



Admissions to Church Schools & Academies in the Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham



Guidance from the
Diocesan Board of Education

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SOUTHWELL & NOTTINGHAM DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION

Admissions to Church of England Schools

Southwell and Nottingham Diocese regard their church schools as central to the mission and ministry of the Diocese. The Diocesan Board of Education see the admission policies of church schools as being of vital importance in securing the mission of the school and the church in offering education. The Board of Education encourages schools to consider the statement offered by Lord Runcie, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, who said that church schools should;

“Nourish those of the faith, encourage those of other faiths and challenge those who have no faith”

The church school will thus be open to young people from Christian homes, from other faith backgrounds and from homes where faith is not known.

The admissions policy of a school should ensure that the school is both inclusive and distinctively Christian.

Distinctive

The admissions policy of a school must have regard to the school's Trust deed. In VA and Foundation schools and in Academies, the Governing body is the admissions authority and draws up the admissions policy in consultation with the diocese, the LA and all other admissions authorities in the area. Admissions policies must conform to the Government's Admissions Code and have regard to Diocesan Board of Education Advice. VA Schools and Academies must have their admissions policies approved by the Diocesan Board of Education and should submit them to the diocese annually.

Inclusive

There are a number of ways by which inclusiveness can be interpreted - faith, gender, black, minority & ethnic pupils, children and young people with additional needs, those with disabilities, at risk of exclusion or gifted and talented as well as socio-economic background. The area where the school is situated may make it difficult for a school to create a diverse community, but schools should strive to make their policies as inclusive as possible and ensure that all pupils are treated with equal respect.

Three important points to remember

1. All maintained schools and academies **must** follow the Government's admissions code.
2. Church of England school governing bodies **must** have regard to guidance from the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) and **must** consult the DBE about their proposed admission arrangements **before** they go out to statutory consultation with other admission authorities.
3. 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

Technical guidance

In VA schools and academies, the governing body is the admissions authority and is responsible for determining the admissions arrangements. Whilst this can be delegated to their admissions committee, the policy itself **MUST** be adopted by the whole governing body. Where a school belongs to a Multi Academy Trust, the Trust is the Admissions Authority.

The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) is the religious authority, as described by the government admissions arrangements regulations, and is recognised by the government as the body with the duty to give advice to Church of England schools and academies on admissions. VA Schools, Academies and Multi Academy Trusts with Church Schools have a duty to consult with the DBE and should follow their advice.

The Admissions Policy must be fair, lawful and easily understood by parents.

It is important to know that a recent power conferred on Diocesan Boards of Education is that of objecting to admissions arrangements in their church schools. This would only be likely if a school refuses to take the advice of the DBE.

Medical or social needs

Church of England Schools are recommended to give 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

This is always the area most difficult area to define. The advice of the Diocesan Board of Education is to use the three strands;

- **at the heart of the church**
- **attached to the church**
- **known to the church**

An applicant '**at the heart of the church**' refers to a regular, committed worshipper. This means one who worships usually at least twice a month to accommodate difficult patterns of work and family relationships, account should be taken of weekday worship

An applicant '**attached to the church**' may be a regular, but not frequent worshipper, for example one who usually attends a monthly family or church parade service, or is regularly involved in a weekday church activity *including an element of worship*.

An applicant '**known to the church**' may not be a frequent worshipper, but will probably be an occasional worshipper, someone who is known through a family connection, or one or more of whose family is involved in some church activity, such as a uniformed or other church organisation.

Governing bodies are advised to think through **and make clear in their policy** what these statements mean in their own context. It is also necessary to state the expected length of commitment necessary to qualify under church criteria.

It is important that only church activities that include worship should count towards church commitment.

It is also very important to define whether the commitment applies to 'family', 'parent' or 'child'.

On a school's supplementary information form, applicants need to state how they meet the church criteria, and clergy may be asked to verify the information given. This should be stated in the school's policy. (To ease the workload of clergy, our recommendation is to ask applicants to explain on the SIF how they meet their chosen criterion as listed above. Clergy may then simply agree or not.

Other Christian denominations

The Board of Education recommends the definition of other Christian faiths as “churches belonging to Churches Together in England or those belonging to the evangelical alliance.” A list of member churches of ‘Churches Together’ can be found on <http://www.cte.org.uk> If in doubt, please contact Sheila Barker in the Education Department.

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

The Church welcomes children of other faiths into its schools and 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.

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.

Twins and multiple births

Church schools must be sensitive to the needs of multiple birth families. It is recommended that if schools do not currently include arrangements for twins and children of multiple births in their admissions criteria, they should consult on it and include a statement in their next Admissions Policy review.

Supplementary Information Forms

The purpose of supplementary information forms (SIF) is to inform schools about the church commitment as specified in the admissions criteria. *It must only ask for information that matches the criteria in the Admissions Policy.*

Trust Deeds

Many governing bodies rely on the working of the original Trust Deed to draw up their admissions policy. These deeds often emphasise 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.

Neighbourhood

Governing bodies must take account of the characteristics of the local area when drawing up or revising their Admissions policy. This will include the proximity or otherwise of other schools and their religious character if any. Any possible effects of the school's policy on other schools in the area must be taken into account. This is of particular importance if a school decides to change its PAN.

Community

When a governing body reviews its Admissions Policy, it should have regard to the responsibility of all church schools to be a living Christian community, strongly related to the local community. However, schools should also seek to be inclusive of the wider community – policies based entirely on the local neighbourhood may not in fact create a diverse community.

Balance between foundation and open places

Some of our schools have foundation places and open places. Where this is the case, governors need to demonstrate commitment to both Christian families and the local community.

Key Definitions:

Looked after children

Priority must be given to children in public care (looked after children) and those formerly in public care, i.e. adopted children.

Church schools may

- a) Give first priority to all relevant looked after children who are of that faith over all other children of 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 must both given "Anglican" looked after children top priority under the school's foundation criteria and give all other looked after children top priority in the open criteria.

It is also very important to note the new definition of looked after children, which now includes those who have been adopted.



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Siblings

Our suggestion is to follow the local authority's definition for siblings.

Parents

Parents include natural parents, step parents, carers and guardians.

Address

The family's main residence at the time of application. Where parents live at separate addresses and share parenting, the address will usually be the address where the child wakes up on most mornings during the week, or the address of the parent who receives child benefit payments *

Proximity

Schools are recommended to use the local authority's measurement system for local consistency, *but must make clear the point at which the school measurement is defined, e.g. the reception door.*