

Admission Guidance for Church of England Schools and Academies

The Church of England's Vision for Education is educating for life in all its fullness. The vision embraces the spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and social development of children and young people. It offers a vision of human flourishing for all, one that embraces excellence and academic rigour, but sets them in a wider framework. This is worked out theologically and educationally through four basic elements which permeate the vision for education:

- Educating for Wisdom, Knowledge and Skills
- Educating for Hope and Aspiration
- Educating for Community and Living Well Together
- Educating for Dignity and Respect

The vision, in line with the Church of England's role as the established Church, is for the common good of the whole human community and its environment, whether national, regional or local. It is hospitable to diversity, respects freedom of religion and belief, and encourages others to contribute from the depths of their own traditions and understandings.

Church schools were originally established for the poor in the community. This desire to retain and promote the dignity of the disadvantaged remains at the heart of the vision. A concern for the disadvantaged and vulnerable should be explicitly promoted.

To enable all, through the love of God in Jesus Christ, to 'live life in all its fullness' (John 10:10b)

Nurture vision-inspired education; Nourish personal and spiritual growth; Enable connected communities that flourish

EDBE Advice - revised for 2026

Exeter Diocese schools are schools for all; those of the Christian faith, those of other faiths and those with no religious faith. Our schools are places for the whole community to be welcomed into without partiality. If we believe in community and dignity, evidenced through just systems, we should not set up exclusive criteria but actively build communities and promote living well together, whilst ensuring all are treated with dignity and respect. EDBE advises that this principle is explicitly reflected within church school admission arrangements.

Therefore, the EDBE strongly advises that over-subscription faith-based criteria should not be used in admission arrangements where it disadvantages local children. Where faith-based criteria are used they will need to reflect the following:

1. A school with a Church of England character expresses its Christian vocation by serving its local community, especially those in need. A church-related admission criterion must not be used so as to disadvantage local children (defined as children living within a specific distance from the school) and may be applied only where places remain available following orderly application of the distance criterion and other statutory criteria.
2. The criterion must be expressed in a way which is easy to understand.
3. The criterion should relate solely to regular attendance at public worship in church.
4. An Admissions Authority should define 'regular attendance' in consultation with local churches where relevant. It is expected that in most cases, regular attendance will be defined as presence at public worship consistently at least once each month over a period of at least two years, whether in the same church or (allowing for families moving into the area or between churches) more than one.
5. 'In church' should be defined so as to include, as well as "‘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’"
6. Where a church-related criterion is to be used, schools must provide a supplementary information form for parents and church leaders to complete and sign (the EDBE has a model form).

In exceptional circumstances and following consultation and consideration of the Exeter Diocesan Board of Education (EDBE) response, a governance body acting as the Admissions Authority for a school may establish admission arrangements by offering a proportion of places to church applicants (foundation) and a proportion to those without church affiliation (open).

Admission Authorities may seek to include oversubscription criteria relating to children of other faiths within their admission arrangements. If doing so, an Admissions Authority will need to be satisfied that the criteria are objective and fair (including when read alongside Christian faith-based criteria) and provides for the fact that different faiths practice in different ways. Some of the considerations outlined above in relation to Christian faith-based criteria may be relevant. To our knowledge, no satisfactory method of inclusion of faith-based oversubscription criteria for those of other faiths has been identified to date, and therefore EDBE strongly recommends that Church schools review their arrangements where priority for other faiths is currently included and remove. We would recommend that schools welcome those of other faiths to their school through their other (non-faith based) oversubscription criteria.

Setting the oversubscription criteria and determining admissions arrangements

In Academies and Voluntary Aided Schools the Governance Board or Academy Trust is the admissions authority. In Voluntary Controlled schools the Local Authority (LA) is the admissions authority and must consult with the Governing Board. We encourage Governance Boards to look at how best the school can serve the local community in line with the Diocesan and National Church of England Vision for Education. This will go beyond the simple administration of admission policies.

Review and Consultation

Questions to consider when reviewing the admission arrangements:

- In what way do our admissions arrangements suggest we are 'a hospitable space'?
- What do our admissions arrangements say about our respect of religious or other traditions which the individual child or family identify with upon entry to the school?
- In what way do our admissions arrangements contribute to community cohesion and development?
- To what extent do our admissions arrangements reflect 'a special attention to the disadvantaged, excluded, despised and feared'?
- What impact does our local context have on our approach to admissions?

