Guidelines for users of 11+ tests for pupils with vision impairment

1. Overview

This document is intended to be read by: local authority schools admissions staff; secondary school admissions staff; qualified teachers of pupils with vision impairment (QTVIs); primary school SENCOs; and any other professionals involved with pupils who are progressing from primary to secondary school where testing for selection takes place.

The purpose of the current document is to provide a single resource for decisions about the use of 11+ test papers for pupils with vision impairment, including: appropriate accessible formats for particular groups of pupils; guidance on best practice in administration of tests; and guidance on appropriate alternative procedures to be used in selection at age 11.

This guidance has been prepared by the RNIB in collaboration with GL Assessment and is part of a broader project which includes internal guidelines for the production of accessible versions of 11+ papers in a range of formats that are intended to be appropriate for the majority of visually impaired pupils who read print up to a maximum size of 22 point.

Also available as part of this project is a case study of the approach used in making reasonable adjustments to Kent's secondary selection tests for pupils with vision impairment, and guidelines for educational psychologists on alternative methods of assessment for visually impaired pupils.

2. Context

Testing for school selection at 10 or 11 (11+) continues to be the norm in a number of local authorities and is used by independent schools, academies, school clusters and consortia. The aim of such tests is to provide, quickly and objectively, a relatively reliable and valid predictive measure of future academic potential such that higher scores on the test should indicate the potential to succeed in a more academically challenging context (e.g. grammar school).

The speed and efficiency of administration (typically a single two- to three-hour session) and the objectivity (children sit a common test that is objectively scored, as opposed to assessment by individual teachers) are seen to outweigh any limitations.

Children who have a vision impairment (i.e. who are blind or partially sighted) have a right to the same educational opportunities as their fully sighted peers. This includes providing access to any selection procedures for accessing specific secondary schools (e.g. grammar schools). The Equality Act 2010 places a duty upon local authorities and schools not to discriminate against disabled people or pupils in their access to education. Any child who is registered as sight-impaired or severely sight-impaired will automatically meet the definition of disability in the Equality Act. Selection for admission for a grammar school education by way of academic testing is a 'permitted form of selection' under the Equality Act 2010. Schools and local authorities have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils in operating a selection process as well as anticipating any potential barriers and mitigating those in advance. Such adjustments may include making special arrangements, including modifying the typical test procedures or providing a **different** but **equivalent** selection procedure.

Recent tribunal and ombudsman decisions have clarified that even where responsibility for administering the 11+ and making the necessary adaptation are passed to third parties, local authorities (and grammar schools to which applicants apply) still have a duty to ensure that the necessary adjustments are made to the papers and will be liable for any failures on the part of third parties.

Blind and partially sighted children have the right to access the typical assessment procedures (modified as appropriate) whenever possible, but this should not take precedence over the right to a fair selection process. Therefore, if there is reason to believe that a particular aptitude test (even appropriately modified) may not reliably measure a vision-impaired pupil's true learning potential (see Appendix 1 for a discussion of reasons why this may be the case), then that pupil should be offered an alternative means of assessment. The following sections provide guidance on decision-making in relation to the identification of pupils who may require and benefit from alternative arrangements for assessment, the selection of appropriate methods of assessment, and for making selection decisions.

3. Understanding the role of modified test papers

Modification of exam papers is standard practice in education (e.g. for National Curriculum tests and GCSE), and a range of guidelines are available to support this process. However, with respect to cognitive ability and aptitude tests, any modification to the standard format of the items used in the standardisation process could result in a threat to the validity of the test as a norm-referenced measure. It is also acknowledged that there are limits to the extent of modification that is desirable or possible, and that some pupils will benefit from alternative modes of assessment (see section 8: 'Alternative assessment procedures for selection'). Limiting factors may include:

