

DBE Services Ltd
*Serving Church schools in the Dioceses of Blackburn,
Carlisle, Chester, Liverpool, York and Manchester*

GUIDANCE TO SCHOOLS ON THE APPLICATION OF THE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS CODE OF 2009

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Introduction

The Education & Skills Act 2006 provides for revised school admission arrangements to take effect from February following consultation on the school admissions code, school admission appeals code and admission regulations laid before Parliament and brought into force on February 10th 2009.

The Act requires all admission authorities to whom the Code applies to 'act in accordance with' it rather than as with previous Codes to 'have regard to' it. The Code specifies for admission authorities many requirements which are either mandatory and **must be** complied with or forbidden and **must not be used**. In other areas it includes guidelines that they **should** comply with unless they are able to justify not doing so.

New and clarified requirements of the Code

- ✓ There is greater stress on equity and fair access, and on diversity and increased parental choice. The statutory framework has been strengthened to ensure that all schools adopt fair and lawful admissions practices.
- ✓ Local Authorities have an important role to monitor compliance with the Code and will be required to report annually to the Schools Adjudicator on the fairness and legality of the admission arrangements for all schools in their area.
- ✓ The Schools Adjudicators have been given a wider remit to consider any admission arrangements that come to their attention in addition to any complaints received through an objection.
- ✓ Schools **MUST NOT** give priority to children according to the order of other schools named as preferences by their parents, including 'first preference first' arrangements;
- ✓ Governing Bodies should set the admission number with regard to capacity assessment for school – if setting a lower one, then they must publish notices. If setting a number that is 27 or more above the previous determined number they must also consult with any Trade Union representing staff at the school.
- ✓ They should not admit above the published number unless exceptional circumstances apply and only then after consultation with their Local Authority, or as part of hard to place scheme.
- ✓ Children having statements of special education need naming the school must be admitted and counted towards the admission number.
- ✓ Children in care **must** be given highest priority in any oversubscription criteria list
- ✓ Oversubscribed schools must consider ALL applicants against published criteria and must not normally admit above admission number in normal round – but hard to place children or late arrivals are not to be disadvantaged.
- ✓ Once parents have made their preferences they are not allowed to change them without a genuine reason for doing so – e.g. moving.
- ✓ Late applications – should be accepted if there are good reasons for lateness, provided that the application is made before offers are finalised.
- ✓ Governing Bodies must provide the Local Authority with a list of all children who applied for places, showing each child ranked in order of priority under the admission arrangements, showing which criterion each child met.
- ✓ Governing Bodies can only withdraw the offer of a place in exceptional circumstances, normally a fraudulent or intentionally misleading application, often to do with the address used.
- ✓ The decision to refuse admission must not be made by one individual in a school; the whole Governing Body or its admissions committee should make such decisions. Head Teachers and other school officials should not give parents an expectation that their application will be successful, or tell them their child has been offered a place before the official date.

- ✓ A waiting list must be kept until at least the end of the autumn term
- ✓ Schools must not have expensive school uniform, sportswear, expensive school trips etc, unless arrangements are in place to ensure that parents on low incomes can afford them. Required items must be widely available in high street shops or on the internet. Schools can use their own purchasing power to buy in bulk but must pass on savings to parents; i.e. governors should not seek to raise additional funds through sale of new school uniforms.
- ✓ Charging: schools must make it clear in all literature and admissions policies that donations and voluntary contributions are NOT expected; school trips must not be compulsory.
- ✓ Governing Bodies should analyse information on intakes and applicants in order to find out whether the school is attracting a wide range of families or failing to attract all sections of local community. This analysis is to be done only after children have been admitted. Schools should note that OFSTED inspections will be looking at “community cohesion” and this information is likely to be needed for inspection.
- ✓ The governing bodies of Church of England Aided Schools must consult their Board of Education about their admissions policies before consulting with other admission authorities. they must also have regard to the advice and guidance given by their Board of Education and should follow that guidance.

Faith aspects

Voluntary aided and foundation schools with a religious character may continue to give preference in their admission arrangements to members of their faith or denomination, provided this does not conflict with other legislation, such as equalities legislation or the mandatory provisions of the Code. As with all other maintained schools, faith schools must not keep open places if they have insufficient applicants of their own faith and other families have applied for a place at the school.

The new Code allows Dioceses to provide guidance for their governing bodies setting out what processes and criteria should be used to establish membership of the faith. Such guidance should clearly define the terms used and how membership of the faith/denomination is to be determined, and must be consistent with the provisions and guidelines of the Code. As with all other over-subscription criteria, the faith-related ones must be simple for parents to understand and to estimate the chances of their child being admitted. The Code also states that where such guidance is produced, the admissions authorities for schools of the faith must have regard to the guidance and should follow it.

