a Life

I realise my failings as a father. I should have spent more time taking care of my family, been a better role model and given more importance to family life. These aspects are important as some things are better caught than taught. One sobering observation of my son growing up was how fast the changes occurred from fascination with "Teletubbies" to electronic games and pretty girls and from being spontaneous, carefree and dependent on us as parents to being "cool", image conscious and independent. Enjoy your children and spend time with them. Teach your child right values, including doing good to others. Keep a balanced perspective. Support your child by giving him or her unconditional love, yet be firm and maintain a good discipline. Be normal. Have fun. Enjoy life. Promote physical activity. Encourage that creative spark. Work on weaknesses - in our son's case it was poor presentation and keeping in his comfort zone. Help your child develop wholesome interests outside academic studies. There is an enormous range of options from which to choose. For some children it is obvious where their leanings lie, but for others not so - get them to undertake a full range of educational activities, whether or not exams are involved, as well as other activities with family or friends or individually, not normally regarded as educational. Don't fret when you make mistakes (as you will) but learn from them and then move on.

Reassure and keep reassuring your child, especially if he or she lacks confidence. Deal with anything that might disturb your child. If you can deflect or absorb the stress your child might be facing or, better still, help

your child face up to whatever it is that bothers him or her, then you should do so - although it seems parents often get more stressed than their children. We noticed in the period just prior to the exam that our son's stress levels did increase as, no doubt, he became aware of how important this exam was for his future and of the expectations that were being placed upon him. But my impression is that this is not an unusual occurrence among children. At that time, especially, you must be strong for and supportive of your child.

A child who is happy and well-adjusted is more likely to succeed than one who isn't. (Just as our son's class teacher counselled us) we should avoid constantly giving out hints or reminders to our child about the exam or comparing him or her with other children (he or she will be burdened enough just concentrating on his or her own performance). It is enough to concentrate on your own parent and child "game-plan" and ensure appropriate measures are in place so that your child will be well prepared when it comes to taking the exam. No-one has an automatic right to or can be guaranteed 11+ success. View the preparation period positively, as part of life's rich pattern, and don't lose sight of the wider educational opportunities that will most certainly present themselves, while still focusing on the stringent 11+ demands. One of the positive things about an exam like the 11+ is that the basic English and maths tenets may not be learned otherwise or to the same extent. Regardless of outcome, the 11+ experience, providing the approach is positive, will place children in good stead for the rest of their lifelong learning journey.

About the waiting time (in our case - three months), between taking the exam and knowing the outcome, there will be anxiety over how our children fared. There is little to be gained, immediately after the exam, attempting to prise out details of the experience (we were relieved our son felt he had given it his best shot and seemed ok) and even less to be gained in the period following. It is wise to act normally and get on with life. With all best intentions and expectations, the 11+ experience can be a surreal one - a blip in your child's journey through life but, almost certainly, not the last. For six months the 11+ became, at times, my obsession, although it shouldn't have, and it had a significant impact on our life as a family. This was not helped by our starting out late and not wanting our son to miss out by being a "late developer" and having low teacher expectations, and a certain self-inflicted isolation while we came to terms with the 11+ challenges. I write to offload those things that occupied me (and still do). I know too well how important it is to get a life!

Chapter 4: Releasing the Resources

Internet:

As with most knowledge these days, a considerable amount of information and downloadable material can be obtained from the Internet. While Google searches on “*free+11-plus*” may return many hits and some good material, much will point to material the website owners want to sell. The outstanding exception was: <http://www.chuckra.co.uk/educational/> (the Chuckra website). The verbal reasoning content was a revelation in its comprehensiveness and, while the maths and English sections were not as good, there was still plenty of useful free material in those areas also. I found engaging with their forums helpful as it helped broaden my horizons and made me feel I was not alone. Sometimes good free material can be found in unlikely places. For example, I found the entrance papers for Manchester Grammar School useful (difficult yet fair). I found other useful related websites, e.g. for our LEA and Ofsted, as well as an enormous assortment of relevant knowledge. While outside the scope of this book, there are useful websites that specialise in SATs tests.

Bookshops:

In my town, the two bookshops that deal with 11+ materials are W.H.Smiths and Waterstones. There is a plethora of material, and not too expensive either. I found the workbook “Revise English”, aimed at stronger year 6 children, and the set of four Bond (English) papers, both around £10, helpful. Remembering how my Junior School teacher used to swear by “First Aid in English” as the definitive work on English learning, I was pleasantly surprised to discover “The New First Aid in English” by Angus Maciver, in the bookshops. While too late (for me) for 11+ preparation, I hope to go through this with my son, before he leaves Year 6. On the Maths side I found a great workbook for around £10, called “Challenge Maths” (for more able year six pupils). We also discovered: KS3 Age 11-14, years 7-9, “Practise Algebra”, £3.99, helpful because it addressed a deficiency in the school’s teaching. Worth considering are a set of workbooks: Scholfield & Sims: Mental Arithmetic, £1.95 each, with books at various levels. I have no doubt you will find a lot more good material on the bookshelves if you look. We didn’t buy Verbal Reasoning papers as we found the Chuckra material to be sufficient. Any of the reading material your child may wish to access can be found or ordered in these stores, providing of course you are prepared to pay.

Schools:

Regarding providing help and resources for the 11+, that will vary from school to school, but there is little to lose by asking. Most schools will provide relevant reading material and some may share other resources. In many ways what the schools do while your child is in their care is going to have a big effect on his or her education. We should do our best to support and complement what happens in school and make schools accountable, but also not to over-rely on schools when it comes to preparing for this exam. Speaking with the school about your child could provide useful information.

Examination centres:

Most centres that administer the exam do provide past papers. Ours, CSSE (www.csse.org.uk), did so at a small cost and very useful they proved too. I tended to use these materials when running full scale mock exams.

Libraries:

Besides lending books, including the more modern examples that children may be keener on, I have found library staff to be helpful when it comes to identifying suitable material and resources. However, I found this did not extend to lending out workbooks and past papers which, because the intention is for children to write on these, understandably libraries may not be keen to provide. I discovered that libraries have lots of books on parenting, including those along the lines - how best to teach a child maths or English. The local library is often a good place to begin when trying to find out what is going on in the local area and important contact details. (On the subject of finding information, I found a good complementary source is the Resource Centre of the local association that brings together voluntary organisations).

Parents:

I have not engaged as much as I could or should have with other parents, who have children in a similar position to my own, who no doubt have similar concerns as me. I am convinced though that there is a lot to be gained by parents exchanging resources, sharing ideas and providing mutual support.

Friends:

Given how many will have accumulated 11+ resources which, once the exam is over, it is likely, they won't need, it makes sense to get hold of some of these (ask nicely, unless they offer of course) even, if like my wife, you end up rubbing out the answers of the child before who completed the exercises

beforehand! Friends can be a rich source of information and inspiration, but check out what they say and measure it according to the yardstick of truth.

Tutors:

While this book is about you preparing your child (which likely you can do, even if reticent), some parents employ tutors, especially if they don't have the time to teach or feel a fresh approach is needed or want their child to learn "tricks" for passing the exam or an expert, independent view is needed. Parents might use tutors to complement their own teaching. This is not an area I have looked at extensively, but I have no doubt there are many that offer this service, some good and some not so good. Many advertise and you may be in contact with parents that have used tutors. It is important if you do employ a tutor you can work together with and he or she understands your child's needs. Make sure that the tutor is teaching the correct material for the exam(s) your child is going to take. Don't be afraid to check out the tutor you may hire - after all you're paying and it is your child that matters. Be careful if your child is taking exams in more than one LEA, or more than one school. We worked with our local Kip McGrath centre for a few sessions plus a summer school and that was helpful to get an objective view, identify areas of weakness, fill in gaps and interact with other children. Near the end, we joined a voluntary group operating at the local Mosque for free, which we found helpful. I wonder whether parents might want to get together to share the teaching burden and provide mutual support, not something we did but it could work. One of the sweetest sights I saw, and one that nicely shows such support in action, was on the day of the exam, following the test, when we took our son for a meal by way of a treat. A group of children, who had obviously undergone a similar ordeal as our son, were together with their parents, "chilling out", having fun and relaxing in the same restaurant.

Media:

As with the Internet, this can be a force for harm as well as good. Yet there are things on television that have positive educational value and entertaining material that is wholesome and, if properly regulated, can have a constructive impact. The same might be said for many of the other forms of media: the arts (music, drama, dance, drawing, crafts), cinema, videos, DVDs, books, comics, newspapers, magazines etc. One friend encouraged her son to read from a quality newspaper every day. It might be worth exploring using newspaper brain teasers and quizzes. You might also consider allowing your child limited access to certain "entertainment" as a reward for hard work.

Non-11+ resources:

A balanced approach is needed when preparing your child for the 11+, not merely teaching those things pertaining to the exam but everything else that contributes toward your child's education and welfare, always looking to find ways so he or she can best relate to the environment using all the senses. You need pay attention to developing healthy relationships and having good diet and plenty of sleep, play and exercise. The role of friends and family (especially grand parents) is important in your child's upbringing, for they can bring an important additional dimension and help in sharing some of the burdens. These can complement the learning you are facilitating by helping to provide the right atmosphere in which children thrive.

I recall two determined friends who helped their three bright children to succeed in the 11+. In the daily timetable they followed fairly strictly, regarding what their children did, most of the planned activities were not to do with study as such. These included: football (or netball), piano lessons, choir practice, drama club, Cubs (or Brownies), nature rambles, swimming, family outings, astronomy, playing chess and other board games. The list of things you can do with your child is nigh endless and this is not just something for middle class parents with money.

