

NOVA PARENT GUIDE

03

7+ and 8+ Readiness

A practical guide for parents wondering
whether their child is ready



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WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

This guide is written for parents who are uncertain. Perhaps your child is bright but inconsistent, or strong in one subject and weaker in another, or capable at home but anxious in tests. Perhaps you simply do not know whether they are at the right level. Nothing in this guide will tell you your child is or is not ready. It will help you find out.

WELCOME

Before you begin

You are not sure. You have looked at the 7+ and 8+ process, and something is nagging at you. Perhaps your child is bright but inconsistent. Perhaps they are strong in one subject and noticeably weaker in another. Perhaps they work slowly, or freeze in tests, or seem to understand things at home but not at school. Perhaps you simply do not know whether they are at the right level.

You are not alone. Many parents feel exactly this way. The independent school admissions process can seem opaque and pressurised, and it is natural to feel uncertain about whether your child is ready.

This guide is written specifically for you. It is warm, honest, and free of judgment. We will not tell you that your child is definitely ready, or that they definitely are not. What we will do is help you understand what readiness really means, how to assess it, and what to do if your child needs support.

Nova Education offers a free consultation: a call with a senior tutor to talk through what you are seeing and give you an honest view, at no cost and with no obligation. Where a fuller picture would help, we also offer the Entrance Readiness Assessment, a full assessment costing £125 with a personalised written report. Either way, you will know where your child stands and what they need next.

The Nova team

What this guide is, and is not

This guide is designed for parents who feel uncertain about their child's readiness for 7+ or 8+ assessments. It offers reassurance, practical guidance, and a clear pathway to understanding your child's position.

This guide is not a substitute for professional assessment, nor does it guarantee any outcome. Every child is different, and readiness exists on a spectrum. The guidance here is intended to inform and support, not to diagnose.

How to use this guide

Read this guide at your own pace. Some sections may speak to your situation more directly than others. That is fine. Focus on what matters to you now.

01

What Does Ready Actually Mean?

The four pillars, and why readiness is a spectrum rather than a verdict.

Starting with the myth

Let us start with the most important point: readiness for 7+ or 8+ does not mean your child is a genius. It does not mean they are ahead of every other child in their class. It does not mean they never make mistakes or that they find everything easy.

Readiness means your child has reached a level of skill, confidence, and maturity that allows them to attempt the assessment with a realistic chance of success. That is all. It is achievable for most bright, well-supported children.

The four pillars of readiness

Pillar	What it means
Core knowledge	The foundational skills in English and Mathematics that the assessment tests
Thinking skills	The ability to reason, solve problems, and work systematically
Exam technique	The ability to read questions carefully, manage time, and check work
Emotional readiness	The confidence, resilience, and calmness to perform under pressure

A child who is strong in all four pillars is ready. A child who is strong in two or three may need support in the others. A child who is weak in one or more can usually improve with the right help.

Readiness is a spectrum

Readiness is not a yes-or-no question. At one end, a child is fully prepared and confident. At the other, a child has significant gaps and needs substantial support. Most children sit somewhere in the middle: capable, but with areas that need attention.

Why two children of the same ability can differ

Ability is not the only factor. Two children with identical ability can have very different readiness levels because of:

Exposure. One child has seen Verbal Reasoning papers before. The other has not.

Confidence. One child believes they can do it. The other doubts themselves.

Technique. One child knows how to plan a story. The other does not.

Stamina. One child can concentrate for 45 minutes. The other cannot.

Experience. One child has sat mock assessments. The other has not.

These factors are all addressable. They are not fixed traits.

Maturity, confidence, and resilience

Some children are academically ready but emotionally unprepared. They know the material but panic in tests. They understand the questions but work too quickly because they are anxious. They are bright but do not believe in themselves.

WORTH HOLDING ON TO

Emotional readiness is as important as academic readiness. A child who feels supported, calm, and confident will perform better than a child who is anxious, even when the anxious child knows more.

KEY POINTS FROM THIS SECTION

- ✓ Readiness is not about being a genius. It is about the right foundation of skills and confidence.
- ✓ Readiness exists on a spectrum, and it can be understood, assessed, and developed.
- ✓ Emotional readiness matters as much as academic readiness.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Think about your child across the four pillars. Where do you think they are strongest? Where do you have concerns? Write them down. This will help you when you discuss your child's position with a professional.

02

Common Scenarios Parents Worry About

Seven concerns we hear often, and what helps with each.

This section addresses the specific concerns we hear most often from parents. Every one of these scenarios is normal. Every one has a solution.

“My child is strong in Maths but English is a struggle”

This is one of the most common patterns we see. Many children, particularly those with logical, systematic minds, find Mathematics intuitive but English challenging. The reasons vary: limited reading, weak vocabulary, difficulty with inference, or simply less enjoyment of language-based tasks.