- Size of materials: a trade-off will inevitably exist between the benefits of enlarging materials for pupils with low acuity and problems created by the excessive size of materials, in particular the increased memory demands placed on pupils by the need to scan to and fro across a large page to access information for a single test item.
- Non-visual access: it is judged to be impossible to provide a modified version in braille of a test designed for print users that will provide an accurate measure of a blind pupil's academic potential. This is because the way in which information is accessed by touch is so different from sight access.
- Time: it may take significantly longer for a pupil with vision impairment to access a test, either in standard or modified format. This may result in fatigue (see below) and may place excessive demands on a pupil's memory (where a long time is required to access and process individual test items).
- Fatigue: pupils with vision impairment are likely to experience a higher level of fatigue in accessing any version of a test than their fully sighted peers, both with and without additional time. This may well have a negative effect on performance and could therefore affect the reliability and validity of test scores.
- Cost and efficiency: as noted in section 2, the purpose of standardised selection test is to provide a relatively objective, valid and reliable means of assessing a pupil's learning potential (aptitude). There will be a point beyond which the cost and inefficiency of providing bespoke modified versions of test papers (including the need to provide appropriate practice

and familiarisation materials) will outweigh the advantages of standardised testing, and it will become more efficient, reliable and valid to use alternative means of assessment (see section 8: ‘Alternative assessment procedures for selection’).

4. Braille readers

It is not appropriate to provide braille versions of 11+ test papers. For pupils who normally access text via braille, an alternative assessment method should be used (see below for guidelines on alternative procedures).

5. Print readers

5.1. Categories of test papers

The 11+ comprises a suite of test papers: Verbal Reasoning, Non-Verbal Reasoning, Spatial Reasoning, English and Mathematics. Not all of these papers are suitable for children with vision impairment.

5.2. Access to standard versions of test papers

To avoid confusion, the term 'standard papers' applies to papers in 12 point print that are produced by GL Assessment as their regular, or usual, layout, which is accessed by the majority of pupils.

It is anticipated that the majority of pupils who have some form of relatively mild vision impairment will be able to access the standard version of the 11+ test paper which has been produced in line with existing standards for production of print materials, i.e. those published by the UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF), available at: Standards - UK Association for Accessible formats (ukaaf.org). This allows access to the standard version by students who normally access print up to 12 point.

It should be noted that pupils who are able to access the standard versions of verbal papers may nevertheless be unable to access the non-verbal and/or spatial reasoning papers. This may be due to difficulties in perceiving fine details in parts of the test items or difficulty in comparing two parts of an item

(e.g. due to field loss). Issues arising from this are discussed further in the following sections.

5.3. Enlarged test papers

Some pupils with a vision impairment may be able to access a simple enlargement of the standard paper from A4 to B4 (an increase of 122%). Assuming the original has been presented in 12 point, the final version will be slightly larger than 14 point.

An advantage of using B4 enlargement is that it results in larger print while maintaining the same page layout as the A4 version. Being halfway between A4 and A3 in size, B4 is a manageable size of paper for pupils to scan and manipulate. By contrast, A3 enlargement, while producing a larger print size, is known to be difficult for many pupils with vision impairment to work with and is not recommended.

For reasons of quality assurance it is recommended that enlarged papers should be produced centrally by the test agency and not locally at school level,

5.4. Modified versions of test papers

Some pupils who normally access a print size larger than 14 point are likely to benefit from modified papers. Modified papers require changes to be made to format and layout and **cannot** be produced by just enlarging the standard paper.

For reasons of quality assurance, modified papers should always be produced centrally by the test agency and not locally at school level.

5.4.1. Verbal reasoning papers

For pupils who normally access print above 18 point, up to and including 22 point, a B4 enlargement of the modified A4/18 point verbal paper can be provided. Enlargement from A4 to B4 involves an increase of 122% which will result in a print size of around 22 point.

Note: where verbal test papers are normally used in isolation (i.e. where selection is not based on a composite score which combines a verbal paper with a non-verbal and/or quantitative reasoning paper), the score from a modified verbal paper can be used in selection in the usual way, provided that it has been possible for a pupil to complete the modified test paper in a reasonable time (see section 7.4: 'Familiarisation and practice').

5.4.2. Non-verbal reasoning papers (and/or spatial reasoning)

Non-verbal papers and/or spatial reasoning tests are **not appropriate** in any form for pupils who normally read text larger than 14pt.

Non-verbal papers or spatial reasoning papers are **not appropriate** for any pupil who is likely not to be able to access pictorial materials in the same way as a fully sighted person, e.g. those with severe field loss who may not be able to perceive the whole of a figure, those with nystagmus who may not be able to resolve or process fine detail adequately, or those with a cortical visual impairment who have specific difficulties processing graphical material.

