

16 October 2019

Dear Parents and Carers,

Ahead of results release on Friday I wanted to draw your attention to the FAQs that are on the TBGS website (<https://www.thebucksgrammarschools.org/faqs>). For convenience I have included them at the end of this letter. These provide further details about the solution to the testing error along with answers to questions some of you have raised with GL Assessment and TBGS. In particular these include a more detailed explanation about test reliability and completion rates.

As I explained in my letter of 1 October, the process for Selection Review and Appeals is exactly the same as in previous years so if you do decide to go ahead with one or both of these, there will need to be strong academic evidence that grammar school is suitable for your child backed up by details from your child's primary school – details of extenuating circumstances on their own will not lead to success.

Once again, on behalf of The Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools (TGBS), I would like to apologise for the additional stress and anxiety that the recent errors in the Secondary Transfer Test have caused you and your child. I would also like to also repeat our thanks to primary Headteacher colleagues for the additional burden they have had in supporting you and your families in connection with this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Sturgeon', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark Sturgeon

Chair, The Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools

FAQs

1. Can you explain what it means if the test is 'reliable'?

'Reliability' is a standard statistical term that is frequently used to describe tests. It refers to the extent to which scores produced by a test are consistent, dependable and replicable.

In relation to the reliability of this year's Secondary Transfer Test to determine whether or not a child is suited to a grammar school in Buckinghamshire, our analysis has found that the overall reliability of the test has not been compromised.

The results indicate that both the Verbal Reasoning and English sections score well above 0.80 reliability, which is considered to be very good. (The maximum reliability score is 1.0.) For comparison, in 2019, GCSE English Literature and Language exams had a reliability of 0.52.

2. What are completion rates?

Completion rates show the proportion of children who reach a specific question in the test, and/or who complete the test as a whole.

In a normal, timed administration of a test, not all children will complete the test. We have therefore been able to look at how completion rates differ to investigate how children may have been affected by the errors.

As highlighted in GL Assessment's [letter to parents](#) on 1 October, the analysis of this year's test found that, while the test reliability and completion rates as a whole remain statistically sound, there was evidence that completion rates started to drop during the last six questions of the VR section of the paper. The solution has therefore been based on this evidence.

3. Does the qualifying score remain the same?

Yes. The qualifying score remains 121.

4. If you are removing six questions from the Verbal Reasoning section, how can you still have a qualifying score of 121?

A child's final score is an age-standardised score rather than a raw score. (A raw score is just the total of the correct marks on the papers.) The standardisation process has taken into account the removal of the last six Verbal Reasoning questions in order to maintain the qualifying score at 121.

Standardisation is described on the [Buckinghamshire County Council website](#).

5. Won't the solution penalise children whose strength is Verbal Reasoning?

No, both because there are a high number of VR questions within the paper so each child will still be able to demonstrate their strengths in VR, and because the weightings of the sections of the test will not be changed. Verbal Skills will continue to have a weighting of 50%.

It is important to reiterate that the independent statistician has looked in detail at how children performed in the Verbal Reasoning section of the paper, taking into account the different conditions under which the children sat the paper (i.e. the children who were advised not to attempt the questions, children who were told part-way through the paper, and children who were not informed). The independent statistician has verified that the outcome of the test, without those questions, is still fair for all children, highly reliable and above the accepted conventions for admissions tests.

6. How are the different sections of the test weighted?

Each of the three sections within the Transfer Test is standardised separately. The overall standardised score is used to determine which children are deemed suitable for grammar school and is based on the sum of the following:

- 50% of the standardised score for the Verbal Skills section
- 25% of the standardised score for the Mathematical section
- 25% of the standardised score for the Non-verbal section

7. Will we still receive the results on Friday 18 October?

Yes, results will still be sent to parents, as planned, on Friday 18 October.

8. Can I appeal if my child doesn't reach the qualifying score of 121?

When results are released on 18 October, as in all previous years, you have the option of going to Selection Review or Appeal if your child has not qualified with the score of 121.

The process for review will be exactly the same as in previous years and therefore please note that success at Selection Review or Appeal requires strong academic evidence of grammar school suitability and not just details of extenuating circumstances.

We understand that you may focus upon the testing error. However, with the statistical analysis and solution implementation this will not be sufficient grounds for reviews or appeals on their own. Academic evidence supported by your primary school will be the first port of call in any request for appeal or review.

9. Could you please explain the process that I would need to go through in order to appeal the decision for my child?

If you feel that there are exceptional reasons for your child not qualifying, the next steps to take following receipt of your child's results are detailed on the [Bucks County Council website](#).