The important thing is that English skills can be built. Reading widely, discussing books, building vocabulary, and practising writing regularly will all help. Targeted support from a specialist tutor can accelerate this process significantly.

“My child reads well but comprehension is inconsistent”

Reading fluently is not the same as comprehending deeply. Some children decode words beautifully but struggle to infer meaning, identify themes, or answer questions that require more than literal recall.

Comprehension is a skill that can be taught explicitly. Children need to learn strategies: how to find evidence in the text, how to read between the lines, how to structure an answer. With practice, comprehension becomes more consistent.

“My child understands Maths but works too slowly”

Speed and accuracy are both tested in 7+ and 8+ Mathematics papers. A child who understands the concepts but cannot complete questions quickly enough will leave marks on the table.

Fluency comes from practice. Mental arithmetic games, timed challenges, and regular calculation practice build speed without creating pressure. The goal is automaticity: the ability to calculate quickly and accurately without conscious effort.

“My child is confident at home but freezes in tests”

Performance anxiety is common in young children, especially those who have not experienced formal testing. The unfamiliar environment, the time pressure, and the knowledge that something important is at stake can all trigger anxiety.

The solution is familiarisation. Mock assessments under realistic conditions, practised calmly and positively, help children learn that tests are manageable. Over time, confidence replaces fear.

“My child’s writing is imaginative but poorly structured”

Many children have wonderful imaginations but have not yet learned to organise their ideas. Their stories wander, their endings arrive suddenly, and their paragraphs lack focus.

Structure can be taught. Planning techniques, story frameworks, and practice in writing with a clear beginning, middle, and end will transform a child’s writing without stifling their creativity.

“My child finds Verbal Reasoning completely unfamiliar”

Verbal Reasoning is not taught in most primary schools. Children who encounter it for the first time on assessment day are at a significant disadvantage. They lose time simply understanding what the questions are asking.

The good news is that Verbal Reasoning skills can be built systematically. Familiarity with question types, combined with strategies for working quickly and logically, produces rapid improvement.

“I just do not know if my child is at the right level”

This is perhaps the most common concern of all. You are engaged, observant, and caring, but you lack an objective benchmark. You do not know how your child compares to the competitive field.

This uncertainty is exactly why professional assessments exist. A good assessment will tell you, clearly and specifically, where your child stands and what they need.

KEY POINTS FROM THIS SECTION

- ✓ Every concern you have is shared by many other parents.
- ✓ Every concern has a solution.
- ✓ The first step is identifying exactly what is happening, not guessing.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Which of these scenarios sounds most like your child? Identify the one or two that resonate most. This will help you focus your concerns and communicate them clearly when you seek advice.

03

How to Know Where Your Child Really Stands

The limits of intuition, the limits of school reports, and what fills the gap.

The limits of parental intuition

You know your child better than anyone. Your intuition is valuable. But it is also incomplete. You see your child at home, in familiar surroundings, doing familiar tasks. You do not see them in a formal assessment setting, working under time pressure, alongside other children, being evaluated by strangers.

A parent who says their child is brilliant at Mathematics may be absolutely right about home performance and still unaware of how that performance translates to exam conditions.

The limits of school reports

School reports reflect classroom performance against age-related expectations. They are designed to show progress within the school curriculum. They are not designed to benchmark your child against the competitive field applying for independent school places.

A COMMON MISTAKE

Reading "making good progress" as "ready"

A school report saying your child is making good progress is genuinely reassuring, and it is measuring something real. It is simply not measuring the thing you are asking about. Progress against age-related expectations and readiness for a competitive entrance assessment are two different questions with two different answers.

What a proper diagnostic assessment should cover

A QUALITY DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT EVALUATES

- ✓ Core skills in English and Mathematics, not just current school level but the specific skills these assessments test
- ✓ Verbal and Non-Verbal Reasoning capability, including familiarity with question types
- ✓ Exam technique and time management: can the child work within time limits and show their working?
- ✓ Concentration and stamina: can the child maintain focus throughout a multi-part assessment?
- ✓ Confidence and approach to challenge: does the child attempt difficult questions or avoid them?

School assessment or diagnostic assessment

School assessments measure progress within the national curriculum. A diagnostic assessment measures readiness for a specific, competitive entrance process. The two are related but not the same. A child can be doing well at school and still need significant preparation for 7+ or 8+.

What to expect from a quality assessment

Friendly and age-appropriate. Not intimidating or pressurised.

Comprehensive. Covering all relevant skill areas.

Specific. Identifying exact strengths and weaknesses, not vague generalities.

Actionable. Giving you clear recommendations for next steps.

Non-committal. Providing information without pressuring you to sign up for tuition.

The Nova Entrance Readiness Assessment is designed exactly this way. If you are not sure whether you need one, the free consultation is the place to start, and we will tell you honestly if we think a full assessment would not add much.

