

Exam Access Arrangements

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. This is different from Special Consideration. Special Consideration is when something unexpected happens that affects a child on the day of their exam such as a temporary illness, injury or a family event.

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.

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 and 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 and include evidence that shows your child's needs, such as assessment reports or an EHC plan.

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 should automatically get extra time to take the tests. If your child is waiting for an EHC plan to be confirmed, then they may also be able to have extra time, but 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 (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) 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 support your child gets is usually like the support they get in the classroom, and the way they normally work. Ideally the SENCo will collect this information from year 7 including anything that has been passed on from previous schools.

The kind of support your child might get 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 word processor 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 and whether extra support can be given is decided for each young person, based on their individual needs.

Useful links

The Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ) have annually updated regulations and guidance for [Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration](#).

The JCQ update their Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments Guidance each academic year, here is the [2025/26 Guidance](#).

