

Understanding the FSCE 11+

A Guide for Parents

The Gloucestershire grammar schools are moving to the new FSCE (Future Stories Community Enterprise) assessment for Year 7 entry. Unlike more traditional 11+ tests, the FSCE is designed to assess how children think, apply knowledge and respond to unfamiliar situations — rather than how many facts they have memorised.

At Cheltenham Tutors, we believe this shift is important. It places greater emphasis on broad learning, curiosity, resilience and understanding, rather than narrow exam drilling.

What is the FSCE assessment?

The FSCE assessment is based on the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum up to the end of Year 5. The official familiarisation guides explain that children may encounter content linked to:

- English
- Maths
- Science
- History
- Geography
- Computing
- Languages
- Art & Design
- Design & Technology
- Music
- Physical Education
- Creativity

The assessment is designed to test *application* rather than recall. Children may be asked to solve unfamiliar problems, interpret information, explain ideas clearly or think creatively.

The FSCE states clearly that there are:

- no official practice papers,
- no officially endorsed tutoring materials,
- and no expectation that children should memorise specialist knowledge.

What might the papers look like?

The official familiarisation guide currently refers to four papers:

Adventure Paper

Multiple choice questions across a range of curriculum subjects.

Compass Paper

Another multiple choice paper covering a range of subjects and problem-solving tasks.

Beacon Paper

Short written responses, including numerical and written answers.

Discovery Paper

A creativity task requiring a longer written response.

The exact structure and content may vary from year to year.

What kinds of skills are being assessed?

The sample materials suggest that FSCE is looking for children who can:

- apply learning in unfamiliar situations,
- explain their thinking clearly,
- read carefully and infer meaning,
- reason mathematically,
- think creatively,
- notice patterns,
- analyse evidence,
- persevere when unsure,
- and connect ideas across subjects.

For example:

- a History question may ask children to evaluate which historical source is most reliable;
- a Science question may involve designing a fair test;
- a Geography question may ask children to think critically about fieldwork methods;
- a Creativity task may ask children to solve an imaginative problem or write from an unusual perspective.

What a child might actually experience

A child may move from:

- a maths reasoning problem,
- to a historical source analysis question,
- to a creative writing task,
- to a question involving scientific thinking or interpretation.

The assessment appears designed to reward flexibility, curiosity and careful thinking.

What does this mean for preparation?

The official FSCE guidance strongly discourages excessive tutoring or highly pressured preparation. Instead, it encourages children to:

- read widely and regularly,
- develop strong mathematical fluency,
- enjoy discussion and curiosity,
- engage fully at school,
- and approach learning calmly and confidently.

At Cheltenham Tutors, we broadly agree with this direction.

Good preparation for FSCE is likely to include:

- developing vocabulary through reading,
- strengthening reasoning skills,
- practising clear written communication,
- becoming comfortable with unfamiliar problems,
- and building confidence in applying knowledge across the curriculum.

This is less about “learning the test” and more about becoming a thoughtful, adaptable learner.

A healthy preparation routine might include:

- 20–30 minutes daily reading,
- regular discussion about books and ideas,
- short maths fluency practice,
- occasional problem-solving challenges,
- opportunities for creative writing,
- maintaining hobbies, sport and downtime.

What is unlikely to help?

- endless worksheet drilling,
- memorising obscure facts,
- high-pressure tutoring schedules,
- spending hours on generic verbal reasoning books,
- comparing children constantly with peers.

Children are likely to perform best when they are rested, confident, widely read and intellectually curious.

Likely helpful	Probably less helpful
Wide reading	Memorising facts
Vocabulary development	Endless drilling
Problem solving	Repetitive reasoning tests
Discussion and explanation	High-pressure cramming
Creativity	Narrow exam tricks

How is FSCE different from older 11+ models?

Traditional GL-style tests often focused heavily on:

- verbal reasoning,
- non-verbal reasoning,
- rapid processing,
- and highly repetitive question types.

FSCE appears to move towards:

- broader curriculum knowledge,
- richer thinking tasks,
- deeper comprehension,
- creativity,
- and cross-curricular application.

Children are likely to benefit from:

- strong reading habits,
- curiosity about the world,
- discussion and explanation,
- and resilience when faced with unfamiliar questions.

Crucially, the FSCE wants to emphasise that grammar schools are not the only option. They fit some students well but not all. Students who need extensive tuition and pressure to get into the grammar schools may not always thrive there, and the FSCE wants to put the focus less on preparation and more on the student's learning and engagement with school.

Practical advice for parents

- Encourage reading

Reading remains one of the strongest foundations for success. High-quality fiction, non-fiction, discussion and vocabulary exposure all matter.

- Focus on calm confidence

The FSCE materials repeatedly emphasise that children should not feel excessive pressure. Confidence, resilience and willingness to try unfamiliar questions are important.

Build broad knowledge

Discuss current events, documentaries, science ideas, history, geography and everyday problem-solving.

- Practise written thinking

Children should become comfortable explaining ideas clearly, justifying opinions and organising their thoughts.

- Keep maths fluent

Rapid recall of number facts, secure arithmetic and multi-step problem-solving remain essential.

Final thoughts

Although many details about the FSCE assessment are still emerging, the overall direction is becoming clearer:

The assessment appears designed to reward:

- curiosity,
- broad learning,
- thoughtful reasoning,
- creativity,
- and strong curriculum foundations.

At Cheltenham Tutors, we believe the healthiest preparation is one that develops confident, capable learners — not children who simply memorise test techniques.

Most importantly, children should not feel that one assessment defines them. The strongest preparation is usually a rich, balanced childhood filled with reading, conversation, curiosity and growing confidence.

FAQs

Will there still be verbal reasoning?

Possibly indirectly, through comprehension, vocabulary and reasoning tasks, but not necessarily in traditional GL-style formats.

Does my child need tutoring?

Not necessarily. Strong reading habits, maths fluency and curiosity remain the most important foundations.

Will there be creative writing?

Some of the local grammar schools have confirmed publicly that there will not be a creative writing element in next year's FSCE (2026-27). However, there is still a possibility that the assessment includes something that has not been done before by FSCE as the assessment is being custom-made for Gloucestershire. The safest assumption is probably that creative writing may not be assessed, but the assessment form itself may be creative and flexible in ways that we do not yet presuppose. That is part of the point of the FSCE: it is seeking to reward creative and flexible learners, not students who have accessed large amounts of extra support out of school.

Should we still use GL materials?

Not primarily. The FSCE is a different framework with different underlying educational principles. Some reasoning practice may still help, but preparation is likely to need a broader curriculum focus.