

THE ISEB COMMON PRE-TESTS: ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

Guidance for schools about access arrangements available for pupils participating in the 2026-27 ISEB Common Pre-Tests session.

INTRODUCTION

We are proud that our newly upgraded ISEB Pre-Tests assessments have been designed by the assessment industry's leading academics and experts. Whilst we are confident of the robust research and assessment design that underpins our new tests, we will strive to continually evolve them to ensure that we continue to be a leading provider of current research-based assessments now and in the future.

Pupil assessment is evolving, and ISEB is committed to providing schools, teachers, parents and pupils with the best research, assessment designs, access arrangement guidance and inclusive features to support all children.

When redesigning our assessments, we commissioned research from leading neuroscientists who specialise in fair and equitable assessment for SEND and neurodiverse children. The research underpins this document and means we can confidently provide schools and parents with guidelines to help ensure that access arrangement decisions are fair to all.

ISEB's core values are to accept, transform and inspire. These values inform everything we do and create.

Reasonable adjustments should be provided to any candidate who is considered disabled for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010.

The JCQ guidelines are specific to a range of examinations and not the Common Pre-Test. Allowing extra time in this assessment will not give automatic rights to the candidate to have extra time for their GCSE examinations. For schools which would like to make this position clear to parents we have suggested the use of a signed pro-forma which is shared with senior schools and kept on the candidate's file.

Restricting access to extra time for candidates who have appropriate professional evidence indicating that they require additional time to access the assessment could place them at a substantial disadvantage. Schools should therefore consider each request carefully and, where supported by evidence and consistent with the candidate's normal way of working, provide reasonable adjustments. Failure to do so may amount to discrimination under the Equality Act 2010, as independent schools must not disadvantage a person in the arrangements they make for deciding who is offered admission.



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COMMON PRE-TESTS ASSESSMENT DESIGN FOR INCLUSION

ISEB is committed to working with leading SEND and neurodiversity experts to continually improve assessment processes. We want every child to realise their potential.

The ISEB Pre-Tests are shared, online, adaptive tests, which means that pupils only have to take the test once, no matter how many schools they are applying for.

The ISEB Pre-Tests is a multiple choice, online, adaptive test. Multiple-choice tests are an accessible format for all pupils, especially those with SEND, as there are minimal writing requirements, and the format of the questions and answer options remains consistent throughout the test, reducing the stress of anticipating the next question.

In adaptive tests, each pupil receives a path through the questions that is unique to them, and pupils may be presented with a differing number of questions. We have undertaken extensive research to ensure the length of the test is optimised to provide an accurate score for every pupil.

All questions have been extensively reviewed to confirm that our instructions and the questions are simple and straightforward to follow. Reasonable adjustments for SEND reading ability should ensure that all pupils understand the questions in the ISEB Pre-Tests.

There are three features built into the online testing platform, which are automatically available to all pupils, specifically aimed at supporting pupils with SEND:

- Pupils will be able to select a coloured overlay to help improve the visibility of the questions, particularly for pupils who face visual discomfort and disturbance when reading.
- The font size can be adjusted to suit visually impaired applicants.
- The timer for the test will be visible to all applicants (even those awarded extra time). The timer can be hidden from view if the countdown makes a pupil anxious.
- In addition, where possible, onscreen instructions are written in plain English with icons for visual stimulus.

To ensure that they are assessed fairly, we understand that some pupils with SEND, disabilities or neurodiversity may require additional arrangements, also known as access arrangements, when sitting the ISEB Pre-Tests. The provision of access arrangements must never advantage or disadvantage a pupil or affect the integrity of the ISEB Pre-Tests.

Decisions on their provision for the ISEB Pre-Tests will be made by the senior schools before they administer the tests. All decisions will be based on evidence of need and normal working ways. Our guidelines are produced to help senior schools make these decisions for pupils taking the ISEB Pre-Tests only.

WHY HAS ISEB PRODUCED ITS OWN GUIDANCE FOR THE COMMON PRE-TESTS?