All Church of England Schools in the Diocese of Exeter must have regard to guidance from the EDBE and must consult with the EDBE about proposed admission arrangements before any public consultation (1.38 of the School Admissions Code 2021). Please can you ensure that all arrangements are sent to the Diocese by **1st October** each year.

Determining the admission arrangements – Whom do you serve?

When determining admission arrangements, the EDBE recommends that Governance Boards think about this question in relation to the school's vision and mission statement and your service to all children in the local community.

Church of England Schools must determine their admission arrangements every year by **28th February**, even if they have not changed, and publish the determined arrangements on their website in full by **15th March**. A copy of the determined arrangements must be sent to the EDBE (1.47 of the School Admissions Code 2021).

Oversubscription Criteria

Admissions criteria only come into play when a school is oversubscribed. The oversubscription criteria must be objective, fair and compatible with admissions and equal opportunities legislation. They must also be clearly defined e.g. definition of sibling; what forms a tie breaker etc? There needs to be regard to any relevant advice, the School Admission and Appeals Codes, the Local Authority co-ordinated admission scheme and the criteria must have been subject to the consultation procedures as set out in the timeline – Annex 1.

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All Governance Boards are required by section 324 of the Education Act 1996 to admit school children with an **Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP)** that names the school. This is not an oversubscription criterion. Schools must admit such children whether they have places or not. Admission authorities must not imply in their published admission arrangements that they have discretion over the admission of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan that names the school as the preferred choice (paragraph 1.6 – School Admissions Code 2021).

It is recognised that there are far more primary schools in the Exeter Diocese who can serve our children, but far less choice for secondary school children. Therefore, this should be taken into account when creating and administering the oversubscription criteria.

If the school is not oversubscribed, all applicants must be offered a place.

Listed are some commonly used and acceptable oversubscription criteria. **These are not listed in any particular order.**

Looked after children.

The Code states that looked after children or those previously looked after are the most vulnerable children in society, and finding a school place in the best interests of the child is of paramount importance. Admission authorities for faith schools **must** give first priority to looked after children of their faith and may give first priority to all looked after children. The EDBE endorses all admission authorities to give all looked after children the first and highest priority in their over-subscription criteria (paragraph 1.7 – Schools Admissions Code 2021).

Social and Medical need.

Admission authorities must ensure that in using these oversubscription criteria there is no discrimination against children because of their Special Educational Needs or Disabilities. There must be a clear explanation of what supporting evidence will be required from a relevant professional, such as a doctor, social worker or educational psychologist. It is also advisable for the school to have a written and agreed policy for this criterion. Admission authorities must not give higher priority to children under this criterion if the required documents have not been produced (paragraph 1.16 – Schools Admission Code 2021) but this criterion supports EDBE's vision of ensuring the most vulnerable children are not disadvantaged.

Siblings of children who are at the school at the time of application.

It is good practice for admission authorities to give priority to siblings in their oversubscription criteria. The complexity of family life means it is important to make clear in the information provided to parents what is meant by a sibling? (Paragraph 1.11 – Schools Admissions Code 2021). See model policy for examples.

Designated areas (catchment areas).

Priority may be given to local children whose parents have expressed a preference, though there must not be any guarantee of a place. A designated area does not prevent parents expressing a preference for the school if they do not live in the area. Admission authorities must comply with parental preference in respect of parents living outside the designated area. Where designated areas are used, admission authorities must provide a map. Designated areas must not be set after other admission arrangements have been determined (paragraph 1.14 – Schools Admissions Code 2021).

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Religious Affiliation.

All church schools are required by section 86 of the School Standards and Framework Act (SSFA) 1998 to offer every child who applies, whether of their faith, another faith or no faith, a place at the school if there are places available. Schools designated with a religious character can legitimately use faith-based criteria as one of their oversubscription criteria (Paragraph 1.36 Schools Admissions Code 2021). Admission authorities must ensure that parents can easily understand how faith-based criteria will be reasonably satisfied. There should be clear definitions to the meanings of 'the church', 'attendance at a church', 'and membership of a church'. Consideration should be given to the proximity of other church schools and other churches where there is no church school in the parish. Consideration may also be given to churches with membership of and/or bodies in association with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and/or the Evangelical Alliance.