5.4.3. Maths and English papers

Further work is needed to define the guidelines around access to the maths and English papers and RNIB is in discussion with GL Assessment about taking this project forward. The maths papers contain a high degree of image content and therefore appropriate arrangements should follow the guidelines given for the non-verbal and spatial papers. The grammar part of the English tests relies more on visual aspects of the presentation and may also be difficult to administer in modified form. Until further work is done, it is recommended that the English paper be subject to enlargement (and not modification) only, as outlined for the non-verbal and spatial papers, and therefore suitable only for pupils who can read 14 point print.

5.5. Coloured test papers

It is beyond the scope of these guidelines to comment in detail on the use of coloured paper; however, the following are suggested:

- For those pupils who do not have a vision impairment diagnosis but who normally use coloured paper for other reasons (e.g. to improve reading speed), test users may wish to apply similar procedures as with the GCSE

exam boards, who authorise one-hour early opening to allow the paper to be reproduced onto paper in the required colour.

- For those pupils with vision impairment who normally use coloured paper (e.g. to increase contrast), it is recommended that the black on white versions are used as supplied by the test manufacturer (in the appropriate version) to create copies. Schools should be given the option of one-hour early opening to allow the paper to be reproduced onto paper in the required colour. However, there is a danger that copying the test onto alternative coloured paper may reduce the quality of print, and inadvertently reduce contrast. Therefore, only a high-quality photocopier should be used and the paper should be of equivalent standard and weight to the original paper. It is also important that schools are made aware of the possible reduction in quality as another factor that needs to be taken into account when considering the test result along with other evidence of the pupil's ability.

5.6. Answer sheets

The standard answer sheets have been designed to work with computer-scanning technology and may be difficult for many pupils with vision impairment to access. Therefore, regardless of which format they use, pupils should always be given the option of writing their answers directly onto the question paper rather than the standard answer sheets.

6. Agreed formats of test papers

The following test papers can be produced by GL Assessment:

- standard versions of the full suite (Verbal Reasoning (VR), Non-Verbal Reasoning (NVR), Spatial Reasoning (SR), English, Maths) of papers at 12 point on A4 paper;
- enlarged versions of the full suite of papers at 14 point on B4 paper;
- modified versions of VR papers at 18 point on A4 paper;
- enlarged modified versions of the VR paper at about 22 point on B4 paper.

Paper type	Question type	Paper size	Print size
Standard print	VR, NVR, SR, English, Maths	A4	12 pt
Large print (LP)	VR, NVR, SR, English, Maths	B4	14 pt
Modified large print (MLP)	VR	A4	18 pt
Enlarged MLP (EMLP)	VR	B4	22 pt

7. Guidelines for the administration of test papers to pupils with vision impairment

7.1. Deciding which paper is appropriate for which pupil

Decisions regarding the appropriate type of paper and any other access arrangements for a student should be made, wherever possible, by a qualified teacher of pupils with vision impairment (QTVI) in consultation with the pupil, his/her family, and school staff.

Decisions should always be made with reference to the usual arrangements for access to learning materials and tests that have been determined to be appropriate for a particular pupil in relation to level and nature of sight loss, length of experience of sight loss, and any other factors related or unrelated to the sight loss (e.g. additional dyslexic difficulties). However, it should be recognised that any significant variations from the standard test procedure may invalidate the scores and may result in a pupil failing to demonstrate his/her true potential.

7.2. Consulting the pupil and the pupil's family

The pupil and his/her family may have views and feelings about the assessment procedure; for instance, they may feel strongly that they would like the pupil to take the 11+ test in full or in some cases only the verbal paper, and in its standard, enlarged or modified version. In every case, these views and wishes should be taken into account and respected wherever possible. However, such decisions may impact on the validity of the assessment process. For example, if a pupil takes only part of a test paper, it

will be impossible to assess their performance directly against other candidates. In these circumstances, appropriate consideration must be given to the use of other information to supplement test scores in making selection decisions (see section 8: ‘Alternative assessment procedures for selection’).