While some of these extra-curricular activities come at a price, there is a lot that is freely available or comes at a small cost. Appropriate low or non cost resources abound: libraries, museums, art galleries, parks, open spaces, faith groups, clubs, community events etc. There are lots of initiatives these days to help poorer neighbourhoods and disadvantaged families - it is worth checking these out. Doing those things outlined above and using the resources available in the community will have an important impact on your child's educational attainment. And you must regulate activities such as playing electronic games and watching television!

I do not purport to be an educational psychologist and, as I have said already, I do not think I am a particularly good father, but I can't help feeling that the best resource of all is you, the parent. I can't get away from thinking that children who succeed in the 11+ usually do so because of their parent's input and not in spite of it and the type of intelligence that one might expect in a grammar school child may be as much to do with nurture as with nature. It is not just a matter of you helping your child to prepare for the exam but it is also the example you set, the (quality) time you spend, including having stimulating conversations, the upbringing your child has and the love that you show. It means ensuring you help your child to lead a balanced life and participate in wholesome activities while avoiding harmful ones. Empowering your child and doing things together has a cost, specifically your time, but this will almost certainly be paid back with interest in due course.

Chapter 5: Choosing the School

One of the established features of the Primary to Secondary School transition occurring in recent years is that parents are able to choose the school their child goes to from a wide selection - potentially any school in the non private and non independent sector. Theoretically, the options are unlimited although real choice is often severely restricted, for the school that a child often ends up in is usually the one in whose catchment area he or she happens to live and it then is a matter of luck whether that school happens to be good or not. The harsh reality is that “good” schools tend to be over-subscribed and will give preference to children living in its defined catchment area or fulfilling specific criteria and “bad” schools, while having the available places, are understandably schools parents often would rather not send their children.

The 11+ provides an added dimension to school selection as passing will often widen the net regarding entry to the better schools, which are often the selective ones. In most of Essex, the grammar schools and schools with grammar streams are part of a consortium that administers a single exam that is applicable to each of the member schools. The pass mark may vary from school to school, depending on its popularity and it may also vary for the individual child, depending on whether or not he or she lives in the catchment area of a particular grammar school. The arrangement may be different outside Essex, for example a child may have to sit an exam applicable to and set by the particular school he or she is interested in. In any case you need to check out the entry criteria for the school you are interested in and, in my experience, that information is usually readily available.

A further dimension is provided by faith and specialist schools. In our town, there are two secondary faith schools (one boys, one girls) and it gives preference to the children of parents who are practising that particular faith, which happens to be Catholic, and after that to any who are regular church goers. While most schools these days are specialist in one area or another (usually in order to draw in extra funding, although how significant this is I am not sure) some may give preference to children who show particular interest and aptitude in their specialist area. In our area, there is one school that fits this criteria and the speciality happens to be the performing arts. Some of these schools require completing their own application form and may set their own test - in any case, you need to check out what is required.

In our town, as in most other areas it would seem, the application process is administered by the local authority (in our case: Southend Borough Council), and they provide plenty of information and guidance on the application process. Regarding this process, a parent can put down up to five schools on the application form, and this is done in order of preference, and can be any combination of selective, non-selective or specialist school in or outside the town. An additional application is needed if your child is to take the 11+ as well as for certain specialist schools. I found the online process for “form filling” works well. The issue then becomes one of choosing the schools you prefer your child to go to and then ranking these in order of preference. Some areas have rationalised the system such that the application is made after the 11+ results are known. In our town, parents find out their child’s 11+ results and the school that has been allocated all at the same time. Such is the competitive nature of the education system that schools are often keen to be shown in a good light and to attract interest from the parents of prospective students and they will often respond individually to questions from parents.

All the schools (in our experience) put on open days for the benefit of their prospective Year 7 intake. We were able to attend four of these and thought these were all superbly run events as well as being great fun (with food and other “goodies” on offer). It was also great to see children from those schools getting involved and taking pride in what they did. A word of caution though - schools will inevitably want to show you their best side, whereas you will want to see all the sides. To do so you can do things like: reading the school’s prospectus and other publications, studying recent Ofsted reports, speak with parents and children who go to that school, meet with staff from the school. I know one parent who stood outside the schools, sizing up the attitudes of the children coming out. We were impressed talking to the assistant head of our catchment comprehensive, when we explained the concerns we had regarding our son. In the end you have to choose based on what you sense, the evidence and what you think is the school that will best meets the needs of your child.

For most readers, grammar schools will likely be at the top of the secondary school choice list, followed by a selection of the perceived best of the nearby comprehensive or specialist schools. For some readers, who are in a position to do so, it is all or nothing - if their child does fail the 11+, he or she will be educated either privately or at home, despite the possible shortcomings and significant expense of private education and the huge commitment needed for

home schooling, for such is the reticence by some parents in sending their children to schools that may not be up to the mark. Others will opt straightaway for a non-selective school for reasons discussed, even when the child is academically able. Some non grammar schools operate a grammar stream (offered to those children who pass the 11+ or are deemed borderline), indicating such schools take seriously the needs of the more able child. Others have their own special entry criteria, for example in the area the school specialises in. I learnt recently of a popular out of town comprehensive that sets a verbal reasoning test for non catchment children. There are many, including among the more academically able children, who do well and thrive in non-selective schools, obtaining excellent exam results. I have just read a report in our local newspaper about two siblings who attended our local comprehensive school, who scored between them nine “A-grades” in their “A-level” exams, and it is stories like these that give me hope and delight.

A significant number of parents, nevertheless, would rather not take risks with their children’s education because they lack confidence in the non-selective schools, which is why they are keen for their children to pass the 11+. Many share a sense of foreboding because the assurances they seek, concerning education in a non-selective school, might not be forthcoming and if these are given they are received with scepticism. They feel their children might suffer and be unable to fully cope if put into schools where standards of education, discipline and behaviour are low and that have cultures that differ markedly from those in the home. Part of the challenge is matching child and school and what he or she will respond to. In those long ago days when I was a pupil and later a teacher, I saw enough examples of improper behaviour and pupil under-achievement in non-selective schools to raise alarm bells, although to a lesser extent that was also true in selective schools. From what parents, teachers and children tell me, things have not improved and may have got worse. These factors, and political agendas that seek to use schools as vehicles for social engineering (overriding parents wishes), cannot be ignored when it comes to choosing the right school for our children and, while I would like to say in most cases it is nowhere near that bad, and the home can compensate for the failings of the school, I cannot ignore these concerns.

The following were our choices and the reasons behind them, based on the considerations above. We realise that the choice of schools will vary from family to family and each will have their own reasoning process and selection criteria. We did not look much outside the town because there was no school there that particularly struck us as being especially good for our son. The travel distance and low chances of being accepted at those schools were also factors. We kept open our options to home school if we found the school allocated was not up to scratch.

Choice 1: Southend High School for Boys

This was a “no brainer” for us. Not only is this an excellent grammar school, highly rated by almost everyone I speak to, with an excellent ethos, but it was our son’s choice, a school I know and attended as a boy and is conveniently located. It impressed us most when comparing the various schools that we might send our son. I was pleased to see how much more child centred, better resourced and more varied the curriculum is compared with “my day”.

Choice 2: Westcliff High School for Boys

This is another excellent grammar school and, along with Southend, seemed significantly superior education wise, and suited to our son’s needs, compared to other schools in the town. We made this choice because of the remote possibility that our son might pass the 11+ but cannot go to our first choice grammar. It was at the school’s open day that our eyes were opened to the anxieties of parents regarding the 11+ exam, given the questions asked during the presentation, and also to the quality of its “Mr. Chips” like head.

Choice 3: St. Thomas More High School

It was a toss up whether this or Cecil Jones should be our third choice but I was outvoted by my family. We liked the Christian ethos, the (perceived) superior discipline and level of pupil care over that of the other non-selective schools, although we had reservations over the quality of education on offer and it being located a longer distance from where we lived. We also felt the school did not do enough to sell itself. The fact it specialised in Maths and Computing (our son’s strength and interest) was also a factor in its favour.

Choice 4: Cecil Jones College

We were advised to put our catchment school among our choices because if not your child could end up being allocated a school you don’t want, and this happened to be our catchment school. While we have reservations over discipline and bullying we felt that the school was well resourced and had a lot to offer pupils. We liked its community and business enterprise focus.

Choice 5: Futures Community College

This might seem a strange choice given the past history of failure of the school and its vocational emphasis. But in recent years there has been a massive investment in resources, with the school well set to take advantage of changes afoot in the education system. While we felt this was the best (for us) of the rest, concerns over academic standards and discipline remain.

Chapter 6: Answering the Questions

Q1: What should parents consider when preparing for the 11+?

1. *Learning priority:* understand English, especially vocabulary.
2. *Learning priority:* manipulate numbers, accurately, with ease.
3. *Learning priority:* master all the verbal reasoning types.
4. Spend time with and encourage your child - in every area.
5. Your child's character development must come first.
6. Identify the resources you need and use them wisely.
7. Start preparing early but it is never too late to prepare.
8. Find out precisely how the system operates in your area.
9. Don't rely on the schools but work with them if you can.
10. Quality rather than quantity learning times - regular and often.
11. Work toward thoroughly covering the whole exam curriculum.
12. Determine your child's learning goals and go for them together.

Q2: What is it that I need to teach and/or my child needs to learn?

