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[Department  
for Education](#)

Guidance

# COVID-19: assessment processes for selective school admissions September 2021

Updated 27 September 2021

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## Latest updates and reviews

This guidance was updated in July 2021 to reflect changes to health controls. It:

- advises that the protective measures in this guidance will not be necessary unless local authorities, directors of public health or PHE health protection teams recommend those measures and the measures described in the [contingency framework](#) are adopted as part of their outbreak management

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responsibilities

- advises that school admission authorities may, nonetheless, choose to continue adopting those protective measures if they carry out a risk assessment which indicates the need to continue with them
- advises admission authorities to book test venues with the possibility of continuing with protective measures in mind
- includes a separate section advising on actions to be taken in respect of those who cannot attend a test venue on a specified date

On 17 August, this guidance was updated to make clear who is no longer required to isolate if identified as a close contact, including clarifying that this includes young people up to the age of 18 years and 6 months.

On 27 September, it was updated to:

- reflect changes to advice around clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
- provide a general update to remove retrospective content relating to in year selection tests in the 2020/21 academic year
- update relevant paragraph references to the School Admissions Code to refer to the 2021 Code, which came into force on 1 September 2021.

## Summary

Admission authorities and local authorities must continue with their admission processes. This guidance provides admission authorities with advice on how assessment for admission to state-funded selective schools should be undertaken.

In line with the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions across wider society, we want to make sure that schools are able to return to normal as soon as possible.

The changes in this guidance apply immediately.

We know that COVID-19 is likely to be present at some level over the coming months. As a result, admission authorities will need to be ready to respond quickly and proportionately to the latest public health advice.

Admission authorities should undertake a risk assessment and decide, on the basis of that risk assessment, whether to continue with the [protective measures](#) in this guidance. They should also operate tests with the protective measures in place when advised to do so by local authorities, directors of public health and PHE health protection teams as part of their outbreak management responsibilities.

The majority of selective state-funded schools operate written tests to assess ability or aptitude. Some will, however, operate other types of assessment, for

example to determine sports or musical aptitude. We recommend that admission authorities which operate these other types of assessment operate according to the same principles set out in this guidance, although they may need to adapt certain elements according to their specific context.

Admission authorities should continue to ensure that they assess the ability or aptitude of those children who are unable to sit their test on a specific day for reasons such as religious observance, disability, illness or bereavement. Such arrangements should cover instances where, for reasons relating to COVID-19, some children may be unable to attend selection test venues on the specific day(s).

These instances will include them having tested positive for COVID-19, being ill with COVID-19 symptoms, where they are having to quarantine after returning from abroad or where they are abroad and, for good reasons, are unable to return to the country to sit the test on the normal date. It will also include cases where a child or young person has been advised to isolate or reduce their social contact by their specialist, due to the nature of their medical condition or treatment, rather than because of the pandemic.

This guidance aims to support admission authorities in operating their selection tests effectively whilst it also:

- advises on how to support children, particularly disadvantaged children, to prepare for the selection process
- aims to ensure fair access for all children including those who may be self-isolating or quarantining during the selection process
- advises that the [protective measures](#) in this guidance should only be necessary in two circumstances:
  - where those operating tests deem them to be necessary after carrying out a risk assessment, or
  - where local authorities, directors of public health or PHE health protection teams recommend the protective measures in this guidance and the measures described in the [contingency framework](#) are adopted as part of their outbreak management responsibilities
- admission authorities should therefore continue to book venues for tests with the above possibilities in mind

Admission authorities, and those arranging selection tests on their behalf, should also comply with the revised control measures set out within the [schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance](#).

Paragraph 1.17 of the [School Admissions Code 2021 \('the Code'\)](#) requires selective arrangements to be included within a school's admission arrangements<sup>[footnote 1](#)</sup>.

The impact of COVID-19 meant that many admission authorities had to change their selection processes for entry in September 2021. Admission authorities should consider whether any major changes in circumstances require further

changes to be made to selection procedures for entry in September 2022 and, therefore, to their admission arrangements<sup>[footnote 2]</sup>. We consider this eventuality to be unlikely even where local authorities, directors of public health or PHE health protection teams recommend the protective measures in this guidance and the measures described in the [contingency framework](#) are adopted to help limit increases in transmission.

