



Department  
for Education

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

**May 2021**

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## Latest updates and reviews

This guidance has been updated to include specific guidance for the 2022 admissions round. It:

- advises local authorities and 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 2021;
- reminds admission authorities to assess the ability or aptitude of those children who are abroad, and for good reason, cannot return to the UK in time to sit a test in person;
- asks the admission authorities of schools which include an assessment of English or maths in their assessments to consider if any changes need to be made, in light of the significant period of time some children spent out of school during 2020 and early 2021.

## Summary

Admission authorities and local authorities must continue with their admission processes during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This guidance provides them with 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. It includes recommendations specific to autumn testing for 2022 entry as well as those applicable to ongoing in-year admissions (e.g. for the 2020-21 academic year).

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, 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, if they are having to quarantine or if they are abroad and, for good reasons, are unable to return to the country to sit the test on the normal date.

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;
- advises on the specific health protection measures ('protective measures') which should be adopted for in-year selection tests, and advises admission authorities to plan on the basis of some protective measures continuing to be necessary in the autumn; 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.

This guidance aims to assist admission authorities in planning effectively both for autumn assessments and ongoing assessments throughout the year. The protective measures set out in paragraphs 35-38 of this guidance apply to in-year tests taking place up to the end of the 2020-21 academic year. Admission authorities, and those arranging selection tests on their behalf, should also comply with the system of controls set out within the [schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance](#).

Protective measures may still be required for autumn 2021 testing. These are not set out in this guidance. Announcements will be made about possible protective measures for autumn 2021 in due course in line with the schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance.

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 subsequent 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>1</sup>.

## Expiry or review date

This guidance applies to selective entry procedures taking place during the autumn of 2021 (for example for September 2022 entry). It also applies to in-year applications for the 2020-21 academic year. It will be reviewed periodically as a result of the latest scientific advice. Updated versions will be available at the same URL.

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<sup>1</sup> 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. 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.

## 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 in-year and late testing (2021 admission)

Admission authorities can continue to test within schools or test venues. Further advice on considerations and processes to be followed is included within this guidance.

Admission authorities should follow the [guidance on face coverings in education](#), the system of controls 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 ability or aptitude.

Admission authorities should not permit those who are displaying COVID-19 [symptoms](#) to attend a selection test venue 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 except where the positive LFD test has been overridden by a negative PCR test. Children and adults with a positive PCR test 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. Staff or pupils with a positive LFD test result must self-isolate in line with the [stay-at-home guidance](#). They will also need to arrange a lab-based PCR test to confirm the result. If the PCR test is negative, it overrides the LFD test and the pupil can return to school and can attend a selection test venue.

In addition, children and adults who are legally required to quarantine, having recently visited countries outside the Common Travel Area<sup>2</sup> should not be permitted to attend a test venue during their quarantine period.

Where vacancies exist, admission authorities for selective schools should 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 they are able to offer a place to eligible children as soon as possible.

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>3</sup>, including religion, race and disability. Admission authorities should mitigate, wherever possible, any negative impacts, and make reasonable adjustments where necessary.

Paragraph 1.17 of the Code requires selective arrangements to be included within a school's admission arrangements<sup>4</sup>. Guidance on the variation process is set out in paragraphs 39-51 below.

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

Admission authorities can continue to test within schools or test venues.

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

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<sup>2</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>3</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>4</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..... 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.'

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 School Admissions 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:

- strongly advises local authorities to issue communications to parents explaining the return to this normal timescale for assessments and the issuing of results; but to continue to advise parents to use their final preference(s) of school for local non-selective schools in case their children do not reach the necessary ability standard in a grammar or partially-selective school test<sup>5</sup>;
- strongly advises local authorities with grammar schools, or which neighbour local authority areas with grammar schools, to consider whether any protective health measures<sup>6</sup> in selection tests they might need to take in the autumn might result in some test results not being made available to parents before 31 October despite local authorities and admission authorities taking all reasonable steps to do so. Where this is likely to be the case, and where possible<sup>7</sup>, they should consider either offering parents an additional preference or allowing them to change their preferences shortly after 31 October.

Paragraph 1.17 of the Code requires selective arrangements to be included within a school's admission arrangements<sup>8</sup>. Although we do not expect this to be the case for many schools this year, we advise admission authorities to consider whether changes to their selection assessments (for example around test dates, pass marks or assessment of those who could not or cannot attend tests on the specified day(s)) require the school's admission arrangements to be varied. If they consider their 2022 admission arrangements need to be varied because of a major change in circumstances (for example because of

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<sup>5</sup> This is to ensure - in the circumstances where test results are not available to parents before 31 October – that more parents can be allocated a school of their choice. We expect such circumstances to be rare and only to occur when an admission authority has a very large number of children to test and the logistics of organising tests in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic mean that they are unable to provide some results earlier.

<sup>6</sup> We cannot advise at this early stage what protective measures will be necessary during the autumn, but we urge admission authorities to take a cautious approach and assume they will be necessary in organising their tests.

<sup>7</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.