1. Depending on your education goals and your child's receptiveness you can teach whatever you want to - there isn't a rule governing this.
2. You need to check this out against what your 11+ examining authority says is tested and whatever past papers you can get hold of - if nothing else it will help you to gauge the style of question likely to arise.
3. Think smartly! What are the learning activities that will give best return result wise - addressing weaknesses and capitalising on strengths?
4. Regardless of whether you are a purist or pragmatist, try to ensure all parts of the 11+ syllabus is taught and as far as possible understood by your child, using any suitable method and material available.
5. Regarding the 11+ exam, you should be prepared to teach everything that is contained in the syllabus that the exam is based on.
6. Depending whether you are a pragmatist or a purist, practice past papers that are closest to what your examining authority uses or any past papers that reinforce the learning outcomes you want to achieve.
7. I sense the 11+ syllabus is, more often than not, not particularly well defined but there will be up to four papers from the following:
 - English - based on a "higher" SATs KS2 attainment
 - Maths - based on a "higher" SATs KS2 attainment
 - Verbal Reasoning - a subset of the 21 Chuckra VR types

- Non Verbal Reasoning

Q3: What can you say about the way the 11+ operates in my area?

1. See <http://www.elevenplusadvice.co.uk/elevenPlus-Areas.aspx>
(Chuckra has just collated information on what happens in each area)
2. Identify the selective school(s) you are interested in.
3. The 11+ examination is generally administered by:
 - the school itself or the relevant local education authority
 - or a consortium or such like covering selective schools in an area
4. You will need to establish for each school you are interested in:
 - who administers the exam, when is the exam and where is it held?
 - what is the exam format and what does it cover content wise?
 - what are the arrangements for taking the exam?
 - how to apply to the school(s) you are interested in?
 - how to apply to sit the actual exam (if not covered above)?

Q4: How do I go about teaching the 11+ learning content?

1. There is no secret to being a good teacher - most teachers learn on the job, finding out what works, their own past experience, how teachers in the past taught them, their own values and any training they have had.
2. The following are some qualities that characterise good teachers:
 - being thoroughly prepared and organised - understand the subject they are to teach and decide on the best approach to teaching it
 - determination and tenacity, almost to the point of belligerence
 - understanding their student's strengths and weaknesses
 - patience, encouragement, courage, integrity, sense of humour
3. Do be clear what is that they need to teach and then teach it.
4. Concentrate on eliminating careless mistakes in your child's work with them eventually answering all the questions in the time allocated, helping ensure they get right those that they are equipped to answer.
5. With English, help them in understanding word meanings and being able to comprehend a wide range of text. With comprehension exercises, while no sure-fire method, I favour reading the passage first, then going through each question, looking for the answer in the passage.
6. Remember, you as the teacher are going to learn maybe as much as your student - be prepared to learn from your mistakes (and then move on) and change your approach if that gives a better learning outcome.

7. While sceptical of claims of preferred methods to teaching children, I recently stumbled across the “Kumon method” (see <http://www.kumon.com/>). This and other methods may appeal to some, especially the thorough, disciplined and child centred approach.
8. With Maths, I concentrated on handling accurately the full range of numbers and numerical operations. I focused on the weaker areas.
9. With Verbal Reasoning, I concentrated on tackling confidently and competently each Verbal Reasoning type (as defined by Chuckra).
10. I favour a traditional approach to teaching, for example learning word lists, formal grammar, times tables but still fostering creativity.

Q5: Is home schooling a viable option?

1. Many UK families home school these days and do not regret it.
2. It may be the best or only way to achieve all your education goals.
3. It may protect your child from the harmful influences in schools.
4. It may be the way to escape school indiscipline or indoctrination.
5. Home schooled children often think more independently.
6. Much of the time a child spends in school is not spent in learning.
7. It avoids many expenses incurred sending children to school.
8. Individual tuition is often the best way to get children to learn.
9. There is a lot of flexibility as to how, what and when you teach.
10. There is more scope for outings rather than class bound activities.
11. There are great resources and self-help groups that can assist you.
12. You may be cut off from many excellent resources schools offer.
13. You may be cut off from certain social networking schools offer.
14. A huge time commitment is needed to cover the entire curriculum.
15. Legal issues, as maintaining education standards, need addressing.
16. The “system” may penalise those who home school children.

Q6: What other options are there outside of the state system?

1. Private and independent schools may be the only (legal) options.
2. While some schools offer free places to some pupils, costs to send a child to such schools are usually prohibitive for lower income families.
3. I don’t know of any private secondary school, in this country, that shares most of my educational values and is affordable for most parents.
4. Information regarding private and independent schools is freely available in the public domain and is helpful when making a choice.
5. Many boarding schools are outside of the state sector.

6. There are wide variations in education provision and school ethos and many private schools are not as “good” as many grammar schools.
7. Sending children to such schools may give parents the assurance that their educational and developmental needs are well taken care of.

Q7: Is there an ethnic minority (BME) issue linked with the 11+?

1. There has been a sharp rise in the BME population of the UK in recent years - and there are huge cultural variations.
2. Many BME families favour a school culture that is more regimented, respectful and ordered, and they often value education, discipline and manners, more than those from the ethnic majority. They often see grammar schools as being more likely to uphold these values.
3. With some BME groups, e.g. Muslim based, single-sex education is important; it may leave single sex grammar schools as the only option.
4. Some BME groups e.g. Asian do well out of the 11+ system. They may be more proactive in their child’s education than non BME groups.
5. Children from some BME communities (especially the newer ones) often do worse than average in securing grammar school places...
6. and often end up in the less popular comprehensive schools.
7. Given that a good grasp of English is needed for all exam papers, children whose first language is not English will be at a disadvantage.
8. Many BME families favour faith schools for their children but due to the short time of their residency they often miss out.
9. 11+ success is partly down to being able to “play the system” and many ethnic minority families are not particularly adept at this. These and other anomalies often highlight injustices in the current “system”.
10. Grammar schools often do well accommodating different cultures.

Q8: What are the advantages of the 11+ system?

1. If grammar schools are to be retained, there must be an effective method of determining who goes there that is broadly fair. The 11+ is a well tried and tested method for doing this and has many supporters.
2. The 11+ administration system is impartial for all children.
3. The exam content broadly covers what pupils should know and tests their capacity to benefit from what grammar schools have to offer.
4. In principle, it enables equal access to grammar schools for all.
5. It exposes children to the real, competitive world that is out there.
6. It encourages children to get the basics (3 R’s) right.

Q9: What are the disadvantages of the 11+ system?

1. Children perform better in the 11+ if coached to do so - making it unfair on those who are not able to access such coaching. It is possible to coach children to success without them having the ability or desire afterward.
2. Children born in summer do less well than those born in autumn.
3. Families, usually the more socially disadvantaged ones, are less likely to prepare their children, who are thus less likely to do well in the exam.
4. Children who go to under-performing and 11+ adverse primary schools are less likely to do well in the exam than those who don't.
5. There is no guarantee a child will perform to his or her optimum ability on the day of the exam and it can be a stressful experience.
6. The aforementioned disadvantages are accentuated if the alternatives (in case of exam failure) to grammar schools are significantly worse.

Q10: What is your philosophy of education?

1. I am pretty sure if people who read this were to exchange views, lots of differences would be highlighted. I hope though that the message of respect can be carried through - even if you don't agree with all my views!
2. My wife tends to be the pragmatist (her mantra is the curriculum and getting good grades); I am the idealist (with all sorts of romantic notions).
3. Everyone has an educational philosophy, linked to their system of values and worldview; mine happens to be Judaeo-Christian (some may not admit to that worldview yet may share much of my educational philosophy).
4. Learning should be a lifetime activity and is every much (and more) about enjoying a quality of life and seeking an understanding of the world in which we live as being given the skills and knowledge to do a particular job.
5. I would want to instil thirst for knowledge, desire for excellence and zeal to want to unravel the secrets of the universe in everyone who I teach.
6. Education should be about meeting the needs and aspirations of individual children as well as them mastering the various subjects in the curriculum; and giving them a sense of wonder and a desire to investigate.
7. While academic attainment is important, attention should be given to social, practical, cultural, aesthetic, spiritual and physical aspects.
8. While exams are necessary and unavoidable, learning activities should not be confined to just those aspects that happen to be covered by exams.
9. Character content is more important than educational achievement.
10. We can and must empower our children to learn but we cannot force them to do so and neither should we try to live our lives through them.
11. Children differ; happy children learn; confident children succeed.
12. Children shouldn't be so pressurised to pass that they fear to fail.

Q11: What are your thoughts on religion and education?

1. People who read this will be from a variety of religious persuasions or none at all - the thoughts that follow are therefore offered respectfully.
2. People of faith have long contributed to educational development and innovation, far in excess of what might be expected given their numbers.
3. While the Bible says little about how or in what subjects we educate our children, it does mandate parents to truly teach what is worth knowing.
4. Schools educate in *loco parentis*, but should be with parental blessing.
5. I would rather my son went to a school whose ethos, worship and teaching is Christian based, e.g. loving God and loving our neighbour.
6. I would like my son to go to a Christian school as much as one that is excellent; yet believe parents should provide an educational and spiritual lead.
7. Children should be taught about other faiths and creeds and be given free reign to examine and question multitudinous ideas within safeguards.
8. Children should be protected against all forms of indoctrination.
9. Regarding origins - creation or evolution, children should be taught both - distinguishing between fact and belief (as with every subject taught).
10. Children should be encouraged to be wise (which has a moral quality and (arguably) a religious link) by adopting right values, more than being “educated”. (Those who ran Nazi extermination camps were “educated”, for they were clever administrators, who could be moved by the music of Wagner and Mozart but, given how cruel and callous they were, they were not wise.)

Q12: Would you do anything differently now to prepare your child?

