

Guidance for Church of England Admission Authorities in the Diocese of Canterbury - 2025-2026 Admissions

Key Principles

- The purpose of this Guidance is to provide advice and guidance to Admission Authorities of Church of England schools in the Diocese of Canterbury. It will principally (although not exclusively) be relevant to Governing Bodies of Voluntary Aided schools and Foundation schools, and Boards of Directors of Academy Trusts/Local Governing Committees of Church of England academies (particularly in respect of Academies that were formerly Voluntary Aided or Foundation schools).
- These guidelines must be read in conjunction with the statutory Admissions Code or Admission Appeal Code and with the scheme of co-ordinated admission arrangements for Kent County Council. All Admission Authorities should make sure that they are familiar with their responsibilities and that their Admission arrangements comply with the mandatory requirements referred to in the Codes and related requirements.
- In line with the Admissions Code, Admission Authorities of all Church of England schools will need to take into account both the Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education (CDBE) guidance and to consult with the CDBE when reviewing or revising Admission arrangements (this includes consultation prior to any public consultation). Timely engagement with the Diocesan education team is essential and schools should be aware of the timetable for review and consultation contained overleaf. Schools should also contact the Diocese in the event that a change of age range/change to the published admission number (PAN) is proposed to ensure all necessary guidance and consents are obtained.
- Church schools are permitted, but not required, to use faith-based oversubscription criteria. Those schools seeking to include such criteria need to consider their use carefully. If schools are using faith-based oversubscription criteria, it is important to monitor their use over time. If they are not being used in practice, they should be removed or revised. Annual consideration should be given as to whether the school should be retaining/amending faith-based oversubscription criteria in its policy. (See Appendix B)
- Admission arrangements must be clear, fair and objective and oversubscription criteria must be stated in order of priority. Governors should seek the most authentic way to realise a balance between the distinctive Christian vision and foundation of the school and the social context in which the school operates. The Admission policy should demonstrably reflect its Christian vision, by being welcoming to all and inclusive of children with different needs, of different faiths and from diverse backgrounds.
- The CDBE acknowledges the overarching considerations for Admission in Church of England Schools published as an 'Admission Builder Tool' by the Church of England Education Office (CEEO)¹. The CDBE offers its guidance after careful consideration of the context of church school heritage, mindful of changing times and circumstances in which it seeks to promote welcoming schools which are inclusive of different faiths and of pupils from diverse backgrounds.

The relevant Admission contact at the Diocese is Rebecca Swansbury rswansbury@diocant.org

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/form/school-Admission>

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TIMETABLE FOR REVIEW AND CONSULTATION FOR SEPTEMBER 2025-6 ADMISSIONS

In order to ensure that you obtain the necessary advice and guidance from the CDBE, within the necessary timescales to enable compliance with the Admission Code, please make sure that you follow the timetable set out below. Please refer to the School Admission Code for a full timetable and details.

	TIMESCALES	ACTIVITY
1.	Summer Term / Early Autumn Term 2023	Admission Authority to commence review of Admission Arrangements. The DBE's Admission Guidance must be considered when constructing the draft policy for consultation.
2.	Summer Term / Early Autumn Term 2023	Admission Authority to carry out initial consultation with DBE on any proposed changes to previous year's policy. Admission Authority to highlight specific changes when sending in draft policy to Diocese.
	Governors to send proposed Admission arrangements to the CDBE (rswansbury@diocant.org) before the public consultation.	
3.	6 weeks between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2024	Diocese to be included as consultee in Admission Authority's formal consultation, if such a consultation is required. (When sending to the Diocese, Admission Authority should flag what specific changes are proposed to (a) the previous year's policy and (b) to the version the Diocese commented on under the initial consultation.) NB. Admission Authorities must publicly consult on Admission arrangements: a. If changes (other than excepted changes²) are proposed; and b. At least once every 7 years.
4.	Before 28 February 2024	Admission Authority to consider any Diocesan objections/comments received as part of public consultation on proposed arrangements prior to determination. Arrangements must be determined by 28 February 2023. NB. Admission Authority must determine Admission arrangements annually even if no changes are proposed and no consultation has been required.
5.	As soon as possible after they are finalised and before 15 March 2024	Admission Authority to provide copy of determined arrangements to the Diocese at the same time as sharing these with the Local Authority. (Please highlight specific changes made since version of policy consulted upon at step 3.) Admission Authority also required to notify all Admission authorities and governing bodies for community and voluntary schools within the relevant area.
	15 March 2024	Deadline for Admission Authorities to send determined arrangements to Local Authority and Diocese. Admission Authority to publish Admission arrangements on their website (and the school's website, if different) along with previously determined Admission arrangements that remain relevant.
	15 May (each year)	Deadline for objections to the Schools Adjudicator and for the Local Authority to report on the Admission arrangements in their area.
	8 August 2024	Admission Authority must provide the full arrangements to the Local Authority for inclusion in the local Admission prospectus (i.e. following the end of the period for objection to the School's Adjudicator, which could have led to further changes being made).