Use the guidance on the variation process in [Admission arrangements variations](#).

Admission authorities must continue to ensure that their selection arrangements comply with equalities legislation. This means they must consider the impact of their selection process in the context of how it might combine with the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and public health measures on children and families with [protected characteristics](#) under the Equality Act 2010<sup>[footnote 3]</sup>, including religion, race and disability. Admission authorities should mitigate, wherever possible, any negative impacts, and make reasonable adjustments where necessary.

## Expiry or review date

This guidance applies to selective entry procedures taking place during the autumn of 2021 (for example for September 2022 entry) and beyond. It also applies to in-year applications for the 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 academic years that take place.

It will be reviewed periodically as a result of the latest scientific advice. Updated versions will be available at the same URL.

## Who is this publication for?

This guidance is non-statutory. It recommends approaches to selection for the following types of state-funded school:

- grammar schools
- partially selective ('bilateral') schools
- schools which band applicants by ability to achieve a comprehensive intake
- schools which select up to 10% of their cohort by aptitude in a prescribed subject

It is also relevant to local authorities as coordinating bodies for school admissions.

Whilst this guidance is targeted at state-funded schools which are governed by the statutory School Admissions Code and admissions legislation, independent schools which operate selection tests for entry and for scholarships may also find

it useful.

## **Key actions for admission authorities and local authorities in respect of ability and aptitude selection for 2022 admission**

The School Admissions Code requires admission authorities to take all reasonable steps to inform parents of the outcome of selection tests before the closing date for secondary applications on 31 October so as to allow parents time to make an informed choice of school.

In July 2020, the Department strongly advised admission authorities to delay testing for the 2021 admissions round to October or November 2020 instead of testing in September 2020. This was because most children had been out of school for almost six months prior to the new academic year and so were likely to benefit from as much time back in education as possible before being assessed. This later testing in autumn 2020 meant that, for the 2021 admissions round, many parents were informed of the outcome of selection tests after the closing date for secondary applications.

This is not the case this year: schools have been open to all children since 8 March 2021 and so it will not be necessary for admission authorities to delay selective tests until later in the autumn. For 2022 admission, admission authorities and local authorities should comply with the Code requirement to take all reasonable steps to inform parents of the outcome of selection tests before the closing date for secondary applications (31 October 2021). This guidance:

- advises that protective measures in selection tests will not be required unless local authorities, directors of public health or PHE health protection teams recommend their adoption as part of their outbreak management responsibilities, or the admission authority otherwise decides measures are necessary after carrying out a risk assessment
- advises admission authorities to book test venues with the above possibilities in mind
- advises local authorities to issue communications to parents explaining the return to this normal timescale for assessments and the issuing of results
- advises local authorities to continue to advise parents to use their final preference for a local non-selective school in the rare circumstances where test results cannot be provided to parents before 31 October

Admission authorities for selective schools are required to make alternative arrangements to assess children who are unable to take a selection test on the specified test day(s). Admission authorities should, therefore, ensure that their

admission arrangements set out the steps they will take to assess the ability or aptitude of such children.

This group of children will include those who cannot attend on the date of the test (or any alternative dates) for reasons such as religious observance, illness, disability or bereavement. It will also include those who cannot attend for reasons related to COVID-19 - including those required to isolate or quarantine. It will also include those who, for good reason, are unable to return from overseas in time to sit the test. Children and young people previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable should attend school and should follow the same [COVID-19 guidance](#) as the rest of the population. However, if a child or young person has been advised to isolate or reduce their social contact by their specialist, due to the nature of their medical condition or treatment, rather than because of the pandemic, they should continue to follow the advice of their specialist. Children in these circumstances should also be considered as part of this group of children for whom alternative arrangements may need to be made.

For children who cannot take the selection test on the specified day(s), it is important that the result of any alternative assessment is known in time for their results to be included in the ranking of applications so that they can be offered a place at the school on National Offer Day if they meet the oversubscription criteria and, in the case of grammar schools, reach the necessary ability standard.

It is essential that where there is a single process for selecting by ability or aptitude in an area, that admission authorities co-operate wherever possible to ensure that they maintain a consistent approach if they vary their admission arrangements. Not doing so will unnecessarily complicate the admission process for parents.

