

Some Advice and Guidance Around Access Arrangements

Some may call me liberal but I am committed to making sure no child is ever left in a situation where they need access arrangements and I haven't done enough to ensure they can have them. In the 2018-19 JCQ regulations, it actually states that 'not putting in place appropriate arrangements for candidates with known and established learning difficulties/disabilities' constitutes malpractice (section 4.2.11) and therefore I am stringent about doing as much as I can, as early as I can, to reduce the chances of children being missed. This is how I endeavour to do it, although I will screen/assess outside of these times, too.

Year Seven Screening

1. Provide English teachers with two tasks to complete with their English groups in September: 10 minutes free writing – where every two minutes they need to make a mark - and a standardised single word spelling test (I use WRAT but others are available.) I ask teachers to mark the spellings and I ask them to get their students to count up their own number of words (which I'll double check). I go through these briefly and note any papers where scores are particularly low, handwriting speed appears slow or handwriting looks spidery and unsure.
2. I review the whole year group data (MidYis/CAT) and look for profiles which are 'spiky' – where scores have a variation of 15 or more. I am as interested in the children with higher scores, as I am the lower ones.
3. I review the transition information from primaries and speak to the Head of Year Seven.
4. I compile a list of children who need to be assessed. (I reckon this is close to 30% of the year group)
5. I write to parents to explain that the SEN team will be assessing their child and that it is not linked to intelligence but that I want to make sure they have an equal chance for success in their exams and therefore I'd like to assess them. I explain that I have selected them for one of the reasons outlined above.
6. I arrange for each child to come and sit a very short 1:1 assessment (10-15 mins per child), looking at reading skills, working memory and visual processing speed. (There are several tests out there for working memory and visual processing; a common one is CTOPP2)
7. I then put their test data into three places. 1. My internal spreadsheet which I use as a quick overview guide. 2. I put the data into a report for parents about each child, which I send home. 3. I upload this report and attach it to their database profile.
8. I then make sure their database profile reflects what we have found out and I make a note of 'internal access arrangements' which is shared with teachers. Everyone – children, parents and practitioners – is aware that these access arrangements will run until the middle of Year Nine, when formal access arrangements takes place.

Year Nine Formal Access Arrangements Testing

1. I review the names of students who already have had access arrangements in Years Seven and Eight.
2. I write to English teachers as well as form tutors and request their views on the list and whether they want to add any more names in.
3. I review behaviour data and look to see whether there are any young people who seem to be struggling emotionally or getting into trouble regularly. Meeting with the Head of Year Nine, I review whether - in their opinion - there might be unmet academic needs.
4. I compile a list of children to assess. (Again, this could be 30% of the year group)
5. I write to parents explaining the testing and follow-up any non responders. (I write at least four weeks before the expected dates of testing, so that gives me time to chase late replies and then arrange time slots, getting these out to parents, pupils and form tutors about a week ahead of time). I ask for their views and any observations they'd like to share. (I have trialled sending out a form but found this unsuccessful)

6. I arrange slots for pupils, working out at about 70 minutes per child. Some of the tests we use are computer-based (Lucid Exact) which means that I can diarise pupils every 30 minutes, with gaps every couple of hours for scoring paperwork and catch-up.
7. Having been to an update training session re JCQ regs earlier on in the year, I am relatively familiar with what students are able to have and am able to make decisions for most cases quite quickly, based on the student profiles that emerge - remembering that for many students I already have a history of need and a pattern of normal way of working from their Year Seven testing. However, for some children whose needs have newly emerged or whose needs are more complex, I will take my time looking to see what might work best. In some cases, if I can, I will speak to another specialist teacher (online Facebook forums are good) and also to teachers who know them well. I may make a decision around trialling variations of support (e.g. a reader or reader pen depending on what they prefer) and then arrange a follow-up for that to be trialled and then finalised.
8. I write simple reports for each child, which I print out three copies of (see my Access Arrangements report proforma) 1. A copy is sent home to parents, asking them to talk through the report with their child and confirm they have all read through it and are aware of the outcomes. 2. I put a copy into my Access Arrangements file which I hand over to the Exams Officer. 3. I put a copy into their SEN file and, I also upload this report, attaching it to their database profile.
9. I write the Form 8 report paperwork, print out, sign and add to my AA file for the Exams Officer.
10. My final file for the Exams Officer includes:
 - Form 8
 - Student Report including all scores for all tests
 - Signed GDPR form
 - (Evidence of Normal Way of Working will be added after future exams and teacher feedback)
11. I make any changes to the SEN register/pupil's database profile, stating the updates to their exam arrangements and make teachers aware that changes are now live and their duties about now ensuring these as a normal way of working.

The Access Arrangements testing process is a very detailed and time-consuming one; not to mention the high sensitivity of personal data which needs to remain strictly private without risk of data breach. When dealing with such high volumes of personal data, paper and the necessity of efficiency-working, this means the process is a high-challenge, intense one, with high risk of human error. In all, I would say that assessing for AA using the process above is about 130 (uninterrupted and efficient) minutes per child. I would also say that this is a very tightly-run and efficient way of doing things, which I've refined over the past eight years!

Whilst I make no suggestion that my way is better than any other way, I find the above to mean that we have clear evidence over time; that parents are involved and aware of how we are supporting their child; and that – to the best of my knowledge – pupils have the maximum chances of being supported through their exams. I feel a great sense of duty that everyone has only one chance at education and, as a SENCO, it is my duty to ensure they have maximum opportunity to succeed and demonstrate their skills. If a child comes 'out of the woodwork' late in their education, I see this as a system error (a system that I oversee and am accountable for) therefore I commit to assessing the pupil regardless of when this is in their learning journey. It does mean that if they are eligible then my searching for retrospective evidence becomes important (e.g. did they finish their Year 10 exams; what do their teachers say about them etc – In my experience, it is most often the most able who fit this last-minute profile.) I once taught a lad who, despite high-quality answers, always under-achieved because he never got to the end of the paper. I never let the SENCO know – I didn't realise then that this was a sign of a learning need! And he underachieved by two GCSE grades in the end – ouch! If only I'd said something! If only the SENCO had been more rigorous... I don't want those stories to be on my watch. Good luck!