

Combined notification of a variation request regarding secondary school admissions policies for 2021 entry

This applies to the following schools:

Lilian Baylis Technology School

The Norwood School

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on everyday life and has brought about the need for a significant number of changes to how schools operate, in particular the impact of social distancing and the possibility of local or national lockdowns. The London Borough of Lambeth and the schools within it who share the Admission Banding Test arrangements are, therefore, seeking a variation to admissions arrangements *not* to run the banding test for the Year 7 2021 cohort.

Each year, eight schools in Lambeth work together to administer a banding test for applications for Year 7 entry. This test is for fair banding purposes only, to provide a comprehensive ability intake, and is not used for ability selection. These shared test arrangements involve thousands of children from a number of London Boroughs and from hundreds of different primary schools. It is strongly believed that it is not feasible or safe in the current pandemic climate to run the test in November, as was originally scheduled when the school's Admissions Policies were determined in February 2020.

Although we have assessed a number of other methods of undertaking the tests, no other option explored would eliminate sufficient risk to be safe or be fair to all applicants. For example, holding additional test sittings on a later date, or multiple dates, would not cover all situations and would lead to inconsistency when applying the schools' admissions arrangements. Therefore, the proposal not to run the test for this year would be the only way to fully mitigate the risks arising from COVID-19 restrictions and health implications for the children, families and staff meeting in large numbers, who would not otherwise be together in a 'bubble'. When considering how many children this may involve and the fact that they come from many primary schools with their health and wellbeing not known, it presents a major logistical challenge. If it was later found that one or more children or staff tested positive for COVID-19, it could potentially mean that all those who sat the test at the same school on the same day would have to self-isolate, having a further knock-on effect to their families and schools. Consideration also has to be made for children who are unable to attend the test due to isolation, or if they or household members have severe health issues so cannot attend.

We had hoped that the situation we find ourselves in across the country would have changed; however, as further restrictions and guidelines come into place, we believe that removing the test for 2021 entry is the most logical, sensible and safe option. Primarily we are concerned for the risk to the health of the children, their families and the staff involved.

Removing the test will allow the schools and Local Authority to be consistent with their admissions procedures and we feel confident that we would not be actively prejudicing or giving advantage to any particular ability group. The 2021 schools' published oversubscription criteria would not be changed and the offer for places would be made to applicants in the order of the current published criteria. The reinstatement of the use of the ability banding test for 2022 entry will be consulted on for those schools that wish to reintroduce it.

The bursary auditions and workshops element of the admissions arrangements for The Norwood School are not affected by this variation.

Once a decision has been made by the Office of Schools Adjudicator (OSA) this will be published.

8 October 2020