## **Adults and children who should not attend a selection test venue**

Children and adults should follow public health advice on [when to self-isolate and what to do](#). Admission authorities should not permit those who are displaying COVID-19 [symptoms](#) to attend a selection test venue with other children and adults. This includes all children and adults with a positive COVID-19 test result - either a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) or lateral flow device (LFD) test.

Anyone with a positive LFD test result must self-isolate in line with the [stay at home guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#). They will also need to [get a free PCR test](#) to check if they have COVID-19. Whilst awaiting the PCR result, the individual should continue to self-isolate and not attend a selection test.

If the PCR test is taken within 2 days of the positive LFD test, and is negative, it overrides the LFD self-test. Children and adults (for example invigilators) can then

attend a selection test, so long as they have no COVID-19 symptoms.

Individuals are not required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, and any of the following apply:

- they are fully vaccinated
- they are below the age of 18 years and 6 months
- they have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
- they are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons

Instead, they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace, informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a PCR test. We would encourage everyone to take a PCR test if advised to do so.

Staff who do not need to isolate, and children and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend school, and who have been identified as a close contact, should continue to attend school as normal. They do not need to wear a face covering within the school, but it is expected and recommended that they wear one when travelling on public or dedicated transport.

Children and adults who are required to quarantine in line with the [rules on international travel](#), having travelled abroad, should not be permitted to attend a test venue during their quarantine period.

In most cases, parents and carers will agree that a child with symptoms should not attend a test venue, given the potential risk to others. If a parent or carer insists on a child with symptoms attending the selection test, admission authorities or those running selection tests on their behalf should refuse to permit the child to sit the test on that day to protect other children and adults from possible infection with COVID-19.

## **Key actions for admission authorities and local authorities in respect of ability and aptitude selection for in-year and late testing**

Admission authorities should continue to follow the revised control measures set out in the [schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance](#). The [protective measures](#) in this guidance need only be adopted if the admission authority deems them necessary after carrying out a risk assessment, or where local authorities, directors of public health and PHE health protection teams recommend the measures described in the [contingency framework](#) are adopted as part of their

outbreak management responsibilities.

Where vacancies exist, admission authorities for selective schools are required to make alternative arrangements to assess the ability or aptitude of children who are unable to take a selection test on the specified test day(s) so that admission authorities are able to offer a place to eligible children as soon as possible.

## Detailed guidance on approaches to selective admissions

### Assessment dates for September 2022 entry

Paragraph 1.32 of the Code is clear that admission authorities must take ‘all reasonable steps to inform parents of the outcome of selection tests before the closing date for secondary applications on 31 October’ so as to allow parents time to make an informed choice of school. Selection tests are, therefore, generally completed well ahead of this date.

For the 2021 admissions round, children had been out of school for almost 6 months prior to September and so the Department advised admission authorities to delay selection tests until October/November 2020 in order to allow children to return to the routine of school before sitting the tests. The situation is different this year. As schools have been open for all children since 8 March 2021, admission authorities should, wherever possible, assess applicants’ ability or aptitude by a date which enables them to inform parents of the results of their children’s assessments in sufficient time to express their preferences for schools by 31 October<sup>[\[footnote 4\]](#)</sup>.

As this is a change in approach from applications for the 2021 admissions round, we recommend that admission authorities and local authorities are clear in their communications with parents that assessments of ability or aptitude will go forward in the early autumn, as normal, before they have to express their preferences for schools.

The [protective measures](#) should only be necessary for selection tests where local authorities, directors of public health and PHE health protection teams recommend they are adopted as part of their outbreak management responsibilities, or where those responsible for operating the tests deem them necessary after conducting a risk assessment.

Admission authorities should, therefore, continue to book test venues for the autumn which will enable them to accommodate these measures, if required.