All Church of England Governing Bodies must consult their local Diocesan Board of Education about the admission arrangements they are proposing for their schools before they go out to statutory consultation with other admission authorities.

The Boards agree with the need to have clear, unambiguous, objective and fair criteria set within appropriate admission arrangements which enable parents to state realistic preferences. They offer the following guidance which they expect schools to follow; doing so will ensure that schools are not referred to the adjudicator on the grounds of unacceptable criteria.

What the Diocesan Boards of Education recommend to all schools

1. **To take all Children in Care (Looked After Children) who apply;** Faith schools must give top priority to such children of their faith group and top priority to those not of the faith group above all other applicants not of the faith. However, we recommend giving top priority to all such children. They should be treated at the same level as those children with statements of special educational need naming the school. Such children are deserving of our compassion and should benefit from the Christian care expected in our schools.
2. **To give a high priority to children with special medical or social circumstances** which affect their education or ability to get to school. This criterion is definitely NOT about educational needs. Usually there is a strong argument on physical / geographical grounds for a particular school. The Code indicates that this is an acceptable criterion, but schools must be clear whether it is the child's needs or the parents' needs which are considered, citing the example where either parent or child has a disability that might make travel to a school further away more difficult. It could be that both needs are important for primary but only the child's for secondary. For this category, professional, written evidence must be provided. Schools must also give a clear explanation of how this evidence will be used, and state that it should set out the particular reasons why the school in question is the most suitable school and the difficulties that would be caused if the child had to attend another school.
3. **To admit a proportion of local children** regardless of faith as appropriate to each school.

The Dearing report highlighted the need for the Church schools, in the words of the late Lord Runcie when he was Archbishop of Canterbury, to

Nourish those of the faith;
Encourage those of other faiths;
Challenge those who have no faith.

Given this view of the schools as the centres of the Church's mission, and the highlighting of the dangers of secularisation as well as the need for community cohesion, the Boards encourage schools to provide a Christian service to as many local families as appropriate for their situation.

Where faith commitment is used as a criterion

- 4(a) **To use regular attendance at worship as the measure of faith commitment.**
Worship attendance should be at public worship on Sundays or other days of the week. It must always be verified by a member of the clergy or a church officer. It is good practice for clergy to discuss their reference with the parents involved. Even if the reference is not discussed with the parent at the time, it will form part of the evidence used by the school if there is an appeal. References should not be given by individuals who are also taking an active part in the admissions procedures of the school. Governors who take part in the admissions process of the school and who have personal contact with applicants as friends or members of their Church should declare an interest.
- 4(b) **To have clear, transparent criteria against which faith commitment will be assessed.**
At its most basic level this could be baptism, certificate of thanksgiving or admission to membership.
or it may take the form of a single hurdle based on regularity of attendance over a set number of years

or it may be a three tier system which distinguishes between levels of commitment based on attendance at worship, with higher priority being given to those with the most frequent or longer duration of attendance.

4(c) To consider how widely the faith criteria should be drawn

Although governing bodies may desire to serve the Anglican church as a priority, schools are encouraged to be inclusive of the wider Christian community. This wider community must be definable in terms of a national or local list such as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (www.ctbi.org.uk). A list is available on the Manchester Diocesan Website. www.manchester.anglican.org

Prohibited criteria

The Code prohibits giving higher priority to children according to:

- likely parental support for school finances
- parental occupational / financial / educational / social / marital status
- parental interests / hobbies
- whether they have siblings or relatives who are **former** pupils at the school
- whether their parents are current or former staff or governors of the school or have other connection with the school.
- an expression of practical support for the ethos of the school.

Acceptable criteria

After the admission of all children with statements of special educational needs, the governing body therefore needs to work out the order of its criteria from:

- ✓ Children in Public Care, (Looked After Children), who must be the first priority category.
- ✓ Special medical or social circumstances affecting the child
- ✓ Where the family lives
- ✓ Whether there will be a sibling in the school at the time of the younger child's admission.
- ✓ Faith criteria
- ✓ Distance of home from school.