1. It might have helped to have the knowledge contained in this book to hand when beginning our 11+ campaign. It might have saved time and effort.
2. In the main, I have been happy with the approach we took although ...
3. There is room for improvement (for me) as a dad and I would spend more time with my son and encourage him in taking up wholesome interests.
4. I would do more to develop a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
5. I would begin our 11+ specific preparation 12 months before he took the exam rather than, as was the case, start our preparation 6 months before.
6. I would not assume his primary school would give us all the support we needed, yet I would be more proactive in engaging and working with it.
7. I would be more deliberate and decisive in what I do when it comes to teaching my son and be clearer what I would leave tutors and teachers to do.
8. I would make even more effort to avoid the hype that often goes with the 11+ and develop a more normal and relaxed environment for my son.
9. I would try to relax and enjoy this “roller coaster” experience more.
10. I would do more to promote character: integrity, discipline, kindness.

Chapter 7: Revisiting the Tin

So with respect to the book's title, let us recap on what is inside the tin ...

A Parents Guide to the 11-plus

This book is for parents who want to know about the 11+ and tries to answer the important how, what, who, why, when and where questions. It is meant as a user friendly guide, just like when a travel guide tells us about places to visit, although my writing style may be too verbose for some. Given regional differences and wide variations in the approaches parents adopt, their circumstances and that of their children, and my own experience, which while intense has revolved round helping my son, I decided to concentrate on empowering parents to make informed decisions, pointing them to some of the many excellent, low cost, appropriate resources that are readily available.

How your child can achieve success in the exam ...

It has tried to focus on the practical and sometimes challenging issues around your child taking the 11+ exam and it does so with the view to passing it.

... by preparing sensibly;

It recognises that in order for your child to pass you will need to prepare wisely, with determined thoroughness. It suggests a varied approach that you the parent can adopt with your child in order to achieve the desired result.

... with you engaging with the system ...

In order for your child to do well, you need to understand the context in which the 11+ operates in your area so you can plan and implement the appropriate strategies that are needed in order to achieve the desired result.

... and overcoming the obstacles,

These could be external, such as the school or educational system, or internal, such as your child's attitude or your own home situation. Whatever those obstacles happen to be, you can and must identify and deal with them.

... working with your child ...

From the outset, importance is attached to involving your child in the decisions to be made and encouraging and facilitating your child's education.

... and helping your child to maintain a good life balance;

Not only should the whole range of educational activity be undertaken but also other, not overtly educational, things you do to enrich your child's life.

... yet upholding ideals of education ...

This book has argued education should be about more than passing exams merely to obtain qualifications and better career prospects. The life children live, their values, approach to learning and wider educational experience are all more important than passing the 11+. Even though I have waxed lyrical about the education offered at my local (language specialist) grammar school, I regret it no longer offers the classics, once one of its strengths. I do so from the perspective of my own work, which involves figuring out relationships and exploiting networking possibilities, as well as realising the importance of knowing the past in order to understand the present. I wonder how well the 1001 practical skills needed for life and to better serve the socially excluded are taught. The point is, and depending on your own educational ethos, you need to compensate for what the school fails to teach your child and reinforce what it does teach, and do so throughout the whole of your child's schooling.

... and social justice ...

It touches upon some of the difficult issues around fairness and opportunity for all. While recognising we cannot create a more just society on our own or do so overnight, because in order to do so there needs to be the political will and changes made in our society, we can still do our bit. I have argued for a level playing field, in particular a school (primary and secondary) system that fully serves the socially disadvantaged and is fair, truly providing equal opportunities for everyone. The chance of going to a grammar school should be available to all children on an equal basis. For those who don't make it, there should be acceptable alternatives where values of strong discipline, good manners and educational excellence are upheld. Parents should not have to worry about having to send their children to non-selective schools. This would make for a fairer society and goes a long way to stopping youngsters being sold short. It means too that books such as this one may not be needed!

... and not having to spend lots of money!

It recognises, for many, preparing their child to take the 11+ is an expensive business, both in purchasing suitable materials and, more significantly, in paying for professional tuition. The book explains how you may have your cake (11+ success) and eat it (not spending out in order to achieve that success). The main cost is your time and effort, but it is one of the best investments you will ever make. Low or no cost suitable materials can be obtained and you can teach your child well, without needing special training.

Verbal Reasoning Types

The 11+ VR paper is meant to test the candidate's ability to reason, not just verbally but numerically too, and tests speed and accuracy. It requires good literacy (e.g. types 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16) and numeracy (e.g. types 17, 18, 19, 20) skills. Types 1 - 4 are more to do with codes and logic puzzles, yet it is possible to improve answering technique by spotting patterns. The 21 Chuckra VR types more than cover what appears in most 11+ VR papers (or may crop up in English and maths) of most examining boards. Most schools teach most English and Maths topics tested in the 11+ (with varying effectiveness). There are many resources that can be used and things that can be easily done to prepare the child, complementing what the school does, but with VR you are more limited, understandable as this may only ever be needed for the 11+ exam and may not be covered by primary schools. Yet more than sufficient VR resources are available. Practicing the VR types in a neo-exam environment may be one of the most practical and score enhancing tasks undertaken as speed and accuracy does improve. VR may account for up to half the marks in the 11+ exam. Much of VR testing uses multiple choice formats, which may assist in solving problems smartly.

The following are examples taken from the Chuckra website:

Type 1 (Ans: UD)

Find the letters that best complete the series: NI, EH, VG, MF, DE, [_]

Type 2 (Ans: TQKH)

The code for WISH is ANYO. What is the code for PLEA? [_]

Type 3 (Ans: MOIST)

SWIM LISP TOOT VOLT each have codes. 5316 1237 9458 are three of those codes.

What is the word for code 74318? [_]

Type 4 (Ans: KG)

Find the letters that best complete the sentence: HU is to FW as ME is to [_]

Type 5 (Ans: FACT)

Find the missing word in the second group of three:

CLEAN [SAFE] FRESH, ALTAR [_] CUFFS

Type 6 (Ans: SALE)

Complete the third pair of words in the same way as the first two pairs:

(STARTS, TSAR), (REASON, ERAS), (ASLEEP, [_])

Type 7 (Ans: FAR)

Find the appropriate 3 letter word to complete the incomplete word:

She said _EWELL before boarding the plane

Type 8 (Ans: dove)
Find the four letter word hidden at the end of one word and the beginning of the next:
Roger paid over the asking price.

Type 9 (Ans: B (to make LOCK BRAIN))
Choose one letter that can be moved from the word on the left to the word on the right, making two new words: BLOCK RAIN

Type 10 (Ans: Y)
Find the one letter that will complete the word in front of the brackets and begin the word after the brackets. STOR (_) AMS CARR (_) ARD

Type 11 (Ans: habitat)
Find the two words, one from each group, that together make a new, real word:
(fresh habit mixed) (acted glass at)

Type 12 (Ans: low high)
Find two words, one from each group that are most opposite in meaning:
(low pump sell) (king high bottom)

Type 13 (Ans: beaker cup)
Find two words, one from each group that are most similar in meaning:
(bucket, beaker, bouquet) (cup, breaker, beak)

Type 14 (Ans: lion elephant)
For each of the following words, find the two words that are different from the other three: octopus lion shark elephant eel

Type 15 (Ans: orange plum)
Chose two words, one from each group in brackets, that best complete the sentence:
pip is to (squeak, orange, red) as stone is to (plumb, pebble, plum)

Type 16 (Ans: crowd)
Choose the word from 5 possible answers which goes equally well with both the pairs:
(group, gang) (gather, congregate) class crowd hunt gaggle collect

Type 17 (Ans: E)
Work out the answer to the sum where: $B = 6, C = 23, D = 9, E = 31$. $B \times D - C = [_]$

Type 18 (Ans: 22)
Find the number that best completes the series: 12, 12, 13, 15, 18 [_]

Type 19 (Ans: 18)
The numbers in the third group relate to each other in the same way as numbers in the other two groups. Find the missing number: $3 [12] 4) (7 [35] 5) (9 [_] 2)$

Type 20 (Ans: 18)
Find the number that best completes the sum: $12 \times 3 \div 4 = 20 + 7 - [_]$

Type 21 (Ans: 15:53)
Ronan leaves home at 15:40 and arrives at school at 15:55. Scott only gets to school at 16:06. Josh takes twice as long as Scott to get to school, but arrives at the same time. Ronan and Josh leave home at the same time. What time does Scott leave home?

Appealing

One of the (probably main) checks and balances in the school allocation system, ranging from infants to seniors, is that parents have the right to appeal if they do not agree with the decision which school to allocate their child. This works only if there are good grounds for an appeal and the parents are able to convince an independent appeals panel that their child should be accepted into a different school to the one allocated. This includes when a child whose preference is a grammar school but does not have a high enough 11+ score. When I set about writing this book, I was reluctant to explore this aspect because I did not want to tempt fate while waiting on my son's 11+ result and it seemed clear to me that if a grammar school has only "x" number of places available then only the first "x" ranking children in the 11+ exam would get those places - as explained in the information supplied beforehand. Yet parents of children that do not meet these straight forward criteria do have the right to appeal and a few do so successfully. Some 11+ websites, including Chuckra, have helpful things to say, including stories of those who have successfully appealed. Also, books have been written on the subject. All that remains for me to say is good luck if you feel you need to go down this route, which I am told can be stressful. I am grateful to Michael Carpenter, an educational consultant, for supplying me the following words:

“Applying for school places can take time and effort. Appealing for a school place when your first application has been rejected will take more time and effort. The whole statutory process of appeals is set out in the School Admission Appeals Code published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The latest version of the code came into force on 10 February 2009 and applies to all school appeals after that date. You have a right to appeal to an independent appeal panel if you are not happy with the outcome of your application for a school place. Appeals are heard by an independent panel of at least three voluntary members of the public. At least one will have an educational background. Panels cannot include members of the governing body of the school you are appealing about, staff at the local authority or anyone else who may not be sufficiently neutral in making a decision.

