

Why delay the Kent Test?

We think that schools and their pupils will find it easier to settle back into the new school year if they are not required to deal with the Kent Test as soon as they return. A delay will allow schools to ease reluctant returners back into the classroom and establish routines which respect Covid safety. It will give pupils time to get used to formal teaching and to begin to catch up on work they have missed. 90% of the schools who expressed a view when consulted have welcomed the delay.

Couldn't you get the results out before the closing date for school preferences if you tested in September as usual?

We don't believe so. This year, because of lockdown, test scores will have to be standardised after the tests are marked, rather than using a national standardisation table drawn up ahead of testing. This could delay the sharing of test scores with schools by 5 to 10 days.

Also, Covid safety measures could still affect the delivery of testing, or of the marking process.

Why delay only by a month? Why not test much later?

Secondary school admissions operate within a timetable set by national legislation. This allows all local authorities to share information with their own secondary schools and with neighbouring Authorities to make sure that every child's preferences are considered, and that they can be offered a secondary school place on 1 March, as required by the School Admissions Code. A longer delay would put this process at risk, with potential unwelcome consequences for all candidates.

Testing much later would take us further into Winter weather, which could also disrupt testing.

Instead of asking for preferences before parents have Kent Test results, why not just delay the closing date for preferences?

The closing date for expressing preferences is set in primary legislation, so Kent does not have the discretion to publish a different date.

Because every Authority must operate an "Equal Preference" mechanism when preferences are considered, naming a grammar school or schools at the top of the preference list without knowing the results will not limit access to lower preferences if a child does not qualify for grammar school. Nevertheless, to make it easier for parents to name their preferred schools with confidence in this difficult year, we intend to increase the number of preference options to 6.

Are children limited to naming two grammar schools?

No. A small number of people have mistaken the proposal to mean that, even with six preferences, parents could only name two grammar schools. They can use the two extra preferences to name two grammar schools without reducing the number of non-selective preferences currently available to them, but they can name more if they wish. Equally, they can name six non-selective schools if they prefer. How many grammar schools parents decide to name will reflect which schools are available

locally, which schools they most want and how likely they feel their child is to qualify for grammar school. You can read more detail about how this will work in a separate document.

Why test at all? Why not adopt a process based on recommendations and existing evidence?

The main difficulty with this approach is that in a typical year we need to assess as many as 16,000 children in roughly five weeks. While the majority are in Kent primary schools, around 6,000 are not. Some are in schools outside Kent, some in schools in the independent sector, and a small number are educated at home.

Even though it has limitations, objective testing is available to almost all candidates, and gives a clear indication of performance on one day under common conditions. It does not require children's schools to compile and share assessment information, and it is not made harder if there is limited evidence of classroom performance and progress for grammar schools to consider.

Testing also provides the aggregated scores which form a key part of the 2021 admission criteria of some oversubscribed schools.

If testing becomes impracticable, of course consideration would have to be given to assessing children by other means, but it would not be ideal because of the difficulty of ensuring consistency in the evidence available, and the time it would take, given the national deadlines explained above.

How can offers still be made on 1 March?

The test has been moved to 15th October as a month's delay will still allow time for assessments to be confirmed before schools are required to rank their applications.

Every year some parents name Grammar schools on their application when their child has not been assessed suitable for a selective education. Many do this to allow them to appeal after National Offer Day. The Admissions Team ensures that grammar schools are only asked to rank children eligible for admission, so they will have sufficient time to complete this task this year, in spite of the delay.

Some schools allowed their Year 5s to return early, is that fair?

Clearly, children will have received a diverse educational offering over the last few months, and this will not be limited to how soon they can return to school. As you have identified, the Covid-19 pandemic is not the source of all these differences, but lockdown has the potential to magnify their effect. The Kent Test process has the flexibility to take account of a child's individual circumstances and the safeguards in place will allow us to continue to support children from all backgrounds. The Special Arrangement facility allows individual accommodations to testing to be made for children with disabilities or SEN where necessary. In setting the grammar threshold after testing, KCC can recognise any marked effect from the reduced classroom teaching that most students will have experienced during the lockdown. For those able pupils who underperform in tests, the Headteacher Assessment process will remain to allow for wider evidence to be considered.

When cases are referred to the Head Teacher Assessment Panels, schools will be asked to confirm when children returned to school, and to provide key information to evidence academic ability.

KCC's guidance in relation to Kent Test coaching remains unchanged. Kent - like other organisations who operate selection processes based on exams - advises against coaching candidates because, if we assume that the aim of coaching is to get weaker candidates through a selection test, it is bad, both for the candidate and the receiving grammar school if children are misplaced as a result. If children only achieve a given performance because of intensive additional input focussed on "passing" particular tests, they are likely to find the challenges of a school which selects on academic ability quite difficult

If KCC receives evidence that test materials have been retained or misused by a school, it will set aside pupils' PESE test scores, and all candidates will be referred to the local Head Teacher panel to be assessed instead by scrutiny of work and records from that school.