

The sun is out, the sky is blue and, all over the country, little heads are substituting sums and school books for inviting images of the lazy summer days fast approaching. And there's nothing wrong with that, of course – with today's youngsters under more academic pressure than ever, they will certainly have earned a rest. But first they must tackle the end-of-year exam season and, with spring fever setting in and the distraction of summer holidays looming large, it's crucial to know how best to keep your child focused until that final bell rings. Luckily, we've sought advice from some of north west London's top prep schools and private tutors on the very best ways to guide your child through exam season unscathed.

Sarum Hall School

15 Eton Avenue, NW3

Catering for all-female students between the ages of three and 11, the school was founded in 1929 by Miss V E Webb, the first headmistress, and is now regarded as one of north west London's most popular small independent institutes, with many students going on to attend the capital's most prominent senior schools (often on scholarships). The school is frequently praised for its intimate, friendly, yet traditional ethos.

Exam tips for your children from Headmistress Christine Smith:

- Try to think of exams as an amazing opportunity to show what you know
- Before you sit an exam, close your eyes, breathe slowly and imagine your completed paper covered in ticks, not crosses
- Be sure to dress for the occasion; always wear your smartest uniform
- Use your favourite pen and have a back-up
- Tell yourself 'well done' when you have finished
- Do not dwell on answers you wished you had put
- Don't discuss your exam with anyone except your parents or teachers
- Reward yourself with some physical activity; go swimming, horse-riding or get on your bike

Tavistock Tutors

92 Clifton Hill, NW8

Based in Paddington and offering more than 350 private tutors within the London area, Tavistock boasts some of the best results in the capital, providing professional private tutors for 11+, 13+, entrance exams, GCSEs, A-Levels and undergraduate subjects in pretty much every imaginable discipline (struggling with your trombone lessons? No problem. Need a hand with your Dutch homework? Look no further). Particularly renowned for their promptness, reliability and dedication (they're contactable day and night, 365 days a year), many a London student undoubtedly owes their straight-As to the team at this outstanding enterprise.

Tips from founders Marcus Ereira and Luke Shelley:
We've seen an improvement in academic performance

with students that receive incentives from parents. These could be in the form of awards for excellence, but we also believe there should be a strong balance between study hours and free time so students don't feel the full pressure and stress of exams. Performance is much greater with most students in more relaxed situations.

Abercorn International School

248 Marylebone Road, NW1

Established in 1987 with only 42 students and now housed across several stunning listed buildings (the middle school in the premises of the former St Marylebone Grammar School and upper school in Wyndham Place on the prestigious Portman Estate), this co-educational prep school has gained an enviable record of excellence by constantly evaluating each student's development in order to foster individual talents and skills. The school prides itself on its state-of-the-art equipment and the opportunity it offers to thoroughly prepare children for the modern age in which we live, although they attach great importance to traditional values above all.

Admissions Co-ordinator Edward Hill explains how to keep students motivated:

To sustain students' enthusiasm over the two years of Common Entrance preparation, we build up the pressure slowly and make sure the children know that it is three-and-a-half days of exams and then they have the reward of our Year 8 Post-CE programme. This is full of activities and trips, but it also gives us the opportunity to bring in new experiences for the children and guest speakers to broaden their educational experience. The highlight is the exchange visits between ourselves and The British International School of New York where children from both institutions get to experience life in another country while living with a family. ■

A FEW TIPS OF OUR OWN

Don't allow your regular routine start to slide just because the holidays are almost here – and don't let bedtimes creep backwards day by day just because the evenings are lighter for longer.

Contact teachers as often as it takes to give you peace of mind that your child is staying on track – after all, this is as important a part of their role as being in the classroom.

Go out of your way to show your child that their education is important to you. They are more likely to focus on it and take it seriously if you do.

Provide your child with a reason to stay motivated during the run-up to exams – give them a goal and decide on suitable rewards if they achieve it.