



Testbourne Community School Guidance for parents

SEND and Access Arrangements for Exams

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Introduction

Access Arrangements are non-standard arrangements approved before the examinations take place to enable candidates with special educational needs, disabilities, or temporary injuries to access assessments. The Equality Act 2010 requires awarding bodies to make reasonable adjustments where a candidate would be at a **substantial disadvantage** in comparison to someone who is not disabled.

The school receives several requests each year regarding Access Arrangements for students in public examinations. Over the last few years, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) has changed both the requirements for, and the evidence needed, to grant Access Arrangements. We have created this document to try to give parents useful information about what is required for Access Arrangements and the evidence the school needs to provide to the Examination boards to support this claim.

It is in the interest of all parties to ensure that children have fair access to the examinations. At the same time, it is important that no child receives an unfair advantage over the others because of unrequired Access Arrangements being granted. The school is required by the JCQ to arbitrate in these matters and school staff use their experience and professional expertise to determine whether Access Arrangements might be required.

If you have any questions regarding access arrangements after reading this document please contact the SEND department on send@testbourne.school

Applying for Access Arrangements

To qualify for an Access Arrangement a student **must have a disability**. According to the Equality Act 2010 a disability is a 'physical or mental impairment which has a **substantial and long-term adverse effect** on someone's ability to carry out normal day to day activities. The impairment must have lasted, or be likely to last, for 12 months or more.

The JCQ specify that normal way of working is a priority when considering awarding an Access Arrangement to a student. Therefore, whilst we will take into consideration a private report from an educational psychologist and/or letter from a GP or other professional, we will not automatically award an Access Arrangement based upon it. It will trigger a process to determine the normal way of working for that student.

As part of the evidence we must provide for the students' normal way of working, we must show that adaptations have been tried and that the student has a barrier to success that teachers have tried various strategies to overcome as part of their usual inclusive practice as mandated in the teaching standards. Therefore, we cannot award an access arrangement



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without teachers having used reasonable adjustments in their classroom over a sustained period of time.

When we apply for Access Arrangements

We apply for Access Arrangements in the first term of Year 11, and we use the normal way of working for students from Year 7 to Year 10, and often we also relate back to their primary school.

When applying for Access Arrangements we are obliged to work within the framework laid down by the JCQ. Non-compliance with the JCQ regulations is considered malpractice, which has potentially severe consequences for all our students. Sanctions can include removing the examination status of a school so that candidates are no longer allowed to sit exams at the centre.

The Examination boards will not consider applications in respect of long-term conditions that are submitted only weeks before the exams. It is essential therefore, that we are informed of existing circumstances that might justify Access Arrangements as soon as possible, preferably on joining the school. Arrangements can then be made to accommodate the needs of students in formal internal assessments and exams. This will allow us to test the effectiveness of such arrangements and will provide grounds for their implementation at GCSE and GCE Level.

If you have a diagnosis of need for your child and you have not passed on this evidence, please let us know by emailing send@testbourne.school

Types of Access Arrangements

When looking at any student's needs, the school can consider the specific disability and the long term evidence to award different access arrangements, depending on the child's difficulty. Some of the access arrangements are 'local' arrangements and school's evidence of the child's normal way of working is sufficient for this to be granted. An example of this is a braille transcript for a blind candidate. However, the JCQ are the body that provide guidance for all access arrangements to maintain the credibility of GCSE and GCE qualifications. They define the parameters of what constitutes a 'substantial disadvantage' and the evidence requirements the school must have to apply for access arrangements as a result of this. The school is inspected every year for examination regulations, including access arrangements, and parents should be reassured that we have been commended for following all guidance consistently and fairly.

Evidence needed for the most common request of Extra Time

Extra time is the Access Arrangement requested most often, and we must make sure that parents understand that there are strict criteria that must be considered. We cannot award this access arrangement without following the strict JCQ rules. Like all access arrangements, extra time can never be given if there is any possibility that the student would thereby be given an **unfair advantage** over other students.

When looking at any student's needs, the school must always consider granting supervised rest breaks before making a request for extra time, as the former will often be a more appropriate response. This means that no students are likely to be granted extra time in the



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Year 10 mock examinations and very few will be granted it for subsequent mock examinations or the real GCSEs.