The ISEB Pre-Tests are specifically designed for pupils in Years 6 and 7 to be used as part of the admissions pathway into senior schools.

They are online, adaptive, multiple-choice tests. As such, these tests are considerably different in assessment design from other forms of testing. Access arrangements for the ISEB Pre-Tests should be considered in line with the Common Pre-Tests design principles which differ from other entrance and public examinations.

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Therefore, an access arrangement decision should be made that follows the ISEB Pre-Tests Access Arrangements Guidelines, and that decision is only valid for the ISEB Pre-Tests (i.e. an access arrangement decision made by a senior school for a pupil taking the ISEB Pre-Tests is not indicative of a decision that may be made for any other tests including a senior school's own entrance examinations, written tests, SATS, GCSEs, A Levels, or any other qualifications).

Underpinned by research which supports the design principles of the ISEB Pre-Tests, this document will outline the access arrangements suitable for SEND pupils and give guidance to senior schools on making their decision on whether access arrangements should be provided, ensuring that access arrangement decisions are fair to all.

WHAT ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE CONSIDERED FOR THE ISEB COMMON PRE-TESTS?

In addition to the three built-in arrangements outlined above (coloured overlays, font size, timer), which ensure that SEND pupils are routinely provided for, parents and guardians can request two additional types of access arrangements for a SEND pupil taking the ISEB Pre-Tests as follows:

- A request for 25% extra time; and/or
- A request for other access arrangements such as supervised rest breaks, prompters, a reader and/or read aloud provision such as a separate room etc.

Senior Schools will decide whether a pupil should be given either or both of these access arrangements based on evidence of need and normal way of working. By 'normal way of working' we mean that the pupil regularly receives that support as part of normal classroom practice.

As each child's needs are unique, an access arrangement request could span a range of provisions. The following guidelines should help senior schools to make their decision on whether, and which, access arrangements will be given for the ISEB Pre-Tests.

Due to the diversity of pupils' needs, this guidance does not list every circumstance where it may be appropriate to use access arrangements. If, after following our guidelines, a senior school is unsure whether the request is suitable for the Common Pre-Tests, they are welcome to contact ISEB to discuss the individual request.

HOW SHOULD THIS GUIDANCE BE USED?

ISEB recommends that senior schools review each request based on evidence of the needs of the individual child and their normal way of working, and how these will affect them when accessing the online, multiple-choice, adaptive ISEB Pre-Tests specifically designed for pupils in Years 6 and 7.

Senior schools will wish to refer to their own admissions policies and SEND processes, but where any specific decisions about requests for access arrangements of the ISEB Pre-Tests are being made (especially in SEND Appeal cases), this Access Arrangement Guidance should be used.

Access arrangements must never advantage or disadvantage any pupil or affect the integrity of the ISEB Pre-Tests.



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EVIDENCE OF SEND STATUS

Evidence of the needs of the individual child and their normal way of working should be uploaded by the parent or guardian on the ISEB Guardian Portal during registration for the ISEB Pre-Tests.

SEND status evidence must be uploaded under SEND Information.

Parents or guardians may wish to seek support from their current school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) for advice about what normal ways of classroom working the school currently provides, and if they believe access arrangements will be suitable for their child when taking this type of test.

Access arrangements might be used to support pupils who have:

- Difficulty reading;
- Difficulty writing;
- Difficulty concentrating;
- Processing difficulties; and/or
- A visual impairment.

Parents or guardians should also seek advice from the senior schools (to which they are applying) with regards to what documentation is required as proof of SEND status, for example, if a parent or guardian wants to request 25% extra time it is likely the senior school will request proof that either the child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), or are waiting on confirmation of one; or that due to a specific need the pupil is unable to work at the same speed as their peers.

We expect that the required evidence will include an Educational Psychologist (EP) report (or other professional assessor's report) and/or a letter outlining the child's normal way of classroom working (as defined by their current school/Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator), giving details of:

- Reading rate and accuracy (fluency); and/or
- Cognitive processing; and/or
- Handwriting speed.

