

Admission Guidance for Church of England Schools

Admissions criteria only comes into play when a school is oversubscribed. The over-subscription criteria must be objective, fair and compatible with admissions and equal opportunities legislation. There needs to be regard to any relevant advice, the School Admission and Appeals Codes, the LA co-ordinated admission scheme and been subject to the consultation procedures as set out in the timeline.

All governing bodies are required by section 324 of the Education Act 1996 to admit to the school children with a statement of special educational needs that names the school. This is not an oversubscription criterion. Schools must admit such children whether they have places or not. Admission authorities must not imply in their published admission arrangements that they have discretion over the admission of children with statements of special educational needs. Paragraph 1.6 – School Admissions Code 2012.

Over-subscription criteria needs to be clearly defined e.g. definition of sibling, tie breaker. Listed are some commonly used and acceptable over-subscription criteria. These are not listed in any particular order.

1. Children in Care. The Code states that children in care are the most vulnerable children in society and finding a school place in the best interests of the child is of paramount importance. Admission authorities for faith schools must give first priority to children in care of their faith and may give first priority to all children in care. The Exeter Diocesan Board of Education endorses all admission authorities to give all children in care the first and highest priority in their over-subscription criteria. Paragraph 1.7 – Schools Admissions Code 2012. The 2012 code also states that previously looked after children must also be included in this priority.

2. Religious Affiliation. Church schools can legitimately use religious affiliation and practice as one of their over-subscription criteria – Paragraph 1.36 Schools Admissions Code 2012. Admission authorities must ensure that parents can easily understand how faith based criteria will be reasonably satisfied. Careful consideration should be given to the meanings of ‘the church’, ‘attendance at a church’, ‘and membership of a church’. Consideration should be given to the proximity of other church schools and other churches where there is no church school in the parish. Consideration may also be given to churches with membership of and/or bodies in association with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and/or the Evangelical Alliance. Faith schools are required by section 86 of the SSFA 1998 to offer every child who applies, whether they are of faith, of another faith or no faith, a place at the school if there are places available. Paragraph 1.36 – Schools Admissions Code 2012.

3. Siblings of children who are at the school at the time of application. It is good practice for admission authorities to give priority to siblings in their over-subscription criteria. The complexity of family life means it is important to make clear the information provided to parents what is meant by a sibling. Paragraph 1.11 – Schools Admissions Code 2012.

4. Designated areas (catchment areas). Priority may be given to local children whose parents have expressed a preference, though there must not be any guarantee of a place. A designated area does

not prevent parents expressing a preference for the school if they do not live in the area. Where designated areas are used admission authorities must provide a map. Designated areas must not be set after other admission arrangements have been determined. Paragraph 1.14 – Schools Admissions Code 2012.

5. Distance from School. Distance from school or nearness to school, is a very commonly used oversubscription criteria and is frequently used as a 'tie breaker'. There should be clear information on how distance is measured. This should include provision for cases where parents have shared responsibility for a child following the breakdown of their relationship and the child lives for part of the week with each parent. Paragraph 1.13 – Schools Admissions Code 2012.

6. Social and Medical need. Admission authorities must ensure that in using these oversubscription criteria there is no discrimination against children because of their special educational needs or disabilities. There must be a clear explanation of what supporting evidence will be required from a relevant professional, such as a doctor, social worker or educational psychologist. It is also advisable for the school to have a written and agreed policy for this criterion. Admission authorities must not give higher priority to children under this criterion if the required documents have not been produced. Paragraph 1.16 – Schools Admission Code 2012.

7. Children of staff at the school

Admission authorities may give priority in their oversubscription criteria to children of staff at the school – Paragraph 1.39 – School Admission Code 2012.

8. Feeder Schools

Feeder schools can be named in the oversubscription criteria but this must be transparent and made on reasonable grounds – Paragraph 1.15 – School Admission Code

9. Pupil Premium

Academies can give priority to pupils eligible to pupil premium where the funding agreement permits.

Governors should decide which type of policy is most relevant to their local circumstances, may adapt the model policy, and formulate a policy specifically for their school.

Decisions on admissions can be made by a delegated committee or the whole governing body. The whole governing body must decide on terms of reference for an Admission Committee and review annually. Admission authorities must ensure that any member of staff employed at the school has no individual role in the admission process. This includes the headteacher.

Headteachers or school staff should not give parents an expectation that their application will be successful or inform them that their child has been given a place, before admissions decisions have been made. Under co-ordinated arrangements the Local Authority will send notification to the parents. This may differ for in year applications.

Governing bodies may need to obtain additional information from parents in order to apply specific admissions criteria. This may be provided via a separate form – a Supplementary Information Form. Governing bodies should agree with the Diocese and Local Authority how any additional forms are received or submitted, and is usually written into a Local Authority co-ordinated scheme. Additional

information sought should be objective and factual and may include evidence sought from a priest or minister, or in the case of other world faiths, from a religious leader. Additional information requested must not include any information other than that required to process the application. Supplementary Information must be collected before the allocation of places.

The national deadline for applications is 15th January and the national offer date is 16th April.

Each admission authority must maintain a waiting list for at least one term in the academic year of admission, for every oversubscribed school. The waiting list policy should be made clear in the published arrangements. The waiting list must be clear, fair and objective and must not give priority to children based on the date either their application was received or the date their name was added to the list. Children on the waiting list must be ranked in the same order as the oversubscription criteria.

Where admission authorities offer places in reception to children before compulsory school age they must allow parents to request that their child's entry be deferred until later in the school year and that the place is held for that child. The parent would not be allowed to defer entry beyond the beginning of the term after the child's 5th birthday, nor beyond the year for which the original application was accepted. Paragraph 2.16 – Schools Admission Code 2012.

When a school place is refused information on parents/carers right of appeal to an Independent Appeal Panel needs to be included with contact details of the clerk to the Independent Appeal Panel.

Any changes to admission arrangements must go through a statutory consultation process for 8 weeks between 1 November and 1 March each year. If there are no changes governing bodies need to consult at least every 7 years. All admission authorities must determine their admission arrangements by 15 April each year even if they have not changed and a consultation has not been required.