7.3. Applying for special access arrangements

Pupils who normally read print at up to 12 point and whose vision impairment permits access to relatively complex pictorial materials will be able to access the standard version of the 11+ papers where these have been produced in accordance with the relevant print standards (see above).

For all other candidates with a vision impairment, a process should be established by the relevant local body that administers the relevant selection test (i.e. local authority, school or school consortium) whereby an application can be made for special arrangements. This body would be obliged to take reasonable steps to make the selection process accessible to all students, regardless of disability. It is important to be aware that special arrangements (such as extra time) may still be necessary for some pupils with vision impairment who can read 12 point print; for example, pupils who have normal visual acuity but who have a very restricted visual field.

Where this body decides to provide alternative procedures for assessment and selection (see section 8), the same panel might consider applications for special access arrangements, and will ultimately make selection decisions for those pupils who do not go through the standard selection route.

Application for special arrangements should take place well in advance of the usual testing period and should be supported by relevant information from professionals on which a decision can be based regarding appropriate arrangements.

7.4. Familiarisation and practice

All pupils with vision impairment should be given the opportunity to access practice papers modified in the appropriate way for their level and nature of sight loss, taking into account other factors relevant to the way they typically access printed educational materials. These should be identical in format to the modified test they are intended to sit. As well as providing an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the format and content of an 11+ test (as is

typically available to fully sighted children), this will provide a further opportunity for educational staff (e.g. QTVIs) to evaluate the appropriateness of this format, as well as any additional access arrangements (e.g. extra time – see below) so as to determine whether or not it would be appropriate for them to access testing in this way. Pupils should be able to answer at least the majority of items in a test paper within the maximum time limit (standard time plus 25%). Wherever this is not the case, it is possible that the pupil is being put at a disadvantage, and alternative arrangements should be considered (see below).

7.5. Magnification aids

Many pupils use magnification aids and/or software (hand magnifiers or other forms of optical enlargement) to access text and pictorial content in lessons as well as in examinations. Where the use of magnification aids is part of the normal and preferred method of working for a particular pupil, it may be appropriate for such aids to be used to access 11+ tests, either in the standard, enlarged or modified versions.

However a judgement will need to be made, consulting a QTVI, regarding the extent to which the pupil may be disadvantaged by accessing the paper in this way, taking into account the following factors:

- Is the student unlikely to be able to perceive the whole of any pictorial material (i.e. in the non-verbal or spatial reasoning test) within the frame of the magnifier?
- Is the use of the magnifier likely to be testing the pupil's capacity to navigate around the page of a test and to find information on the page?
- Is the use of the magnifier likely to place significant demands on the pupil's memory (e.g. in moving from one part of a page to another)?

If the answers to such questions indicate that a pupil's access to the test is likely to be significantly limited by the use of magnification (even given extra time), this suggests that the pupil may be disadvantaged by accessing the paper in this way. A modified paper and/or alternative assessment arrangements should be considered.

7.6. Additional time and rest breaks

Pupils may be allowed up to 25% extra time to complete a standard or modified test paper. Decisions about extra time should be made by an appropriately qualified professional (e.g. QTVI) and should be based on the usual arrangements and normal way of working for a particular student. Any additional time above 25% is likely to undermine the standardisation of the test to the point where the results will be of little value in determining the pupil's potential.

When needed, breaks should be allowed for a maximum of five minutes per occasion.

7.7. Invigilation

The above arrangements – in particular the use of extra time and rest breaks – may require the separate invigilation of pupils with vision impairment.

7.8. Summary

It is important to remember that the more changes that are made to the original test (either in the layout or the time allowed), the less reliable the test result and the more important it is to include other assessment methods in coming to a decision about the pupil's ability.

8. Alternative assessment procedures for selection

As noted above, the purpose of standardised selection tests, like the 11+, is to provide a quick, efficient and objective means of assessing a student's potential to learn at a particular level. However, for some pupils, in particular those with sensory impairments, it should not be assumed that access to standardised testing materials is essential, **at any cost**. Where expensive bespoke testing materials need to be produced, elaborate arrangements for administration put in place and where the resulting scores may not in any case be meaningful, it may be more efficient, as well as being fairer to the pupil, to consider an alternative procedure for assessment.

