

Guidelines – Faith Based Admission Criteria

Introduction

These guidelines have been written to help schools and governing bodies when reviewing their admission criteria, particularly in regards to church attendance.

Covid 19 resulted in the Church buildings being closed for a significant period in 2019. After which some buildings continued to be closed whilst others opened but with social distancing measures greatly impacting the capacity for attendance. All of which has had, and will continue to have an impact for schools that use church attendance as part of their admission criteria.

These guidelines have been written in conjunction with advice from the National Church. There are two main sections to these guidelines: -

Part 1 – A checklist for Faith- Based Admissions Criteria which has been produced by the National Church.

Part 2- Some frequently asked questions which are specific to the Liverpool Diocese.

If you would like help in reviewing admission policies please contact

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Part 1

Checklist for Faith- Based Admissions Criteria¹

Checklist	Notes
Strongly recommend that attendance at public worship is the sole measure of religious activity used.	This measure is simple to understand, can be objectively measured and is compliant with the Admission Code.
Other forms of religious activities may only be used where they are compliant with the Code but can be problematic Only those religious activities specified in diocesan guidance, as the 'the representative religious authority' may be used by schools in their admission arrangement. Use of activities not included in diocesan guidance is automatically invalid. Activities may breach the Code (1.9i) where they are not clearly defined and laid out and so we recommend that they are not generally used.	Some activities are potentially permissible within the code but are complex and difficult to define clearly. Those with a purely social purpose unless clearly defined may not be compliant and other often involve a subjective element, such as the frequency or scale of activity (leading a music group; being a PCC member and so on).
Both the duration and frequency of attendance at public worship must be clearly defined and provide an obvious threshold.	Duration: express this in terms of the period for which attendance is required e.g. <i>'not less than 12 months prior to the closing date specified on the which the application is submitted'</i> Frequency: ensure this is explicitly defined e.g. <i>'not less than 8 times in', 'not less than monthly/fortnightly...'</i> Do not use subjective and undefined terms such as <i>'usually attends'; 'regular attendance'; may take part in activities with an element of worship'; 'occasional worshipper'.</i>

¹ Based on the Faith-Based Admission Criteria: A checklist for dioceses. March 2021.

Ensure the frequency and duration of attendance at public worship is reasonable and proportionate.	Consider the age of the children seeking admission and the school calendar, so that it is reasonable to expect applicants will be generally able to meet the requirement.
Check for and remove previous approaches to defining religious practice in admissions.	Do not continue to use terms previously found in admissions guidance, such as <i>'at the heart of the church/attached to/know to the church'</i> . As these no longer meet the objectivity and transparency requirements of the Code.
Ensure that attendance at public worship is sufficiently defined	Whether attendance at worship is acceptable in admission arrangements would need to be tested against: (a) whether it had been laid out as an activity by the diocese and (b) whether it was clear, objective and reasonable. This criterion means physical attendance at an act of public worship. Online worship and private prayers in the church building do not meet this requirement. Whilst the pattern of church worship naturally varies, the routine weekly services (morning and evening prayer and celebration of the Eucharist) meet this criterion, as do the many other forms of public worship found in the Church of England. Note that there is no requirement for attendance to be only on a Sunday in order to count. In fact, to seek to insist on this is almost certainly discriminatory, for example for those families where shift work precludes this.

Wherever possible, avoid restricting church attendance to only one or small number of named churches.	Whilst there is nothing in the Code to preclude this, and it is not unusual to see individual churches named (often where there is a particular historic link) it can create difficulty for families who may not be able to attend that specific church. The reasons for this may vary, including work, family and caring commitments, or even their preference for a particular ethos or tradition. This makes things more complicated if people have re located. In addition, as pastoral reorganisations increase in number and scale, it may be wiser to broaden the range of churches that that are within the criteria, for example to 'any Church of England church.'
Ensure there is a clear definition of 'churches' in any criteria.	It is advisable to use the definition included in the variation guidance namely '<i>Christian church means any church which is designated under the Ecumenical Relations Measure nationally by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York or locally by the diocesan bishop, or is a member of churches Together in England, or the Evangelical Alliance, or a partner church of Affinity</i>'.
Check whether a priority is to be given to those of other faiths.	Admission authorities are not obliged to make this provision under the Code, but many do so. If doing so, the rationale for including only some faiths needs to be carefully explained. It is also crucial to frame the attendance criteria for those faiths so that their adherents are not unintentionally excluded from fulfilling them e.g. by not specifying that attendance at worship must be on a Sunday.

Checking that the wording on faith-based criteria of the admissions policy, the Supplementary Information Form (SIF) and any clergy reference form is identical.	This is essential. Also ensure that open clergy references are replaced by a template, as they will otherwise almost certainly not meet the requirement of the Code. The template may be an additional proforma alongside the SIF itself or in the form of a letter. Using a template also removes the risk of clergy including information which is impermissible to mention, or the reference being made using subjective judgments
Check if a Supplementary Information Form (SIF) is required	A SIF must only be required to obtain essential information not included on the Common Application Form (CAF). It is not therefore required in every case. The two principal reasons it can be required are if the school uses faith-based criteria or takes account of social or medical needs within its criteria (for which additional evidence is normally required). Check that the Local Authority Common Application Form (CAF) does not already include information that the school is intending to put on the SIF: if on the CAF, then the same information must not be sought via the SIF.
Check if faith-based criteria are still appropriate.	In addition to compatibility with the schools ethos, where the school is regularly undersubscribed to a significant degree retaining faith-based oversubscription criteria appears pointless and may be thought by some possible applicants to be a barrier to admissions (however mistakenly).

