

PPTC Entrance Assessment 2021-22

Frequently Asked Questions

Background

Q1 What is PPTC?

A The Post Primary Transfer Consortium Ltd (PPTC) is a not for profit, private limited company made up of a group of schools which normally use academic selection within their year 8 Admissions Criteria. It is not under the control of the Department of Education, the Education Authority or any public body and does not report to the Department of Education, the Education Authority or any public body.

Q2 Does PPTC have a role in determining if there should be academic selection?

A No, PPTC has absolutely no role in determining whether there should be academic selection or whether any particular school should or should not use academic selection. It is up to the Boards of Governors of individual schools to decide if they wish to use academically selective Admissions Criteria for 2021-22 and if they wish to join PPTC, leave PPTC or remain a member.

Q3 What is the role of PPTC?

A The role of PPTC, since it was set up in 2009, has been to provide an Entrance Assessment with outcomes (results) for pupils who will be transferring from primary school and who may wish to transfer to a school which uses PPTC outcomes.

Planning for the 2021-22 Entrance Assessment

Q4 When will the 2021-22 Entrance Assessment take place?

A The Entrance Assessment will take place on **Saturday 13th November 2021**.

Q5 Why has that date been chosen?

A Parents and primary school principals made it very clear to PPTC that they did not want pupils to have to sit the Entrance Assessment in January and that “tests” should be planned to take place before Christmas. Teachers expressed a preference for a November test date and, traditionally, the Entrance Assessment has always been held in Mid-November. PPTC and AQE have always co-ordinated the dates for their Assessments to ensure that there is no clash in dates and this is happening again for 2021-22.

Q6 What contingency does PPTC have in place in the event that the Entrance Assessment cannot take place on 13th November 2021?

A If it is not possible to hold the Entrance Assessment on 13th November 2021 then the contingency date for the Entrance Assessment is Saturday 11th December 2021, to avoid any potential clashes with AQE dates whilst also ensuring that the Entrance Assessment can be held before Christmas.

Q7 Can we be certain that the Entrance Assessment will be based on English and Mathematics?

A Yes. In planning for 2021-22 and given the disruption to schooling experienced by pupils in 2020 and 2021, PPTC considered a number of options including continuing to use English and Mathematics, assessing Verbal Reasoning and Non-Verbal Reasoning or a combination of elements of both approaches. As part of that consideration, PPTC engaged with parents and primary school principals. Many of these principals in turn consulted their P6 and P7 teachers. Teachers and parents were overwhelmingly of the view that the 2021-22 Entrance Assessment should be based on English and Mathematics. PPTC took full account of these views in deciding to base the 2021-22 Entrance Assessment on English and Mathematics.

Q8 Given that the education of pupils who will sit the 2021-22 Entrance Assessment has been disrupted, how will PPTC ensure the Entrance Assessment will be as fair as possible?

- A** Of all the planning that has gone into the 2021-22 Entrance Assessment this question is perhaps the most important. Not only has the education of pupils been disrupted but parents and teachers have clearly told PPTC that they want an Entrance Assessment to happen during the normal time period (i.e. in November 2021).

If PPTC held the Assessment later, for example in January 2022, pupils could have more time to prepare but parents and teachers have clearly expressed that they do not want PPTC to base its planning on a January 2022 Entrance Assessment.

It would not be fair to expect those pupils to sit papers in November 2021 which are equivalent to those taken in previous years' Entrance Assessments.

This means that PPTC and GL Assessment are adopting a different approach. This can be summarised as "putting mitigations in place to make the Assessment papers more accessible".

Q9 What does "putting mitigations in place to make the Assessment papers more accessible" actually mean?

- A** Again this is where input from parents and teachers, alongside discussions PPTC has had with GL Assessment, has helped shape the steps that PPTC will take. The statement "putting mitigations in place to make the Assessment papers more accessible" really comes down to making the papers straightforward and fair for pupils, given the disruption in school learning over various periods from the end of March 2020.

Some examples of what PPTC and GL will do are given below:

English – Teachers and parents requested that the reading time be reduced. They suggested that the length of the passages be shortened or the number of passages be reduced from 3 to 2 and that PPTC should consider the use of a poem for one of the comprehensions.

PPTC has worked with GL Assessment to agree that:

For the 2021-22 English Assessment:

- The number of English passages has been reduced from 3 to 2.
- One of these two passages will be prose; the other will be a poem.
- The overall "amount" of comprehension material to be read has been reduced by between 30% and 40% compared to a "normal" year.
- The total number of questions has been reduced from 60 to 50.

Mathematics – teachers and parents felt that it would be very helpful if pupils were not assessed on the full Key Stage 2 Mathematics curriculum; if some material / some topics which would be considered to be level 5 could be removed and if a list or specification could be provided to provide detail regarding what could be assessed.

PPTC has worked with GL Assessment to agree that:

For the 2021-22 Mathematics Assessment:

- PPTC will provide a much more detailed specification than ever before for parents and teachers to access.
- Some topic areas which have been assessed in previous years will not be assessed in the 2021-22 Entrance Assessment.
- Some topics areas have been simplified by removing more challenging parts of the topic.
- The total number of questions will remain at 45.

Q10 Can PPTC make practice or past papers available for 2021-22 please?

A The papers used in the Entrance Assessment are owned by GL Assessment and PPTC does not have the right to publish these papers. However, parents and teachers have told PPTC that they would really welcome some practice materials. PPTC and GL are working together to produce a full practice paper for English and a full practice paper for Mathematics to help pupils prepare for the 2021-22 Entrance Assessment. It is planned that these papers will have the same format as the actual papers and that they will be available to download, free, on the PPTC website (www.pptcni.com) in September 2021 so that they can be used as practice tests for P7 pupils.

Q11 Why will the Assessment be held in Post-Primary schools?

A It was very clear from the engagement with parents and primary school principals and from correspondence from a teaching union that, although many parents would have welcomed the opportunity for their children to sit the Entrance Assessment in their own primary school, many primary schools were very opposed to the idea of their schools being used to host the “tests”. PPTC has a responsibility to ensure that the same opportunity, in respect of the location and organisation of the Assessment, is adopted for all pupils.

The decision that the 2021-22 Assessment will be held in PPTC schools, as it has been since 2009, provides certainty for all parties and ensures the same opportunity for all pupils. All the PPTC schools who will host the Assessment are very experienced in welcoming and caring for the P7 pupils who come to their schools for the Entrance Assessment.

Q12 Will pupils be able to be in their primary school class “bubbles” when they sit the Assessment?

A Yes, as far as possible. Although parents can choose which PPTC school they would prefer their child to go to for the Entrance Assessment, PPTC expects that, as far as possible, parents whose children are in the same primary school class bubble will name the same PPTC school as their preferred Assessment Centre. The Registration Form for 2021-22 is being adapted to help identify the class bubble which each pupil is in. PPTC schools will liaise with one another to help ensure that, as far as possible, pupils in the same class bubble can be in the same PPTC school for the Assessment.

Q13 What will happen if my child is feeling unwell, showing symptoms of Covid-19 or self- isolating or similar on 13th November 2021 and cannot sit the Entrance Assessment then?

A Firstly, in order to help keep everyone safe, a pupil should not come to the PPTC Centre on 13th November if he/she is unwell, showing symptoms of Covid-19, self-isolating or similar. A parent should inform the PPTC Centre. PPTC has set aside Saturday 11th December 2021 as the Supplementary Entrance Assessment day for pupils such as the example above, who were unable to attend on 13th November. In the event that no pupil was able to sit the Entrance Assessment on 13th November, then 11th December 2021 will become the main Assessment Day for all pupils.