



Department  
for Education

# **Coronavirus (COVID-19): assessment processes for selective school admissions**

**March 2021**

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## Latest updates and reviews

On 26 March 2021 we updated this guidance to include changes on:

- face coverings in education settings;
- assessing the ability of children under paediatric or other specialist care who have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend school; and
- the use of the Catch-up package to support disadvantaged applicants.

## Summary

This guidance was first issued in July 2020. Admission authorities will have taken account of the advice within it, in considering applications received by the national closing date for secondary applications (31 October 2020), in many cases changing the dates tests were run in line with this guidance as an exception to the general position set out within the [School Admissions Code](#) ('the Code'). We retain that advice within this guidance, so admission appeals panels have it as a reference when hearing parents' appeals for places.

However, the guidance has also been updated in February 2021 to provide new advice on selection assessment processes for in-year and late applications for places. It was updated again in March 2021 to include details of the Catch-up package and how it can be used to support disadvantaged applicants, advice on face coverings and changes to wider advice on clinically extremely vulnerable children and shielding within the [Schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance](#).

Despite the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, admission authorities and local authorities must continue with their admission processes. It is therefore necessary to consider how assessment for admission to state-funded selective schools can continue to be undertaken in the context of the nation's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Since this guidance was first issued in July 2020, selective schools will have completed the majority of their selection tests for entry in September 2021 but may still be testing:

- late applicants; and
- in-year applicants.

These remaining tests are likely to be on a small scale with few candidates for testing.

This guidance has been updated in light of the ongoing national response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to support admission authorities with these remaining tests. Earlier versions of this guidance were for tests taking place before this time, which constitute the bulk of selective testing. Key points which have been updated since July are:

- **Alternatives to testing in a venue.** Admission authorities and local authorities should consider assessing the aptitude or ability of late and in-year applicants by

other means ahead of looking to test children under exam conditions in schools or test centres where that is possible. See paragraph 13.

- **Testing in a venue.** Admission authorities can, however, continue to test within schools or test centres where it is not possible, or appropriate, to assess aptitude or ability by other means. See paragraph 14.
- **Protective health measures.** Wherever selection testing takes place in a school or test centre and, bearing in mind that children attending tests will in most cases be being tested outside their normal education and social bubbles, schools and local authorities should adopt the protective measures set out in paragraphs 15 and 37 to 39 of this guidance and within the system of controls. This includes advice on face coverings set out within the [Schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance](#).
- **Catch-up package.** Updated information within this guidance set out in paragraphs 32-34 to reflect the February 2021 Catch-up and Recovery Premium announcement. Catch-up and Recovery Premium funding can be used to provide familiarisation and other outreach work to support applications from disadvantaged families and the admission of disadvantaged children.

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.

The impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) protective measures mean that many admission authorities have had to change their selective processes for entry in September 2021<sup>1</sup>.

Admission authorities should continue to ensure that they assess those who are not able to sit the 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 coronavirus (COVID-19) some children may be unable to attend selection test centres on the specific day(s). These instances will include them having tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), self-isolation due to them being ill or because they have been exposed to someone who is ill, if they are one of the very small number of pupils under paediatric or other specialist care who have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend school, or if they are having to quarantine.

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<sup>1</sup> Where the local co-ordinated admissions scheme will allow for this at such a late stage in the process, 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. Schools which band by ability may also remove selection 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. The forty maintained schools and academies which had partially selective arrangements prior to 1998 and continue with those arrangements would not be able to reinstate selection if they remove it.

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

- supports children, particularly disadvantaged children, to prepare for the selection process;
- puts in place health protection measures during the selection process; and
- ensures fair access for all children including those whose health status or that of their families means that they may be self-isolating, quarantining or having to take additional precautions during the selection process.

Admission authorities are best placed to decide which approach works best for them. We will not, therefore, prescribe a single course of action. This guidance instead aims to assist admission authorities in planning effectively both for autumn assessments and ongoing assessments throughout the year.

## **Expiry or review date**

This guidance applies to selective admissions for the 2021-22 school year.

## **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; and
- 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 and they should follow the protective measures set out here and the system of controls set out within the Schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance.

## **Key actions for admission authorities and local authorities in respect of ability and aptitude selection for 2021 admissions**

From February 2021 we advised, admission authorities and local authorities to consider assessing the aptitude or ability of late and in-year applicants by other means (such as online testing or teacher assessment) ahead of looking to test children under exam conditions in test centres. Admission authorities can, however, continue to test within schools or test centres, where they consider this appropriate, and we consider travel to

such tests to be essential travel. Further advice on considerations and processes to be followed is included within this guidance.