In these circumstances it is possible that the logistics involved in testing under the additional protective measures could lead to a minority of parents not being provided with the results of their child's selection assessment before 31 October. Given this risk, there are a couple of steps local authorities and schools can take in advance to ensure that parents are not disadvantaged if any test results are delayed. These include local authorities:

- advising parents to use their final preference(s) for a local non-selective school(s)
- considering either offering all parents applying for a secondary place an additional preference of a school if this is appropriate in their area or allowing parents to change their preferences, shortly after 31 October, if their child has not reached the required standard for a grammar or partially selective school in the rare situation and the local authority or admission authority has been unable to provide parents with the results of their child's assessment before 31 October

Where local authorities permit parents to change their preferences after 31 October, we strongly advise neighbouring local authorities to work together, insofar as possible, to agree dates by which they will permit parents to change preferences. Each local authority should make it clear to parents that, if they are applying for schools in neighbouring areas, admission authorities in those areas will be working to the dates (for example around changes of preference) which apply to the area within which the school is located rather than the dates within the child's home area co-ordinated admissions scheme.

Whilst this is for the coordinating local authority to determine, offering parents additional preferences for schools or allowing parents to change their preferences after 31 October is unlikely to be necessary where assessment results are provided to parents before 31 October or where the only local selection assessments are:

- for up to 10% of places allocated at a school based on aptitude
- for banding in a school or group of schools

This is because it is not possible to fail a banding assessment. For schools which allocate up to 10% of places based on aptitude, the majority of places are available to children irrespective of the assessment result.

## **The assessment process for September 2022 entry**

It is for admission authorities to decide how to assess the ability or aptitude of applicants, whether that is by a test under exam conditions, an online test (where available), teacher assessment or other means, providing assessments comply

with the provisions of the Code.

Although, in most cases, protective measures should no longer be necessary for autumn 2021 selection tests, admission authorities are advised to take a cautious approach, and book sufficiently spacious venues and enough invigilators to enable them to test in line with the additional protective measures set out below where local authorities, directors of public health and PHE health protection teams recommend they are adopted as part of their outbreak management responsibilities. Schools and those delivering selection testing should always follow the control measures set out in the [schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance](#).

Admission authorities or those organising tests on their behalf may also adopt the protective measures below if they deem them necessary, following a risk assessment.

Whilst many grammar schools and partially selective schools use verbal, non-verbal and, in some cases, spatial reasoning tests to assess ability, some take account of what children have learnt in English and maths as part of their assessments of ability. Admission authorities for schools which test ability in English and maths may wish to consider if any changes to the test need to be made, in light of the fact that most children were out of school for a significant period during 2020 and early 2021.

If, for reasons connected to COVID-19, the arrangements for tests need to be changed within a school's determined admission arrangements, the admission authority is asked to apply for a variation by the beginning of August 2021. Find information on the [variation process](#).

## **In-year admissions testing for entry in the 2021/22 academic year**

In-year applicants must have their applications considered by the relevant admission authority but need only be assessed for ability or aptitude where a vacancy exists. Whether or not their children are assessed for ability or aptitude, parents have a right of appeal to an independent appeals panel if a place is not offered, and their child must be offered a place on any waiting list for the school<sup>[[footnote 5](#)]</sup>.

Where vacancies exist, assessment of the ability or aptitude of applicants should take place to enable those vacancies to be filled as soon as possible.

## **Cooperation between admission**

# authorities in operating selection tests

It is important that the process of applying for a selective school is not made unnecessarily complex for parents by any changes to the selection process.

Admission authorities often co-operate so that children sit a single selection test for a number of schools, whether for banding or for admission to grammar or partially selective schools. Where there is currently a unified approach to assessment, admission authorities should continue to work together to ensure, insofar as possible, that such approaches can continue, so that any complexities for parents are minimised. This helps ensure that children can be assessed once for eligibility for a number of schools.

Admission authorities can also co-operate across local authority boundaries if that is helpful to make the process even simpler for parents.

Children both from within the home local authority area and from outside the area must be able to sit selection tests.

## Minimising disadvantage for protected groups, socially and economically disadvantaged children and children who are unable to attend a selection test venue

A small number of children may be unable to attend a selection test because:

- they have one or more [COVID-19 symptoms](#), however mild
- they have had a positive test and are required to isolate
- they have been advised to isolate or reduce their social contact by their specialist, due to the nature of their medical condition or treatment, rather than because of the pandemic
- they are required to quarantine, having travelled abroad, according to the [rules for travel to England from abroad](#)
- they are overseas and, for good reason, are unable to return to the UK in time to attend the test venue on the date or dates of the test

Admission authorities are required to put alternative selection assessment arrangements in place for children unable to attend a scheduled test.

