



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



Admissions to Church of England Schools

**Board of Education / National Society Advice to
Diocesan Boards of Education**

June 2011

Introduction

1. Changing times and changing circumstances have created the need for new guidance on this important topic. In the year when we celebrate 200 years of the Church of England's service to children and their families through its schools it is timely to review the nature and purpose of those schools and its expression through admissions policies. This paper provides an up to date national perspective on admissions from the Board of Education and the National Society. It aims to support the work of Dioceses and schools in fully recognising both the requirements of the most up to date DfE Admissions Code and the Church of England's intention to foster distinctive but inclusive schools.

The Nature of the Advice

2. All maintained schools and academies have to follow the Government's admissions legislation and Admissions Code so there is little need reiterate its requirements.
3. The purpose is to provide Diocesan Boards of Education (as the relevant Religious Authorities) and governors' Admissions Committees with some overarching considerations. This will be important when reviewing, revising or devising admissions arrangements in local contexts.
4. Currently all Church of England school governing bodies must have regard to guidance produced by the relevant Diocesan Board of Education and must consult the DBE¹ about their proposed admission arrangements before they go out to statutory consultation with other admission authorities.
5. Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools and Academies may also find it helpful, used in conjunction with diocesan advice, when revising their own admissions arrangements. It may also serve to inform the wider public about how the Church understands the purpose and vocation of its schools.

Background to this Advice

6. The Church of England, through the National Society last issued Guidance on Admissions to Church Schools in January 2007. That guidance provided a short a commentary on the then current Admissions Code and included suggestions for defining Church commitment.
7. Since then, the Government have issued further Admissions Codes designed to tighten up the arrangements and make them clearer, more objective, fairer and easier for parents to understand, as well as for the schools operating within the Codes.
8. The Office of the Schools Adjudicator carried out a wide-ranging scrutiny of admission arrangements in all types of schools in 2008, looking at Admissions Policies posted on school websites and booklets issued by local authorities. It was evident from this scrutiny that there needed to be an increased engagement in and monitoring of the process by DBEs. It also revealed that were cases of partial compliance with the Code on the part of some admissions authorities.
9. The National Society carried out a review of diocesan admission guidance in 2010. Diocesan Directors of Education, the Diocesan Admissions Group, National Society Council members and Board of Education members contributed to this review. Many of the diocesan documents received were very detailed and it was clear that material had been drawn from existing national advice.

¹ Required by Section 3(1)(cc) of the DBE Measure 1991 as amended

10. One of the most sensitive issues for church school admissions is the balance of places offered to church families and to the local community. For the vast majority of primary schools this is not an issue, since, while admissions policies almost always include the provision for applications from church families there is rarely any tension between achieving this and meeting the needs of the community more generally. Most of the Church of England's 2,600 primary schools serve the local community, whatever its composition. It is only for that small number of primary schools and the 100 or so of the Church of England's 160 secondary schools where there is a very heavy demand for places that the relationship between admissions based on church affiliation and on local residence can be a cause of contention.
11. The National Society also carried out a survey of all Church of England secondary schools² to gain information about both policies and practice in admissions. In particular the balance of admissions between faith based and neighbourhood places was examined. The study demonstrated the wide variety of patterns in Church school admissions. For a majority of schools, including all Voluntary Controlled and the vast majority of Academies, all places were offered on a neighbourhood basis, and with no faith based places. At the opposite end of the spectrum were a very small number of oversubscribed schools that did not identify the proportion of faith based places and filled all their places with faith based applicants. There was a larger group that did specify the proportion of faith based and neighbourhood places, with the majority of places faith based (typically between 50% - 80%). The rest admitted a mix of faith based and neighbourhood applicants, the proportions varying in relation to local and current factors.³
12. This variety of practice is in many cases the result of purely pragmatic decisions, locally taken, often incrementally over time and reflecting the school's popularity or lack of it. Admissions policies however embody a view of the nature and purpose of the schools and other considerations should be brought to bear.

