

Guidance for CE Admissions Authorities in the Diocese of Canterbury

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Statutory Code and with the scheme of co-ordinated admission arrangements for Kent County Council. This note is to provide a practical framework to aid governors as they carry out their responsibilities for admissions and appeals within the wider family of diocesan schools. Admissions arrangements must be clear, fair and objective and the criteria must be stated in order of priority. Governors should seek the most authentic way to realise a balance between the Christian principles of the school and the social context in which the school operates.

Background

1. The vision of the Children and Young People Framework is to ensure that every child and young person in the Diocese is at the heart of mission, having the opportunity of a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ; that they reach their God-given potential and are an integral part of church life.
2. We believe that schools remain at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation, the heart of local communities, for children of all faiths and none. We aim to promote distinctive, inclusive communities of learning that seek to be underpinned by Christian values sourced in the Gospel narrative, enriching the whole educational experience.
3. We believe that all human beings are made in the image of God and are precious and valued in God's sight. In schools we commend a distinctive approach, serving young people in ways that relate to their humanity in all its fullness.
4. By enabling leaders in Christian schools to interpret faith for their communities, we acknowledge and confront our responsibility to safeguard the vulnerable, those marginalised by society, living out Kingdom values of justice and mercy.

Principles

5. The Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education (CDBE) acknowledges the overarching considerations for Admissions in Church of England Schools published as an 'Admissions Builder Tool' by the Church of England Education Office. 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.
6. Given the mission that underpins the Church's provision of schools, each organisation must hold in balance the nurture and service roles, mirroring the Church's own purposes in both building up those of the faith and of serving and reaching out to those not of the faith.

7. Church schools must have regard to their responsibility to be living Christian communities, strongly related to the local community and demonstrating wider inclusivity; to erase boundaries between school and church and make the Church a familiar and secure place for children and families to go. In individual schools the balance will depend on ethos, history and tradition and local circumstances, and is reliant on schools working together with a supporting church community.
8. The CDBE encourages the policy of offering open places, which ensures that local children who are not connected with the church are able to gain admission.
9. Admissions authorities may decide (at their discretion) to offer foundation places, which enable local children who are connected with the church to gain admission.

Key Questions for Consideration by Admissions 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 admissions authority clear about their objectives in setting the admissions criteria?

Protecting the Vulnerable

- Do the admissions 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 admissions 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 admissions policy meet the needs of the community that it serves?

Distinctive Christian Ethos

- How are you demonstrating your school's commitment to being deeply Christian while serving the common good?
- Does your admissions policy reflect the ethos and mission of your school?
- Does your admissions policy suggest that you are a hospitable space?
- Are there any groups who may be excluded by your admissions 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

- Do the admissions 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?
- Is your admissions policy suitable to the local context and how has the local context changed since your last admissions policy?
- How does your approach to admissions 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 admissions arrangements enable the school to contribute to community cohesion and, if so, how? In what way does your admissions policy contribute more to social cohesion than community division?

Faith Based Criterion

- Do the admissions 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 governing body who must articulate reasons for having it, including demonstration of the number of families of real faith commitment. The 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 real faith commitment live within the school's locality?
 - c. Admissions bodies are required to word the faith criterion 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?
 - e. Do the admissions 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 admissions committee defend the decisions made in terms of the criteria and procedures?
 - g. Has the school included COVID admissions variation appendix applicable from 2020?ⁱ

Model Policies & SIF

For model policies to support your school in writing its admissions policy, please see the Church of England Education Office website:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies>

Point of Contact

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Quentin Roper, Diocesan Director of Education qlroper@diocant.org who will be able to help in the setting of your admissions policy.

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Short Summary

Key considerations for any admissions policy are as follows:

1. Is the policy easy to understand?
2. Is the policy compliant with the admissions code?
3. Does the policy reflect the school's distinctive ethos, vision and values?
4. Is the policy reflective of the local community the school serves?

Consultation and Determination

- Please do remember to consult with the Diocese before any public consultation including the Local Authority (LA), please see paragraph 1.38 of the Admission Code.
- Admission Authorities (AA) **MUST** determine admission arrangements annually by the 28 February in the determination year. This is a decision made at a quorate, full governing board meeting.

- Where changes are proposed the AA **MUST** first publicly consult for a minimum of 6 weeks between 1 October and 31 January of the school year before the arrangements are to apply.
- Where no changes are proposed the AA **MUST** consult once every 7 years.
- When a school consults it **MUST** consult on all the admission arrangements including any supplementary information forms (SIF).
- Public consultation mentions parents, other schools, religious authorities and the local community. See the Admissions Code 2014, paragraph 1.44 for a full list and see paragraph 1.45 on how to publicise the consultation.
- Once determined, the arrangements **MUST** be published. Please see the Admissions Code 2014, paragraph 1.46 and 1.47 on what and how to do this.
- After determination, admission arrangements can be objected to and referred to the Schools Adjudicator.

Applications

- For the normal admissions round - parents apply to the LA. Parents can express a preference for at least three schools.
- If a school is undersubscribed, any parent that applies **MUST** be offered a place.
- When oversubscribed the AA **MUST** rank applications in order against the published oversubscription criteria and send the list back to the LA.
- Parents are then offered a place at the highest preference school at which a place is available.
- Parents and in some circumstances, children, have the right to appeal against the AA's decision to refuse admission. The AA **MUST** set out the reasons for the decision to refuse an offer of a place, that there is a right of appeal and the process for hearing such appeals.
- The AA **MUST** establish an independent appeals panel to hear the appeal. This is usually done by the LA. A Schedule of dates for Appeal Hearings should be on the school website.

To consider

- Please consult the Diocese if you are considering changing your PAN.
- Pupil Premium and Service Premium – AA's can give priority to children eligible for early years pupil premium and those eligible for service premium. Please consult the Diocese if you are considering adding these to your oversubscription criteria.
- Year R places – remember full time places **MUST** be offered to children in the September following their fourth birthday. Only parents have the right to defer entry or for their child to attend 'part time'. (Please see paragraph 2.16 of the Admissions Code 2014).
- Admission of children outside their normal age group. (Please see paragraph 2.17, 2.17A and 2.17B for detailed information).

In Year Admissions

- Whilst LA's do not have to coordinate In Year Admissions some do, however all AA's **MUST** notify the LA of any in year applications and the outcome. (Please see paragraph 2.22 or the Admissions Code 2014). AA's **MUST** be consulted before the LA offers a place especially if this will increase the PAN.
- Updated May 2022 (endnote added)

ⁱ May 2022 - To be compliant for September 2021 admissions, several admissions authorities applied for this variation which relates to providing evidence of church attendance (required when applying under faith-based criteria). The variation *continues to be effective*; indeed, to remove it, consultation and a further application to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator would be required. Given that the variation appendix may be helpful in the future, our advice is not to seek its removal.