Prior to selection testing taking place, admission authorities are strongly advised to make provision for parents to alert the admission authority if their children are disabled and require special assessment processes or if their child has been

advised to isolate or reduce their social contact by their specialist, due to the nature of their medical condition or treatment, rather than because of the pandemic.

It would be a breach of paragraph 2.9(e) of the Code (which says that admission must not be refused solely because a child has missed an entrance test for selective places) to refuse to admit a child to a selective school simply because it is not possible for the child to attend the selection test venue on any set date or dates. It will normally be possible to offer alternative dates for a test so that they can be allocated a place - if they reach the necessary ability standard in a grammar or partially selective school test - on National Offer Day, but it may be necessary to make arrangements for them to be assessed in their homes, via an online selection test (where available) or at another venue.

Further to the above, admission authorities are required to comply with the Equality Act 2010. This means that they must consider the impact of their selection process on children with protected characteristics, including religion, race and disability. Admission authorities should mitigate, wherever possible, negative impacts.

Admission authorities are also advised to consider any concerns from parents about the greater risk their child may face, or feel they face, due to their own personal circumstances. This may include pupils who have underlying health conditions or whose parents are concerned about the comparatively increased risk to their children from COVID-19, including those who have certain conditions such as obesity and diabetes. Admission authorities should provide reassurance of the measures they are putting in place to reduce any risks during selection tests.

To the extent it is not covered in considering duties under equalities legislation, in the interests of fairness, we also prompt admission authorities to identify any impact of the selection process which might prove a barrier to children from lower income backgrounds in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to take action to mitigate such impacts wherever possible.

The [memorandum of understanding](#) between the Department for Education and the Grammar School Heads Association sets out our shared ambition for more pupils from lower income backgrounds to apply to, pass the test for, and be admitted to selective schools.

We advised in July 2020 that admission authorities could consider lowering the selection test pass mark for children eligible for the Pupil Premium by varying their admission arrangements. This was and remains a decision for the individual school's admission authority. A number of grammar schools already set a lower pass mark for disadvantaged children. Any admission authorities which take this approach should ensure this still provides sufficient rigour to ensure those children can thrive within the highly academic environment of a grammar school.

Many grammar schools are also carrying out a programme of outreach activity to engage lower income families and to support their children, including preparing

high ability disadvantaged children to be ready for a grammar school place. Schools should consider how they can engage with disadvantaged families and children to provide support.

An example of this activity might be for grammar schools to support families with targeted selection test familiarisation work and/or support in English and maths. Schools which select by ability will know their traditional feeder schools, and selective schools and feeder primaries are asked to work together to identify which disadvantaged children might be supported in this way. In undertaking face-to-face outreach work grammar schools should follow the [protective measures for holiday and after-school clubs, and other out-of-school settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)

On 10 June 2020, the Prime Minister announced a £1 billion COVID-19 Catch-up package. The additional [£650m we are providing](#) to schools, and the [£350m National Tutoring Programme](#), supports children who have lost time in education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In February 2021, we committed [an additional £700m](#) to support summer schools, tutoring, early language interventions and a new one-off Recovery Premium. The £302m Recovery Premium, which includes a fund to scale-up proven approaches, will build on the Pupil Premium to further support pupils who need it most. The average secondary school will receive around £22,000 and we have included a 'floor' to ensure that no secondary school will receive less than £6,000. The per pupil rates and school level allocations will be published in due course.

In June 2021, we announced [£1.4bn of additional funding](#) to support education recovery, investing a further £1 billion for national tutoring, over £250 million to help provide 500,000 teacher training opportunities and £153m for training for early years staff to support the very youngest children's learning and development.

Selective schools should use recovery and tutoring funding, alongside their existing Catch-up Premium, and their Pupil Premium, to prioritise support for particular pupils according to their need, including for potential applicants who come from disadvantaged households.

## **Selection test security and integrity**

Whilst arrangements need to be made to accommodate children who are unable to attend a selection test on the normal dates, admission authorities are advised to give careful thought to how various circumstances might threaten the security of test questions (which are often the intellectual property of test agencies), and the integrity of the test. It is recommended admission authorities consider how these risks can be mitigated insofar as possible. This does not mean that children cannot be tested from home or outside a test venue. Some providers may be able

to arrange an online selection test.

