

Exam support

Pupils who have SEN may be able to get help (sometimes called access arrangements) in public exams.

The most common arrangements are for:

- extra time, or
- provision of a computer,
- a person to read or write for the pupil (except for exams that specifically test these skills, such as English).

How will the school or college decide who qualifies for help?

The school decides whether this support is needed. It does this by looking at the rules laid down by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) on behalf of the exam boards, overseen by Ofqual.

For Key Stage 1 and 2 assessments, the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) oversees access arrangements.

For each type of access arrangement, there are particular evidence requirements which must be met for the pupil to qualify and the rules are updated annually.

When a school or college is aware that a pupil or student may need access arrangements, it should gather the necessary evidence of need from class teachers and others (such as parents, the pupil and any other staff and external professionals involved). The school may need to carry out assessment tests (for example of reading, spelling, comprehension, writing or processing speed).

Documents such as an EHC plan or professional reports may be supportive but do not automatically entitle a pupil to access arrangements without additional supportive evidence from the school.

The first step

The first step is to speak to the class teacher and SENCO to discuss the kind and amount of help which you believe is necessary.

Be prepared to show evidence that the help is needed, has your child has, or as a young person needed and received help of this kind in the past? For example, previously receiving help reading exam papers, or extra time for independently reading exam papers, in internal exams.

If you have any other evidence from reports that set out your child's difficulties, this is important supporting evidence.

Having an EHC plan may strengthen your request, but it doesn't create a legal obligation on the school to arrange this extra help with exams. However, if the EHC plan specifies help with reading texts (for example, in the form of support from a teaching assistant) then this will be important evidence that this is how your child normally works or how you, as a young person, usually work, and the same kind of support is going to be needed in order to do their best in public exams.

Exam access arrangements and Key Stage 2 SATS

There is different guidance for adjustments for the Key Stage 1 and 2 SATS.

SATS take place in May. Schools need to apply for certain adjustments in advance, the school SENCO should be able to explain this process to you.

In addition, there are certain other adjustments that schools won't need to apply for in advance, typically this includes things like the use of a scribe, making a transcript of the child's work and using word processors or other electronic aids.

You will need to discuss what adjustments your child might need with school staff (such as the class teacher and SENCO).

Study Leave

The guidance makes clear that study leave should be used sparingly and only granted to enable pupils to study for public examinations. Provision should still be made available for those pupils who want to continue to come into school to revise, and as study leave is unsupervised it must be recorded as authorised absence.

If your child's school says they must take study leave it is likely to be failing in its duty to do all that it can to secure special education provision for your child.

Additionally, children and young people with EHC plans must continue to receive the special education provision set out in their EHC plan. It is the local authority's duty to secure this, even during study leave periods.

Exam access arrangements for pupils not attending a school/college

Children and young people who are home educated and wanting to take exams such as GCSEs or A-Levels may choose to do correspondence courses (such as IGCSEs) or enrol at a college or adult education centre. Any adjustments would need to be discussed with the exam centre or tutor/course provider.

Children or young people who receive education otherwise than in school or college through an EHC plan (EOTIS, sometimes known as 'EOTAS') may have similar arrangements.

www.sendiasswokingham.org.uk

Telephone: 0118 908 8233

E-mail: Sendiass@wokingham.gov.uk

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