



To: All Headteachers

**Children, Young People and
Education Directorate**

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Dear Colleague,

I am aware that those schools directly involved with Kent's 11+ process are receiving enquiries from anxious families who want some certainty for their children in Year 5 about whether or how the Kent Test will be going ahead in September 2020. You may also have seen views expressed in the public domain by Rosie Duffield, the MP for Canterbury, and Mrs Trudy Dean, the Member for Malling Central.

Although considerable thought has already been put into contingency planning, Kent has not published any more than a general holding statement because of the number of "unknowns" likely to impact on any proposal. This is in common with other Authorities with Grammar schools. Two substantial difficulties we face are the unusually high volume of candidates assessed in a typical year (currently about 16,000, around 6,000 of whom are not in Kent schools), and the fixed legislative framework within which the admissions process for all secondary schools must operate.

As the half term break and the opening of test registration are now imminent, I wanted to share some information with you so that you have a sense of the way things are developing. It is our intention to open a more detailed dialogue with schools during the test registration period, since every week that passes helps clarify the direction of travel as regards advice from central government.

Essentially, the options are that testing should take place as originally proposed, that it should be deferred or that it should be substituted with a scheme based on teacher assessment. Our discussions so far have indicated that testing – notwithstanding the practical problems of delivery - reduces additional work for teachers, and offers a method of assessment which is equally open to pupils already in Kent primary schools, pupils arriving early in the new academic year and those in schools outside the borders of the Local Authority. Completing testing later than scheduled, perhaps the most practical option, would compromise the sharing of results with parents before the

national closing date for expressing school preferences, so we are awaiting guidance from the DfE about what flexibility might be possible in this exceptional year.

Kent's MPs and Members are aware that a continuing lack of clarity is difficult for schools and parents and will ensure that the County's needs are not overlooked among the many pressing concerns around education during and after lockdown.

Test registration will open on 1 June and close on 1 July as it would normally do, with caveats in place to explain to parents that effectively they will be expressing an interest in obtaining an assessment which will allow any Kent grammar school to consider their application. When we have solid information on which to proceed, we will send guidance to schools and update our website. While we need to share this information with colleagues in schools to ensure you have a better understanding of what is behind the delays in finalising a preferred process, please treat this information as sensitive and do not share it more widely than is necessary. You may find it helpful to see the statement to parents we intend to place on the Kent Test page of www.kent.gov.uk in advance of registration opening:

Dear Parents,

We understand that many of you with children in Year 5 are very anxious to know what will happen about the Kent Test when the new school year starts in September. We are carefully considering what might be deliverable, depending on advice from central government as the pandemic runs its course and decisions are made about the easing of lockdown for children of primary school age.

Many factors could change between now and the end of term and this means that we are currently unable to tell you exactly how we will assess children for grammar school in the new academic year. We can confirm, however, that we will need some way to identify which children are eligible.

Testing has the benefit of being available to the thousands of grammar school applicants we normally assess every year, however recently they have arrived in Kent and wherever they usually study, even if they are home educated, so it would be the most straightforward option if it is possible. Whatever is decided, though, we need to be confident that we can keep the risk to children and their teachers as low as possible, allowing grammar schools meet their legal obligations in a fair and transparent way, while allowing KCC to stay within the national timetable for coordinating school admissions.

We appreciate that everyone of school age is missing classroom teaching, but it is fortunate that there are many excellent resources available through schools and education sites for children. Familiarisation material for the Kent Test can also be found in the "Test Paper" tab below.

We will update the website for everyone's benefit when we have received further guidance from the Department for Education and there is a clearer understanding of what arrangements may be possible. In the meantime, we would ask that parents monitor the Kent Test page for updates, rather than sending individual enquiries. We do understand that uncertainty is difficult, especially for children, but KCC is unable to confirm what arrangements will be in place until there is a clearer understanding of how children are likely to return to school in greater numbers.

Virtual School Kent

Many of you will already be working with the Virtual School Kent in supporting our Looked After and Previously Looked After Children.

Please could we advocate for special consideration to be given to those who are Previously Looked After, i.e. those children who were previously in the care of a Local Authority and who are now placed under an Adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order, as these young people may need some additional support during these unprecedented times. The relationship that they have with individual members of your staff may well be very important to them and there is a risk that they may worry unnecessarily about relationships breaking down. They may feel abandoned by friends and staff and this will lead to a feeling of isolation. These children and families may well be struggling to manage or be reluctant to ask for help. Please reach out to them.

Virtual School Kent's Previously Looked After Team will be contacting you individually over the forthcoming week, but please can I ask you to be proactive in contacting VSK with any queries and information that you may need on supporting your cohort of Previously Looked After Children? Please contact families and pass on VSK's contact information, so that individual advice can be sought by parents and guardians.

Information can be found on the VSK website <https://www.virtualschool.lea.kent.sch.uk/plac/> or email us directly at VSKPLAC@kent.gov.uk.

Educational Psychology Service – Service Level Agreements

The service provides statutory functions such as advice as part of the statutory assessment process, consultation at Local Inclusion Forum Teams (LIFTs) and crisis support for schools. Statutory functions are not charged, they are paid for directly by the Local Authority.

In addition, the service offers a range of traded packages and products that schools and other customers can purchase through Service Level Agreements, this year's deadline for requesting an SLA is for the 2020-21 school year is 19th June. If you would like to commission time from the

psychology service in the new academic year for any inclusion and capacity building activity in your school please use the [service request form on KELS!](#)

Response rates to the daily attendance return remain impressively high and I would like to thank you again for providing this information, we continue to ensure that we only request information that is needed. From tomorrow those schools with a nursery will be asked additional questions regarding provision for vulnerable children; the DfE has asked local authorities to collect this from the preschool sector on their behalf.

Finally, no matter which date is confirmed by Government for the wider opening of schools, there is clear consensus amongst the varying views expressed as part of the national conversation; the role schools hold within their community is highly valued by all and that you have continued to provide vital support for all pupils throughout this crisis. We will continue to work with you and support you to tackle the challenges that you are facing.

Yours sincerely



Matt Dunkley CBE
Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Education