Admission arrangements

Governing bodies must consult on their admission arrangements for a minimum period of 8 weeks between November 1st and 1st March in the year preceding that to which they apply. They must publish a notice in the local 'free' press giving details of the consultation and how individuals and groups may take part. They should seek to involve relevant local interest groups in the consultation. Prior to this consultation they must first consult with their Diocesan Board of Education. The arrangements must include information about:

- ✓ the timetable and how to apply for a place, including the use of supplementary forms
- ✓ the admission number for any year group to which it intends to admit pupils.
- ✓ the oversubscription criteria
- ✓ where maps of parish boundaries or other defined areas may be viewed, if necessary.
- ✓ last year's admissions criteria and the number admitted under each
- ✓ how late applications can be made and will be handled
- ✓ how long after the end of the autumn term a waiting list will be maintained
- ✓ the definition of home address and evidence
- ✓ how non routine admissions are dealt with
- ✓ how parents can appeal if they are refused a place

- ✓ how fraudulent applications are dealt with
- ✓ how twins are considered when there is only one place left
- ✓ deferred admission to reception
- ✓ a copy of any supplementary form

Model admission arrangements are attached.

Supplementary form

Faith schools may use a supplementary form which asks parents about their membership of, or relationship with, the church or religious denomination. Such forms may only ask for additional factual information which has a direct bearing on decisions about oversubscription criteria, e.g. the name of the member of the clergy or a church officer from whom a reference can be obtained. Supplementary Forms are not compulsory but governors may point out that failure to complete the form will mean that the governors would not be able to apply the school's faith criteria. Supplementary forms must be made available to Local Authorities in electronic form for those who wish to make an application on line.

The following information will be obtained from the local authority form, but certain information may need to be replicated in order to match up the two application forms:

- ✓ Name and address of people with whom child normally lives
- ✓ Siblings who will still be on the school roll at the time of the admission of the younger child.
- ✓ Social/medical/welfare reasons for choice of school (where applicable)
- ✓ Children in care (Looked After Children) and children having a statement of special educational needs.

A model form is attached.

The Admissions Committee

Where the governing body decides to delegate responsibility for admissions to an admissions committee to consider applications for school places the committee is to be constituted along with other committees at the first meeting of the academic year.

It may not include any non-governors, except in the case where the headteacher is not a governor.

Decisions as to whether any child should be admitted or not may not be delegated to the headteacher or any other individual.

Membership

The committee must include the headteacher and at least two more governors. (It is helpful if one or two members are available during the daytime in order to present the school's case at an Admission Appeal hearing). The quorum for any meeting of the committee and for any vote must be at least three governors who are members of the committee, including the headteacher, providing they are also a governor.

A clerk who is neither a governor nor the headteacher must be appointed.

Terms of Reference:

The committee is responsible for all matters to do with admissions, subject to the requirement that the full governing body must approve the policy. Decisions as to whether any child may be admitted may not be delegated to the headteacher or any other individual, unless governors are advised that there is a vacancy in the year group.

Delegated Powers:

1. To draft the admissions arrangements, including criteria, which must be reviewed and approved annually by the full governing body.
2. To ensure that consultations with other bodies are carried out when required.
3. If the school is over-subscribed, to apply the admissions criteria to all applicants and provide the local authority with a list of pupils ranked in order of the criteria by the due date.
4. To prepare the case of the governing body ready to go to the Appeals Panel
5. To deal with all non-routine admission

ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

Making an application

Applications for admission to the school should be made on the common application form enclosed with the Local Authority's brochure and also on the school's own form on the dates advised by the Local Authority, between September and October in the year prior to entry to school. Applications may also be made electronically.

In order for the governors to consider applications under faith criteria it is necessary for parents to also complete the school's own supplementary information form. The forms should be completed and returned to the Local Authority by the date in October designated by the Local Authority.

Applications may also be made on-line by using both the common application form and the Supplementary Form. It is not normally possible to change the order of your preferences for schools after the closing date. Whether application is made on paper or electronically, the common application form must be completed and the Supplementary Form should be completed if the applicant wishes faith or special medical and social circumstances criteria to apply.

Letters informing parents of whether or not their child has been allocated a place will be sent out by the Local Authority by March 1st or the next nearest working day in the year of entry to the school. Parents of children not admitted will be informed of the reason and offered an alternative place by the Authority.

Admission procedures Sample Wording

The number of places available for admission to the Reception class in the year 2010 will be a maximum of.... This arrangement follows consultation between the governing body, the Diocesan Board of Education, Local Authorities and other admissions authorities in the area. The governing body will not place any restrictions on admissions to the reception class unless the number of children for whom admission is sought exceeds this number. By law, no infant class may contain more than thirty children.

The Governing Body operates a system of equal preferences under which they consider all preferences equally and the Local Authority allocates places according to its policy. All children having a statement of special educational needs in whose statement the school is named will be admitted. In the event that there are more applicants than places remaining, the governing body will allocate these places using the following criteria, which are listed in order of priority:

List here your oversubscription criteria and notes.