Access arrangement requests are not guaranteed until the senior school(s) approve the application before the tests are scheduled.

25% EXTRA TIME - GUIDANCE FOR SENIOR SCHOOLS ON DECISION MAKING

The ISEB Pre-Tests are designed so that the vast majority of pupils will be able to finish each test. Based on extensive piloting and analysis, generous time limits were set. This means scores are based on the ability to answer questions correctly, not the speed of working. The tests do not have a fixed number of questions but terminate when a pupil's score can be accurately determined. There is a set maximum and minimum number of questions for each test, but most will receive something in between. The time allowance is based on the time taken for slower pupils to complete the maximum number of questions. This means that for nearly everyone the test will terminate when all the required questions have been answered. This will generally be well within the maximum time allowed.

However, it is possible for 25% extra time to be given in the tests for those who require reasonable adjustment to ensure they can access the tests in the same way as their peers.

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When making your decision about whether 25% extra time should be provided for an individual applicant, we expect you to refer to evidence provided by the applicant's parent or guardian on the Guardian Portal. The ISEB Portals have been designed to ensure any requests for SEND are supported by an evidence upload. However, parents and guardians are also advised that senior schools should be made aware of any special education needs and/or disabilities as part of the admissions process.

Factors that may affect a pupil's ability to access the tests in the same way as their peers could be (but are not limited to):

- Reading rate and accuracy (fluency); and/or
- Cognitive processing; and/or
- Handwriting speed.

We expect pupils who will be granted 25% extra time by senior schools would have evidence and/or test scores that are below average, demonstrating they work more slowly than their peers. In the case of the ISEB Pre-Tests 2026-27, below average in a test score would be considered as any standardised score below 85.

Although the ISEB Pre-Tests are an online, multiple-choice test, handwriting speed is important because pupils are allowed a pen and paper to make notes for rough work during all four tests.

We expect that those applying for 25% extra time may be pupils with learning, communication and interaction needs; a medical condition, sensory, physical, social or mental and emotional needs.

We expect that you will allow pupils who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to automatically qualify for 25% extra time.

Senior school decision-makers may wish to consider whether supervised rest breaks during the Common Pre-Tests would be more beneficial to pupils than additional time. Some pupils may require both extra time and supervised rest breaks.

When considering an application for extra time, senior schools should seek answers to the following questions, from the evidence submitted:

- Can this pupil focus on a task, which requires them to work independently and without interruption, for at least 15 minutes without being prompted to stay on task?
- Does this pupil have a learning, motor skill or physical disability which prevents them from writing independently at a speed of more than 10 words per minute?
- Does this pupil have difficulty processing information, which prevents them from being able to answer questions on other practice tests, even when they are allowed to refer back to the questions?
- Can this pupil read age-appropriate texts aloud and fluently, at a speed of 90 words per minute, with few errors (this means less than 5 errors per 20 words)? (i.e. do they have a standardised score below 85?).

Please note that 25% extra time is the maximum additional time allowed for the ISEB Pre-Tests. If a pupil qualifies for more than one reason, they are only allowed 25% additional time.

Pupils who qualify for extra time may also be allowed the use of other access arrangements (an aid) as well as 25% extra time.

OTHER ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

Pupils sitting the ISEB Pre-Tests who have special education needs or a disability may get extra time and/ or other access arrangements (known as an aid) such as supervised rest breaks, prompters, a reader and/or read-aloud provision such as a separate room.



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Supervised rest breaks

Most pupils in this age range should be able to complete the tests without a break. However, supervised rest breaks may be needed for pupils who experience fatigue or who find it difficult to concentrate.

We expect that senior schools will allow supervised rest breaks where applicants show evidence of:

- Cognition and learning needs; and/or
- Communication and interaction needs; and/or
- Sensory and physical needs; and/or
- Social, emotional and mental health needs; and/or
- A medical condition.

