

Access arrangements for entrance test applicants who have special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries

INTRODUCTION

Some pupils who apply to sit the entrance tests may be considered to be at a disadvantage due to the testing arrangements that would normally apply.

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty upon schools not to discriminate against disabled people or pupils in their access to education. Selection for admission for a grammar school education by way of academic testing is a “permitted form of selection” under the Equality Act 2010. Schools do, however, have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils in operating a selection process. Such adjustments may include making access arrangements.

The arrangement(s) put in place **MUST** reflect the support given to the applicant in their current school in the classroom and/or in internal school tests.

This is commonly referred to as ‘normal way of working’.

This **MUST** be supported in writing by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCo) of the applicant’s current school on headed paper and arrangements will not be considered without this supporting evidence.

The purpose of an access arrangement is to ensure, where possible, that barriers to assessment are removed for an applicant preventing them from being placed at a **substantial disadvantage** as a consequence of **persistent and significant difficulties**. The only exception to this is where an arrangement is put in place as a consequence of a temporary injury or impairment. The integrity of the assessment is maintained, whilst at the same time providing access to assessments for the applicant.

Access arrangements may include:

- extra time
- supervised rest breaks
- a prompter
- separate invigilation
- coloured overlays (supplied by parent)
- enlarged papers

(Note that the examples given are illustrative only and not exhaustive.)

Access arrangements that offer applicants an unfair advantage over others or that give rise to misleading test outcomes will not be made.

Consideration will always be given to the individual needs of pupils. The consortium of schools will determine whether the test papers and their method of administration constitute a suitable form of assessment for the disadvantaged pupil. In certain circumstances, it may be decided that a test is wholly inappropriate for a particular pupil.

For the sake of clarity, and to avoid any misunderstanding, the following terms are clearly defined in the Appendix (page 7 onwards):

- Access arrangements
- Reasonable adjustments
- Disability
- Special Educational Needs

THE PROCESS

Applications for access arrangements **MUST** be received by the deadline set. The application **MUST** be accompanied by the supporting evidence and **WILL NOT** be considered without evidence. This will allow the Consortium to consider each application and evidence in detail, and to make provision for any access arrangements from the perspective of timetabling, logistics, accommodation and staffing.

A panel comprising of SENDCos and Specialist Teachers from all four schools will sit to consider all applications for access arrangements received by the deadline. They will carefully review all of the evidence presented and determine the access arrangements that will be put in place, if appropriate.

Parents will be advised of the outcome of their application for access arrangements shortly after the meeting.

THE EVIDENCE

Please complete the form in full by the deadline set. The points below should act as a checklist for you to ensure you include all the required details:

- Identify on the form the specific arrangement(s) you are requesting.
- Provide relevant information and/or evidence of the nature and extent of the disability or difficulty (see below and on page 3).
- Confirm that the applicant has a temporary injury that necessitates access arrangements being made, **AND / OR**
- Persistent and significant difficulties when accessing and processing information.
- Provide evidence of the difficulty your child has in processing information.
- Include a letter from the SENDCo of the applicant's current school on headed paper supporting this application. Please ask the SENDCo to include in their letter:
 - your child's current difficulties in the classroom setting to show how they impact on teaching and learning and performance in the class, as well as tests, summarising evidence of feedback from teachers and/or support staff;
 - the support and adjustments that are currently in place for your child in the classroom. This must be reflected in your child's Individual Learning Plan. If extra time is requested, the SENDCo must confirm that your child routinely uses extra time in classroom assessments and internal tests as their normal way of working.

For Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD), such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia or Dyspraxia, evidence MUST include:

- a specialist assessment, by a suitably qualified professional* (see below), completed usually **no earlier than the start of Year 4** showing standardised scores in relation to:
 - speed of reading; or
 - speed of reading comprehension; or
 - cognitive processing measures which have a substantial and long-term adverse effect on speed of working

two below-average standardised scores of 84 or less;

OR

one below-average standardised score of 84 or less and one low-average standardised score (85-89).

- **AND** information from the applicant's current school to evidence their "normal way of working" **AND** how the disability/difficulty has impacted on teaching and learning.