Your notes must spell out all definitions: parental and / or child's attendance in worship; other Christian churches; siblings; parents; how distance from home to school will be measured; tie breaker for each category. If you use a parish boundary, you need a copy of a map showing the boundaries. Sample policies are on the Board's web-site.

Admissions information:

Last year the school was able to admit all pupils whose parents applied.

OR

Last year there were ... applications for ... places The Admissions Committee applied the criteria and offered places to

x children under criterion 1; [*say what it is – e.g. residence in parish*]

y children under criterion 2;

z children under criterion 3.

There were $z + n$ children who fell into this third criterion so the tie break of distance was applied. The line was drawn at A.B miles. Children living further away from the school were placed on the waiting list.

Late applications for admission

Where there are extenuating circumstances for an application being received after the last date for applications, and it is before the governors have established their list of pupils to be admitted, then it will be considered alongside all the others.

Otherwise, applications which are received after the last date will be considered after all the others, and placed on the waiting list in order according to the criteria.

Waiting list

Where we have more applications than places, the admissions criteria will be used. Children who are not admitted will have their name placed on a waiting list. The names on this waiting list will be in the order resulting from the application of the admissions criteria. Since the date of application cannot be a criterion for the order of names on the waiting list, late applicants for the school will be slotted into the order according to the extent to which they meet the criteria. Thus it is possible that a child who moves into the area later to have a higher priority than one who has been on the waiting list for some time. If a place becomes available within the admission number, the child whose name is at the top of the list will be offered a place. This is not dependent on whether an appeal has been submitted.

This waiting list will operate until the end of the autumn term only.

Address of pupil

The address used on the school's admission form must be the current one at the time of application. If the address changes subsequently, the parents should notify the school. Where the parents live at different addresses, the current-at-the-time-of-application, normal address of the child will be the one used. This will normally be the one where the child wakes up for the majority of Monday to Friday mornings. Parents may be asked to show evidence of the claim that is being made for the address, e.g. utility bills of various sorts showing the child's address as the one claimed. Where there is dispute about the correct address to use, the governors reserve the right to make enquiries of any relevant third parties, e.g. the child's GP. For children of UK Service personnel and other Crown Servants returning to the area proof of the posting is all that is required.

Non-routine admissions

It sometimes happens that a child needs to change school other than at the "normal" time; such admissions are known as non-routine admissions. Parents wishing their child to attend this school should arrange to visit the school. They will be provided with an application form once they have a definite local address. If there is a place in the appropriate class, then the governors will arrange for the admission to take place. If there is no place, then the admissions committee will consider the application and information about how to appeal against the refusal will be provided. Appeals

for children moving into the area will not be considered until there is evidence of a permanent address, e.g. exchange of contracts or tenancy agreement with rent book. The Local Authority will coordinate all non-routine admissions from 2010 onwards.

Please note that you cannot re-apply for a place at a school within the same school year unless there has been relevant, significant and material change in the family circumstances.

Appeals

Where the governors are unable to offer a place because the school is over subscribed, parents have the right to appeal to an independent admission appeal panel, set up under the School Standards and Framework Act, 1998, as amended by the Education Act, 2002. **Parents should notify the clerk to the governors at the school within 14 days of receiving the letter refusing a place.** Parents will have the opportunity to submit their case to the panel in writing and also to attend in order to present their case. You will normally receive 14 days' notice of the place and time of the hearing.

If your child was refused a place in Reception or Key Stage 1 because of Government limits on Infant class sizes, the grounds on which your appeal could be successful are limited. You would have to show that the decision was one which in the circumstances no reasonable governing would have made, or that your child would have been offered a place if the governors' admissions arrangements had been properly implemented.

Please note that this right of appeal against the governors' decision does not prevent you from making an appeal in respect of any other school.

Fraudulent applications

Where the governing body discovers that a child has been awarded a place as the result of an intentionally misleading application from a parent (for example a false claim to residence in the catchment area or of involvement in a place of worship) which effectively denies a place to a child with a stronger claim, then the governing body is required to withdraw the offer of the place. The application will be considered afresh and a right of appeal offered if a place is refused.

Deferred admission

If your child is due to start school during the next academic year, it is important that you apply for a place for September. If your child's fifth birthday is between the months of September and December, then, if you wish it, admission may be deferred until January; if it is between January and April, then admission may be deferred until the start of the summer term though it is likely to be in your child's interest to start no later than January.

Twins

Where twins, triplets etc. or other children born within the same school year might be split when allocations take place, and there are too few places available at the school to accommodate them all, the governors will consult with the Local Authority and the parent to consider whether all the siblings can be offered a place at the same alternative school (which may not be a preference school named on the CAF) or whether the parents can be offered places at two or more schools with a view to the parent deciding which child will take up which offered place.