The following guidelines should be followed in the case of any pupil who does not take the full suite of tests and/or takes them using modified print and other access arrangement.

8.1. Assessment by an educational psychologist

Advice and assessment could be sought from an educational psychologist (EP); however, it is important that the EP is aware of the specific issues in assessment of blind and partially sighted pupils. Such advice could be used on its own as an alternative to test scores or might be combined with other evidence. Separate guidance for this is available from GL Assessment and RNIB.

8.2. Informal use of 11+ papers as part of broader assessment

Where accessing the non-verbal spatial reasoning, English or maths paper has been deemed inappropriate, it may be helpful to administer only the verbal paper and the scores used alongside other evidence (e.g. examples of school work and reports from school staff), bearing in mind the evidence that scores from verbal items in isolation cannot provide a valid and reliable estimate of a pupil's learning potential.

Where the full verbal paper cannot be accessed due to slow working and/or fatigue, a sample of questions from across the range of item types could be presented **informally** and used as part of a broader decision-making process alongside other evidence of learning potential.

8.3. Assessment by portfolio of work

One approach that has been used successfully is the assessment of a portfolio of pupil work by a selection panel. An illustrative case study of such an approach used by Kent County Council for admission to their 33 grammar schools has been produced by RNIB in collaboration with GL Assessment.

Such a panel is likely to be involved in making decisions about a range of pupils with different needs, including pupils for whom vision impairment is considered to be their prime need. It will consist of a range of professionals with specialist training in educational needs (e.g. educational psychologist, speech and language therapist, ASD specialist adviser) and should include a

QTVI. This panel should make decisions about application for alternative assessment procedures and should make final selection decisions on the basis of a portfolio of evidence.

The aim of the portfolio will be to provide assessors with information about the student's performance across a range of subject areas. All work submitted should have been completed independently, or with such support as is considered appropriate to compensate specifically for the student's vision impairment.

Such a portfolio could include:

- data on student progress obtained from their primary school;
- examples of work and/or test scores completed under controlled conditions, including standardised scores from tests designed for use with vision-impaired children (e.g. norms for vision-impaired children are available for the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA) (Hill *et al*., 2005) and a braille version of the test is also available (Greaney *et al.*, 1998));
- examples of work that demonstrate 'process' (i.e. reasoning skills, creativity, planning skills, capacity for selective attention) as well as 'product' (i.e. knowledge, information etc.);
- scores from verbal sections of standardised assessment tests (including 11+ tests, appropriately modified where necessary);
- reports from class teacher, QTVI, educational psychologist or other relevant professionals.

9. Conclusion

This document has provided guidelines for all professionals involved in decision-making in relation to pupils with vision impairment and selective testing for secondary transfer. For all pupils who usually access print at size 12 or 14 point and whose vision allows them to access non-verbal (or spatial) reasoning items without difficulty, then either the standard or enlarged standard versions of the tests can be used as with fully sighted pupils. However, it is important to be aware that special arrangements (such as extra time) may still be necessary for some pupils with vision impairment who can

read 12 point print; for example, pupils who have normal visual acuity but who have a very restricted visual field.

For all other vision-impaired pupils, i.e. those who typically read text at above 14 point and/or who cannot easily access printed non-verbal items, additional assessment is recommended, as outlined in the last section above.

References

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RNIB (2006) *See It Right: Making Information Accessible for People with Sight Problems.* http://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/accessibleinformation/Pages/see_it_right.aspx

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Appendix 1: What do we know about the assessment of aptitude in children with vision impairment?

The problem of assessment of blind and partially sighted children and adults has been discussed almost since the first development of intelligence testing. Over the decades, a number of approaches have been proposed, developed and evaluated.

Using verbal parts of existing tests

The simplest, and still by far the most common, approach has been to administer only the verbal parts of existing IQ and aptitude tests. A wide range of criticisms has been raised against this approach.

One strong early criticism was the lack of norms for the blind and partially sighted population, which significantly reduces the validity of applying these tests to this group. This has since been addressed by the development of norms for some existing tests and the development of bespoke tests for vision-impaired pupils. It remains the case that tests that have not been normed with a vision-impaired population should be interpreted with caution when applied to this group.