<sup>8</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..... 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.'

the COVID-19 pandemic or government guidelines in relation to it) since those arrangements were determined in February 2021, we ask those admission authorities to apply for a variation early, at the beginning of August 2021 at the latest. Guidance on the variation process is set out in paragraphs 39-51 below.

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 COVID-19 - including those required to quarantine or because they are, for good reasons, unable to return from overseas in time to sit the test - 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), 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.

## **Detailed guidance on approaches to selective admissions**

### **Assessment dates for September 2022 entry**

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. Selection tests therefore are generally completed well ahead of this date.

2. 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 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, we recommend that admission authorities should 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>9</sup>.

3. 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.

4. Local authorities and admission authorities should plan for there to still be the need for protective health measures when organising their autumn tests of ability or aptitude. This might mean that – despite local authorities and admission authorities taking all reasonable steps to inform parents of the outcome of their children's selective tests before the closing date for applications (31 October), the logistics involved in testing, under protective measures, could lead to a minority of parents not being furnished with the results of their child's selection assessment before this date. Given this risk, there are a number of steps that local authorities and admission authorities can take 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);
- to consider, 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 when a local authority or admission authority has been unable to provide parents with the results of their child's assessment before 31 October.

5. 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 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.

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

6. 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; or
- 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**

7. 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, teacher assessment or other means, providing assessments comply with the provisions of the Code.

8. Although it is not possible, at this early stage, to set these out in this guidance, admission authorities are advised to take a cautious approach, and assume protective measures will still be necessary for autumn 2021 testing. They should bear this in mind particularly when booking venues and recruiting invigilators. Announcements will be made about possible continuing protective measures in due course in line with the [schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance](#) and this guidance will be updated if necessary.

9. 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.

10. 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. Information on the variation process is set out in paragraphs 39-51.

## **In-year admissions testing for entry in the 2020-21 academic year**

11. 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 and their child must be offered a place on any waiting list for the school<sup>10</sup>.

12. Fewer children will be being assessed in-year than if their parents had applied in the normal admissions round or late. Again, admission authorities can test within schools or test venues. Because of the need to comply with any guidance on face coverings, the system of controls within the schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance and the specific advice on health protection measures in selection tests set out in paragraphs 35-38 below, 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.

13. 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**

14. 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.

15. 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.

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

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

17. 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**

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

- they have one or more [COVID-19 symptoms](#);
- they have had a positive test;
- a member of their household (including someone in their [support bubble](#) or [childcare bubble](#) if they have one) has COVID-19 symptoms;
- have been in close contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19. Anyone told to isolate by NHS Test and Trace or by their public health protection team has a legal obligation to self-isolate;
- 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;
- they are overseas and, for good reasons, are unable to return to the UK in time to attend the test venue on the date or dates of the test; or
- they are legally required to [quarantine, having recently visited countries outside the Common Travel Area](#).

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

20. 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 18 or if their children are disabled and require special assessment processes.

21. 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 1 March but it may be necessary to make arrangements for them to be assessed in their homes, via an online selection test or at another venue. 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.

22. 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.

23. 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 to their children from COVID-19, including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds or 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.

24. 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.

25. 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.

26. 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.

27. 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.

28. 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.

29. On 10 June 2020, the Prime Minister announced a £1 billion 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 COVID-19 pandemic.

30. 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.

31. 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 £6000. The per pupil rates and school level allocations will be published in due course.

## **Selection test security and integrity**

32. 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.

33. If children are to be ability or aptitude tested over a longer period of time than normal, it will be important for admission authorities to ensure that all selection test papers are secure and that 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.

34. 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 reasons, 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 for in-year admissions during the 2020-21 academic year

35. The measures set out below apply only to in-year admissions during the 2020-21 academic year.

36. 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.

37. Wherever selection testing for in-year admission takes place in a school or test venue, 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 COVID-19 website](#) contains free resources for schools, including materials to encourage good hand and respiratory hygiene.

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

- test venues should have a small contingency supply of face-coverings available for people who need them;
- selection tests must take place in well-ventilated rooms with everyone seated at least 2 metres apart in all directions. 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. 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 venue maintains 2 metres' distancing within and around the venue;
- 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. 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;
- 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 or who are unwell, self-isolating because they have tested positive – even if they are asymptomatic – or if they are 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 ability or aptitude 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 venue 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 venue;
- limit escorts for candidates to one adult and discourage group travel to selection test venues; 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 sufficient tissues and bins are available to support pupils and staff to follow this routine.

## **Admission arrangements variations**

39. 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.

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

41. 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).

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

43. 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.

44. 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.

45. 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.

46. 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.

47. 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 2 above, which may require wider changes to their admission arrangements if they wish to abandon banding.

48. 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.

49. 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. 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>11</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.

50. 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<sup>12</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.

51. 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.

52. Admission authorities wishing to make changes to their selective processes for 2022 admission should be clear that the process set out in paragraphs 1.42-1.49 of the 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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<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 3.6 of the Code

<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 3.7 of the Code



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for Education

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