KEY POINTS FROM THIS SECTION

- ✓ Knowing where your child stands removes anxiety and replaces it with a plan.
- ✓ A proper assessment does not label your child. It illuminates their path forward.
- ✓ You deserve clarity, not vague reassurance or unnecessary worry.

YOUR NEXT STEP

If you are uncertain about your child's readiness, start with a free Nova consultation. It costs nothing, carries no obligation, and will tell you quickly whether a full assessment is worth doing.

04

Turning Weaknesses into Strengths

Gap analysis, and why targeted support works faster than more of everything.

The idea of gap analysis

Every child has strengths and areas for development. The key is not to panic about weaknesses but to identify them precisely and address them systematically. This is what we call gap analysis: understanding exactly what needs attention and building a targeted plan.

Why targeted support beats general extra help

General extra tuition can help, but it is often inefficient. A tutor who works through the curriculum broadly may spend time on areas your child has already mastered while neglecting the specific gaps that are holding them back.

Targeted support focuses on the exact skills that need development. It is faster, more efficient, and more motivating for the child, who can see progress in the areas where they previously struggled.

How Nova addresses specific weaknesses

Our structured curriculum allows us to target weaknesses precisely. This is the sequence the Nova books follow, and it is why we teach in this order rather than simply working through more questions.

English writing. We teach planning and structure before asking for creativity. A child who learns to organise their ideas will write more confidently and coherently.

Comprehension. We teach explicit strategies for finding evidence, making inferences, and structuring answers. Children who previously guessed begin to answer with confidence.

Mathematics. We secure calculation fluency first, then stretch problem-solving ability. A child who calculates automatically has more mental energy for reasoning.

Verbal and Non-Verbal Reasoning. We introduce question types systematically, teach strategies for each, and build speed through practice.

Building confidence alongside competence

It is not enough to build skills. A child who has improved but does not believe they have improved will still underperform. Our tutors celebrate small wins, track progress visibly, and help children see their own development. Confidence and competence grow together.

KEY POINTS FROM THIS SECTION

- ✓ Weaknesses are not character flaws. They are specific skills waiting to be developed.
- ✓ Targeted intervention is far more effective than general extra tuition.
- ✓ Children who overcome challenges often develop the resilience that sets them apart.

YOUR NEXT STEP

If you know your child has specific weaknesses, write them down. Be as specific as possible: not "bad at English" but "struggles with comprehension inference" or "writing lacks structure". Specificity is the first step towards solutions.

05

Making Preparation Positive, Not Stressful

What to say, what to watch for, and when to pull back.

How to talk to your child about the assessment

The words you use matter enormously. Children absorb parental attitudes, often without realising it. If you frame the assessment as a terrifying hurdle, your child will feel terrified. If you frame it as a chance to show what they can do, they will feel more positive.

GOOD THINGS TO SAY

- *This is a chance to show what you have learned.*
- *We are proud of you for trying your best.*
- *Whatever happens, we love you and we are proud of you.*
- *This is one school. There are many good schools.*

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING

- *You must pass this or we will be disappointed.*
- *If you do not get in, you have failed.*
- *This is the most important thing you will ever do.*
- *All your friends are getting in. Why can't you?*

A COMMON MISTAKE

Signs that preparation is becoming too much

Mood changes, meaning irritability, sadness, or withdrawal. Resistance, refusing to do preparation or becoming upset about it. Sleep disturbance, difficulty falling asleep or nightmares. Physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches. And loss of interest in activities they previously loved. If you notice these, pull back. Reduce the load, talk to your child about how they are feeling, and consider honestly whether the pressure is coming from you, the tutor, the school, or the child themselves.

Building a healthy mindset

Help your child understand that their worth is not determined by a school place. The healthiest children are those who try their best, accept the outcome, and move forward with resilience.

Routine, praise, and rest

A predictable routine helps children feel secure. Regular but manageable preparation sessions, balanced with play, sport, and rest, create a sustainable rhythm.

Praise effort, not outcome. A child who tries hard and falls short has done something admirable. A child who succeeds without effort has not learned resilience.

Rest is not laziness. A well-rested child learns better, concentrates longer, and performs more reliably than a tired one.

When to push and when to pull back

Push when your child is capable but reluctant. Encourage them to attempt something difficult, to persist when it is hard, to believe they can do it.

Pull back when your child is showing signs of stress, when preparation is interfering with sleep or happiness, or when the pressure is coming from your own anxiety rather than your child's needs.

How Nova keeps preparation positive

Our tutors are trained to recognise when a child is struggling emotionally, not just academically. We adjust the pace, celebrate progress, and ensure that preparation feels like support, not pressure. A child who enjoys their sessions with Nova will learn more than a child who dreads them.