The Church School Heritage – Origins and purposes

13. The Christian Churches were the first to seek to provide education to people in England and Wales.
14. From the early middle ages onwards the Church provided education in monasteries and elsewhere. After the Reformation, charity schools, mainly for the 'poor', were founded with philanthropic endowments. .
15. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, founded in 1699 with the encouragement of leading members of the Church of England, was a further significant initiative. Then, in 1811 the National Society was founded with the more ambitious aim of building a nationwide system of schools for the poor. The original title was 'The National Society for the Promotion of the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church throughout England and Wales'. The founders understood the establishment of the Church of England as giving it a wide concern and responsibility for the national good beyond its own congregations and were deeply concerned about both the morals and the fate of the burgeoning population, as England and Wales became industrialised. They set up the Society to raise money to give grants for school buildings and to train teachers.
16. These schools were to teach basic skills and also to provide for the moral and spiritual welfare of the children, by teaching them the 'National Religion' - Christianity as represented by the Church of England and Wales.

² Carried out in a web based and phone survey in the summer of 2010

³ A detailed summary of the information emerging from that study is included at Appendix x

17. Their aim was to found a Church school in every parish. During the first 50 years, still before there was any widespread state provision, 12,000 schools had been set up in union with the National Society, with a national network of training schools, National Society and diocesan training colleges to provide the teachers for them.
18. With the arrival of free, state provided education from 1870 and the growth of public expenditure on education in the twentieth century the Church of England- along with other Christian churches who ran their own denominationally based schools- found it increasingly difficult to keep pace with increasing educational expectations and eventually church schools were integrated into a substantially state funded pattern of provision through the 1944 Education Act. The development of voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools was a response to the funding difficulties experienced by many dioceses and the National Society. Voluntary aided schools retained much of the church influence and funding, including control over admissions. Voluntary controlled schools' Church of England foundation was simply expressed through the worship offered in the school and a minority of church appointed governors. The local education authority became the admissions authority, and determined the policy and practice.
19. Over the succeeding decades the rationale for Church of England schools was a matter of recurrent debate. In 2001, the Dearing Report ('The Way ahead: Church schools in the new millennium) restated the Church of England's policy that Church schools should be 'both distinctively Christian and inclusive communities, providing nurture in their faith for children from Christian families and serving the whole local community in which they are situated.'
20. The lesson from the history of church schools is that they have both served the local community as an expression of service and also provided for the Church family an education within an explicitly Anglican Christian ethos and framework. These twin objectives remain valid today.
21. The Dearing Report popularised the use of 'foundation' and 'open' places as an expression of this dual purpose. **Foundation places** are those offered to children whose parent(s) or carers are faithful and regular worshippers in an Anglican or other Christian Church. **Open places** are those available for children from the local neighbourhood or community surrounding the school, irrespective of religious affiliation.

Theological rationale

22. As a service initiated, sponsored and supported by the Church of England theological reflection on the purposes of church schools is critical to ensure consistency of purpose and interpretation with the parent body.
23. The 1999 General Synod resolution stated that Church of England schools stand at the heart of the mission and ministry of the Church. Their role therefore must be seen as at one with the mission of the Church.
24. **Going for Growth**⁴ offers an understanding of the Church's engagement with children and young people that draws on a theology of mission to articulate the guiding principles central to the work of the Church with children and young people.
25. The starting point is the Christian belief that all human beings are made in the image of God⁵. That means each child is a unique human being, made by God and loved by him, and worth the highest possible standards of education and care and the closest attention to what will enable them to flourish.