You can attend the hearing along with other parents involved if the panel is hearing lots of appeals for the same school. Each parents' case will be heard

individually. You can ask someone such as a friend, to accompany you, but you are advised not to as a rule bring your child to the hearing. Representatives of the admission authority (local authority or governing body depending on the type of school) will also be there to present their case.

The key to a successful appeal is careful preparation. Read very carefully the criteria for admission and the process for the school of your preference. Did your application meet those criteria? If not, why not? The majority of parents who appeal were unsuccessful first time round because the school was over-subscribed and pupils were generally admitted on the basis of siblings and distance from the school. This leaves dissatisfied parents whose application met the criteria for admission but were not admitted. To enable your appeal to be successful you have to ask: what are your particular reasons for wanting a school place that would stand out and convince an appeal panel to admit your child over and above the school's admission number? An application to a selective school in addition to the usual admission criteria has the added criterion of an academic test to determine the academic abilities of a child which is used to identify children for admission. Some admission authorities have review systems to re-consider those children who when tested were not deemed selective. This however does not affect your right to appeal.

In addition to the normal appeal case, if your child was not deemed selective but you still wish to apply, you will need to have a case as to why your child did not perform on the day of the test - this could include:

- Medical reasons - illness
- Family circumstances - divorce, recent bereavement
- Cultural - English is not the first language
- Discrimination - your child has not been treated fairly

You will need independent confirmation e.g. letter from primary school head teacher, independent professional and/or test results, that your child has the necessary academic ability to be admitted to a grammar school. Appeal panels are by and large sympathetic to the parent's case. However, winning an appeal is not easy. Nationally only around one in three appeals are successful. If at the end of the appeal process you consider that your appeal was not dealt with properly you can write to the Local Authority Ombudsman to complain. The Ombudsman cannot overturn an appeal but they can recommend that the appeal is heard again before a new panel.”

Afterthoughts

I chose to write this book soon after my son sat his 11+ exam. At that time, everything was fresh in my mind and I was coming down from the mountain top. I decided to release the first edition while we were waiting on his results, in order not to be swayed by the outcome (smugness if he was successful; embitterment if not) or be accused of being so influenced. New perspectives, exam results (I hope not), experiences of other parents, reactions of those who read this book and my son's secondary school experience; might all later come to affect how I view my subject, but at the time what I wrote reflected what I felt I needed to say, despite missing some of the nitty-gritty details of how to go about preparing, that some would no doubt be wanting. Waiting can be agonising, especially as the day approaches when the schools allocated to children are announced (we didn't realise you could check results online and nervously anticipated the arrival of the email that revealed all), followed by something between euphoria and despair (depending on result).

Once knowing the exam outcome, I knew it was time to move on and that we needed to work on life after the 11+ and the next stage of the journey. I remain unrepentant regarding my idealistic educational views, maintaining these need not be costly in money terms, and my "middle of the road" politics. I am no right wing reactionary, for we need to fight injustice (and living in a democracy insist our leaders do so too) wherever it is found (and it is found in many places), yet I am no left wing dogmatist either, for we need to provide opportunity and real choice and not allow schools to indoctrinate and to make them accountable. Obtaining full equality is a nigh impossible dream and imposition by the state often creates more problems than it solves.

I am suspicious of those who use schools to indoctrinate pupils in a system of values that are not, in my view the right ones, yet I believe a "value neutral" education can itself be a form of indoctrination. I would want children to be taught good values but also be encouraged to question and seek after truth wherever it may be found. There is a fine balance to be struck between providing moral guidance (something, sadly lacking in our society) to impressionable youngsters, promoting an appropriate set of values (according to where one stands on these matters) and allowing free thought. At this stage in the nation's history, this is far from being resolved when it comes to schools, which I fear will become and are becoming a cultural battlefield.

For parents, irrespective of the 11+ result and the schools children end up in, our task is to prepare them for secondary school but, before that, SATs and making the most of those never to repeated opportunities primary schools have to offer. As a personal observation, while I was pleased my son did some of this all-important “creative stuff”, he also did an inordinate amount of SATs “dry runs” as well, something I didn’t welcome given the school’s earlier disinterest in the 11+. As parents we need to fulfil that awesome and “sacred” duty of bringing up our children to be the best they can be and give them a fully rounded and balanced education for as long as we have the power to do so. As for secondary school, the words of my primary school teacher still ring loud in my ear many years after: *“up to now you have been big fishes in a small pond; you will now become small fishes in a big pond”*.

There will be big, often startling, changes when our children enter secondary school, not least entering into a more grown up and hostile and less forgiving environment, with unforeseen challenges and new expectations placed upon them. We hope we have done the right thing but, if not, we are prepared to make amends and, in any case, we want to go on encouraging our children in whatever way is needed. Many of the hopes and fears we share are about whether or not our children will prosper in their new schools. We would want them to be enthused about school and make the most of whatever opportunity might come their way. The support we gave them when they prepared for the 11+ now needs to be tailored for the new challenges ahead. It seems that these days most secondary schools try to engage with their new intake as soon as schools have been allocated. Like all parents in our position, this has been a new experience and one we have tried to approach in a positive way.

While the ethos of the secondary schools our children enter and the way our children cope will have a bearing on our approach, we will still need to do what good parents have always done: encourage, teach, discipline, advocate for and, most of all, love our children. How to deal with these challenges is what this book’s sequel will be about, should it ever be written! After finding out how our children fared in the 11+ exam, I would encourage those parents, who have the result they want, not to rest on their laurels. For one thing, while grammar schools provide fantastic opportunities for academically able children, it is no sure-fire guarantee for success in life or content in character. While you may feel your 11+ goals have been realised, your duty towards your child remains. However good the school is that you have had the good

fortune for your child to be accepted into, there will be gaps in the education it delivers and you need to fill them. Each child is different and has different experiences of and perceptions about school. Your child needs the nurture only you can give and be helped to live happy, useful and fulfilled lives.

The same could be said if the result is not what you had hoped for. There are many who entered their child for the 11+ more in hope than expectation. While some children may not be up to the mark academically, many able children enter the exam unprepared, thus reducing their chances of passing and, sad to repeat this, being bright is often not enough. But there are others, whose children have prepared well and who might have been expected to pass, making the disappointment that much greater. While not something I have experienced as a parent, I can, because of what other parents have told me and my own experience long ago, suggest things you can do if you find yourself in this position. As with all of life's setbacks, if that is what this is, you will need to gladly accept the positives and compensate for the negatives. For one thing, the fact your child tried but failed could and should make him or her more determined to succeed next time (with your support). History will recount many great deeds done by those who had tried and failed (maybe many times), who came back stronger, prevailing and finally triumphing. Moreover, I have observed that those people who do well and live useful and fulfilled lives have the spark that can ignite a fire and who do follow their dreams and goals because they are determined and have confidence to do so.

My disappointment failing the 11+ never fully went away. I wanted to prove I was better than the grammar school kids. Three degrees on, I am better qualified than most ex-grammar school pupils. Praise your children and let them know their worth! My own experience at a secondary modern school was not a particularly happy one, yet I left with nine good grade 'O-Levels' and went on to a grammar school, gaining four good grade 'A-Levels'. While the bar when it came to academic expectation was not always set particularly high, I did receive some good teaching (and smaller classes) especially in the later stages and, in the main, I was able to get on with my work despite the distractions around me and a lack of motivation and lesser ability among my peers. The broader social mix and the practical bent behind some of the teaching and being less tied to exam syllabuses also proved to be beneficial.

Even the not so good schools may offer things the better schools do not and, moreover, parents can fill the gaps and provide something of value. However

bright your child is, you need to work with the school to bring out their best, but if more needs to be done then you need to ensure it is done, with or without the school's help. You need to also be watchful of your child's welfare, especially as he or she grows more independent, and be quick to deal with anything that could be a barrier or a disturbance (whatever the school).

Regarding the more controversial points made in this book, the educational debate has raged from time immemorial and shows no sign of abating. Even among this readership, there will be wide differences in opinion, linked to our view of the world and value system; from those who favour following set syllabuses and standards or more utilitarian considerations, to those favouring free enquiry, exploring new ideas and learning for learning sake. I hope what I have said has made you think, and you are not offended unduly. If we are to disagree, then let's do so out of respect and recognition of what we have in common. I believe I am right with my facts. Extremists, fools and villains are to be found the whole world over and all manner of persons (from religious fundamentalist to militant atheist) will try to hijack the education system to advance their own particular agenda, often without our realising it. Don't let them do it or at least ensure your values are the ones that will influence your child and those you are able to help, as well as encouraging genuine enquiry!

As for social justice, I agree with the grammar school head who said his: *“school seeks to ensure that there is academic selection with social selection as a by-product, rather than social selection with academic selection as a by-product”*. I hope this will increasingly be the case. I support the primary school head, whose children are mostly from a not too promising catchment area; yet he tries to give them every opportunity to realise their educational dreams and widen their horizons, preparing them for the 11+ if appropriate and providing a service otherwise only offered by private tutors, as well as making his school a community hub and taking up issues of social justice. I have gone on about good grammar and bad comprehensive schools and supportive and non-supportive primary schools, as well as exposing flaws in the 11+ and SATs exam systems, almost *ad nauseam*, although it isn't easy comparing apples and oranges as children and schools do differ. While some parents just want the “nuts and bolts” of how to get their child through the 11+, I would not be doing my subject (or conscience) justice if I let it rest there. As the saying goes, we need to courageously change what we can, serenely accept what we can't and be wise enough to know the difference.