- It cannot be required that all applicants complete a SIF. Please note that as well as any faith-related criteria, a SIF can be used for other elements in our criteria that are not faith related, for example exceptional need provisions, unless this is already covered by the CAF.
- We recommend that a useful focus for responsible bodies when reviewing admissions issues should be the 'crunch point' in the criteria, which is the point at which the criteria is most frequently applied. Provides may consider streamlining criteria that are never or very infrequently applied to make the application process as transparent and straightforward as possible.
- Further consideration may be required as to what extent the criteria specified is essential for the authority to come to a fair lawful and objective decision on the application, for example gender or ethnicity.

Part 2

Frequently Asked Questions

Q These guidelines only include guidance on faith based criteria how does a school know if the rest of their admission policy is Code Compliant?

A The education department can only issue guidance on faith based criteria. However, in order to help with the writing of admission policies the Church of England has developed an Admission Builders.

This website enables schools to input all their specific information and in turn the site will produce a downloadable, Code Compliant admissions policy for the school. The Admission Builder can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/admissions-arrangements>

Q What if a school's admission policy does not include faith-based criteria, is that a problem?

A No problem at all, each school is unique and the board of education recognises and encourages schools to have criteria that is suitable and relevant to their context.

Q What if a school doesn't include faith-based criteria does that mean the Admission Builder can't be used?

A The Admission Builder can still be used as there is an option to remove faith based criteria.

Q What if a school's admissions policy is not currently due it's 7-year public consultation can this wait till the 7yrs is up?

A. You could. However, in light of the Office of Schools Adjudicator report to the national church the board of education are advising all school to thoroughly review their admission policies, when they come to set their policy for 28/29 to ensure they are code compliant.

Q When a school makes changes to its policy, and/or goes to a public consultation does it need to consult the diocese?

A Yes. Whenever changes are made, schools MUST consult the diocese. If a public consultation is needed school MUST consult the diocese PRIOR to the start of the public consultation

Q How do we consult with the diocese?

A. Dawn Harrison is the person to discuss your changes with. Ultimately the diocese will need school to send in (email is best to dawn.harrison@liverpool.anglican.org) its current admission policy, along with the proposed new admission policy which includes track changes/highlighted sections as to what are the proposed changes.

Q Which is better a Supplementary Information Form (SIF) or Clergy letter?

A. A SIF that is well written and clearly linked to the admission policy is better. The problems with clergy letters are that they could contain information that is not linked to the admission policy and information that is subjective or an opinion i.e. they are a very nice family, this will not link to any faith based criteria, is an opinion and is therefore impossible to use.

Q Can a school use only an open clergy letter?

A. No. Open clergy references are to be replaced by a template, otherwise they will not almost certainly not meet the requirement of the Code.

Q Can a school use both a Supplementary Information Form (SIF) and a Clergy/Priests letter?

A. It could. However why would a school want both? If a SIF is clearly written and linked to an admission policy, it will provide all the information needed. A SIF could indicate that details will be confirmed with the Clergy/Priest, i.e. as part of the admission procedure Clergy/Priest could be ask to confirm the details on a SIF

Q Is it only traditional Sunday worship that counts as attendance?

A. The board of education encourages school to be inclusive of all worship communities, i.e. midweek, services, morning/evening prayer worship communities linked to schools, etc. To insist on only Sunday worship only could almost certainly be seen as discriminatory.

Q If my child attends Collective Worship either in school or as part of a school trip to the local church, does that count and church attendance?

A. No. Normally church attendance is based on attendance at public worship – ie worship that is open to the public, collective worship is not normally open to the public.

Q. What is the time frame for reviewing an admission policy?

A.

Key Deadline s	Actions	
June-Sept 2026	Governing boards to decide whether any alternations are required to their admission policy. If changes are required then they will to consult. If no changes are required that Governing Boards can determine new arrangements for 2026 and send them to the Board of Education	
	Consulting	Not Consulting
30 th Sept 2026	Inform the Board of Education that you are making changes to your admission policy and therefore going to public consultation.	Governors can determine admissions policy and send it in(ie email it to dawn.harrison@liverpool.anglican.org) Or they can wait till closer to the deadlines for determined polices.

	Schools Inform the Board of Education by emailing (dawn.harrison@liverpool.anglican.org) with a copy of their current admissions policy and a copy of their proposed changes to their admission policy with track changes	
1 st Oct 2026-31 st Jan 2027 (Date set by the Schools Admissions Code)	Consultation Period Information on what needs to happen for a public consultation is below (more details can be obtained from Diocese or the Schools Admission Code May 2021 – part 1.47)	
6 th February 2027 or before if possible	Immediately after the 6-week public consultation has finished inform the Board of Education (ie email dawn.harrison@liverpool.anglican.org) of any amendments to be made following public consultation	
28th February 2027 (Date set by the Schools Admissions code)	All new arrangements to be determined and set to the Board of Education (ie email your agreed admission policy to dawn.harrison@liverpool.anglican.org)	All new arrangements to be determined and set to the Board of Education (ie email your agreed admission policy to dawn.harrison@liverpool.anglican.org)
15th March 2027 (Date set by the Schools Admissions code)	Last date at which new determined arrangements to send to the Local Authority and arrangements put on school's website.	Last date at which new determined arrangements to send to the Local Authority and arrangements put on school's website.

