



# Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education

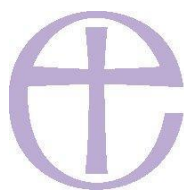
## Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education (BDBE)

### Guidance for Admission Authorities Setting Admissions Policies 2024 *(as amended July 2025)*

**This Guidance was approved by BDBE in 2024 and becomes effective in a phased way in line with the transition timetable circulated to all schools.**

**If your school uses church attendance or other faith-based criteria, you are very likely to need to make some changes in line with this new Guidance.**

*Please note that this Guidance supersedes all previous BDBE Guidance on setting admissions Policies.*



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  
BIRMINGHAM

## Background

***National Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian Serving the Common good (2016)***

The National Church of England's vision centres around John 10:10: **'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full'**. It refers to Education being for life in all its fullness and cites the Church of England's involvement in education over many centuries, seeking to 'promote educational excellence everywhere, for everyone'. See pg 2



- It reflects that the Church's commitment to education is at least as important today as in the past.
- It offers a model of education that is both thoroughly Christian in its foundation and highly attractive to others in education because of the quality of its outcomes for children and young people.
- It comments that there is no neutrality in education. Every school has a particular ethos, with commitments, beliefs and value-laden practices. Amidst the variety of approaches, the Church of England is confident that their vision of education for 'fullness of life' is one that fully deserves its place in twenty-first century Britain.
- It is a special strength that it achieves educational excellence in a broad framework within which pupils and teachers can pursue the big questions of meaning such as 'Who am I?', 'Why am I here?', 'What do I desire?' and 'How then shall I live?'

**This vision of education is at once deeply Christian in its inspiration and healthily plural in its operation.**

# Birmingham DBE vision for education

Church schools are at the heart of the Church of England mission to the nation, serving families, communities and neighbourhoods by “*educating for fullness of life for all*”. As the Gospel of Jesus changes lives and, thus, the world, our educational vision needs to be transformative and enable the capacity of children and young people to be agents of change, for themselves and others.

For us, educating children and young people in the light of the Gospel involves offering every opportunity we can give them to enhance their life chances beyond school, with proper access for all to employment, housing and every element essential for a flourishing, happy human life. Within our schools, children and young people should receive, and be enabled to give, love.

**Church schools living out the good news of Jesus:  
transforming the world by transforming lives.**

The Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education (BDBE) recognises the importance of quality education in the broadest sense of the word and its impact on all involved with a local school, its families, its staff and its local community.

The BDBE is a statutory body established under the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021, with functions including advice to school governors on any matter affecting church schools and academies, including admissions.

The BDBE has a **statutory responsibility to provide guidance** to those with responsibility for making arrangements for Admissions. Governing Boards of academies and VA schools are the Admission Authority with responsibility for setting admission arrangements. The following guidance is reflective of the context outlined above.

Please note that a SIAMS inspector may now ask questions about your admissions policy, particularly around any faith-based criteria and how many pupils are admitted under these provisions. Do your admissions criteria correlate with your Vision statement?



## Determining the policy: Whom do you serve?

The Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education is committed to ensuring that all our schools nurture and develop their distinctiveness as church schools. **We value and recognise the heritage of those original Church of England voluntary schools, established in many cases before the 1870 Schools Act. They were set up for the education of the poor of the parish in the principles of the Church of England, with no requirement for families to be members of the church.**



When determining your admissions policy, the BDBE advises Governing Boards to think about who their school serves, in relation to their school's theologically rooted vision and values statements. Boards need to consider the original reason their school was founded and its service to children in the local community. Ask yourself whether your school offers a warm welcome to all. Does it appear that some children are more welcome than others?

All children in a church school should have opportunities to engage at a profound level with faith in general, and the Christian experience and way of life in particular. A child's experience of being part of a faith 'full' school community is much more important than their parent's attendance at church. If we believe in justice and equality, we must not set exclusive criteria but build communities in the love of Christ.

***To aid schools and academies in an inclusive approach, we believe that Governing Boards should have admission criteria which do not rely on attendance at a place of worship.***

The BDBE believes that offering places using distance from the school gate is generally the best way to follow the ethos of the Trust Deed.



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## **Admission authorities MUST:**

1. **Have regard to** this advice document when setting their admission arrangements.
2. **Consult with** their Diocese about proposed admission arrangements before any public consultation and as part of that consultation.

If an admission authority decides that it can demonstrate that it has good and proper reason for departing from this guidance, the only activity to be used to satisfy any faith-based criteria is attendance at public worship at a Christian church. No other activity will be compliant within the provisions of the Admissions Code 2021.

If choosing to use faith-based criteria, Governing Boards **MUST** also have due regard to the following further guidance:

- All looked after children should be the first priority in the oversubscription criteria;
- Faith-based criteria should be given a lower priority than siblings;
- Other faiths **should not** be included as a criterion because of the difficulty of treating them in an equitable way in defining and measuring membership of different faiths;
- The Parish church clergy should be consulted, as important stakeholders, about any faith-based provisions. If in vacancy, the Church Wardens and the relevant Area Dean should be consulted.