⁴ Archbishops' Council Education Division 2010

⁵ **Going for Growth** 3.6

26. In particular this belief leads to an obligation to recognise and make visible those who often remain invisible, through ethnic or cultural disadvantage, or through disability or poverty. This belief should underpin everything that happens in Church schools, and should underpin every Admissions Policy. It automatically gives church schools a bias in favour of the disadvantaged in whatever way disadvantage is manifest in the local circumstance of the school.
27. **Going for Growth** also recognises the Christian imperative to build the kingdom of God here on earth.⁶ The church is challenged to work for justice and liberation for all, to change the structures of oppression and injustice. In relation to schools it is to do this *for* the children we serve and also *with* those children. They too are the agents of change and transformation for themselves and for their communities.
28. This reinforces the lesson from our heritage: that Church schools have particular vocation to the poor, to enable them through education to change their lives. When the Church created schools in the nineteenth century, it did so to offer basic education to the poor, at a time when the state did not provide such education, to enable children and young people made in God's image to escape from poverty and degradation.
29. The Kingdom is built on the foundations of the Word, and the Christian character of the Church school will ensure that 'every child and young person has a life enhancing encounter with the Christian faith.'⁷ As well as offering the full range of educational opportunities to the children who attend, Church schools are also where children and young people can engage at a profound level with faith in general and the Christian experience and way of life in particular.
31. This objective is enhanced by the presence of children already being brought up in a Christian family, and for whom the school reflects the values of the home and reinforces their nurturing in the Christian faith. The Dearing report spoke of the value of having a core of children who came from families already committed to the Christian faith⁸. For them the school will be strengthening and enriching their religious upbringing.
32. This is also the basis on which the relationship with families from other faith traditions is built. Commitment to honouring faith in the lives of families and the community is a common commitment with the other major faith traditions in Britain today.
33. Church schools are integral to the ministry and mission of the Church and can offer a genuine witness to the Incarnation and the creative, redemptive and transforming purposes of God. They do this by loving and valuing all humanity equally; by proclaiming the Gospel through all of their words, and actions, and through the quality of the community life and concern for individuals. Church schools are called to bring fullness of life to their pupils, whatever the beliefs of the children and young people or their families.

Implications for church school admissions

34. The message from history and theology is that there is a mission imperative that underpins the Church's provision of schools. Schools therefore 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. All Church of England schools have a vocation to be distinctive and inclusive, whether or not their admissions policy specify a particular proportion of open and foundation places.
35. In individual schools the balance between nurture and service will depend on ethos, history and tradition, local circumstances, including whether there are other Church of England schools in

⁶ **Going for Growth** 3.14ff

⁷ *Ibid* 5.2

⁸ eg Para 4.47 of the Dearing Report in relation to new schools

the area and the current governors' commitment to the purposes of the school. When a governing body reviews its Admissions Policy, it should have regard to the responsibility of all Church schools to be living Christian communities strongly related to the local community. In recognition of the vocation of the Church to transform the world, Church schools should also seek to be inclusive of the wider community. There are a number of ways by which inclusiveness can be interpreted, but all Church schools should ensure that their policies do make that provision. In some cases policies based solely on the immediate, local neighbourhood may not in fact create a diverse community reflective of the wider area and that too needs to be taken into account.

36. **Church of England schools should be able to show how their Admissions Policy and practice demonstrates the school's commitment both to distinctiveness and inclusivity, to church families and the wider community.**
37. The Church of England stands ready to give support to the small number of schools that currently only admit children from Christian families to enable them to provide some open places available to the local community.
38. The Church of England national office will regularly review, by sampling, the national picture of admissions arrangements in Church of England schools and report to the National Society Council and the Board of Education biennially, beginning in September 2012. The purpose of such monitoring is so that a national perspective can be offered to both the Church and the Government of the day on how church schools carry out their responsibility to both parties.

APPENDIX I Additional technical Guidance

A The role of the governing body

- 1 In voluntary aided and foundation schools and academies, the governing body is the admissions authority and is responsible for determining the admissions arrangements. This may be delegated to the Admissions Committee of the governing body. The Admissions Policy must be adopted by the whole governing body.
- 2 The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) is the religious authority, as described by the government admissions arrangements regulations⁹ and is recognised by the government as the body with the duty to give advice to Church of England schools on admissions.
- 3 Church of England schools which are their own admissions authority, including academies, have a duty to consult with the DBE and should follow their advice.
- 4 The Admissions Policy must be fair, lawful and easily understood by parents.
- 5 The DBE in advising its schools will be able to take account of the overarching guidance provided by the Board of Education /National Society interpreting it as relevant to their local context. They will also ensure that Admissions Policies comply with the current admissions code.
- 6 An important and relatively recent power conferred on the DBEs by the government is that of objecting to admission arrangements in Church schools in the Diocese. It is expected that this will be an infrequent course of action, and will only happen if a school refuses to take the advice of the DBE.

B Admissions criteria: issues for discussion

1. All schools must adhere to current admissions legislation and regulations as expressed in the most up to date Admissions Code issues by the Department for Education. Within that there may be some areas of discretion on which the aims and purposes of church schools may be brought to bear. The general principle is one of generosity to those in need and follows from the original commitment to the poor.