KEY POINTS FROM THIS SECTION

- ✓ A stressed child will not perform well. Emotional readiness is as important as academic readiness.
- ✓ Preparation should build your child up, not wear them down.
- ✓ The best outcomes come from children who feel capable and supported.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Have an honest conversation with your child about how they feel about the assessment process. Listen without judgment. Their feelings will tell you whether your current approach is working.

06

Your Child's Next Steps

Readiness is knowable, addressable, and achievable.

Where this leaves you

If you take one thing from this guide, let it be this: whatever your concerns, there is a path forward. Readiness is not a mystery. It can be assessed, understood, and developed. Your child does not need to be perfect. They need to be prepared, supported, and confident.

The value of starting with clarity

Uncertainty is exhausting. It keeps you awake at night. It makes every conversation with your child feel loaded. Clarity, by contrast, is liberating. When you know where your child stands, you can make good decisions. You can stop worrying and start acting.

Two ways to get clarity

The free consultation

A call with a senior Nova tutor. You describe what you are seeing at home, we ask the questions that matter, and we give you an honest view of whether your concerns are the kind that need attention. It is free, it carries no obligation, and if we think your child is broadly on track we will say so rather than sell you something.

The Entrance Readiness Assessment

A full, structured assessment for families who want a measured picture rather than an opinion. It is a separate service costing £125, and a complete piece of work in its own right. The fee is credited in full against your first invoice if you go on to enrol in a Nova programme within 60 days of your consultation with the assessor.

Friendly. Your child will feel at ease. There is no pressure, no pass-or-fail, no judgment.

Thorough. We assess the areas that matter in entrance examinations, and how your child works under timed conditions: pace, accuracy, independence and response to difficulty.

Detailed. You receive a personalised written report and a one-page visual profile, explaining your child's strengths, areas for development, and overall readiness.

Clear. The report sets out three clear priority actions, and you talk them through with the assessor at a follow-up consultation.

Non-committal. There is no obligation to enrol in Nova tuition afterwards. The results are yours to use however you choose.

How to use the results

Whether or not you choose to work with Nova, the assessment results are yours to use. You can share them with your child's current teacher to inform school-based support, use them to guide your own preparation at home, take them to another tutor to inform their approach, or use them to decide whether now is the right time to apply and whether waiting for 8+ might suit your child better.

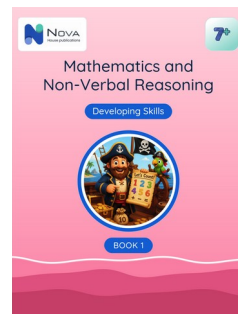
THE NOVA COURSE BOOKS

Where a child begins

If an assessment shows your child would benefit from support, this is where they would start. The two Developing Skills books below cover the four assessed areas between them, and they are the entry point to the Nova programme. Nobody begins with everything at once.



English and
Verbal Reasoning



Mathematics and
Non-Verbal Reasoning

EVERYTHING INCLUDED

Course books and all programme materials are included in the programme fee. There is nothing extra to buy.

KEY POINTS FROM THIS SECTION

- ✓ Readiness can be assessed, understood, and developed.
- ✓ Clarity is more useful than reassurance, and far more useful than worry.
- ✓ Whatever the outcome, you will know what to do next.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Book a free consultation

You do not have to work this out alone. Start with a free consultation: a call with a senior Nova tutor, at no cost and with no obligation.

Tell us what is worrying you. We will give you an honest view, and we will tell you plainly whether the Entrance Readiness Assessment, which costs £125, would tell you anything the conversation has not already answered. Sometimes it would. Often it would not.

No question is too small. We are here to help.

TO BOOK YOUR FREE CONSULTATION

novaeducation.uk/nova-tutorials

Or email contact@novaeducation.uk

We look forward to meeting you and your child.



ABOUT NOVA EDUCATION

Who we are

Nova Education is an independent educational publisher and online tutorial centre in London, providing everything from curriculum support in Years 2 to 6 to selective school entrance preparation.

Our 7+ and 8+ programmes are built around 16 original course books, written specifically for these admissions and taught by qualified teachers, several of them practising examiners. We offer structured preparation, detailed reporting, and a personalised approach that treats every child as an individual.

Our mission is simple: to help children perform at their best, with confidence, skill, and resilience.

Stay in touch

Subscribe to our monthly email for tips, insights, and updates on the 7+ and 8+ landscape. Visit novaeducation.uk or follow us on Facebook.

SAFEGUARDING

All Nova tutors hold a current Enhanced DBS check and complete Nova's safeguarding induction before their first session.

This guide was published by Nova Education in September 2026. The information reflects our professional experience and should be adapted to your child's specific needs and circumstances.

If you have feedback on this guide, or if there is a topic you would like us to cover in future, please let us know. We are always listening.

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