In July 2020, we strongly advised admission authorities to review their processes and think carefully about whether changes were needed to deal with the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Admission authorities were asked to consider whether they needed to vary their determined admission arrangements to allow for any necessary changes to selection processes. Most variations for the 2021/22 school year have already been decided either by the schools adjudicator (maintained schools) or the regional schools commissioners (RSCs) on behalf of the Secretary of State (academy schools). We do not expect school admission authorities to require variations at this stage of the admissions cycle, but if they do, more information on the variation process is included within this guidance.

No child was likely to perform to their utmost ability in a selection test at the beginning of September 2020 and were likely to benefit from as much time back in education as possible before being assessed. The attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers was likely to be magnified by their absence, for several months, from school when they were closed because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. We therefore:

- strongly advised that selection tests for grammar and partially selective schools were moved back into late October 2020 (which meant that many parents had to express preferences for school places before results were known) or to November if local admission co-ordination processes allowed. Many selective schools have responded to this advice by varying their admission arrangements;
- strongly advised that local authorities issued communications clearly explaining to parents the consequences of choosing only selective schools in their preferences in case their child did not attain a sufficiently high score to qualify for a grammar school. This was to help address the fact that parents would have had to express their preferences without knowing whether their child would qualify for a place in a selective school. We also recommended that local authorities strongly advised parents to use their final preference(s) for a local non-selective school(s) – if selection test results were not known before 31 October 2020– in order to increase their opportunities of obtaining one of their preferences; and
- advised local authorities with grammar schools to offer all parents applying for a secondary place at least one additional preference, if this was possible<sup>2</sup>, to help address the same issue. Local authorities in which a large number of parents choose selective schools in neighbouring authorities were also asked to consider whether a similar approach would be feasible or appropriate in their area, particularly where they currently offer parents the minimum number of preferences.

We advise admission authorities to follow the system of controls and any guidance on face coverings set out in the Schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance as well as the protective measures set out in this guidance if testing children in a test venue for

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<sup>2</sup> We recognise that some contracts with companies providing co-ordination software may not permit such changes to be made at reasonable cost but that other contracts will.

aptitude or ability. They should not permit those who are displaying coronavirus (COVID-19) [symptoms](#) to attend a selection test centre with other children and adults. The same applies to children with a positive COVID-19 test result - either a polymerase chain reaction ('PCR') or lateral flow device ('LFD') test. They must self-isolate and not attend a selection test on the day of the positive test or symptoms and for at least the following 10 full days.

In addition children and adults who are legally required to quarantine, having recently visited countries outside the Common Travel Area<sup>3</sup> should not be permitted to attend a test venue.

Whether or not they had to change their admission arrangements, admission authorities must continue to ensure that their selection arrangements continue to 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 coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and public health measures on children and families with [protected characteristics](#) under the Equality Act 2010<sup>4</sup>, including religion, race and disability. Admission authorities should mitigate, wherever possible, any negative impacts, and make reasonable adjustments where necessary.

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), for reasons such as religious observance, illness, disability or bereavement. Admission authorities should, therefore, also set out within their admission arrangements the steps they will take to assess the ability or aptitude of children who cannot take a selection test on the scheduled date (including on any alternative dates) for reasons related to coronavirus (COVID-19), if they do not consider this is already sufficiently covered by their existing arrangements.

For children who could not take the selection test on the specified day(s), we advised that it was important that the result of an alternative assessment was known in time for their results to be included in the ranking of applications so that they could be offered a place at the school on National Offer Day, if they met the oversubscription criteria and, in the case of grammar schools, reached the necessary ability standard. For late and in-year applications, any necessary assessments of ability or aptitude should be carried out, where there are vacancies, and an offer of a place made as soon as possible.

Paragraph 1.17 of the Code requires selective arrangements to be included within a school's admission arrangements<sup>5</sup>. In July we therefore asked admission authorities to

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<sup>3</sup> The Common Travel Area (CTA) is a long-standing arrangement between the UK, the Crown Dependencies (Bailiwick of Jersey, Bailiwick of Guernsey and the Isle of Man) and Ireland

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.....

consider whether changes to their selection testing arrangements (e.g. around test dates, pass marks or assessment of those who could not or cannot attend tests on the specified day(s)) required the school's admission arrangements to be varied. In the unlikely situation of any schools still needing to vary their admission arrangements for 2021 and subsequent years, advice on how to do so is set out below. They should consider the impact of any changes at this late stage on applicants.

