



Access Arrangements for Examinations: Guidance for Parents

Version 2 published 19 Sept 2025

Introduction

Access arrangements (AA) are non-standard arrangements approved before the examinations takes 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 access arrangements and the evidence the school must provide to the Examination boards to support any applications made. This document was revised and updated in September 2025 after the JCQ updated their requirements for schools and colleges to evidence their AA.

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 AA 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

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1. What do the Joint Council for Qualifications say about access arrangements?

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) is a body that represents all examinations boards. On access arrangements they say:

An access arrangement can only be granted where the centre has evidence that the arrangement is required. There is a 'picture of need' and it is the candidate's normal way of working.

Where a parent or candidate requests an arrangement that has not been recommended by subject teachers or Learning Support/teaching assistants who are familiar with the way the candidate works in the classroom, the SENCo, Access Arrangements Coordinator or an equivalent member of staff should fully investigate the request. For example, speaking with the candidate, speaking with their teachers and carrying out some screening tests. If it is determined that the access arrangement is not needed, the SENCo (or equivalent) should provide feedback to the parent(s)/candidate, explaining why the requested arrangement would not be appropriate. The JCQ document Guidance for parents, carers and students about access arrangements might be a useful resource. It is important that parents/candidates understand that the centre must work within the published regulations and that it would be malpractice for a candidate to be awarded an access arrangement without the required evidence in place. If the parent(s)/candidate continue to request the arrangement, the SENCo (or equivalent) should refer the matter to a member of the senior leadership team. Ideally, there will be a member of the senior leadership team who has a good working knowledge of the JCQ document Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments. The senior leader should then liaise with the parent(s)/candidate explaining why the arrangement would not be appropriate. An online application must only be processed where it is supported by the centre, and the candidate meets the published criteria for the arrangement with the full supporting evidence in place.

2. Which students qualify 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 the priority when considering awarding an access arrangement to a student. Therefore, whilst we will take into consideration a private report from an educational psychologist or other professional, we cannot automatically award an access arrangement based upon it. It will trigger a process to evidence the normal way of working for that student.

As part of the evidence that we must provide for the students' normal way of working, we show that adaptations have been tried by teachers as part of their usual inclusive practice as mandated in the teaching standards. Therefore, we cannot award an access arrangement without teachers having used reasonable adjustments in their classroom over a sustained period.



3. When do we formally apply for access arrangements?

We apply for access arrangements in the first term of Year 11. We look at history of need and use the normal way of working for students from Year 7 to Year 10, and we also relate back to their primary school Key stage 2 results.

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.

A centre must make decisions on appropriate access arrangements for their candidates. Although professionals from other organisations may give advice, for example a dyslexia assessment report may suggest eligibility for extra time, whilst this is valuable information it does not automatically provide this arrangement. No diagnosis report written by a professional can make the decision for the centre alone. As they do not have a working knowledge of an individual candidate's needs and how their difficulties impact in the classroom and/or in timed assessments.

The Examination boards will not consider applications in respect of long-term conditions or very late diagnosis that are submitted to school only weeks before the annual deadline and final exams. It is essential therefore, that we are informed of existing circumstances that might reasonably support the possible need for 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 if demonstrated 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

4. How are 'local' access arrangements awarded?

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, but these must be in line with the JCQ guidance. 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, or use of a coloured overlay for students with Irlen syndrome. The local access arrangements are applied for using the normal way of working evidence, which is collected as part of the normal process of detailing a child's SEND throughout their schooling, and we use our One Page Profiles as well as evidence from teachers for these local arrangements. It is important to note that extra time is not a local arrangement and has a very high threshold.

5. How do I know the school are awarding access arrangements in line with guidance?

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 because of this. The school examination system and practice are inspected every year for all examination regulations, including access arrangements, and parents should be reassured that we have been commended for following all guidance consistently and fairly in every year that we have been inspected.

6. What do access arrangements look like in practice 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 an increasing number of children require 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.

Students who have access arrangements that can be housed in the main hall such as word processor, braille transcript, coloured overlays, rest breaks, and in fact, most other access arrangements, will be in the hall as this is the quietest part of the school and we can maintain an exclusion zone around the building.

7. What happens if students do not use their access arrangements?

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.

8. What evidence is needed for the most common request, 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.



The evidence required for application for extra time has further increased in the 2025-2026 exam season, including the following:

- Supervised Rest Breaks **must** be trialled extensively before Extra Time is considered.
- If a student is put forward for testing to potentially be awarded Extra Time, there **must** be samples of timed tests from class/mocks from teachers showing that extra time has been used (change of pen colour/font/font colour).
- There needs to be evidence as stated above from a minimum of three (3) different subjects.
- The evidence and narrative must be written in full detail on the official form – Form 8 or Form 9 – for JCQ **before** sending it to the assessor **prior** to formal assessments being carried out.

These changes are in place for current Year 11 students onwards.

‘Form 8’ is completed for *Cognition and Learning* needs – this requires external assessment as well as evidence of Extra Time being used from three (3) different subjects.

The external assessment for possible extra time can only be arranged if samples of work from three (3) different subjects are evidenced. These must reflect the positive impact and reasonable need for extra time a student demonstrates during school tests and mock exams. These adverse difficulties on speed of working must have been substantial and long-term, with evidence of need shown in school records. If we have evidence from three (3) different subjects that the candidate is using Extra Time, and Rest Breaks have been trialled, then after completing Form 8 we will arrange for external assessment of the candidate. The external assessor visits school in January and February of Year 11 and can only assess those candidates with a completed Form 8 with a history of need evidence from three (3) different subjects that the candidate is using Extra Time. Even then, the external assessor may complete the assessment and determine the student is not eligible for Extra Time to be awarded.

‘Form 9’ is completed if an *EHCP is in place or Medical Diagnosis which impacts learning* – this does not require external assessment but still requires evidence of Extra Time being used from three (3) different subjects.

The requirement for evidence of normal way of working has been extended from this year (2025-26) to include those students with significant and sustained need, including those with an EHCP in place, and/or a medical diagnosis. The physical report to evidence any medical diagnosis must still be collated and evidenced besides the sample of work evidence. Although in the case of EHCP or medical diagnosis, there is no requirement for further external assessment, teachers must still carefully monitor all their students and provide examples of their use of Rest Breaks and Extra Time in class assessments as described above. Again this must be for three (3) different subjects.



Appendix: 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 full history of need from teachers and medical documents since birth.

Case Study 5

A GCSE candidate has severe learning difficulties that has resulted in an EHCP being awarded while the student was in primary school. Evidence from teachers for several years shows that the student has used extra time in their assessments, including their SATs in Year 6. In line with the JCQ regulations, the SENCo asks all teachers to collate evidence that the student uses Extra Time in their assessments in class. The SENCo also arranges the student to fully trial Rest Breaks in the Year 10 Mocks, to show these have been considered. The November Year 11 Mocks are used to collate further evidence that the student requires Extra Time. The SENCo then completes the paperwork to justify the need for **Extra Time**. The



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SENCo has evidence of the use of Rest Breaks, as well as Extra Time being used in three (3) or more different subject, a history of need and the EHCP. There is no need for external assessment as an EHCP is in place.