It is important that admission authorities ensure all selection test papers are secure and all question papers are locked up at night or collected daily by the test provider. Children should not be permitted to take question papers home after they have sat a test.

If sufficient care is taken, it should be possible for the intellectual property of test agencies to be protected even where children are allowed to sit late and in-year paper selection tests at home, or overseas where they are out of the country and unable to return, for good reason, in time to sit the test. Admission authorities should talk to their test providers about such tests when a selection test in a test venue, an online test or teacher assessment of a candidate's ability is not an option. Again, question papers should be collected after the test.

## Protective measures in selection test venues

Admission authorities should follow the control measures set out in the [schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance](#) when testing children for ability or aptitude.

The measures set out below need only be adopted in the following circumstances:

- if the admission authority or those operating the selection test on its behalf, deem them necessary after carrying out a risk assessment or
- if local authorities, directors of public health or PHE health protection teams recommend measures described in the [contingency framework](#) (and the protective measures set out below) in individual education settings, including test venues, as part of their outbreak management responsibilities.

In such cases:

- selection tests should take place in well-ventilated rooms. Guidance on ventilation within schools is set out in more detail within the schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance
- social distancing will only be required in limited circumstances, for example, only where local authorities, directors of public health and PHE health protection teams recommend it as part of their outbreak management responsibilities. In such circumstances, desks in the venue should be placed 2 metres apart
- where recommended by local authorities, directors of public health or PHE health protection teams, those children taking selection tests in a school, whilst other children are being educated in that school should be kept separate from them to minimise any risk of transmitting COVID-19

- candidates or staff who have one or more COVID-19 symptoms, no matter how mild, or who are unwell, self-isolating because they have tested positive or if they are quarantining must not be permitted to attend. Separate arrangements should be made for assessing children who are unwell, self-isolating, quarantining, who are one of the very small number of children under paediatric or other specialist care who have been advised by their clinician or other specialist not to attend school or who are abroad and, for good reasons, are unable to return to the country to sit the test on the normal date
- hand washing facilities should be made available to all candidates. There needs to be good access to hand washing and toilet facilities to avoid queuing
- any selection test rooms and toilet areas should be kept clean. Frequently touched surfaces (door handles/desks) should be regularly cleaned with the usual cleaning products
- hand sanitiser should be placed around the selection test room(s) and general area to help candidates and staff keep their hands clean. It may be necessary to provide sanitiser on every desk
- candidates should bring their own equipment (pencils/pens/calculators), tissues and water bottles to avoid sharing. It is recommended that a supply of unused equipment should be available for those candidates who do not bring their own
- the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach continues to be very important. Make sure sufficient tissues and bins are available to support pupils and staff to follow this routine

The [e-Bug COVID-19 website](#) contains free resources for schools, including materials to encourage good hand and respiratory hygiene.

## Admission arrangements variations

The Code sets out at paragraph 1.17 that: 'all selective schools must publish the entry requirements for a selective place and the process for such selection'. The selection process will therefore be written into schools' published admission arrangements.

A number of selective schools varied their 2021 admission arrangements because of necessary changes to their selection processes. Whilst we do not expect a large number of variation requests in relation to 2022 arrangements, some admission authorities may need to change ('vary') them in respect of the following:

- selection test dates
- selection test pass marks
- other changes to the selection test process
- arrangements for those unable to attend on selection test dates because of religious observance because they are ill or bereaved, have a disability, are unable to attend because of public health measures such as self-isolation and

quarantine, or they are overseas and, for good reason, are unable to return to the UK in time to attend the test venue on the date or dates of the test

Academy school admission authorities would need to seek an in-year variation from their relevant Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) who takes this decision on behalf of the Secretary of State. The admission authority should send its request to [Academy.QUESTIONS@education.gov.uk](mailto:Academy.QUESTIONS@education.gov.uk).

Maintained school admission authorities would need to seek an [in-year variation from the Schools Adjudicator](#).

There is an [online form on the adjudicator's website](#) for requesting an admissions variation. Admission authorities for maintained schools should complete this form and submit it to the adjudicator. Admission authorities for academy schools should also use this form, but they submit it to the [Academy Questions mailbox](#).

