


If your child has special educational needs, they may be able to have extra support when sitting tests and exams. This includes SATS, GCSEs and A Levels. This extra support is sometimes called access arrangements.

What are access arrangements?

Access arrangements are about making 'reasonable adjustments' to exam conditions so that a child or young person with special educational needs is not at a disadvantage compared with others. The rules are different depending on the type of exam. This extra support aims to meet the needs of a child without affecting the value of the exam.

The school must apply to have some exam support or tell the testing agency about their plans in the months before the exam or test takes place. For some tests the support can be arranged by the school with very little notice. Exam support can include things like extra time, having an adult write for your child or rest breaks.

Well before any exam or test is due to happen, ask your child's teacher or SENCO about whether and how your child will be supported.

 Access arrangements are different from 'Special Consideration'. Special consideration is when something unexpected happens that affects a child on the day of their exam. This could be a temporary illness, injury or a family event.

Support during SATS

Key stage 1 SATs are taken at the end of year 2 and Key stage 2 SATs are taken at the end of

year 6. Support for these tests is based mainly on the support your child would usually get in the classroom. It isn't allowed to give your child an unfair advantage.

When planning for the tests, school staff should be thinking about the needs of their pupils and whether they normally get any extra support in lessons. For SATS taken in year 6, your child's teacher may need to apply to have extra support in advance. They would include any evidence that shows your child's needs, such as assessment reports or an EHC plan.

These are some of the types of support schools could use for SATs:

- extra time to take the tests
- having an adult (usually a teaching assistant) write things down
- having an adult read for your child – this does not include the English reading test where only the general instructions can be read out
- being able to use a laptop or other technical or electronic aids
- rest breaks
- taking the test somewhere other than school
- compensatory marks for spelling – this is support for children who can't take the spelling test, such as those who are hearing impaired
- making transcripts – this is where a child's answers are written out neatly by an adult and both copies are sent to the exam board
- written or oral translations – these are for children without English as a first language who have been in the UK for less than two years
- the use of prompts – this is for children who find it hard to focus well without help

For key stage 2 SATS, if your child has an EHC plan or uses a modified large print (MLP) or braille versions of the tests they will automatically get extra time to take the tests.

Children with an EHC plan are allowed up to 25% extra and children who use the MLP or braille versions of the tests get up to 100% extra. That means if an exam is one hour long, children with an EHC plan will get up to 15 minutes extra time and children who use MLP or braille versions of the tests will get up to an extra hour.

If your child is waiting for an EHC plan to be confirmed, then they may also be able to have extra time. Their teacher will need to apply for it.

Support during GCSEs, AS and A Levels

For your child to get extra support for these exams, the SENCO at your child's school or college usually needs to apply for it before the exams start. The deadlines vary each year, but it's usually around January or February for summer exams and tests.

The SENCO will need to show evidence that your child needs the extra support. As with SATS, the kind of support your child will get would be like the support they get in the classroom, and the way they normally work. Ideally the SENCO will start collecting this information from year 7, including anything that has been passed on from previous schools. You can't use a private assessment as evidence unless the SENCO knows about it and you've discussed it with them.

The final decision to apply for the support in exams is usually made at the end of year 9 or beginning of year 10, based on your child's needs then. Once they have been agreed, then exam support arrangements will apply for up to 26 months.

These are the kinds of extra support that school or college can put in place:

- rest breaks – these are always supervised
- extra time to take the exam
- a computer reader or an adult to read the questions
- being able to read aloud and/or use an exam reading pen
- having an adult to write things down for you, use speech recognition technology or a laptop

- a sign language interpreter
- practical assistant
- taking the exams somewhere other than school
- Braille, enlarged or coloured exam papers
- making transcripts – where a child's answers are written out neatly by an adult and both copies are sent to the exam board
- written or oral translations – these are for children without English as a first language who have been in the UK for less than two years
- the use of prompts – this is for children who find it hard to focus well without help

Your child is unlikely to need all of these! The kind of support your child gets will depend on their specific needs. For example, if your child has autism, they may need rest breaks and extra time or to take the exam somewhere other than where everyone else is taking it. Whereas if your child has a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, they may need to use a laptop to write with, a computer reader or a coloured copy of the exam paper.

For certain subjects some arrangements are not allowed, for example if the exam is testing reading then a reader may not be allowed. Some types of support may not work well for some subjects, so for example, using a word processor may not be helpful for a maths exam. Your child would still be able to use these types of support in other exams if they need to.

If your child has an injury, has a disability diagnosed or develops a learning difficulty after the deadline for applying for extra support has passed, they may still get support. The SENCO can make a late application. Giving extra support is decided on for each young person, based on their individual needs.



The kind of support a child or young person might get

A girl with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) has problems concentrating and has poor working memory. She is able to have supervised rest breaks and the use of a prompter, who may need to show her where on a page she had been working, in order to re-start her work.

A boy with dyslexia needs to use a coloured overlay and word processor and needs extra time. Being able to use a yellow coloured overlay is a reasonable adjustment, as it helps improve his reading accuracy. Using a word processor is a reasonable adjustment too, as it's the normal way that he does written work.

A child with a severe vision impairment needs 50% extra time to read the enlarged text papers. In papers involving complex layout and diagrams she also needs a practical assistant and a reader to work under her instruction to find information.

A young man with Asperger's Syndrome has significant difficulties with handwriting, which is poor but not illegible. He cannot finish his mock English, Geography and Religious Studies papers within the time allowed. In other subjects he finishes the mock papers before the end of the test. He is given 25% extra time for the exams he sits for those GCSE subjects.

Taken from Joint Council for Qualifications access arrangements and reasonable adjustments guidance 2019-20

over a few years. Make sure you know well in advance how this will work for your child and plan ahead.

A group of parents who home educate have developed a resource for other parents around exams and qualifications. It includes lots of detail about the focus of different exam boards, which exam centres offer support to SEN students and what qualifications are needed to study certain subjects at a higher level.

It's worth remembering that there are different paths your young person can take to reach their end goal. Colleges and universities are being encouraged to accept other forms of evidence of a student's skills and knowledge, apart from formal qualifications. This could include things such as a portfolio of work.

Need more information?

- Standards and Testing Agency**
 Extra support for Key stage 1 SATS
www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-tests-access-arrangements
- Standards and Testing Agency**
 Extra support for Key stage 2 SATS:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-access-arrangements
- Joint Council for Qualifications**
 Extra support for GCSEs, AS and A Levels
www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration

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Exams and home education

Your young person can take exams such as GCSEs and A Levels if you're home educating.

You'll have to pay the exam fees and contact exam boards and nearby exam centres. You may also need to pay for extra exam support, for example if your child needs someone to write or read for them during the exam. This can sometimes be difficult to arrange and costs quite a lot, so many families spread exams out