² 1 For example, no consultation is required under a. if the proposed change relates to an increase to a school's PAN/has been made to comply with any mandatory requirement of the Code or School Admission Regulations.

The role of the Admission Authority

The Governing Body of a Voluntary Aided school/Foundation school is the relevant Admission Authority. As such, it is their responsibility to ensure that their Admission arrangements comply with the School Admission Code (current version dated September 2021),³ the Schools Admission Appeals Code (current version dated October 2022)⁴ and all related legislative and regulatory requirements.

For an Academy, the Academy Trust is the Admission Authority and therefore takes on this responsibility.⁵

In Voluntary Controlled schools, the Local Authority is the Admission Authority and is responsible for ensuring that the school's Admission arrangements comply with the relevant Codes and all related legislative and regulatory requirements.

Admission Authorities of Church of England schools should

- In line with the Admissions Code, take into account the CDBE's guidance when reviewing or revising Admission arrangements.
- Use the reflection questions (Appendix A) when reviewing and shaping Admission arrangements.
- Discuss Admission arrangements at the relevant Governing Body/Board/Admission Committee meeting and appropriately minute the discussion, decisions made and actions to be taken.

Admission Authorities of Church of England schools must

- have regard to any guidance from the CDBE when constructing faith-based Admission arrangements (para 1.38 Admissions Code)
- consult with the CDBE about proposed Admission arrangements before any public consultation, including the Local Authority (para 1.38 Admissions Code) and as part of the required public consultation (para 1.47(f) Admission Code).
- consult with the CDBE when deciding how membership or practice of the faith is to be demonstrated (para 1.38 Admissions Code)
- notify the CDBE as soon as possible if they are aware that an objection has been made to the Schools Adjudicator in respect of their Admission arrangements.
- consult on their Admission arrangements at least once every 7 years. The consultation must consider all the Admission arrangements including any supplementary information forms (SIF) (para 1.45 Admission Code).
- consult the CDBE of any intention to change the PAN or age range.

Key considerations for the Admission policy:

- Is the policy easy to understand?
- Is the policy compliant with the Admission Code?
- Does the policy reflect the school's distinctive Christian vision, ethos and values?
- Is the policy reflective of the local community the school serves?

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admission-code--2>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admission-appeals-code>

⁵ Academies are required by their Funding Agreement to comply with the Codes and the law relating to Admission (although the Secretary of State has the power to vary requirements where there is demonstrable need).

Appendix A

Reflection questions for consideration by Admission Authorities (in no particular order):

Statutory Code Priority

- Are looked after children or previously looked after children (children in public care) first priority, or in a foundation / open place policy, first in both categories?
- Is the Admission authority clear about their objectives in setting the Admission criteria?

Protecting the Vulnerable

- Do the Admission arrangements give high priority to those with exceptional social or medical needs to enable them to gain a place?
- To what extent does your school's Admission policy reflect the local community and foster a commitment to the poor and disadvantaged?
- How does the policy encourage hope and aspiration?
- How does your Admission policy meet the needs of the community that it serves?

Distinctive Christian Ethos – Living out the schools theologically rooted Christian vision

- What are the key messages we communicate through our Admission policy about our school's vision for education?
- How are you demonstrating your school's commitment to being deeply Christian while serving the common good?
- Does your Admission policy demonstrably reflect the Christian vision and theological rootedness of your school?
- Does your Admission policy suggest that you are a hospitable space?
- Are there any groups which may be excluded by your Admission policy?
- In what practical ways is your school community prepared to welcome and serve those who are vulnerable so that they can flourish?

Local Context

- Does the Admission policy give opportunity to all and support inclusion and diversity?
- Do the Admission arrangements allow the pupil population of the school to reflect the ethnic balance of the local community, including those for whom English is not the first language?
- Are we being inclusive of different faiths and of pupils from diverse backgrounds?
- Is your Admission policy suitable to the local context and how has the local context changed since your last Admission policy?
- How does your approach to Admission support a positive interaction between your school, your church and wider local communities?
- Do the arrangements include distance as a criterion - and if so, does this enable the school to serve its local community?
- Do the Admission arrangements enable the school to contribute to community cohesion and, if so, how? In what way does your Admission policy contribute more to social cohesion than community division?