It is essential that where there is a single process for selecting by aptitude or ability 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.

## **Detailed guidance on approaches to selection for 2021 admissions**

### **Delaying selection testing for 2021 admissions**

1. 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.

2. Given the initial coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown measures in 2020, with the majority of children not attending school for several months, children were unlikely to be ready to perform at their best in any selection test which took place at the normal time in September 2020. Additionally, in many cases, it will not have been feasible for admission authorities to provide results before 31 October 2020 due to coronavirus (COVID-19) related disruption (for example if additional selection test sessions were needed to accommodate protective measures).

3. Our advice to the sector, therefore, was that it was reasonable, for this year only, to aptitude or ability test in late October 2020 or, if the local co-ordinated scheme allowed for this, in November even if this meant that selection test results were not known before the closing date for applications (31 October). This action by admission authorities will have enabled as many children as possible to get back into the routine of education before being tested and therefore minimised the disadvantage caused by the lengthy period many children had to spend away from school while schools remained closed. This disadvantage was likely to be especially acute for children eligible for the pupil premium, and for children who face particular barriers to their education.

4. We acknowledge that late selection testing meant that parents applying in the normal admissions round needed to make choices about secondary schools for their

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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.'

children without knowing whether their children necessarily met the academic standards required for selective schools.

5. We recommended, therefore, that admission authorities and local authorities were clear in their communications with parents about the consequences of late selection testing, so that parents could consider how many selective schools to choose within their preferences.

6. Where the outcome of selection tests was not known before 31 October, we strongly recommended that local authorities considered offering all applicants for a secondary school at least one additional preference, under the admission co-ordination process for 2021 admissions, where this was possible.

7. Whilst this was for the coordinating local authority to determine, offering an additional preference was unlikely to be appropriate where the only local selection testing is:

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

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

9. For partially selective ('bilateral') schools, the question of whether to offer an additional preference depended on the overall number of schools with partial selection in an area and the overall proportion of selective places. It was and is, however, for local authorities to decide their course of action.

## **Delaying selection testing: choice advice**

10. Local authorities have a duty under section 86(1A) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to 'provide advice and assistance to parents of children in the area of the authority in connection with [their] preferences'.

11. Where grammar school assessment results were not provided until after 31 October 2020, we therefore recommended that local authorities advised parents to use their final preference(s) for a local non-selective school(s). This would improve the chances of a child being allocated a preferred school on national offer date (1 March 2021) if he or she did not demonstrate sufficiently high academic ability in the assessment process for a grammar school.

12. Although we strongly advised local authorities both to offer an additional preference (where possible) and to advise parents to use any additional preference for a local non-selective school, parents were free to use an extra preference in any way they saw fit.

Local authorities were reminded to explain the consequences to parents of choosing only selective schools, in case their child did not attain a sufficiently high score to qualify for a grammar school.

## **In-year admissions and late testing**

13. Admission authorities and local authorities should consider assessing the aptitude or ability of late and in-year applicants by other means ahead of looking to test children under exam conditions in schools or test centres. This may include allowing children to take the selection test in their own homes (either by a paper test or an online test, where available), or primary school teacher assessment, where this is a viable alternative.

14. Admission authorities can, however, continue to test within schools or test centres, where they consider it appropriate to do so. We consider travel to such tests to be essential travel, although only one person should accompany the child. If using public transport, parents should be reminded to follow the [public transport guidance](#). Group travel to selection test centres should be discouraged, in particular lifts in private cars.

15. Where tests do take place in person, we strongly advise admission authorities and those selection testing on behalf of admission authorities to follow the system of controls and guidance on face coverings within the Schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance and the specific advice on health protection measures in selection tests set out below, in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) when carrying out such testing. As a result of taking these measures, it is unlikely to be possible to test as many children in one sitting as is normal practice. Late and in-year selection assessments and tests may either need to be run over a longer period of time or the admission authority may need to allocate more space - for selection testing in a venue - in order to follow health protection measures, especially given the need to maintain at least 2 metres distance between candidates.

## **Cooperation between admission authorities in operating selection tests**

16. 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.

17. 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.