A second criticism arose from the finding that blind and severely vision-impaired people tended to perform more poorly than fully sighted people on some verbal items that depend on an understanding of visual concepts. One outcome of such criticisms was the development of specifically designed tests which were normed on a vision-impaired sample and which were typically drawn from a subset of verbal items from existing tests that did not require an understanding of visual concepts (e.g. the Hayes-Binet Test).

In a third criticism, it has been argued that people with vision impairment who have been brought up in a linguistically rich home and school environment may acquire the capacity to use verbal concepts appropriately although they may lack experience and full understanding of the concrete object or events referred to (e.g. things like fire, which are difficult if not impossible for a blind person to experience directly). This suggests that any purely verbal test may actually overestimate the understanding of some blind and partially sighted people. Conversely, however, such tests may underestimate the learning potential of children who have experienced less rich (or even impoverished) early language environments.

Finally, evidence indicates that verbal and non-verbal tasks correlate with different aspects of school attainment and that they have different neurological bases. Significantly, research has shown that the validity of combined verbal and non-verbal (tactile) tests to predict academic attainment of blind children is greater than either type of test on its own.

Non-verbal tests designed for people with vision impairment

A number of non-verbal tests designed for blind and partially sighted people have been developed. Because of the need to exclude verbal content, these have generally consisted of pictorial items presented in a tactile form, such as reasoning problems consisting of raised-line shapes or blocks with different textured surfaces. Some of these have been designed as stand-alone non-verbal tests intended to be administered alongside existing verbal tests, and others have been developed as part of a complete cognitive testing system.

As is the case for fully sighted children, the use of combined verbal and non-verbal tests increases validity (in terms of correlation with measures of academic attainment). However, this approach has also received criticism. Firstly, due to the relatively small size of the vision-impaired population, samples used to establish norms have been relatively small, which limits their reliability in practice. Secondly, this is compounded by the extreme heterogeneity of the population, with large differences in level of vision, aetiology and nature of impairment, all of which can impact differentially on cognitive development.

Thirdly, it has been suggested that the construct validity of tactile non-verbal tests (the extent to which a test actually measures what it is meant to measure) is limited, particularly for certain groups. Specifically, concerns have been raised that younger children and those who have had less experience with tactile images may find it difficult to access the test items, so that the tests actually end up measuring differences in basic tactile perception skills (e.g. strategies for identifying tactile shapes and for relating different parts of a figure to each other). This appears to be particularly relevant for children under 10 and for those whose verbal IQ scores are relatively low.

Finally, tactile tests are by their very nature bulky, cumbersome and relatively expensive to produce and distribute. They often require highly specialist skills to administer and interpret properly. As a result, very few are available and they have been relatively little used. (In a survey of teachers of the visually impaired in the USA in 2003 it was found that only 14% of all assessments of vision-impaired children were carried out using any kind of specialist test (including verbal-only tests). In contrast, 45% of assessments used only the verbal sections of tests standardised on a fully sighted population.)

General issues of construct and predictive validity

Also, just because a test appears to be similar to one designed for sighted children, it does not mean that it is measuring the same thing when used with vision-impaired people; for instance, the increased reliance on memory or on tactile perceptual skills may mean that any differences in scores found between children are due to differences in these factors rather than in the skills the test is intended to measure (e.g. logical reasoning skills).

Although specialist tests for pupils with vision impairment have generally been found to correlate well with scores on existing non-specialist tests, very little research has been done on the capacity of these tests actually to predict subsequent academic performance (although some studies have demonstrated correlations with current academic performance). Since the primary function of 11+ tests is to provide a measure of learning potential, it is not obvious that any existing test can serve the same function in relation to blind and partially sighted students.

Conclusion

Although work is still ongoing to develop tests that are appropriate for blind and partially sighted students, there are currently significant limitations in our understanding of what exactly these are measuring, both in relation to sighted performance on the same or equivalent tests and in terms of the performance of different groups of children with vision impairment (e.g. different age groups, those with different aetiologies and those with different degrees and/or types of impairment). Therefore, although such tests may be useful as part of a broader assessment, and when used by a professional trained to interpret test scores (e.g. psychologist), it is difficult to be confident that the scores obtained on any given test will provide meaningful information about a child's aptitude in a range of areas.