*Note: All oversubscription criteria must be expressed in a way that parents can understand.  
A BDBE model policy is available on request.*

**If, having carefully considered this Guidance, your Governing Board would choose to continue to use attendance at church as a criterion, please ensure that you have a conversation with the Diocesan Director of Education about this as soon as possible and well before you determine your Admissions Arrangements.**



## Appendix 1: Reviewing your Admissions Policy in light of the new BDBE Admissions Guidance

### Guidance for governors

Identify which year you are asked to amend your policy (in line with the timetable) and then:

| Date                                                                                                                                       | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Between July (previous term) and September                                                                                                 | Familiarise yourself with the new guidance from the Birmingham Diocesan Board of Education                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| In your Autumn Term meeting:<br>(either via your admissions committee or at full governors)<br>(and if possible, before October half term) | Review your current admissions policy in light of the new guidance and decide what changes need to be made (if any)<br>In particular, review your “over subscription” criteria in line with DBE guidance | Check whether your school has any “faith-based” admissions criteria.<br><br>Decide on your Pupil Admission Number (PAN)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                            | If your school has faith-based admissions criteria, consider removing them                                                                                                                               | If your governors do not wish to remove the faith-based criteria, please contact the diocese in order to discuss the best way forward for your school                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| From 1 <sup>st</sup> October (and starting no later than 20 <sup>th</sup> December)                                                        | Consult all stakeholders on your revised policy (for a minimum period of 6 weeks, ending no later than 31 January)                                                                                       | You should consult: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;</li> <li>• other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;</li> <li>• all other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools);</li> <li>• whichever of the governing body and the local authority who are not the admission authority;</li> <li>• any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority; and</li> <li>• The Diocese (DBE)</li> </ul> |
| November - January                                                                                                                         | After consultation, consider any responses received, make any further changes to your policy and agree the final version at a full governing body <b>no later than 28<sup>th</sup> February</b>          | It is a good idea to ask the Diocese to support you in finalising the policy to ensure it is legal/correct                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| From 28 <sup>th</sup> February onwards                                                                                                     | Publish your revised admissions policy on your website and copy to the the Local Authority                                                                                                               | This policy will come into operation for admissions in <b>September two years after your consultation period started.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

Please note: You are of course free to amend your Admissions Policy ahead of your allotted year, in which case please contact the Diocese for any assistance needed.

#### Useful contacts:

Admissions advice: Rachel Raftery: [rachelr@cofebirmingham.com](mailto:rachelr@cofebirmingham.com)

Governor support: Barrie Scott: [barries@cofebirmingham.com](mailto:barries@cofebirmingham.com)

**Appendix 2:** Questions for Governing Boards to consider when setting admission arrangements.

| Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Notes |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <p>What are the key messages we communicate through our admissions policy about our school's vision for education?</p> <p>Does the school's admissions policy demonstrably reflect its Christian vision?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |       |
| <p>What does it mean to offer a rich experience of Christianity and an encounter with Jesus Christ which enhances a child's life within our community?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |       |
| <p>How does our admissions policy influence the balance between being distinctive and inclusive? Does our admissions policy ensure that the school population both reflects its local community and promotes its Christian character?</p> <p>In particular, if we have historically used residence in the Parish or other criteria in preference to distance from school, does that arrangement continue to serve our school community well?</p> |       |
| <p>Does our admissions policy help to create a hospitable community that seeks to embody an ethos of living well together?</p> <p>Does our admissions policy contribute to social cohesion?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |       |
| <p>Does our admissions policy give opportunity to all and support inclusion and diversity? Does it reflect a special attention to the disadvantaged and excluded? Are we being welcoming to pupils with particular needs?</p> <p>Are we being inclusive of different faiths and of pupils from diverse backgrounds?</p> <p>What does our admissions policy contribute to social mobility?</p>                                                    |       |
| <p>Does our approach to admissions reflect a positive interaction with our local church community?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |       |

### **Appendix 3: Legal Provisions** (Referred to in the Admissions Code 2021)

Admission Authorities of Church of England schools **MUST**:

- **Have regard to** any guidance from the DBE when constructing faith-based admission arrangements (para 1.38 Schools Admissions Code 2021).

If a school chooses to depart from this guidance, it must be able to demonstrate that it has considered and engaged with the guidance and has a clear and proper reason to depart from it. *Mr Justice Cobb, London Oratory School Judicial Review case 2015*

- **Consult with the DBE** when deciding how membership or practice of the faith is to be demonstrated (para 1.38 Admissions Code).

Under para 1.9 (i) of the Schools Admissions Code 2021 .... *Schools which have been designated as having a religious character may take account of religious activities, as laid out by the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.*

Mr Justice Cobb, in the 2015 Judicial Review case referred to above, clarified that Admission Authorities using faith-based criteria may only use activities to satisfy those faith-based criteria which have been expressly 'laid out' by the Diocese in its guidance. No other activity will be compliant with the permitted exclusion in para 1.9(i).

**Consult with the DBE** about proposed admission arrangements before any public consultation (Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021 and para 1.38 Schools Admissions Code 2021), and as part of the required public consultation (para 1.47(f) Schools Admissions Code 2021).