Looked after children

2. Priority must be given to children in public care (looked after children and previously looked after children. Previously looked after children are those who were looked after, but ceased to be so because they were adopted (or became subject to a residence order or special guardianship order¹⁰) in all Admissions Policies.

Looked after children regulations¹¹ offer both a general and specific way of prioritising children in public care:

Church schools 'may give first priority in their oversubscription criteria to all relevant looked after children, whether or not they are Anglicans and shall in any event -

(a) give first priority to all relevant looked after children who are of that faith over all other children of

⁹ Regulation 12(2)(i) of the Admissions Arrangements Regulations 2008, under Section 69(3) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998

¹⁰ Paragraph 1.7 of the 2011 DfE Admissions Code has extended the definition of looked after children to include previously looked after children. Previously looked after children are those who were looked after, but ceased to be so because they were adopted (or became subject to a residence order or special guardianship order).

¹¹ The School Admission Arrangements (England) Regulations 2008 Part 3, 9(1)

that faith, and

(b) give higher priority to all relevant looked after children not of that faith than all other children not of that faith.'

This means that a Church of England VA school could either prioritise children in public care over all other, or each time within separate categories of application.

The Board of Education / National Society recommends that all children in public care should be given top priority regardless of faith commitment.

Medical or social needs

3. Governors in Church of England schools are recommended to give a high priority to children living in special social circumstances or with exceptional medical needs which affect their education or ability to get to school. This criterion is not the same as educational needs. It is likely that there will be a strong reason on physical or geographical grounds why a child should be admitted to a particular school. The Admissions Policy must make it clear whether it is the child's needs or the parents' needs which are to be considered.

Church Criteria

4. Church criteria must be as easy to understand as possible. It is the role of the DBE as the religious authority to advise schools on methods and definitions to use when deciding membership or commitment to the Church of England.
5. As the Church of England is not a membership organisation this can create complexities. Each governing body must decide for itself, based on its knowledge of local circumstances and in discussion with local clergy, what is appropriate for their situation when defining religious commitment.
6. Evidence may be sought from clergy on the supplementary information form (SIF) and this should be stated in the policy. Policies must make it clear if the commitment of the family, parent or the child will be measured. 'Family' and 'parent' must also be clearly defined.
7. The National Society recommends that the only criterion to be taken into account is attendance at worship.
8. Points systems used to differentiate between families with equal commitment should be as simple as possible, and only used if absolutely necessary, and ideally should be phased out over the next few years. Points systems can discriminate against families unable for a variety of reasons to participate in Church activities.
9. **Other Christian denominations** may have different criteria for defining membership and governing bodies should consult with local Christian Churches to ensure that their admissions arrangements do not discriminate against them indirectly.

Other faiths

10. The Church welcomes children of other faiths into its schools. The Dearing Report referred to earlier, highlighted the need for Church schools to nourish those of the faith; encourage those of other faiths; and challenge those who have no faith.
11. Families of other faiths often choose to send their children to Church of England schools because they are places where faith will be respected and taken seriously.

12. Where the Admissions Policy has both foundation and open places such children would automatically be in the open category. Some schools will include a category for children of other faiths. Many primary schools do not have separate categories and take children on the basis of proximity so children of other faiths will be admitted on that basis.

C Supplementary Information Forms

1. The purpose of Supplementary Information Forms (SIFs) is to inform schools about the commitment of the child's family to the Church as specified in the admissions criteria.
2. It must only ask for information that matches the criteria in the Admissions Policy.
3. This information may also be required for children who attend Churches of other denominations named in the Admissions Policy
4. The essential elements of the supplementary information form are:
 - the child's name and address
 - the name of the Church attended
 - an indication of the regularity of attendance and the length of time of this regularity. Simple tick boxes can be used
 - In cases where a simple points system is still used to further differentiate between applicants, a space for the family to note extra involvement in the life of the Church
 - Confirmation from authorised church officer that the Church is one which is named in the Admissions Policy or belongs to one of the denominations named in the policy. Again, a tick box can be used
 - The signature of the church officer to confirm that the information provided by the family is correct
 - A space for the signature of the relevant officer of the previous Church attended where a family has recently moved into the area to confirm attendance as above

D. Trust Deeds

Many governing bodies rely on the wording of the original Trust Deed to draw up their Admissions Policy. These deeds often emphasised a bias to the poor. Governors should ensure that they examine the trust deed and if necessary reinterpret its terms to reflect the current context. The Diocese can help with this.