Sally's Story

Sam (a civil servant) and Sally (a housewife who does part-time retail work) are a normal, middle income couple. They have two children: John (aged 15) and Janet (aged 12). Both John and Janet go to local grammar schools, as did their parents. Sam and Sally grew up on sink council estates and valued the opportunities going to grammar schools gave them. Realising their children were bright, they were keen for them to go to grammar schools too and took appropriate measures to prepare them to take the 11+, made more urgent by the lack of support provided by their primary school. Sally felt the school's head was anti-grammar school and did little to stretch the more able children. In contrast to two of the neighbouring primary schools that had far better 11+ (and SATs) results, very few children from the school passed the 11+, despite serving similar catchment areas. Because of the low standards, bullying and poor discipline, they wanted to home school John but opted not to do so when they found the LEA would penalise him when he came to take his 11+. While always supportive of their children's learning, 11+ preparations for John began at the start of Year 5. The sessions were around half an hour each weekday morning (including school holidays) and were a mixture of doing exercises from 11+ workbooks purchased at local bookshops and past papers, including those donated by a friend, and reading. This was complemented later by an hour a week session with a sympathetic tutor. Sally felt she could have got by without that help, yet was grateful for the reassurance this gave and the "tips" the tutor could pass on, as well as bringing a fresh approach. A similar pattern took place with Janet, made easier by John's experience and Janet's placid temperament. Both children comfortably passed their 11+ exams and thrive in their new schools (possibly this would not be the case if they had failed). Sally notes it can be costly, friends are scattered and, in the girl's case, a snob factor exists. Sally is aware of social justice issues, noting one of her daughter's peers disinterest in school and under-performance, yet had been coached to pass the 11+, thus depriving a worthy child of humbler means of a grammar school place. Sally supports grammar schools, realising the comprehensive ideal will unlikely ever be achieved, but would like to see a level playing field and anything to lessen stress, e.g. taking the exam in the primary school and reducing the waiting time for results. Sally advises: "be realistic, don't be stressed unduly and realise life goes on whatever happens." *(The above names are made up to protect identities - everything else is true!)*

A Teacher's Perspective

From talking to teachers, I became aware of a range of perspectives and types of primary school. I am grateful to Lesley Burnett for sharing her insights. While it relates to one of the "posher" areas of the country, it is not so different to what might be found in other places:

“Playground talk in March, when the schools results are received, is intense and speculative. Will my son get the school of his choice? Did we do enough work for my daughter manage to pass the 11+? Year 6 children are difficult to teach in the week leading up to these letters arriving in the post and parents are anxious. But it is not always these parents and pupils that I think about at this time, but those in Year 4 and Year 5 who face all this in the coming years. They have all the work ahead of them. I teach in both the private and state systems of education and enjoy the rewards offered by both. I also work individually with a number of pupils, again from a range of schools. There can be a differing approach to the 11+ in these establishments.

Teachers in the state system often do not have the time in the day to work on the specific requirements of verbal and non verbal reasoning as it is not a requirement of the National Curriculum. It may be difficult to justify spending time on an area which is only of benefit to the top section of your class. That said I know that some schools run after school clubs for 11+. The private schools curriculum is aimed specifically at passing the Common Entrance and 11+ exams. Children here often spend lesson time each week learning and working on skills required for this exam. Some private schools drill their pupils rigorously in the art of passing exams; some will have taken exams in all academic subjects twice a year since they were eight years old.

As a teacher, I would like to see all pupils fulfil their potential, although they do not always thank me for it when I set the standards high in my class and expect all of them to keep striving to achieve their personal best! However we look at it, not all pupils are going to pass the 11+, or even be suited to take it. What is needed is for parents to be aware of how the system works. A parent of a bright pupil spoke to me recently stating her hopes for her child. She was not keen for tutoring or grooming for tests, preferring to let her child enter the 11+ on her own merit. She had sat the 11+ and passed so hoped for the same for her child. Unfortunately, times have changed and pupils rarely sit the test without many hours of work being undertaken. Parents may not realise that the system that worked for them is not the same thirty years later.

My advice to parents is: “*be prepared*” and research the requirements in your particular area. You are not sitting this test but your child is. Talk to them and ensure they are ready to put in the work required. When you were young ... if your parents wanted you to do something and you were not keen, did you have the enthusiasm for it? There will be times that will be difficult even with the most motivated child, but that spark of interest must be there from the start. There are many good books so it need not be an expensive option. If necessary learn new skills together - this can give a child confidence as they can be the teacher too. Time spent together is rarely wasted. Do not discount a tutor for part of the preparation as an outsider can often teach a lot in an hour to a bright keen student. It does not have to be long term (but make sure that the tutor and your child have a rapport). Children who receive rightful praise for their efforts do gain confidence in their abilities. Do ensure that the process does not consume all of the spare time available - there needs to be a balance as children need time to enjoy their own pursuits. It is a commitment to undertake the 11+ route, but a rewarding one, whatever the outcome. My final word would be to impress on parents that “*Happy Children Learn*”.

Southend Context

While the book is meant to help any parent preparing their child for the 11+, my experience is based on what goes on in Southend, although often wide ranging diversity can be seen elsewhere when it comes to schools and the types of systems in place. There are 12 secondary schools in the town, all with various specialities and types of governance (average size 1000, from 600 to 1600 pupils): four are grammar (two boys, two girls, all with around 1000 pupils), three deemed by Ofsted as “outstanding”. Of the non-grammar schools, two are faith (Catholic) based (one boys, one girls), the remainder are mixed-sex; three have recently been in “special measures” (two now out of them). Four of the non-grammar schools have grammar streams, including the two faith schools. Entrance to the grammar schools is by passing the 11+, administered by a local consortium (CSSE). Competition for places is stiff, with grammar schools massively oversubscribed, including from outside the town. The pass mark is higher for children living outside the town than those who live inside. There are several non-selective schools just outside the town. The next nearest grammar schools are in Chelmsford. There are local private schools, although no nearby, highly ranking, independent schools. Finally, there are also huge variations among the 37 primary schools in the town.

Other Perspectives

For the sake of balance and fairness, I wanted to get other perspectives on the 11-plus. I approached a grammar and a primary school head, and while they provided input it was felt inappropriate for them to contribute given their position. I engaged in a dialogue with our local LEA, particularly about making the exam fairer and accessible to all. While I received useful input, in the end they declined to contribute further, saying there was a debate to be had first. I was tempted to engage with Central Government, who one would think has power to improve things if there was the will but decided against it, partly because I felt that I would not get anything new or interesting, despite a purported commitment to social justice and educational excellence. I was tempted to contact the teaching unions. I know of their well publicised opposition towards SATs; I would like to know their views on the 11-plus.

Philosophical Musings

Most people who read this are likely to be interested primarily in how best to prepare their child for the 11-plus. I have argued that it is also important to be able to formulate your own philosophy on education as it will influence how you prepare your child and, for those who care, why. I beg the indulgence of the reader and offer some ideas that have affected my own thinking, based on the work of a number of great thinkers, writers and activists down the ages.

I was long ago struck by the Greek philosopher Plato whose philosophical system paid particular attention to truth, beauty and goodness, who saw these as being related. Since then those notions have guided my own educational philosophy. Around the same time, I learnt about the influential English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, who is often credited with articulating the notion of utilitarianism, sometimes linked to the slogan: “the greatest happiness for the greatest number”. While the idea of learning in order to make the learner more useful and better placed to take up his or her place in society, has its appeal, and has certainly influenced successive governments and the education system, I am not convinced the emphasis is right, partly because no-one can measure what it is that will lead to persons being useful and education has (or should have) many more facets than current usefulness. Another great philosopher that has had a profound influence on my own thinking is Dr Samuel Johnson, renowned for producing the first English

dictionary of any substance. While I suspect he was an irritating “know all”, he did come up with the notion that a truly educated man is also “a man of letters”, and one well able to debate, understand and relate issues around mathematics, science and medicine; theology, literature and the arts and do so with equal confidence, and that attention should be given to all disciplines.

I have been struck by the portrayal of teachers by some of our great authors. One example of how not to teach was the sadistic and ignorant schoolmaster, Whackford Squeers, in *Nicholas Nickleby* by Charles Dickens. Both my parents, who attended school just before the Second World War, assured me that teachers of that ilk did exist and perhaps in a subtle way still do - although the balance may now have swung too far the other way. Another Dickens’ teacher was Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, who considered the only learning that mattered was the accumulation of facts and, in contrast, was the tutor in Rousseau’s *Emile*, who gave his charge freedom to discover for himself the secrets of the universe, acting as a mere guide. I often find myself balancing the two approaches. Two inspirational headmaster characters in English literature are Mr Chips and David Powlett-Jones, who both dedicated their lives to the boys they taught - both captivating and charming this author.

I have long respected educators who have worked tirelessly to bring learning to minorities and those who are socially disadvantaged. One cannot help but admire someone like Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote “*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*” and helped pave way for universal women’s education. In a similar vein, I herald the efforts of numerous men and women who have devoted much of their lives, in this country and overseas, yet are often now forgotten, to teaching those who “suffered” other forms of disadvantage and have made a huge difference. In a country I know well, India, I keep coming across education institutions founded with those themes and priorities in mind, whose legacy still survive. Finally, when it comes to great writing, there is Oliver Goldsmith’s poem: “*the Deserted Village*”. Among many of the village inhabitants sympathetically portrayed is the stern school master, who had many laudable qualities, including wisdom, practical application, kindness, humour, love of learning and imagination. The literature that has influenced me most though is the Bible (although some would see this as much more than literature). The pursuit of wisdom, truth, justice, knowledge, righteousness, creativity and compassion are all themes expounded within its pages and which have guided my own educational priorities and philosophy.