If this consultation fails to resolve the issue then the Admissions Committee will use random allocation to decide which of the children can be offered a place.

Example admission policies

APPENDIX 2 Sample Admission Policy for a Church of England Aided Primary School

Admissions Policy

Admissions to an Aided school are the responsibility of the Governors, in agreement with the Diocesan Board of Education and the Local Authority.

The standard number agreed for admission to the Reception Class is 45.
30 children may be admitted to the Nursery class.

Responsibility for admissions is delegated to the Governing Body Admissions Committee.

The school will admit all children having a statement of special educational needs in whose statement the school is named.

When the number of applications received is greater than the number of remaining places available, the decision on which children will be admitted will be based on the following criteria:

1.	Children in public care, (Looked after children)
2.	Children whose medical or social circumstances mean that their needs can only be met at this school.
3.	Children who will have an older brother or sister attending the school at the time of their admission.
4.	20% of the remaining places will be allocated to any children based on geographical proximity to the school. <i>(In this example Governors have decided to allocate 20% of places without using faith criteria)</i>
5.	Baptised children whose parent/guardian is in regular attendance at any of the churches within the parish of the local Anglican Team Ministry. (If governors require the child to attend as an addition or alternative they must say so in this section.)
6.	Baptised or dedicated children whose parent/guardian is in regular attendance at a church within the parish which is a member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, or a local Churches Together organisation. (Governors may wish to add membership of the Evangelical Alliance as an alternative category. If governors require the child to attend as an addition or alternative they must say so in this section.)
7.	Any other children. (Governors must include this final category, which is mandatory)

Notes:

- a) Regular attendance is normally taken to mean a minimum of fortnightly attendance at church at public worship for at least the year prior to 1st September in the year before admission to the school. **(If the governors decide to give higher priority to those with a more frequent or longer period of attendance you should say so here.)** Evidence of infant baptism or dedication of the child and of regular attendance of the parent/guardian **(and/or child)** must be provided by a member of the clergy or other designated church officer on the form provided.
- b) Where there are more applicants for the available places within a category, then distance to the child's normal home front door from the main gate of the school in a straight line

measured on a map will be used as the final determining factor, nearer addresses having priority over more distant ones. The 'normal' home of the child will be taken to be the home in which the child sleeps for the majority of the school week. **(Governors may wish to use the Local Authority measuring system where appropriate, in which case their wording should be written in this section.)**

- c) Where admission is sought under exceptional medical or social circumstances criteria, professional supporting evidence, e.g. from a doctor, psychologist or social worker, is essential. Such evidence must set out the particular reasons why the school is the most suitable for the child and the difficulties that would be caused if the child had to attend another school.
- d) Brother' or 'sister' includes step, half, foster and adopted brothers or sisters living at the same address and full brother or sister living apart.

Waiting list

Where we have more applications than places, the admissions criteria will be used. Children who are not admitted will have their name placed on a waiting list. The names on this waiting list will be in the order resulting from the application of the admissions criteria. Since the date of application cannot be a criterion for the order of names on the waiting list, late applicants for the school will be slotted into the order according to the extent to which they meet the criteria. Thus it is possible that a child who moves into the area later to have a higher priority than one who has been on the waiting list for some time. If a place becomes available within the admission number, the child whose name is at the top of the list will be offered a place. This is not dependent on whether an appeal has been submitted. This waiting list will operate until the end of the autumn term only.

Appeals

Where the governors are unable to offer a place because the school is over subscribed, parents have the right to appeal to an independent admission appeal panel, set up under the School Standards and Framework Act, 1998, as amended by the Education Act, 2002. **Parents should notify the clerk to the governors at the school within 14 days of receiving the letter refusing a place.** Parents will have the opportunity to submit their case to the panel in writing and also to attend in order to present their case. You will normally receive 14 days' notice of the place and time of the hearing.

Nursery Admissions

30 places are available in the Nursery, and the Governors shall determine how many of these places are to be allocated on a full-time or part-time basis each year, depending on the number of applicants. A place in the Nursery does not guarantee a place in the Reception class the following year. A separate application must be made for both Nursery places and for Reception places. The above criteria and procedures are also followed for Nursery admissions.

Notes:

- 1 Children will be admitted to the Reception class at the beginning of the Autumn term before their fifth birthday, and to the Nursery class at the beginning of the Autumn term before their fourth birthday.
- 2 Please give details of the points you wish to be taken into consideration regarding your child's qualifications for entry under the above criteria, either on the reverse of the application form or in a covering letter.
Please keep this copy of the Admissions Policy for your own information.