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

19. 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 centre.**

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

- they have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) or a recent positive test result themselves;
- they live with someone who has symptoms or has tested positive and are a household contact;
- they are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19) or someone who is asymptomatic but has tested positive;
- they are one of the very small number of pupils under paediatric or other specialist care who have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend school; or they are legally required to quarantine having recently visited countries outside the Common Travel Area.

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

22. Prior to selection testing taking place, admission authorities are strongly advised to make provision for parents to alert the admission authority if their children fall within the categories within paragraph 20 or if their children are disabled and require special assessment processes.

23. 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 place simply because it is not possible for the child to attend the selection test centre on any set date or dates. It may be necessary to make arrangements for them to be assessed in their homes, via an online selection test or at another venue either at the same time, or later. Children under paediatric or other specialist care who have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend school should not be required to sit a test outside their home environment.

24. 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.

25. 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 are clinically extremely vulnerable, those living in households where someone is clinically extremely vulnerable, or those concerned about the comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds or who have certain conditions such as obesity and diabetes. They should provide reassurance of the measures they are putting in place to reduce the risk during selection tests.

26. 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 public health situation and take action to mitigate such impacts wherever possible.

27. 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.

28. 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 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.

29. 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 to benefit from a grammar school place.

30. Schools are advised to review how any outreach activity focused on disadvantaged children has been affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and associated social distancing measures. Schools should consider how they can engage with target families and children to provide support.

31. 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.

32. On 10 June 2020, the Prime Minister announced a £1 billion coronavirus (COVID-19) Catch-up package. The additional [£650m we are providing](#) schools and the [£350m](#)

[National Tutoring Programme](#) supports children who have lost time in education as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

33. In February 2021, we committed [an additional £700m](#) to support summer schools, tutoring, early language interventions and a new one-off Recovery Premium. The Recovery Premium, worth £302m, will build on the Pupil Premium to further support pupils who need it most. Schools' allocations from the Recovery Premium are calculated based on the numbers of their pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium. Selective schools should use this new funding, alongside their existing [Catch up Premium](#), and their Pupil Premium as a single total from which to prioritise support for particular pupils according to their need, including for potential applicants who come from disadvantaged households.

34. The package will provide each mainstream school with a total of £145 for each eligible pupil across the 2021/22 academic year. Recognising the uneven distribution of pupil premium eligible pupils, we have also ensured that no secondary school will receive less than £6000. The average secondary school will receive just over £22,000.

## **Selection test security and integrity**

35. Whilst arrangements need to be made to accommodate children who are unable to attend the 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. Some providers can arrange an online selection test.

36. If children are to be ability or aptitude tested over a longer period of time than normal (a period of a week, for instance), it will be important for admission authorities to ensure that all selection test papers are secure, that question papers do not leave the selection test centre and are locked up at night or collected daily by the test provider. It would not, however, be impossible for the intellectual property of test agencies to be protected even if children were allowed to sit late and in-year paper selection tests at home. Admission authorities should talk to their test providers about such tests when a selection test in a test centre, an online test or teacher assessment of a candidate's ability is not an option.

## **Protective measures in selection test centres**

37. In this guidance, where something is essential for public health reasons, as advised by Public Health England (PHE), we have said 'must'. Where there is a legal requirement, we have made that clear. This guidance does not create any new legal obligations.

38. Wherever selection testing takes place in a school or test centre, admission authorities for schools are strongly advised to ensure the protective measures set out here are in place within the venue. Admission authorities are reminded that this advice is reviewed regularly to reflect the latest scientific advice. We strongly recommend therefore that admission authorities' procedures are kept under review in line with the latest advice. The [e-Bug coronavirus \(COVID-19\) website](#) contains free resources for schools, including materials to encourage good hand and respiratory hygiene.

39. Admission authorities should follow the protective measures set out within the system of controls and guidance on face coverings in education set out within Schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance, as well as the following protective measures:

- any guidance on face-coverings within schools set out within the [Schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance](#) must be followed. Test centres should have a small contingency supply of face-coverings available for people who need them;
- children should be selection tested in smaller groups. There is, however, no specific overall limit that can be provided in this guidance on the number of candidates who can sit in a room, as each setting will differ in its layout, build and ventilation capacity;
- selection tests must take place in well-ventilated rooms with everyone seated at least 2 metres apart in all directions. Guidance on ventilation within schools is set out in more detail within the Schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance;
- more broadly, admission authorities should ensure that everyone within the test centre maintains 2 metres' distancing within and around the venue. The upper limit to the number of candidates who can take a test, in a room together, will depend broadly on the desk spacing requirements. Invigilators may walk up and down aisles between desks but there must also be points in the room where an invigilator can stand at least 2 metres from the nearest desk and see all the candidates in the room;
- 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 coronavirus (COVID-19);
- candidates or staff who have one or more COVID-19 symptoms or who are unwell, self-isolating because they have tested positive – even if they are asymptomatic – or quarantining must not be permitted to attend. Those children under paediatric or other specialist care who have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend school should not be required to attend an aptitude or ability test. Separate arrangements for assessing children who are unwell, self-isolating, quarantining or under advice from their GP or clinician not to attend school should be made;
- selection tests should be managed to avoid a mass drop-off or pick-up of candidates at the same time. Parents should not be permitted to park or congregate

at or around the school or selection test centre and the admission authority will need to police safe distancing of 2 metres inside and outside the venue. Likewise, children should not be permitted to congregate in groups whilst entering or leaving the school or test centre;

- limit escorts for candidates to one adult and discourage group travel to selection test centres; in particular lifts in private cars;
- hand washing facilities must be made available to all candidates. There must be good access to hand washing and toilet facilities to avoid queuing;
- any selection test rooms and toilet areas should be sanitised and kept scrupulously clean. Frequently touched surfaces (door handles/desks etc.) 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 etc.), 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 enough tissues and bins are available to support pupils and staff to follow this routine.

## Admission arrangements variations

40. 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'.

41. The selection process will therefore be written into admission arrangements. Our advice to admission authorities in July 2020 was that it may, therefore have been necessary 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 because they are one of the very small number of pupils under paediatric or other specialist care who have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend school, for instance.

42. Most schools which need to do so have already varied their arrangements. Any that are yet to vary their arrangements, but need to do so, should follow the advice below.

43. Academy school admission authorities would need to seek an in-year variation from their relevant RSC (who makes 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).
44. Maintained school admission authorities would need to seek an in-year variation from the Schools Adjudicator via [this website](#).
45. 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.
46. 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.
47. 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 2021 would have been determined by 28 February 2020 (i.e. before measures were implemented by the government in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak).
48. The Schools Adjudicator or Regional Schools Commissioner ('RSC') - on behalf of the Secretary of State - will consider each application for an admissions variation on its merits. Clearly, the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is a major event. It is likely that the Schools Adjudicator or RSC will consider that this justifies necessary changes to arrangements.
49. The changes should be the minimum necessary, but admission authorities may also want to consider whether it is necessary to change any other aspect of their determined admission arrangements, beyond selective arrangements, which may be undeliverable due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. 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.
50. Any further requests to vary 2021 admission arrangements will not affect those offered places on 1 March. If any changes are now necessary, they should be submitted as soon as possible. Each local authority was required to publish its composite admissions prospectus by 12 September 2020. We therefore advised in July 2020 that 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. We also advised that because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the volume of variations the RSC/Adjudicator would be considering was likely to be large, and so

submitting a request early would be helpful to enable these to be processed in a timely manner.

51. Nevertheless, some requests continue to be submitted, and these will be considered on their merits. In particular, where admission authorities need to change their arrangements for any remaining tests for September 2021 admission or for handling in-year applications in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, it is probable that they will need to apply for an in-year admissions variation (depending on what the published admission arrangements say). For example, if they want to replace late and in-year selection testing in a school or test centre (as set out in their admission arrangements), with teacher assessment of ability or with an online test or paper testing at home, a variation is likely to be necessary.

52. To undertake the variation, 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. For example, where the intention is to hold selection tests over more days and for these tests to take place in local primary schools, admission authorities need to be confident the primary schools can accommodate this. In addition, where the local authority is the admission authority it must consult the school's governing body<sup>6</sup>;
- the admission authority should inform the appropriate bodies/persons listed in footnote 61 and paragraph 1.44 (c), (d) and (f) of the 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.

53. If the RSC/Adjudicator approves the variation, the changes must be published as revisions to the admission arrangements and the amended arrangements must<sup>7</sup> be displayed prominently on the school's website. 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.

54. 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.

55. Admission authorities wishing to make changes to their selective processes for 2021 admission should be clear that the process set out in paragraphs 1.42-1.49 of the

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<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 3.6 of the Code

<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 3.7 of the Code

Code would not permit them to revert to their previous arrangements for 2022 unless they had already begun their consultation by 21 December 2020.



Department  
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