Pupils using supervised rest breaks should be given the same overall time as the rest of their peers unless they also qualify for 25% extra time. The ISEB Pre-Tests must be completed on the same day that it was started. During supervised rest breaks, pupils should remain under test conditions.

Prompters

Pupils who are unable to focus independently or who lose concentration easily, may be aided by a prompter. The prompter should keep the pupil's attention on the ISEB Pre-Tests but not to help them answer any of the questions.

A prompter usually taps on the desk or says the pupil's name, depending on what is normal working practice, to remind them to focus on the task.

We expect that senior schools will allow prompters where applicants:

- Have little or no sense of time; and/or
- Persistently lose concentration; and/or
- Are affected by an Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder which inhibits them from moving onto the next question.

Readers and/or read aloud provision (such as a separate room)

Human readers

ISEB commissioned specific research* to clarify the academic, legal and scientific basis for allowing human readers for the ISEB Pre-Tests Reading Comprehension.

Our findings were that reading comprehension constitutes two interconnected areas, decoding text and language comprehension. Any applicant who has difficulty reading would be at a substantial disadvantage in accessing, and therefore demonstrating their skills/knowledge in the language comprehension element of any reading comprehension assessment. According to the Equality Act 2010 it is therefore an applicant's legal right that reasonable adjustments are made for any applicant who has difficulty reading.

The provision of a human reader for all pupils who have a reader as their normal way of work in the reading comprehension ISEB Pre-Tests examination would constitute a reasonable adjustment for those who are considered disabled for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010.

A pupil who is disabled for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, whose disability impacts on their reading ability, may ask for a human reader even if that individual does not as their normal way of working have a reader. In these circumstances, to not provide the human reader or some other reasonable adjustment may be discriminatory under the Equality Act 2010.

Under the Equality Act 2010, an independent school must not discriminate against a person in the arrangements it makes for deciding who is offered admission, as to the terms on which it offers to admit a person as a pupil, or by not admitting the person as a pupil. ISEB are also under an obligation not to discriminate, in that it must not discriminate against a person as to the terms on which it provides examinations.

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Pupils who have difficulty reading (i.e. have submitted evidence of lower than average reading speeds) may be supported by a human one-to-one reader who can read the instructions and the words on screen to the pupil, as long as no additional information is given which could give the pupil an advantage over their peers.

We expect that senior schools will allow readers to be used where applicants have a reading age that is considerably lower than their actual age.

For mathematical questions, a reader may read words and numbers, but not mathematical symbols. This is so that the function of a mathematical symbol is not inadvertently explained by reading its name.

Computer readers

For the ISEB Pre-Tests in 2026-27 computer readers will be incompatible with the test so schools should allow a human reader where SEND evidence provided by the parent or guardian or current school shows that reasonable adjustment is required.

Providing a human reader, rather than a computer reader, is a reasonable adjustment because the academic evidence is clear that:

- Readers allow equity of access to comprehension
- Having a human reader offers no advantage over a computer reader.

It is clear that restricting access to a human reader for applicants for whom a reader is their normal way of working, for the ISEB Pre-Tests (where a computer reader is not available) would substantially disadvantage the applicant. Failure to make this reasonable adjustment would be discrimination against the applicant.

Read aloud provision (such as a separate room)

Senior schools may decide that reading aloud to himself/herself is a granted access arrangement for a pupil who provides evidence of this requirement. A separate room (with an invigilator) should be provided, as a pupil reading aloud is likely to disturb or aid others in the cohort.

Scribes

Scribes should not be required for the ISEB Pre-Tests, as all answers are multiple choice and are submitted online.

Disclaimer: Please note that this guidance is for access arrangements for the ISEB Common Pre-Tests only. Any decisions made by the senior school or the ISEB with regard to access arrangements are not valid for any other tests, such as GCSEs or A-level examinations.

*Connections in mind, research commissioned by ISEB, compiled by Victoria Bagnall, MA (Cantab), PGCE. - 11 August 2022.



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