Supplementary form (A) - (Parent(s)/Guardian(s))

Name of child:

SurnameChristian names

Date of birth Boy Girl

Date of Baptism/Infant Dedication (If required under the admissions policy. Delete if not required))

Name of parent(s)/guardian(s)

Address

.....

Post code

Daytime contact telephone number

The name of any older brother or sister who will still be attending the school at the date of admission of the younger child.....

Place of worship one of the parents / guardians regularly attends: (It is not acceptable to require the attendance of both parents or guardians. The attendance of the child can be an alternative or additional requirement if the governors wish it to be.)

Name of place of worship

Address

.....

Name of vicar / priest / minister / faith leader

Address

.....

Post code Telephone

Tick this box if you wish to apply for a local place without the use of faith criteria

(Governors delete this item if not applicable.)

Worship attendance:

How frequently do you attend worship?

Weekly fortnightly

For how long has this been your practice?

2 years 1 year (Governors need to decide if they are going to give higher priority to those with a longer duration of attendance. If so it must be clearly stated in the Admissions policy that you will do this. You may only ask parents for information relevant to the agreed policy, so **delete the boxes that do not apply.**)

Your faith leader will be contacted in order to confirm this information.

If you wish exceptional medical or social needs to be taken into account please say what these are and supply written, professional evidence to support your application. (Governors delete this item if not applicable)

SIGNED.....Parent/Guardian

Supplementary Form (B) – Reference from Church Leader

Name of child:

SurnameChristian names

Name of parent(s)/guardian(s)

Address

.....
.....

Post code

Telephone Mobile

Place of worship one of parents / guardians regularly attends:

Name of place of worship

Address

.....

Name of vicar / priest / minister / church officer

Address

.....
.....

Post code Telephone

....

I confirm that the parent/guardian **(and / or child)** named above has attended church at least fortnightly for the past year. *(NB Example only. Governors may agree a different level of attendance or duration if they think it is appropriate. This form may only ask for confirmation of information sought from parents. It is not permissible to ask for any additional information from referees.)*

SIGNED..... Vicar/priest/minister/ church officer

DATE.....

- The Dearing Report *The Way Ahead* : ‘*Church of England schools in the next millennium*’, describes the historical origins and purpose of CE schools in terms of service and nurture: providing an education for both Christian families and the local neighbourhood.
- The Report calls on church schools in the 21st century to remain true to this historic function, and recommends Diocesan Boards of Education to draw up a policy for admissions that will guide governors of aided schools in formulating their own admissions criteria.
- Attitudes to the concept of a faith school are intimately bound up with perceptions of who might be admitted to such a school. The hostility expressed in sections of the media and political circles is to some extent based on a view that all schools with a religious foundation are exclusive in their admissions and reinforce segregation in society on religious grounds.
- The drive for additional CE secondary schools needs to be set in the context of a clear policy for admissions that will identify whether such schools are intended for one faith community only, for all faiths or for anyone to attend. On 14 March 2006, the Archbishop of Canterbury asked the Church to find “some simple objective criteria, applicable across the country, for admissions; and, to avoid misunderstanding, some clear public commitment in the whole sector to guarantee places for local children and for children of other faith backgrounds”.
- To this end, On 3 October 2006 the Bishop of Portsmouth wrote to the Secretary of State to say that new Church of England schools should make 25% of places available without test of faith.
- The Dearing Report, followed earlier reports (notably *The Fourth R* and *A Future in Partnership*) in identifying two purposes for church schools: nurture and service, both of which have been a clear part of Anglican practice since the first schools were founded.
- A primary reason for having schools has always been for the nurture of children from church families in the Christian faith. In the 19th century, the competition between the Church of England and the Free Churches was replicated in schools. Within the Church of England it was clear that, while for the most part, no formal allegiance to the Church of England was demanded at entry, all pupils were thoroughly exposed to Anglican influence and teaching whilst on roll. The weekly visits of the vicar to catechise the pupils and the regular services held in church are well attested to in logbooks and the reports of the National Society.
- Where there is an acknowledged Anglican family background there is still a duty of nurture on the church school, sharing with the family the bringing up of their children in the faith.
- For most schools, this would also hold true for children from other Christian families. Ecumenical hospitality extends to all mainstream Christian denominations, and in practice also to those outside formal ecumenical instruments. In an age when the survival of Christianity as a significant movement is daily threatened, there would have to be very good reasons for not recognising our common heritage with other Christians.
- For some primary and some secondary schools within the dioceses, the very considerable number of applications for places means that the school could fill its places with children from practising Christian families. Indeed, in some schools the level of over-subscription is so high that applicants have to have been regular church attenders for some considerable time. In

these circumstances, governors have the difficult task of framing an admissions policy that allows them to discriminate between applications. In most of these cases, governors have decided that their first obligation is to nurture those already of the Christian faith, even in some cases only those belonging to the Anglican church. There are accordingly a very few schools that take only Christian pupils.