OR

- an Education, Health and Care Plan, which confirms the applicant's disability **AND** that the access arrangement requested is the applicant's normal way of working in their current school. **Please note that an EHCP itself does not automatically qualify the applicant for extra time- this should be evidenced in Section F of the EHCP.**

* A suitably qualified professional should be one of the following to be able to assess a specific learning difficulty:

- an appropriately qualified psychologist registered with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC);
- a specialist assessor with a current SpLD Assessment Practising Certificate;
- an access arrangements assessor who has successfully completed a postgraduate course at or equivalent to Level 7, including at least 100 hours relating to individual specialist assessment.

A. For a need other than a specific learning difficulty, such as:

- Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- Sensory and/or physical needs, such as a hearing or sight impairment or a physical disability
- Social, emotional and mental health needs such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) or mental health condition
- Speech, Language and Communication Needs

Evidence MUST include AT LEAST ONE of the following:

- a letter from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), an NHS clinical psychologist, an HCPC-registered psychologist, a hospital consultant, or an NHS psychiatrist;
- a letter from the Local Authority Educational Psychology Service, Local Authority Sensory Impairment Service, or Occupational Health Service;
- a letter from a Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT);
- an Education, Health and Care Plan, which confirms the applicant's disability **AND that the access arrangement requested is the applicant's normal way of working in their current school.**

B. For temporary injury please include hospital notes or GP letters.

SPECIFIC ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

The Consortium must make decisions on appropriate access arrangements for the applicants. Although professionals from other organisations may give advice, they cannot make the decision for the Consortium.

Supervised Rest Breaks

Supervised rest breaks may be awarded on account of:

- cognition and learning needs;
- communication and interaction needs;
- a medical condition;
- sensory and physical needs;
- social, emotional and mental health needs.

During the supervised rest break the pupil must not have access to the question paper/answer booklet. The purpose of a supervised rest break is for a break from the examination and must not be used as 'thinking time'. If the pupil needs to leave the examination room, an invigilator must accompany the pupil.

A single supervised rest break should be no more than 30 minutes in duration. A supervised rest break will often be shorter than this. Pupils cannot be given as many supervised rest breaks as they like for as long as they like. A supervised rest break will not normally be required within the first 10 minutes of an examination but may be thereafter.

Extra Time

Extra time will not be allowed if an applicant's literacy difficulties are primarily caused by English not being their first language.

Additional time will usually be 25% extra on top of the published exam time.

Extra time will not be awarded for applicants with slow handwriting speeds as this is not a requirement of the entrance test.

Extra time will only be awarded if the applicant has the scores (detailed in the evidence section above) which show a significant impairment in speed of processing. Tests must be completed by a suitably qualified professional. **Dyslexia screeners alone will not be considered as evidence.**

The panel must be convinced that without the application of 25% extra time, the applicant would be at **a substantial disadvantage (when compared with other, non-disabled pupils undertaking the assessment).**

Separate Invigilation

In some circumstances, the schools may decide that an applicant should sit the entrance tests in a specific room and/or on a day other than the main testing day. This will ensure the integrity of the exam for all candidates. Such decisions will be based upon the evidence provided.

Alternative Accommodation

Only in very exceptional circumstances will an applicant be allowed to sit the entrance tests at a venue other than one of the four schools in the Consortium.

Parents should only request such an alternative when an applicant has:

- an impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect giving rise to persistent and significant difficulties; or
- a temporary illness or injury at the time of the examination(s).

An applicant may be allowed to sit their examination(s) at a residential address, at a hospital, or at another school due to, for example:

- Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development Needs (BESD); or
- a medical condition or a psychological condition which prevents the applicant from taking examinations in one of the schools.

In all such cases, the test papers will be taken under strictly controlled conditions and under the direct supervision of a suitably qualified employee of one of the four schools at a time agreed by the school.

Applicants residing some distance from the schools (including overseas) must make arrangements for the entrance tests to be sat at one of the schools to ensure the security of the papers and preserve the integrity of the selection process.

An example of reasonable adjustments for a disabled applicant

An applicant with Dyslexia needs to use a coloured overlay and requires 25% extra time. The use of a yellow coloured overlay is a reasonable adjustment for the applicant since it helps them to improve their reading accuracy. The parent provides evidence that their child has been assessed by a specialist assessor using an up to date, nationally standardised test. **The assessment shows that the applicant has a substantial and long-term impairment as their working memory score is in the below-average range. The applicant has two standardised scores of 79.** The parent provides written evidence from their child's current school showing 25% extra time as their normal way of working and explaining the impact of the child's need on teaching and learning in school. The application of 25% extra time is a reasonable adjustment.

RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the parent's responsibility to:

- submit the application for access arrangements and **all** supporting evidence on time (by the published deadline);
- specify the nature of the access arrangements requested;
- liaise with other parties (such as the applicant's current school and medical professional) to ensure that the necessary evidence is submitted with the application;
- provide any materials (such as coloured overlays) that may be reasonably required following the outcome of the panel's deliberations.

It is the Consortium of Schools' responsibility to:

- review the application and supporting evidence in detail;
- determine any access arrangements that will be made ensuring that without such an arrangement the applicant would be at a substantial disadvantage;
- communicate the outcome of the assessment of the application and evidence in a timely manner following the meeting of the Consortium school staff.

APPENDIX - DEFINITIONS

Access Arrangements

Access arrangements must be agreed before the assessments. They allow applicants/learners with special educational needs, disabilities or temporary conditions to:

- access the assessment;
- show what they know and can do without changing the demands of the assessment.

The intention behind an access arrangement is to meet the particular needs of an individual applicant without affecting the integrity of the assessment. Access arrangements are the principal way in which the schools comply with the duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make 'reasonable adjustments'.

Reasonable Adjustments

The Equality Act 2010 requires the schools to make reasonable adjustments where an applicant, who is disabled within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010, would be at a **substantial disadvantage** in comparison to someone who is not disabled. The schools are required to take reasonable steps to overcome that disadvantage.

Whether an adjustment will be considered reasonable will depend on a number of factors which will include, but are not limited to:

- the needs of the disabled applicant/learner;
- the effectiveness of the adjustment;
- the cost of the adjustment; **and**
- the likely impact of the adjustment upon the applicant and other candidates.

An adjustment will not be approved if it:

- involves unreasonable costs;
- involves unreasonable timeframes; or
- affects the security and integrity of the assessment.

This is because the adjustment is not "reasonable".

Disability

Generally, impairments have to meet the statutory requirements set out in section 6 and Schedule 1 to the Equality Act 2010 and associated regulations.

The Equality Act 2010 definition of disability is usually considered cumulatively in terms of:

- identifying a physical or mental impairment;
- looking into adverse effects and assessing which are substantial;
- considering if substantial adverse effects are long term;
- judging the impact of long-term adverse effects on normal day to day activities.

Statutory guidance on the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability has been produced by the Office for Disability Issues (within the Department for Work and Pensions) to help better understand and apply this definition.

The clear starting point in the statutory guidance is that disability means *'limitations going beyond the normal differences in ability which may exist among people'*.

'Substantial' means *'more than minor or trivial'*. Substantial adverse effects can be determined by looking at the effects on a person with the impairment, comparing those to a person without the impairment, to judge if the difference between the two is more than minor or trivial.

'Long-term' means the impairment has existed for at least 12 months, or is likely to do so.

'Normal day to day activities' could be determined by reference to the illustrative, non-exhaustive list of factors in pages 47 to 51 of the statutory guidance relating to the Equality Act 2010.

Factors that might reasonably be expected to have a substantial adverse effect include:

- persistent and significant difficulty in reading and understanding written material where this is in the person's native language, for example because of a mental impairment, a learning difficulty or a sensory or multi-sensory impairment;
- persistent distractibility or difficulty concentrating;
- difficulty understanding or following simple verbal instructions.

Factors that might reasonably be expected not to have a substantial adverse effect include:

- minor problems with writing or spelling;
- inability to fill in a long, detailed, technical document, which is in the person's native language without assistance;
- inability to concentrate on a task requiring application over several hours.

Special Educational Needs

An applicant has "special educational needs" as defined in the Education Act 1996 if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them.

An applicant has a "learning difficulty" if:

- they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of their age; **or**
- they have a disability which either prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of their age in schools within the area of the local authority.

The existence of a medical diagnosis or a physical disability in itself does not imply that the applicant in question has special educational needs.

The applicant must have an impairment in their first language which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect. An applicant **does not** have a learning difficulty simply because their first language is not English. As two components of the entrance tests examine aspects of English language, dictionaries (of any type) may not be used.