One Year On

It has been more than a year now since my son got his 11+ results. As I reflect, I realise that my perspectives have widened due to feedback received and what has taken place in my family's lives and all around me, yet I stand by what I wrote originally. It is because there has been a steady stream of parents (and a few grand parents too) buying the book (and wanting to talk about the issues raised), in order to help their children overcome the 11+, their main obstacle to gaining a coveted grammar school place, that has made me realise the project has been worthwhile. Some are clued up and already making timely preparations, including a number who live outside of grammar school catchment areas. Some are in similar position to the one I was in and some are approaching the exam with much still to do and with little time left to do it, perhaps having only recently been alerted to the importance of the 11+ while trying to decide which secondary schools to apply for. Because many parents wake up to these realities late on, I have decided to devote a new chapter to consider what to do. For some, the 11+ is still years away and I admire their forward thinking but worry at the same time when parents push too hard, too early and fail to see the bigger picture. While I would not recommend doing 11+ specific preparation until the start of Year 5 at the earliest and even then to ease them in gently while trying to get the basics right, it is good to consider what is needed for the child's life-long educational journey at this early juncture, having the 11+, among other things, in mind, making the necessary adjustments.

A major happening has been our son starting grammar school. It hardly seems possible but he is nearing the end of his first year and the 11+ is now a distant memory. He is enjoying it and responding to the demands arising out of a packed program of varied activities: at school, extra-curricula and homework, which he completes, (and nice food!) and he looks forward to what the school has to offer, something missing in his latter stages at primary school. He enjoys participating in optional sporting and musical activities - not his natural forte and has been exposed to a number of new subjects and relishing the challenge. He has shown hitherto unrealised talents in art and DT. He is able to indulge his ICT passion. He is encouraged to and does question things, something often missing in schools. He is, however, expected to take much more responsibility for all what happens in school. One refreshing discovery is how down to earth (void of snobbery) and diverse the school community is and how well the school accommodates diversity.

While there is a more "softly" approach compared with "my day", his assignments are appropriately challenging and varied. It is tempting to stand back because of the new found independence and stimulating environment and let him get on with

it. Parents do need to be involved to help their children achieve excellence yet not be too intrusive, giving them space to find their own way. The bar of expectation will have been set high and there is no room for complacency. Still I harp back to the need for character development and being able to adjust to their surroundings.

One of my son's early homework assignments was to write a mini auto-biography. What he originally produced was mediocre but with a little cajoling from us he did end up with something that was more acceptable. Another example was a piece of RE homework where he was asked to identify and comment on any "You Tube" video that helps toward answering the question "why is religion important"? The first hit was by an atheist and he critically evaluated the arguments that were made. As a family, we recognise the limitations in our son's abilities, especially as he now rubs shoulders with lots of bright boys, but we will work with him to do and be his very best as well as to be a good and happy boy. We need to be involved until such time these disciplines are firmly ingrained yet try to resist the temptation of doing for our children what they should be doing for themselves.

It is early days, of course, and there is a long way to go, but we are optimistic and glad we did make that extra effort for our son to gain a grammar school place ... and, in case you wonder, we did go through a lot of the teaching contained in "First Aid to English" but have to decide what to do with the rest - realising unlike in countries like India for example that such a formal approach to English learning is not part of the UK curriculum. My efforts focus on ensuring he presents his work well and is thorough, resisting (so far) giving him extra lessons so he can become a maths guru! As for our son's former Year 6 classmates, who did not go to grammar school, most seem to be positively responding to their secondary school experience although one mother has lamented the "lack of aspiration" peer pressure. Sadly, we recently learnt one of the schools failing its Ofsted inspection. I am pleased that our son wishes to maintain his former friendships and hope he will relate positively to people in every situation and from every background.

My other main observation is how quickly the children seem to grow up between their leaving primary school, where they were seen and treated as children, albeit with expectations placed on them, to their beginning secondary school, where (certainly in our son's case) they are being treated as the young adults they are becoming, and expected to take personal responsibility to a much greater extent than they may have been used to in the past. It seems too that the children / young adults do respond to this added expectation, which as parents we need to reinforce in the home. This highlights a new challenge for us parents - that regarding the transition from childhood to adulthood... and, by the way, it is as I suspected, SATs scores now seem irrelevant, comparing with the internal tests that are taken!

The Comprehensive Dream

During the previous summer, there has been a stream of letters about the 11+ in the main newspaper that serves my town. Many of the old concerns and arguments about this exam and the grammar school system were aired. Some referred to the fact that children do better in the exam if properly prepared and adequately supported. It is children from families who know the system, going to the better primary schools and accessing private tutors, which tend to pass. A few commented on the wide gap between high and low attaining primary schools in the town when it comes to 11+ success, illustrating the social divisiveness of the system and the failure of authorities to help all families prepare adequately. Some have supported the status quo by defending grammar schools and the system currently operating, yet usually without answering these criticisms. The best contribution (in my opinion, even though not entirely aligning with my own views) was from someone who related how he recently gained a good degree pass from a good university yet had previously failed his 11+. He generously gave credit to the comprehensive school he attended for the support and education he had been given and observed that the comprehensive system could be further strengthened if the more able pupils were not creamed off by the grammar schools as presently happens.

Despite the observation, real or perceived, of class divide, I have come to realise that most grammar children I come across are from “ordinary”, unpretentious families and from widely diverse cultural and class backgrounds. Most parents just happen to have ambitions for their children’s education and provide support in the home. The unfairness is that other aspirational families lose out through ignorance of the system. Contrary to popular belief, it may be because of their ethos that grammar schools often do well in accommodating the diversity they embrace.

Throughout the book, readers may have detected a measure of disquiet when I have reflected on the overall fairness of the selective system. I hark back to the idealistic dream I had a long time ago, when I was young and impressionable, in comprehensive education. I thought this would lead to equal opportunities for all, good standards, wide choices, social levelling and equality. I felt grammar schools needed to be scrapped in order to achieve this. While I would still like to believe in such a dream, I have come to realise that the realities are different from the simple, clear cut picture that seemed to present itself all those years ago.

Arguments continue to rage and there are many. As I write, there is a newspaper article quoting the Government Schools Secretary arguing the 11+ makes those that fail feel like failures and that affects their aspirations and belief in themselves,

although research suggests no evidence that the grammar school system causes collateral harm for those consigned to other schools. I can certainly identify with feeling aggrieved, having failed my 11+, and reflect that my aspirations were not particularly high early on (not helped by the lower expectations of the school I was in and my home environment) but this did recover thanks to some good teaching and there were those who encouraged me. But some grammar school children have said they were made to feel failures and tended to disengage - if not ranked high enough in the tests they took early on or they felt good reason not to conform. Some felt they did well in spite of what their school offered rather than due to.

Most readers want their children to go to a school that best meets their child's needs. For many this just happens to be a grammar school. The argument that scrapping grammar schools leads to a fairer system is compelling but whether this raises overall standards is debateable as is the ability of most true comprehensives (i.e. selection scrapped) to cater well for the needs of children at both ends of the learning spectrum. This book does not take sides in that debate other than comment that while comprehensive school utopia may seem a laudable goal, based on past experience it is not usually achieved. I have tried to present the pertinent facts to help readers give their children the best possible opportunities, even though the education system often fails to match children with good schools. I also reluctantly concede that, whether because of nature or nurture, it is often children of "posher" parents that are likely to be amenable to a grammar school education.

It is concerning that alternatives to grammar schools are not always of sufficiently high enough quality or geared to stretching brighter and motivated children, so the price to pay for "11+ failure" can be a significantly high one, particularly for those who might struggle if the discipline is weak or the demands made are low. For some, forcing "the cream" go to non-selective schools may seem an attractive proposition, because it might help toward raising overall standards and provide equal opportunities for all. Yet I believe this will not compensate for the down side, especially if overall standards are lowered. Whatever happens in the future, the priority should be for all children to be given opportunities to achieve their potential and be encouraged to aspire toward and achieve educational excellence.

I failed to recognise in my youthful idealism the importance of parental choice and empowerment and the tyranny of government. Imposition of flawed ideology and political correctness, secular agendas forcing social engineering, educationalists indoctrinating or failing to stretch children, poor leadership and the breakdown of society, have made me realise that one of the main ways to counter such problems is to give more power to parents, allow them more choice as to which school their child attends, including retaining and starting grammar schools, new schools

whose character, style and ethos is decided by the local community and giving parents more say in running schools including imposing standards of discipline.

Most parents of school aged children are not as proactive as they could be when it comes to engaging with their children's schools and being involved with their education, even though most are decent people who love their children and are, on the whole, supportive of the schools. There is a minority of children, and often their families too, whose attitudes are unhelpful, especially when they misbehave. The inability of many schools to deal with this, to the detriment to the majority, who suffer as a result, is a matter of concern. So is the failure to enthuse children who want to learn or to extend their horizons. Sadly, many fail to achieve their true potential or become apathetic due to peer pressure. It may surprise some but the desire to escape untoward and find conducive conditions is an overriding reason why many parents are keen to get their children into grammar schools.

While the need to deal effectively with the problems in our society is a matter of concern (and one that is presently far from being resolved), it must not be at the expense of our children's education. If schools do have to take disruptive children, these must not be allowed to impose their unruliness. Sadly, too many schools are losing that battle. Recruiting, retaining and empowering excellent teachers must also be given priority. All schools must be given the opportunity to flourish and be brought to task when that fails to happen (and not just arising out of Ofsted inspections). Teachers must be allowed to teach without unnecessary distractions and children must be given every opportunity to succeed educationally. Schools must be encouraged to do superbly what they are meant to do - educate children!

