


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.

 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.

Important things to know

Access arrangements are based on each individual child's needs. So, for example, one child with ADHD may have quite different exam support to another. Support is usually based on what your child would get in the classroom.

The school may need to apply to have some types of exam support or tell the testing agency about their plans in the months before the exam or test takes place.

Exam support can include a wide range of things, such as extra time, having an adult write for your child or rest breaks.

Some reasonable adjustments may be unique to a specific child, depending on their needs. So, they may not be included in the list of available access arrangements written by the test centre.

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. If your child is in school, teachers and the SENCO are likely to have been gathering evidence for a while about your child's needs, and the support they have.

Support during SATS

Key stage 1 SATs can be taken at the end of year 2 and Key stage 2 SATs are taken at the end of year 6.

Key stage 1 SATS

Key Stage 1 SATs are now optional for schools – they do not have to do them. If your child is taking these tests, the school does not have to apply in advance for any access arrangements. They do not need to tell the test board what support they will be putting in place either.

Key stage 2 SATs

For SATs taken in year 6, your child's teacher may need to apply in advance for permission to use some types of extra support. For support that does not need permission, the school may still need to tell the test board that they are using it for your child. School may have to show evidence that sets out 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
- a prompter – someone who can help your child stay focused on the test

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 between January and March for summer exams and tests.

The SENCO will need to show evidence that your child needs the extra support. That could include information about any diagnosis from a hospital consultant or paediatrician, a copy of your child's EHC plan or any relevant assessment scores.

As with SATs, the kind of support your child gets will be similar to what 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.

Once they have been agreed, then exam support arrangements can be in place 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, or in school but in a small room
- Braille, enlarged or coloured exam papers
- making transcripts – where a young person's answers are written out neatly by an adult and both copies are sent to the exam board
- the use of prompts – this is for young people 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 young person with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) has difficulty concentrating and poor working memory. They are able to have supervised rest breaks.

A child with a complex language disorder is allowed a reader. They have persistent and significant difficulties with sentence recall and this has an impact on the speed at which they can process information.

A child with autism has no sense of time is able to have a prompter. They see that they are doing nothing and ask them to focus on the question, reminding them how much time they have.

A young person who has significant learning difficulties, cannot write legibly. However, they are allowed to use a word processor, with the spelling and grammar check facility switched off to record his answers. This is their normal way of working in school and allows them to work independently.

Taken from Joint Council for Qualifications access arrangements and reasonable adjustments guidance 2024/25

Exams and home education

Your young person can take exams such as GCSEs and A Levels if you're home educating. Usually, they will need to go to an exam centre, which could be a school or a

private exam centre.

You'll have to pay fees and contact exam boards and nearby exam centres to find out about access arrangements. You should not have to pay for access arrangements, but some centres do not offer them, which may mean you need to travel a fair distance to an exam centre that does. Make sure you know 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/2025-optional-key-stage-1-tests-access-arrangements-guidance

Extra support for Key stage 2 SATS

www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-access-arrangements/2025-key-stage-2-access-arrangements-guidance

Ofqual

Extra support for GCSEs, AS and A Levels

www.gov.uk/government/statistics/access-arrangements-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-2023-to-2024-academic-year

JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications

Information and exam centre search for private Candidates

www.jcq.org.uk/private-candidates/

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