Appendix B

Oversubscription criteria – Foundation places

Church schools are permitted, but not required, to use faith-based oversubscription criteria and allocate places by reference to faith where the school is oversubscribed. Such oversubscription criteria are often referred to as ‘foundation places.’ In general, foundation places are those offered to children who are, or whose parent(s)/carer(s) are of the Christian faith and regular worshippers.

Schools will be aware that this is one of the more sensitive issues relating to Admission and one which is potentially open to challenge and misuse. Those schools seeking to include such criteria need to consider their use carefully.

Admission Authorities are not permitted to ‘reserve’ places where they are not full. For example, if a school’s Admission policy specifies a set number of foundation places but there are insufficient successful applications for such places, it would not be open for the Admission Authority to keep these places open for those who may seek to join in year.

Admission Authorities wishing to include foundation places must decide not only the number/proportion of foundation places they will make available, but also the definition of a foundation place.

Foundation places - Points to consider:

- Do the Admission arrangements take into account children of other denominations/faiths and the enriching contributions they may bring to the life of the school?
- The application of faith-based criteria requires clear justification from the Admission authority/governing body who must articulate reasons for having it, including evidence of the number of families of demonstrable faith commitment. The Admission authority/governing body is required to word such criteria to reflect what is achieved by including them, e.g., does the requirement for church criteria reflect your school’s founding purpose to serve the community?
 - a) On what basis can your school determine a policy which includes faith as part of its oversubscription criteria?
 - b) How many families of demonstrable faith commitment live within the school’s locality?
 - c) Admission bodies are required to word the faith criterion/criteria to reflect what they are seeking to achieve by including it as a priority - what might the unintended consequences be?
 - d) What does church attendance actually mean?⁶
 - e) Do the Admission arrangements reflect the views of the local worshipping community, the deanery or other Christian bodies and take into account these guidelines?
 - f) If the school is oversubscribed can the Admission authority or committee defend the decisions made in terms of the criteria and procedures?

⁶ There is no single definition of Christian commitment for these purposes which will be suitable for all Church schools, especially where families are drawn from a wide range of denominations. Admission Authorities, together with the local church, need to consider for themselves how commitment should be defined in the light of local circumstances.

Appendix C Appeals⁷

The responsibility for Appeals rests with the Admission authority: in VA and Foundation schools this will be the Governing Body, in Academies it is the Trust Board, for VC schools the Admission authority is Kent County Council.

Admission Authorities must make arrangements for parents/carers to appeal against a decision not to admit their child to the school. The appeal is to an independent appeal panel set up by the Admission Authority in accordance with the Admission Appeals Code.

Admission authorities must set a timetable for organising and hearing appeals in line with the requirements of the School Admission Appeals Code 2022. Admission authorities must publish their appeals timetable on their website by 28 February each year.

All schools, regardless of category, can instruct Kent County Council's Independent Appeals Team to provide expert support for independent appeal panels deciding appeals for primary and secondary school places throughout Kent. For more information please contact: appeals@kent.gov.uk

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⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admission-appeals-code>

Appendix D

Using the CEEO ADMISSION BUILDER TOOL – guidance for schools⁸

This tool offers options for your school Admission arrangements that are legally compliant, while letting you take into account your school's character and local context. In practical terms, you will soon see that you have to work through each section, including all the required fields, before being able to move to the next one.

When schools have finished working through the Admission Builder, a PDF of their Admission arrangements will be generated which can be downloaded or requested to be sent by email. As well as the text the school has selected, the final PDF will contain additional standard provisions so that parents are informed about matters such as Admission outside the normal round, appeals and other waiting lists.

Please be aware that you will need to separately generate the SIF, the catchment area map itself and the standard 'Clergy Reference Letter'.

Schools do not have to restrict using this tool to create brand-new Admission arrangements; it is also a good way of reviewing their current arrangements (which Governors are required to do annually) or considering how those Admission arrangements reflect the school's vision and mission as a Church of England school, serving the common good. Church of England schools are called to bring life in all its fullness to their pupils and the wider community. They seek to offer wisdom, hope, community and dignity to those they serve. The Admission arrangements are the beginning of that service.

⁸ <https://www.churchofengland.org/form/school-Admission>