When requesting variations, admission authorities should provide information on what the major change is that necessitates the change, what changes they want to make to their admission arrangements, when they want changes to come into effect and that they have informed the relevant persons/bodies that they have applied for a variation.

In line with paragraph 3.6 of the Code, admission arrangements can only be varied if such changes are necessary in view of a major change in circumstances since they were determined. Admission arrangements for 2022 would have been determined by 28 February 2021.

The Schools Adjudicator or RSC - on behalf of the Secretary of State - will consider each application for an admissions variation on its merits. They will need to be satisfied that there has been a major change in circumstances since the arrangements were determined in February 2021, that the change requested is necessary and the changes are the minimum necessary.

Schools which band by ability should note the requirements of section 103(3) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, set out in footnote 1 above, which may require wider changes to their admission arrangements if they wish to abandon banding.

Each local authority is required to publish its composite admissions prospectus by 12 September 2021. It would be helpful to parents if varied arrangements were in place by the deadline for publication, so that parents could begin to consider their options on the basis of up to date information. As a result, it would be helpful if any requests for a variation were submitted by the beginning of August 2021 at the latest.

To vary their admission arrangements, admission authorities must follow the process set out in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the Code:

- we recommend that, as part of this process, admission authorities ensure that bodies which will need to play a part in varied arrangements are content with the



approach proposed. In addition, where the local authority is the admission authority it must consult the school's governing body<sup>[footnote 6]</sup>

- the admission authority should inform the appropriate bodies/persons listed in footnote 61 and paragraph 1.47 (c), (d) and (f) of the 2021 Code as to which changes are being requested and how these will change the admission arrangements. It should provide evidence these groups have been informed with its application.

If the RSC or Schools Adjudicator approves the variation, the changes must be published as revisions to the admission arrangements and the amended arrangements must be displayed prominently on the school's website <sup>[footnote 7]</sup>. The admission authority should inform its local authority of any changes and use any other methods it normally uses to inform local parents of changes.

The local authority should amend its online admissions prospectus to include the varied admission arrangements. The admission authority and the local authority should ensure that what is published on the school's website and the local authority's website is consistent.

Admission authorities wishing to make changes to their selective processes for 2022 admission should be clear that the process set out in paragraphs 1.45 to 1.48 of the 2021 Code would not permit them to revert to their previous arrangements for 2023 unless they had already begun their consultation by 21 December 2021.

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1. Footnote 4 of the Code says, 'Admission arrangements means the overall procedure, practices, criteria and supplementary information to be used in deciding on the allocation of school places and refers to any device or means used to determine whether a school place is to be offered.' Selection is part of the 'procedure..... to be used in deciding on the allocation of school places' and assessment is a 'means used to determine whether a school place is to be offered.' ↩
  2. Schools which select up to 10% of their pupils by aptitude in a prescribed subject may choose to apply to vary their arrangements to remove selection if necessary. Schools which band by ability may also remove selection if necessary but are reminded that, if they seek an in-year variation to remove banding, their intake must remain representative of the full ability range of applicants (or the full ability range of children in the local authority area or the full ability range of all children in England), even without a test. This may require wider variations of the admission arrangements. Grammar Schools and the forty maintained schools and academies which had partially selective ('bilateral') arrangements prior to 1998 and continue with those arrangements would not be able to reinstate selection if they removed it. ↩
  3. The Public Sector Equality Duty (contained in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) requires the proprietors of maintained schools and academies (as public bodies) to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act; advance

equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. [↩](#)

4. This is a change from the guidance we published in July 2020 stating that it was reasonable, for one year only, to test in late October 2020 or, if the local co-ordinated scheme allowed, in November even if this meant that selection test results were not known before the closing date for applications (31 October 2020). This was to enable as many children as possible to get back into the routine of education before being tested and therefore minimise any disadvantage caused by the lengthy period many children had to spend away from school while schools remained closed. [↩](#)
5. Where a child has not had their ability or aptitude assessed, they must be placed on any waiting list, where one exists, for the school in accordance with the school's oversubscription criteria. If they are ranked sufficiently highly on the list when a vacancy arises, they must have their ability or aptitude assessed at that point in time, so they can be allocated a place if eligible. [↩](#)
6. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code [↩](#)
7. Paragraph 3.7 of the Code [↩](#)

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