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Therefore, the EDBE advises that over-subscription faith-based criteria should not be used in admission arrangements where it disadvantages local children.

Distance from School.

Distance from school or nearness to school, is a very commonly used oversubscription criteria and is frequently used as a 'tie breaker'. There should be clear information on how distance is measured. This should include provision for cases where parents have shared responsibility for a child following the breakdown of their relationship and the child lives for part of the week with each parent (paragraph 1.13 – Schools Admissions Code 2021).

Children of staff at the school

Admission authorities may give priority in their oversubscription criteria to children of staff at the school in either or both of the following circumstances (paragraph 1.39 – School Admissions Code 2021):

- a) where the member of staff has been employed at the school for two or more years at the time at which the application for admission to the school is made, and/or
- b) the member of staff is recruited to fill a vacant post for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage.

Feeder Schools

Feeder schools can be named in the oversubscription criteria but this must be transparent and made on reasonable grounds (paragraph 1.15 – School Admission Code 2021).

Pupil Premium

Priority can be given to pupils' eligible for pupil premium where the funding agreement permits.

Admission arrangements must include an effective, clear and fair tie breaker to decide between two applications that cannot otherwise be separated.

Governance Boards must decide which type of policy is most relevant to their local circumstances, may adapt the EDBE model policy, and formulate a policy specifically for their school.

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Decisions on admissions can be made by a delegated committee with agreed terms of reference such as an Admission Committee which should be reviewed annually and approved by the Full Governing Board. Admission authorities must ensure that any member of staff employed at the school has no individual role in the admission process. This includes the Headteacher who can be part of the committee but cannot make independent decisions.

Headteachers or school staff should not give parents an expectation that their application will be successful or inform them that their child has been given a place before admissions decisions have been made. Under co-ordinated arrangements the Local Authority will send notification to the parents. This may differ for in-year applications.

Supplementary Information

Governance Boards may need to obtain additional information from parents in order to apply specific admissions criteria. This may be provided via a separate form – a Supplementary Information Form. Governance Boards should agree with EDBE and the Local Authority how any additional forms are received or submitted. Additional information sought should be objective and factual. It may include evidence sought from a priest or minister for faith-based criteria, or an appropriate professional for social and medical need criteria. Additional information requested must not include any information other than that required to process the application. Supplementary Information **must** be collected before the allocation of places.

The national offer date for primary applications is 16th April or the next working day.

The national offer date for secondary applications is 1st March or the next working day.

Each admission authority must maintain a waiting list for at least one term in the academic year of admission for every oversubscribed school. The waiting list policy should be made clear in the published arrangements. The waiting list must be clear, fair and objective and must not give priority to children based on the date either their application was received or the date their name was added to the list. Children on the waiting list must be ranked in the same order as the oversubscription criteria.

Where admission authorities offer places in Reception to children before compulsory school age they must allow parents to request that their child's entry be deferred until later in the school year and that the place is held for that child. The parent would not be allowed to defer entry beyond the beginning of the term after the child's 5th birthday, nor beyond the year for which the original application was accepted (paragraph 2.16 – Schools Admission Code 2021).

Where parents seek a place for their child outside their normal age group, admissions authorities must make decisions on the basis of circumstances of each case and in the best interest of the child concerned which will include taking account of the parent's views, the child's developments and professional views.

When a school place is refused, information on parents/carers right of appeal to an Independent Appeal Panel needs to be included with contact details of the Clerk to the Independent Appeal Panel.

Any changes to admission arrangements must go through a statutory consultation process for 6 weeks between 1 October and 31 January each year. If there are no changes, Governance Boards need to consult at least every 7 years. All admission authorities must determine their admission arrangements by 28th February each year even if they have not changed and a consultation has not been required.

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The EDBE has a template for admission arrangements and for a supplementary information form which aims to meet all the statutory requirements and can be amended to reflect the individual ethos, PAN and over-subscription criteria of the school.

Document reviewed by the EDBE	Date: 2nd July 2026
Document to be reviewed	Date: Summer / Autumn 2028

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