While it is tragic that some children are needlessly deprived because of their home environment, there is a limit as to what can be done to change parental attitudes (much as we may want to try) in what ought to remain a free society. It is questionable that doing for people what they ought to do for themselves, or using schools as vehicles to force social change when the result is detrimental to some children's welfare, or imposing wrong values, is a good thing. We do need to work toward an education system that provides opportunities for all children to succeed and parents to make wise choices. Without dismissing society's responsibility to address social disadvantage or schools wanting to plug gaps in knowledge due to parental neglect e.g. sex education, schools should be primarily a resource to help parents educate their children rather than be agents of social change or have to work out an imposed political agenda. Schools do reflect the society in which we live. For some, schools are havens from the worst aspects. For others, schools are anything but. How to improve schools and society is a question we all ought to be considering and merits a book that is devoted to dealing with that question alone.

Having to Prepare With Little Time Left

“Don’t panic, don’t panic” was the catchphrase of the legendary Corporal Jones of the immortal TV series: “Dad’s Army”, which he would append after announcing frantically to those around him some item of alarming news. Parents, typically of Year 6 children, suddenly faced with the daunting prospect of what to do in order to negotiate the 11+ so their children can go the school of their choice, may well be tempted to panic. While not the answer, they do need to take urgent action. What follows are things to consider for parents beginning to prepare their child with the exam less than six months away and is useful for all when time is short:

1. While you have left it rather late to effectively prepare, you are at least in a position to do something of practical significance that will help your child.
2. You need to do the educational equivalent of taking up “battle stations” and this means, from now on, preparing for the 11+ has to be your number one priority until that particular “crisis” is (soon) over ...
3. But only do so if that is in the best interests of your child, i.e. he or she shows the necessary acumen and wants to and has potential to succeed.
4. To an extent, you will need to shut yourself and your family off from the world, or at least from the distractions around about you and the hype that goes with the 11+ etc. that could so easily become a negative influence.
5. While it may seem difficult to maintain a normal life, you need to do what you can to ensure that your child has a regular and disciplined routine, good rest and diet and plenty of exercise, fun, affection and “ordinariness”.
6. Speak to the school. Let them know what your concerns and intentions are. Find out what they can do to help and what resources they can offer you - and, if this is not particularly on their radar (quite likely given your situation), don’t let them fob you off or deter you from your plans.
7. All the ideological stuff mentioned in the book is important but much of it and also learning not directly to do with the exam can be temporarily put on hold while you concentrate on your main goal - your child’s 11+ success.
8. Find out as much as you can about the 11+ exam, guided by this book.
9. If you can find someone who has recently been through the “ordeal”, learn from them, but remember time is short and you will very soon need to come up with an action plan that suits your child and your circumstances.
10. Gather past papers or as close as possible to what your child will soon be facing. Refer to this book for how and where to get hold of these.
11. Gather helpful resources such as discussed in this book but remember that because time is short there is much you won’t be able to use at this late stage and besides past papers and Internet based resources e.g. Chuckra, I

- can't think much beyond a good dictionary and reading books and, just maybe, primers for the different content areas covered by the exam.
12. After going through what is to be expected in the exam and how to approach it, as soon as you can, get your child to attempt an example of each paper under, as near as practicable, exam conditions, in order to help ascertain your child's ability, knowledge and chances for passing the exam.
 13. Be realistic when looking at the results of mock tests. In some cases a child may be so far from passing that it may be prudent to ask whether or not to continue. If it is approaching the pass mark then it is "game on".
 14. Identify strengths and weaknesses and those questions that ought to be bankers when it comes to getting them right. Note how many unanswered questions remain - timing is one area where improvements can be made.
 15. Of all the areas where most improvement can be made, it is likely to be Verbal Reasoning. Using the advice and resources referred to in this book, practice all the VR types and techniques and note the progress that is made.
 16. Make sure those questions your child should get right he or she does get right and does not miss out because of carelessness etc. We found in all the papers that certain questions were eminently "get rightable" and we nagged away at our son so that he would be getting these consistently right.
 17. Go through the techniques for answering the types of questions that will crop up in the exam, aiming to get right ones where most improvement can be made and where there will be most to gain in terms of marks awarded. There are tips to discover and pass on, e.g. in VR code questions, looking at the possible answers to start with can mean arriving at the right answer is quicker and in comprehension word searches it can be made easier by trying to match word types. All the time you must be looking to work smartly and improve your child's overall score. Try to get to the point where all questions are attempted by your child in the time that is allowed.
 18. You may consider employing tutors to help because of what they can offer your child when it comes to tackling the exam but, given your situation, it is important that you take control of operations - tutors can help but they need to complement what you do and they need to buy into your approach.
 19. While it goes against the grain for me to say this, doing past papers under exam like conditions and going over the answers may well have to be you and your child's main occupation in the limited time left to prepare.
 20. Maintain a proper perspective (allow time for rest, fun, healthy living and normality - in a disciplined setting). The emergency will soon be over and life will go on, whatever the exam outcome. There are far more important things in life than passing exams, even ones as important as the 11+!

Overview of the School Journey by Age

Before I had a child going through the school system, terms like Year or Key Stage whatever were a mystery to me. I was brought up when “first year of Infants / Juniors / Seniors” meant something and, as for Key Stages, they did not exist. For those coming from overseas, these terms can be even more baffling as is the criteria for allocating schools. I would recommend if there is any doubt as to how the system operates, that you contact your local school or education authority. Remember, education is mandatory from the year a child has his or her 5th birthday, until aged 16. From Year 12 onwards, education can take place any- or no-where. Besides state schools, children can be educated in private schools or at home, providing basic standards are adhered to. The following is a basic guide to what happens at the various child ages, as they go through the school system.

Age (years)	Year (Sep - Aug)	Key Stage	Comment
0-4	Nursery	0	Optional - some free places. Primary school choose / allocate
4-5	Reception	0	This is when state schooling starts officially and it is free
5-6	1	1	Note: a child's 6 th etc. birthday will fall in this school year
6-7	2	1	No KS1 exam. Infants are Years: Reception to 2
7-8	3	2	Juniors are: Years 3 to 6 - do monitor all what goes on
8-9	4	2	Your child may start to get KS assessments - note these
9-10	5	2	This is the time (ideally) to start 11+ preparation
10-11	6	2	KS2 and 11+ exams. Secondary school choose / allocate
11-12	7	3	Senior school (grammar, comprehensive etc.) begins
12-13	8	3	Start to consider which subject “options” your child takes
13-14	9	3	No longer are KS3 exams taken at this juncture
14-15	10	4	Education is currently compulsory until 16 (18 is planned)
15-16	11	4	Exams held at the end at GCSE level. Consider next steps
16-17	12	5	Commonly known as Sixth Form. Exams at the end are:
17-18	13	5	A-Levels, AS-Levels, NVQs, HNDs etc.

Useful Contacts

(This is produced from a Southend perspective - why not produce your own list?)

Chuckra (*web based resource referred to in this book: www.11plus.co.uk*)

Website: <http://www.chuckra.co.uk/educational/> Tel. 0208 123 7911

Consortium of Selective Schools in Essex (*CSSE - administers the 11+*)

Website: <http://www.csse.org.uk/> Tel. 01245 350522

Office for Standards in Education (*Ofsted - inspects schools etc.*)

Website: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/> Tel. 0845 6404045

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (*the town's local education authority*)

Website: <http://www.southend.gov.uk/> Tel. 01702 215000

Southend High School for Boys (*one of the town's four grammar schools*)

Website: <http://www.shsb.org.uk/> Tel. 0844 4771752

Southend High School for Girls (*one of the town's four grammar schools*)

Website: <http://southendgirls.school-site5.net/> Tel. 01702 588852

Westcliff High School for Boys (*one of the town's four grammar schools*)

Website: <http://www.whsb.essex.sch.uk/> Tel. 01702 475443

Westcliff High School for Girls (*one of the town's four grammar schools*)

Website: <http://www.whsg.info/> Tel. 01702 471328

Closing Salvo

In researching this book, I became aware of parents at the non pushy end of the “pushiness spectrum” regarding the 11+, a group easy to overlook if we only consider those who stop at nothing for their children to succeed. Many are terrific parents who only want the best for their children. They may enter them for the 11+ exam if they feel it is appropriate, not necessarily with great expectations or doing much by way of special preparation and many may only become aware of the exam rather late on. They would like their child to pass but only on merit and may be averse to coaching. I understand parents protecting their children, who may take the view that too much preparation can be too high a price to pay or feel uncomfortable with the unaccustomed role of being their child's main educator. Yet while thorough preparation is no guarantee for 11+ success, not preparing makes failure more likely. There is no shame in failure of course and we ought to love our children irrespectively, yet we need to help them become the best they can be. As with everything in life, balance is the key. I hope parents take in the message presented in this book, realise where the balance lies and act accordingly.

Quotations

*“The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein”
Psalms 111v2 (inscribed over the entrance of the old and new Cavendish laboratories)*

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” Bible - Hosea 4v6

“To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity ... The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding... Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding... Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Bible - Proverbs

“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity ... Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” Bible - Ecclesiastes

“And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. ... But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. ... As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the King. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.” Bible - Daniel - chapter 1

“I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.” Isaac Newton (1643-1727)

“Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.” Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

“God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, Courage to change the things which should be changed, and the Wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.” Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

Finally

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you
But make allowance for their doubting too,
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:*

*If you can dream--and not make dreams your master,
If you can think--and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it all on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"*

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings--nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much,
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And--which is more--you'll be a Man, my son!*

IF - Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)