



Department  
for Education

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

**24 February 2022**

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## Overview

On 21 February, the Prime Minister set out the next phase of the government's COVID-19 response. COVID-19 continues to be a virus that we learn to live with and the imperative to reduce the disruption to children and young people's education remains. To this end the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) published [new guidance](#) on isolation and tracing close contacts on 24 February.

This selection assessment guidance sets out the actions schools and those organising and running ability and aptitude selection tests should continue to take in test venues.

Control measures are set out in detail within the [Schools COVID-19 operational guidance](#) and these should be followed within test venues, whether or not the venue is a school.

## Changes to the previous version

This guidance has been updated from the version published on 22 February to reflect the [new guidance](#) on isolation and tracing close contacts published by UKHSA on 24 February. This new guidance means [some invigilators and children who were previously unable to attend a selection test may now be able to do so](#)

## Summary

Admission authorities and local authorities must continue with their admission processes.

The following guidance provides advice on how assessment for admission to state-funded selective schools can be undertaken in the context of the nation's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Children staff and other adults attending test centres should follow UKHSA guidance for [People with COVID-19 and their contacts](#) if they have [COVID-19 symptoms](#). Test centres should consider how they can best ensure this guidance is followed.

Admission authorities and those organising selection tests on their behalf should ensure they follow the [advice in this guidance](#) on assessing the ability and aptitude of children who, for good reason are unable to attend a test on the normal date. They should also adopt the control measures set out within the [Schools COVID-19 operational guidance](#).

Those organising and running selection tests should have contingency plans in place outlining how they will operate if they need to take extra measures in exceptional circumstances.

They should, accordingly, undertake a risk assessment and decide, on the basis of that risk assessment, whether and when it is necessary to adopt the [additional protective measures](#) in this guidance.

They should, in any case, adopt the additional protective measures within this guidance in test venues when advised to do so by directors of public health as part of their outbreak management responsibilities.

Information on what circumstances might necessitate taking additional action can be found in the [contingency framework](#).

## 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.

## **Expiry or review date**

This guidance applies to selective entry procedures taking place for September 2022 admission and beyond and in-year applications for the 2021/22 academic year. It will be reviewed periodically in line with wider COVID-19 guidance for educational settings.

# Detailed guidance on approaches to selective admissions for 2022 admission

## The assessment process for late and in-year applicants

Children must continue to be assessed for entry, although in-year applicants need only be assessed for eligibility for a grammar school place where a vacancy exists<sup>1</sup>.

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.

## Children and adults who should not attend a selection test venue

Children and adults should not attend a selection test if they have the [key symptoms of COVID-19](#).

Public health advice for [People with COVID-19 and their contacts](#) changed from 24 February. Contacts are no longer required to self-isolate or advised to take daily tests, and contact tracing has ended.

In most cases, parents and carers will agree that a pupil with the key symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend a selection test, given the potential risk to others.

If a parent or carer insists on a child attending a selection test those organising and running selection tests can take the decision to refuse to permit the child to sit the test on that day if, in their reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from possible infection with COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> Where a child has not had their ability 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 assessed at that point in time, so they can be allocated a place if eligible.

## **Assessing the ability or aptitude of those children who cannot attend a test on the normal date.**

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).

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 because they have the key symptoms of COVID-19 or who are quarantining and those who, for good reason, are unable to return from overseas in time to sit the test.

Following expert clinical advice and the successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme, people previously identified as clinically vulnerable (CV) or clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), are not being advised to shield again. Children who were previously identified as being CV or CEV are advised to continue to follow the same guidance as the general public contained in [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#). Children over the age of 12 with a weakened immune system should follow [DHSC and UKHSA advice](#) for people whose immune system means they are at higher risk from COVID-19.

Children previously considered CV or CEV should attend school (and therefore test venues). In some circumstances, a child may have received personal advice from their specialist or clinician on additional precautions to take and they should continue to follow that advice. This may mean that they cannot attend a selection test venue on the specific day(s). Children in these circumstances should also be considered as part of the group of children for whom alternative arrangements may need to be made.

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.

## **Minimising disadvantage for protected groups and socially and economically disadvantaged children.**

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, including where their child has received personal advice from their specialist or clinician on additional precautions to take due to the nature of their medical condition or treatment.

It would be a breach of paragraph 2.9 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 - but it may be necessary to assess them in their homes, via an online selection test (where available) or at another venue.

In addition, 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. Admission authorities should provide reassurance about 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. 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.

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, and those arranging selection tests on their behalf, should follow the control measures set out within the [Schools COVID-19 operational guidance](#).

These include:

- ensuring good hygiene for everyone
- maintaining appropriate cleaning regimes
- keeping occupied spaces well ventilated; and
- following public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19

They should also advise invigilators and children who may be considering attending test venues to follow the UKHSA guidance for [People with COVID-19 and their contacts](#).

Mandatory certification is no longer in place and so venues and events are not required by law to use the NHS COVID Pass as a condition of entry, but some may do so voluntarily. Further information on this is available: [Using your NHS COVID Pass for travel abroad and at venues and settings in England](#). You should not use the NHS COVID Pass as a condition of entry for education or related activities such as selection tests.

On the basis of the current evidence, the following additional protective measures need only be adopted in exceptional circumstances. These circumstances would be:

- following a risk assessment conducted by those organising or running selection tests

- when advised to do so by directors of public health as part of their outbreak management responsibilities.

A director of public health might also advise those organising or running selection tests that face coverings should temporarily be worn in test venues (by children and adults, unless exempt). You should make sure your contingency plans cover this possibility.

The additional protective measures are:

- selection tests should take place in well-ventilated rooms. Guidance on ventilation within schools is set out in more detail within the [Schools COVID-19 operational guidance](#)
- desks in the venue should be placed 2 metres apart
- hand washing facilities should be made available to all candidates and invigilators etc. in the test venue. 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.



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