The JCQ have strictly defined eligibility for up to 25% extra time. The guidance is complex but includes external assessment of below average standardised scores in two different areas of speed of working (e.g. reading, writing, cognitive processing/fluency) – these must have a substantial and long-term adverse effect on speed of working. To request this external assessment, evidence of the below average standardised scores is needed from KS2 and KS3 (e.g. SATs, CATs and Reading ages).

Extra time with a private report

The school must present a ‘compelling’ case that the student’s learning difficulty has ‘a substantial and adverse effect’ on the student’s performance in exams. Any private report will only form part of the school’s evidence and the school will still have to test the student. Results of the testing undertaken by the school will be used in the application with reference made to the scores within the private report that has been submitted.

Applications for extra time will generally require statements and other feedback from subject staff that a student is underperforming in classroom tests, as well as evidence in the form of incomplete mock examinations or similar. The student must also have made use of extra time over a substantial period, in both classroom tests and mock examinations, before the arrangement can be used in external examinations.

What access arrangements look like at Testbourne Community School

Where access arrangements are granted, we will seek to accommodate them within the sports hall or the classrooms above the sports hall. This is because it is impossible to maintain silence in other areas of the school where up to 900 other children may be moving around between lessons and during breaks and because with increasing numbers of children requiring access arrangements, we do not have enough rooms available to do otherwise. The sports hall is subdivided into smaller areas to accommodate most students in one venue. These areas can be accessed through different entry points and the configuration of the subdivisions is adjustable depending on the needs of the cohort. Some children, whose access arrangements might cause a disruption to others, may be accommodated in the other rooms in the sports hall building.

We always maintain that the sports hall is the best place to sit exams. In the sports hall, all students have received the top tips briefing from a subject teacher, are focused on the exam in hand and are silent. Additionally, we are able to maintain an exclusion zone around the building meaning it is the quietest place in the school.

If students do not use their Access Arrangement

JCQ regulations state that ‘if a candidate has never made use of the arrangement granted to him/her.....then it is not his/her normal way of working. The arrangement should not be awarded for examinations’. Therefore, if a student does not use an Access Arrangement in any of their examinations, we are required to withdraw the Access Arrangement in future examinations. If we continued with the Access Arrangement, we would be in breach of regulations which is considered malpractice.



Case Studies

Case Study 1

A GCSE candidate is currently undergoing medical treatment for a serious illness. She is physically and mentally fatigued due to the illness and the treatment.

Supervised rest breaks have proved effective in allowing the candidate to complete her first set of mock GCSE examinations. She sits at the rear of the examination hall in a separate area so that she may take rest breaks without disturbing other students.

Following the JCQ regulations, the SENCo completes the paperwork to justify the need for **supervised rest breaks and seating in a separate area**. The SENCo has evidence including a letter from the candidate's consultant outlining the seriousness of her condition.

Case Study 2

A GCSE candidate is worried about assessments, and reports to her parents that she didn't finish in her mocks. When the SENCo and her teachers look at the evidence, she has above average KS2 scores, no long-term history of need, and has been doing well in internal progress data. She had struggled with exam technique and needed help and support in using her time appropriately. The SENCo has no evidence to support an access arrangement and so the candidate's support is directed towards helping her anxieties.

Case Study 3

A GCSE candidate was diagnosed with autism and suffers with high anxiety. He has access to support in school including arriving early for lessons, prior warning of changes and a key member of staff to discuss his worries.

During the mock examinations in Year 10 the candidate struggled to enter the main examination hall, and so was given an alternative access door and a screened off separate area of the hall, and his key member of staff guided him to the door of the room. He was given opportunities to practice during the Year 11 mock examinations and his key person gave him chance to de-brief at the end of each examination.

This worked well in the mock examinations and so following the JCQ regulations, the SENCo completes the paperwork to justify the need for a **separate area of the examination hall**. The evidence includes the history of SEND support and the evidence from the mock examinations.

Case Study 4

A GCSE candidate has a condition which has affected his eyesight since birth. He has used a computer with reader software for all his lessons, and this continues in his mock examinations. He is seated in a separate part of the examination hall so that his computer can use a power outlet.

Following the JCQ regulations, the SENCo completes the paperwork to justify the need for a **word processor with a computer reader**. The SENCo has evidence including a history of need and medical documents.