- This response from governors is understandable. Indeed governors are under very heavy pressure and feel keenly the responsibility not to disappoint the many families who seek places. In some cases this response is presented as more than just a practical response to a practical difficulty; the school would see its function as exclusively meeting the need of Christian families for a school providing Christian nurture.
- The historic position of the Church of England, however, has been to see its schools as both nurture and service. The five Dioceses that form DBE Services maintain a commitment to that dual focus and believe that their schools are both for committed Christian families and to meet the needs of the local community. We therefore accept the principle expressed by the Bishop of Portsmouth, of allocating a proportion of places available in our schools to pupils of other faiths and of none.
- This is the service function of church schools. Service is represented in doing those things Christ would do, to bring about his kingdom of justice, peace and love. Providing for his little ones, so that they might live life in all its abundance was, and still is, the reason why the church is institutionally involved in the provision of education. Education with an eternal dimension is the gift of the church to contemporary society and it is available to all.
- Church of England schools were founded under the explicit auspices of the Church as a clear expression of Christian service and witness. As such, they share in and are major agents for the mission of the church. They are a means whereby those with no formal contact with the church, (and in some cases that may be for two or three generations), may encounter the Christian gospel and the Christian community. The church school allows children, and their families, to draw on the Christian and Anglican heritage in their own spiritual development, through an exposure to Christian faith and life, worship and values.
- Christian witness is carried out in the telling of the Christian story, through RE and worship; through keeping the festivals of the church; through linking ideas of right and wrong to Christian ethics; and is present in the assumption that part of the educational process is exploration of Christian beliefs, not as an intellectual exercise, but as a potential path for all to tread.
- Church schools therefore have a clear obligation to enable those with little or no contact with the Christian faith access to places. The clear logic of mission is to take the Gospel to the places where it has not been heard, and schools are in a position of privilege not matched in any other area of the Church's ministry.

'Distinctive and inclusive'

- The Dearing Report distinguishes CE schools from other models of 'faith school' with reference to their origin in service to the whole community. The impetus behind the establishment of Roman Catholic and, later, Jewish and Muslim schools was different. The stated aim of the Catholic education service was to provide for baptised Catholics to be

educated within a Catholic context from start to finish. Establishing and reinforcing faith identity was, and still is, a crucial component of the system. That aspect is also clearly evident in Jewish schools with religious teaching designed to nurture children in their faith. This nurture model is also characteristic of Muslim schools.

- By contrast CE primary schools at least see themselves as serving the community within which they are set. As the Church of England itself is uniquely there for the whole community, whatever their commitment, so the CE school is available for all those who choose to come. In this respect the school's 'catchment area' is parallel to the idea of the parish. Where the school accepts pupils from the local neighbourhood there must be a clear sense of distinctiveness, so that the mission functions are being discharged. To this extent new the Admissions Code of Practice is likely to strengthen schools links with their local communities by the allocation of places to those from other faiths and none and by the increased use of geographical proximity to allocate places in circumstances where schools remain oversubscribed after the criteria have been applied.
- Hospitality to other faith traditions is a long-standing feature of the role of CE schools in many parts of UK. This does not detract from or compromise the mission function of the church school. It is acceptable to represent the Christian community to other religious communities. Church schools start from a position of respect for faith, and the recognition that spiritual growth is the heart of all growth. They acknowledge the importance of nurture for all faith traditions and the contribution that learning from those of other faiths makes to our own religious development. The continued confidence families from other faith traditions place in Church of England schools, albeit as a second best in some (though by no means all) cases to having schools with an Islamic foundation, signals the careful way in which church schools have sought to be true to both the Christian foundation and the needs of their families.
- The Dearing Report discusses whether there are limits to the numbers from other traditions that might be admitted while still preserving Christian distinctiveness: (Dearing 4.47) 'In any new primary and secondary schools it should be the policy to establish within measurable time – if it is not possible from the outset – at least a substantial minority of pupils with a Christian background'
- The Report suggests a mechanism for distinguishing places available for church families from those available for other applicants. It suggests that a specified proportion of places are designated 'Foundation' places for church applicants and the rest 'Open' places for other applicants. Open places may be allocated with reference to a variety of criteria e.g. residence, faith background, medical or social need or other locally relevant criteria. The AdmissionsCode, (2007), says that, 'Admission authorities for faith schools should consider how their particular admission arrangements impact on the communities in which they are physically based and those faith communities they serve.' Faith schools can contribute to community cohesion by having admission arrangements that are inclusive or other faiths and of all elements of the population of their local area. Some faith schools already achieve inclusiveness by designating a proportion of places for which children of their own faith or denomination will be given priority, and the remainder as community or open places for which local children will be given priority.
'In particular, the aim over time in new voluntary aided schools should be to achieve an appropriate balance of 'open' and 'foundation' places, sufficient to ensure that the school is a

distinctively Christian institution whilst remaining grounded in the local community in all its diversity.' Dearing 4.47

