

Mrs Sarah Moss, Headteacher
Tel: 01304 611360
Fax: 01304 621145
Email: headteacher@eastry.kent.sch.uk
www.eastry.kent.sch.uk



EASTRY CHURCH OF ENGLAND
PRIMARY SCHOOL
COOKS LEA
EASTRY
SANDWICH
KENT
CT13 0LR

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Dear Parents,

Admission to Secondary School

I know that your child has only just started in Year 6 but you need to start thinking about which school they transfer to in September 2021.

Kent Country Council produce a leaflet 'Admission to Secondary School in Kent' which explains how to apply for a secondary school place. This hasn't yet been received but as soon as it is we will send this home with your child. Further information regarding various Secondary Schools will shortly be available on the Kent County Council website at www.kent.gov.uk/secondaryadmissions. Details of Schools open evenings can be found on their individual websites. I would suggest visiting the school during the school day, where possible, to see the school in action. We have been asked to recommend the online application process at www.kent.gov.uk/ola. However, should you require a paper SCAF (Secondary Common Application Form) please contact the school office. (The official closing date for applications is midnight on 2 November 2020).

Due to the delay in the Kent Test you are able to select 6 schools instead of the normal 4 for this year's application. Further information about this was sent to you on the 8th July and I have attached a further copy of this.

Mrs Williams and myself will help you with advice on completing the SCAF. We have arranged a general discussion meeting between 4.30pm and 5.00pm on Wednesday, 23 September where we will try to answer your queries. This meeting will be held via Zoom and further details about this will be sent nearer to the time. After this meeting if you have any specific questions or would like to discuss this further we will make an appointment for you.

I would be grateful if you could return the slip indicating your attendance at the meeting.

Kind regards

Sarah Moss
Headteacher

Admission to Secondary School

Child's Name: _____

We will be attending the meeting on Tuesday, 24 September to discuss admissions to secondary school.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

How will allowing six preferences avoid disadvantage?

As always, parents should rank the schools on their form in order of preference. An “Equal Preference” scheme means that each valid preference is considered under that school’s admission criteria, and schools are not told where they were named on the form. The parents’ order of preference is used by the Local Authority only if more than one school could offer a place, so that the highest available of parents’ preferences can be offered on 1 March. (If none of the schools named can offer a place, the Local Authority allocates another school.)

The important thing for parents to remember is that this year the grammar school preferences should be placed highest on the form, if they wish for them to be considered first if the child is given a “grammar” assessment. (If they are ranked below other schools the grammar applications will still be considered if the child qualifies, but the highest-ranked school that is available will be offered, so that could be a non-selective school, regardless of the Kent Test results.)

Parents who would have named only grammar schools after receiving the results

Last year, parents whose children qualified for grammar school could have named as many as four grammar schools (depending on the local provision) after the results came out. They can still do this before they have the results, but with the insurance of two more options to name other schools further down the form. When the results are out their grammar school preferences will be considered exactly as they would have been last year. If their child can’t be offered any of the first four schools (whether because they are oversubscribed, or because the child is not assessed suitable for grammar school) the two remaining preferences will still be taken into account.

Parents who would have named a mix of grammar schools and non-selective schools after receiving the results

Some parents whose children qualified for grammar school might have named a mix of school types after receiving results, either because these reflected their true local preferences, or so that, if all their local grammar schools were oversubscribed, at least one non-selective preference could be considered if their higher preferences couldn’t offer. They can still do this before they have the results, but can name two more schools than before.

Other parents whose children didn’t qualify for grammar school might have named a mix of school types after receiving results, in order to leave scope for appeals to one or more grammar schools after securing a non-selective place. They can still do this before they have the results, but can name two more schools than before.

Parents who would have named all non-selective schools

Some parents would have named all non-selective schools because their child did not take the Kent Test. They can do the same by 31 October, with up to six options instead of up to four.

Parents whose children were tested but did not qualify for grammar school might also have named four non-selective schools after receiving the results. They can still do so. Provided they use their first two preferences to name grammar schools ahead of receiving the results, these preferences can be considered if their child qualifies, leaving them four non-selective preferences if not. They are not limited to two grammar schools, but after they have named two, any additional grammar preference will reduce the number of non-selective preferences available.

Frequently Asked Questions

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 proposal is to move the test to mid-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 are allowing their Year 5s to return early, is that fair?

Since the lockdown on March 20, KCC has offered schools guidance on reopening prepared in line with the direction from Central Government, which has most recently included a request that schools make use of any additional pupil capacity where it was safe to do so in light of the wider Covid-19 guidance. The Government's intention is that this expansion should not be at the expense of those year groups that have previously been identified as having priority to return to school (Year R, 1 and 6 in addition to children of key workers and vulnerable pupils). Schools and/or admission authorities were advised to offer this additional capacity where their individual circumstances allowed, but central Government provided no further restrictions or guidance on which children should be prioritised, so it is ultimately for each admission authority to decide the priorities for their individual school.

Our recent data collections show that just over half of Kent Primary and Junior schools (197 out of 389) are currently accommodating Year 5 students.

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.

Once a formal decision has been made regarding the proposal to delay the Kent Test by one month, schools will be sent further guidance. 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.

Schools with capacity may allow Year 5 students to return to school in line with wider government guidance, but this should not be with the specific intention of coaching them for the Kent Test.

My students are anxious about the time they have been out of school. What support can I provide them?

"Return to school" guidance [found here](#) provides useful reminders for schools on strategies that schools can use to support students who are anxious as a result of the many changes they have experienced during lockdown.