E Ecumenical issues

1. Previous Guidance has used advised governors to take membership of Churches Together in England or the Evangelical Alliance as a guide to the standing of particular local Christian churches. This is still a useful marker of mainstream churches with a national infrastructure. More recently this has been supplemented by taking into account local ecumenical agreements and practice.
2. In recent years there has been a considerable growth in black-led Churches and independent community Churches. Few of these have national organisations and are therefore precluded from membership of national groupings. A form of words to allow such independent Churches to be treated on the same basis as CTE in applications for Foundation or other denomination places at Church schools is under discussion.
3. There are a number of agreements between the Church of England and other churches that ought to be reflected in admissions arrangements.

a. Methodist Covenant

This is a common statement of belief with common aims although it has no legal effect – it does not make Methodists members of the Church of England. Dioceses may give guidance that Methodist children should be considered on the same basis as Church of England children, and schools would have to have regard to that guidance.

b. The Moravian Church

The Fetter Lane Declaration between the Church of England and the Moravian Church of Britain and Ireland 1995 stated: 'we commit ourselves to share a common life and mission. We will take all possible steps to visible unity in as many areas of life and witness as possible.' Although admission to Church of England schools on an equal basis with Church of England children was not mentioned in the declaration or the steps towards the goal of visible unity, where there is a Moravian Church in their locality governors may wish to recognise this in the policy. The Church is a member of Churches Together in England (CTE).

c. The Lutheran Church

The Lutheran Council is also a member of Churches Together in England. The Porvoo Declaration places the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches in a special relationship with the Church of England on the same footing as the Moravian Church. While this is not likely to arise very often, governors should be aware of this and may wish to recognise it in the same way.

d. Affinity

Affinity is an umbrella organisation to which independent churches belong, similar to and including the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. It has been agreed that Affinity and FIEC should be treated on the same basis as CTE and the Evangelical Alliance (EA) members for the purpose of admissions to Church of England schools.

e. LEPs

Where Local Ecumenical Partnerships exist, governors should include partner Churches in their Foundation or other denominations criteria.

4. Roman Catholic Church

The Dearing Report encouraged the establishment of ecumenical schools, and a number have been set up in partnership, especially with the Roman Catholic Church. In these cases there will need to be careful discussion to align in one admissions policy the different approaches taken by our two churches. The examples of the existing schools can be helpful in determining an appropriate local approach.

APPENDIX 2 Analysis of the survey of admissions arrangements in Church of England secondary schools (2010)

1. The vast majority of church schools admit pupils from the local neighbourhood regardless of faith background.
 - 2508 voluntary controlled schools admissions in the control of the Local Authority, so all open places
 - 42 academies on neighbourhood admissions (bar 6 or so mostly in London with a minority of foundation places)
 - 77 new schools established after the Dearing Report also mostly on neighbourhood admissions

2. Voluntary aided schools are able to prioritise faith criteria
 - 2111 VA schools in total
 - c1950 primary: outside London very few admit significant numbers on foundation places so are still overwhelmingly neighbourhood schools (including those with 100% Muslim intake)
 - in London some church primary schools are heavily oversubscribed and not all cap the foundation places

3. VA secondary schools
 - 100 / c160 oversubscribed (Data from survey of 2009 admissions)
 - The proportion of foundation places varied from 0 to uncapped (effectively 100%)

Allocation 1 – 19%	10 schools
Allocation 20 – 49	21 schools
Allocation 50 – 69%	20 schools
Allocation 70 – 89%	30 schools
Allocation 90 – 99%	6 schools
Uncapped	11 schools
 - A tiny number of schools **only** admit pupils on foundation places (11/160)
 - Just over one third of va schools admit more than half of the intake on foundation places (67/160)
 - Nearly two thirds of va schools admit under half the intake on foundation places (93/160)