

1. INTRODUCTION

Church of England schools and academies should be able to show how their Admissions Policy and practice demonstrates their school's commitment to distinctiveness and inclusivity, for both church families and the wider community.

This latest edition of the Rochester Diocesan Board of Education's (RDBE) guidelines on admissions in Church of England schools has been fully revised to take account of the DfE School Admissions Code published in December 2014.

These guidelines are intended to outline core principles and some adaptations, to suit local circumstances, may be possible. Further advice should be sought from Diocesan Board of Education officers.

These guidelines are not exhaustive and whilst care has been taken to ensure accurate information is provided they should be read in conjunction with the School Admissions Code and with the Local Authority's (LA) scheme of co-ordinated admission arrangements.

No attempt has been made to summarise all of the complex and rapidly changing provisions but relevant references are made where appropriate

2. KEY POINTS

- a. This guidance applies to Church of England schools within the Diocese of Rochester which are their own admission authorities. It is therefore relevant for Church of England Voluntary Aided schools and academies but not Voluntary Controlled schools (except those located within Medway Council who permit the use of Faith oversubscription criteria).
- b. Where Church of England schools convert to Academy status the predecessor school's admission criteria should apply. Therefore Church of England Voluntary Controlled schools that convert to Academy status should not use Faith oversubscription criteria post conversion (other than those located within Medway Council).
- c. Governors and Directors of Church of England Voluntary Aided schools and academies are responsible for the formulation, consultation, publication, implementation of their school's / academy's admission arrangements and to ensure that they comply with the Schools Admissions Code.
- d. The admission arrangements must be fair and objective, clearly written and unambiguous therefore the use of undefined phrases such as "regular", "at the heart of" "habitual attendance" and "faithful worshipper" (as well as others), should be avoided.
- e. Governing bodies have a statutory duty to consult the RDBE over their admission arrangements prior to consulting more widely and have regard to the RDBE's guidance.)
- f. Regulations give Diocesan Boards the ability to refer an objection to the Schools Adjudicator where a school's admission arrangements do not comply with the School Admissions Code. The RDBE would normally only use such powers as a last resort and where its guidance had been ignored and therefore the arrangements did not comply with the School Admissions Code.

2. KEY POINTS (CONTINUED)

- g. Unless there are more applications than there are places available, children must automatically be offered a place irrespective of any over subscription criteria.
- h. Where schools have an attached nursery or children's centre, care must be taken over the arrangements for admission into the reception class(es). There is no automatic entry into reception from the nursery or children's centre.

3. MODEL POLICY FOR SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

A suggested format, for guidance only, is provided which may be necessary to adapt to suit local circumstances.

Where applicable definitions should be provided as suggested by the School Admissions Code (eg SEN statements, EHCP, Children in Local Authority Care and Siblings).

Church of England schools and academies admission policies should contain the following:

- a. An ethos statement
- b. A statement confirming that priority will be given, above all others, to children with SEN statements / EHCP that name the school for admission and the subsequent number of available places will be reduced accordingly
- c. First priority will be given to children in, or previously in, Local Authority care
- d. An outline of the application process including confirmation of the school's/academy's PAN, age range, infant class size limitations and parental rights of entry deferment
- e. Over subscription criteria for each relevant age group
- f. A Supplementary Information Form (where a school uses one to apply its oversubscription criteria)
- g. Tie break
- h. Waiting list arrangements
- i. In-year admission arrangements
- j. Appeal arrangements and
- k. A statement confirming that the school is committed to fair access arrangements

Item 1 of the suggested over subscription criteria is mandatory whilst items 2 to 6 are optional, as is their priority ranking. The RDBE considers and recommends Children in Local Authority Care or Previously in Local Authority Care should be given first priority regardless of Faith, (although the Schools Admissions Code does allow for Church of England Children in Local Authority Care or Previously in Local Authority Care to be given a higher priority).

References to Faith criteria should clearly specify the required periods of attendance at religious services.

4. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION FORM (SIF)

LAs will have a scheme for co-ordinating admission arrangements and it is a requirement of such schemes that there is one Common Application Form for all applicants living in the LA. Qualifying Church schools that are permitted to use Faith criteria as part of their admissions policy, may use a SIF to obtain additional information usually connected with religious membership (a suggested format for guidance only is provided). Governors will need to decide what information is relevant to their admissions policy, amend as appropriate and design forms with sufficient space for parents to complete the relevant details. The SIF should **NOT** request information which is already on the Common Application Form (including non-Faith criteria categories) or details not required by the admission policy. The SIF need only be completed by parents applying for a Faith place within the oversubscription criteria and should be completed in addition to the common application form / in year common application form.

5. REVIEW OF ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

- a. Admission authorities must set and determine admission arrangements annually.
- b. If no alterations are made to the admission arrangements they must be consulted on at least every 7 years.
- c. Where alterations to the admission arrangements are proposed the admission authority must publicly consult on these, having first consulted the RDBE.
- d. The public consultation must be for a minimum of **6 weeks** and must take place between **1 October and 31 January** of the school year before those arrangements are to apply.
- e. The consultees must include the following, all of whom should be given the opportunity to raise any concerns over the proposed admission arrangements.
 - i. parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen,
 - ii. other admission authorities (including the LA), except primary schools need not consult secondary schools,
 - iii. religious authorities,
 - iv. the local community,
 - v. any other admission authorities across LA borders and
 - vi. other persons who in the opinion of the admissions authority have an interest in the proposed admissions.
- f. Any objections must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator by the 15 May in the determination year. Any decision by the Schools Adjudicator must be acted upon by the admissions authority and the admission arrangements amended accordingly. The LA will collate and publish all the admission arrangements in the area in a single composite document.

ROCHESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION
ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS IN CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES

6. TIMESCALES

The following example timetable relates to the academic year in which admission authorities determine their admission arrangements for entry to school in September 2017.

1 May 2015 to 30 June 2015	Admission proposals to be submitted to RDBE.
1 October 2015	Earliest date to commence consultation on proposed arrangements. Consultation must last a minimum of 6 weeks.
1 January 2016	Deadline for the LA to formulate a coordinated scheme for state funded schools in their area, including any new school or academy which is expected to open.
31 January 2016	Deadline for the completion of the consultation on proposed admission arrangements.
28 February 2016	Deadline for admissions arrangements to be determined even if they have not changed from the previous year and a consultation has not been required (after which the Secretary of State may impose a coordinated scheme if local agreement has not been secured).
15 March 2016	Deadline for admission authorities to send a copy of their full determined admission arrangements to their LA. Deadline for LAs to publish on their website the proposed admission arrangements for any new school or academy which is intending to open within the determination year, details of where the determined arrangements for all schools, including Academies, can be viewed, and information on how to refer objections to the Schools Adjudicator.
15 May 2016	Deadline for objections to the Schools Adjudicator.
30 June 2016	Deadline for LAs to report to the Schools Adjudicator on admission arrangements in their area.
8 August 2016	Deadline for governing bodies to provide admission arrangements information to the local authority to allow them to compile composite prospectus for pupil entry.

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