Further Theological Considerations

The Church school as a model of the Church:

The church school stands not only as the church's gift, but also as an integral part of that church. One way of looking at it is as a threshold, which is part of the building without being the whole of the building. It can function as a route into the Church, a means of entry. In it people see reflected and enacted the characteristics of the people of God and are drawn into the fellowship.

One useful checklist for assessing whether a church school is living up to its vocation is based on the

Notes (or Marks) of the Church. As the whole church is called to be One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, so is the church school. This can happen if the school truly shares in the marks of the

church: One, holy, catholic and apostolic.

Being One:

Is the school truly a local manifestation of the universal Church, sharing and showing its characteristics? Is there, among richly varied styles of being and action among church schools, a perceptible deep unity with other such local manifestations? Is there a core of common beliefs, common values, and a sharing around word and sacrament in worship?

It may be that the school can demonstrate unity more readily than the Church. All schools have to take account of an externally imposed framework; the National curriculum and Ofsted, SATs and GCSEs. The outcomes and expectations operate across all schools. In addition, church schools can claim common values explicitly owning Christian inspiration. The majority does function as a united community regardless of the origins of the pupils. Belonging to the school creates the unity and identity that enables pupils and staff to see themselves as a community.

Being Holy:

Is the school truly driven by the things of God? Does it seek always to find Christ and the Holy Spirit in the world and to mirror Christ in its action and being? Does it, for instance, seek to express servanthood without subservience? Has it opted to transform and heal rather than acquiesce and ignore? Can it see the pain and redemptive power of crucifixion, and can it witness to the hope of resurrection?

The school already exists to serve others, seeking the enabling and empowerment of those who attend. Education's primary function is transformation and autonomy; founded on an explicit commitment to the well being of others, holding out a vision of wholeness that underpins its daily life and work.

Being Catholic:

Is the school genuinely striving to express the Church's vocation to be for all? Is it, in the first place, in some measure ecumenically inclusive of different expressions of Christianity? Is it a place of dialogue between cultures and identities, and a bridge builder in its community? Is universal humanity and inter-relatedness acknowledged and celebrated?

The school can hold up to the church a model of what this means. Most schools include all those who want to come, and seek to create communities of hospitality and welcome. In its members and through the curriculum, the school offers the opportunity to explore the breadth and richness of human living, and to equip pupils to be creative members of a rainbow world. At the same time the church school does this with an explicit commitment to Christian values. The school is living out the tensions of that dual commitment, which most churches have not begun to acknowledge.

Being Apostolic:

Is the school conscious that it stands in the tradition of Christian proclamation, mission and ministry? Is it truly able to see beyond the past to co-operate with God's purposes for the future? Is it open to offering the things of God to children and adults who have hardly begun to know God exists, as well as those within the community of faith?

Whether consciously or not, the school is clearly continuing the preaching and teaching ministry through RE and worship. Children in church schools have far more opportunities to engage with Christian teaching than most committed adults. The worshipping life of the school is imprinted by the Christian calendar, the festivals and rhythms in a way that many parish churches are unable to do. It is in school that the sacramental life of the Church is being reshaped to enable it to speak to the communities of children and unconnected adults.

Schools are living theology for the Church: theology in the real world across cultures and faiths

Another possible checklist is based on the Five Marks of Mission (Lambeth 1988 and ACC following):

- Is the school proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God?
- Is the school playing its part in teaching, baptising and nurturing new believers?
- Is the school responding to human need by loving service?
- Is the school, with others of goodwill, seeking to transform the unjust structures of society?
- Is the school striving to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth?

Finally, the school must share in the bias to the poor demanded of Christ's followers. The life of Jesus constantly demonstrates movement across boundaries of class, race, respectability, disability, gender and wealth to show his identification with the poor. His teaching and experience demonstrated a constant concern for the marginalised and excluded, both as those for whom the Kingdom would be established and also as those by whom the Kingdom would be brought in. For us, as for him, the poor are all those who we would exclude, for whatever reason, whose voices are not heard, who have no access to the goods of this world.