



ADMISSION GUIDANCE 2026/27

Introduction

These guidelines are intended to support the governing boards of Church of England Voluntary Aided ('VA') schools and Church of England academies in single or multi-academy trusts as they consider their admissions policies.

In this guidance, the term 'governing board' is used to refer to the responsible body: in a VA school this is the governing board; for an academy it is the academy trust board.

The 'admissions authority' is the VA governing board or the academy trust board. Admissions authorities cannot delegate their responsibility to consult on and determine their admission arrangements to the local authority (LA) or any local governing body/committee. VA schools should take note of any feedback received from their LA. Academy trust boards can delegate the annual review of the admissions arrangements to local boards/committees but must receive the feedback and make the formal determination.

Governing boards should consider their admission arrangements in the light of their own theologically rooted Christian vision. Oxford Diocesan Board of Education ('ODBE') recommends that the school's vision is included at the top of its admissions policy, so the two can be seen in conjunction.

The School Admissions Code ('the Code') published in September 2021 applies to all admissions from that date. Model admission arrangements have been produced and are included within this guidance, which both meet the requirements of the Code and support the principles that ODBE would like to encourage.

Schools and academies with a Sixth Form must provide details of arrangements for Sixth Form entry following the requirements of the Code 2021. Model Sixth Form policies are not provided.

ODBE expects schools to recognise their foundation as places primarily intended for the education of the 'poor of the parish'. This is in line with the work of The Sutton Trust and the Fair School Admissions campaign. Consequently, ODBE expects catchment/designated area to be prioritised in any oversubscription criteria.

Schools 'designated as having a religious character' must take account of and reflect any guidance from the Diocese when constructing 'faith-based admissions arrangements'. If a school does not follow this guidance, there should be a written statement saying why it has disregarded it.

In this guidance, the term 'school' is used to refer to any school or academy.

1 Consultation on Admissions Policies for 2026/27

The admission arrangements must be ‘determined’ or formally approved and adopted by 28 February every year ie by 28 February 2025 for the 2026 admissions arrangements.

A formal consultation must be held if any changes to the admission policy are proposed eg to over-subscription criteria, catchment/designated area, etc. There is no need to consult on increases in published admission number (PAN), but any decreases must be consulted on. Any increase must be notified to the relevant local authority (LA) and published on the school’s website.

In addition, every school must consult at least once every seven years. If the school has not consulted for the past seven years, it must undertake full consultation on the Admission Policy for 2026/27 even if no material changes are proposed.

Formal consultations must start on or after 1 October 2024, last at least 6 weeks and be concluded no later than 31 January 2025. The suggested timeline is as follows:

By mid-September 2024 or earlier if possible

Send the draft admission policy for 2026/27 to ODBE (admissions@oxford.anglican.org).

ODBE **must** be consulted **before** any wider consultation, including with the LA. ODBE will consider policies and endeavour to respond with comments. The draft policy should be amended and resubmitted as necessary.

November/December 2024

Where appropriate, a formal consultation must take place for a minimum of 6 weeks between 1 October 2024 and 31 January 2025.

The draft policy should be:

- published clearly on the school’s website with details of how comments can be made, to whom and by what date
- sent to the LA and any other LA when the school is close to the borders of its own LA and particularly where there is a tradition of taking pupils from other LA areas
- sent to all other admission authorities within the ‘relevant area’ – VA schools, academies, foundation schools, free schools, etc. Primary schools do not need to consult secondary schools.
- available to parents of children between the ages of 2 and 18 eg place a notice at the entrance to the school, put in the newsletter, send to local libraries, play groups, nurseries, doctors’ surgeries, etc.
- available to others who might have an interest in the proposed arrangements eg local churches, parish councils, etc.

Details of the consultation should be retained to show that it has been carried out effectively.

Admission authorities cannot delegate the responsibility of consulting to the LA.

December 2024 - January 2025

The governing board must receive and consider any comments on the draft policy and ‘determine’ (ie formally agree) the policy for 2026/27 by **28 February 2025**. The approval by the board should be clearly minuted.

Before 15 March 2025

The approved policy must be published on the school’s website together with how objections to it can be made to the Schools Adjudicator.

'Appropriate bodies' must be notified that the admission arrangements have been determined: this includes all other admission authorities and the governing bodies of all community and voluntary controlled schools in the relevant area.

A copy of the policy must be sent to:

- ODBE using admissions@oxford.anglican.org
- The LA

2 Oversubscription criteria

Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan which names the school must be admitted before consideration is given to any other applicants. This is **NOT** an oversubscription criterion. The school must admit a child in these circumstances even if there is no place.

There must be oversubscription criteria which will be used to allocate places when there are more applications than places. The order of the criteria will dictate how allocation will be made.

If the school is not oversubscribed, then all applications **MUST** be offered a place.

The oversubscription criteria must be reasonable, clear, objective and procedurally fair and comply with all relevant legislation. Definitions should be included of terms to ensure that there is clarity and these should reflect those included in legislation/guidance or used by the relevant LA.

A) Looked after children and previously looked after children

The highest priority **MUST** be given to looked after children and previously looked after children who have been adopted. The criterion must include any children who 'appear to have been in state care outside England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted' (internationally adopted, previously looked after children - IAPLC). It will be for the admission authority to decide whether a child qualifies as an IAPLC.

B) Siblings

Care must be taken over the drafting of this criteria bearing in mind the timing of when it will be applied ie it is impossible to know for certain whether a sibling will still be at the school at a date in the future. ODBE suggests: 'with a sibling on the roll of the school at the time of application and who is expected still to be in attendance at the time of entry to the school'.

ODBE recommends that this clause is defined widely and includes children living in the same household as a family unit even where the parents are not married to each other.

C) Church affiliation

ODBE is keen to ensure that all its schools nurture and develop their distinctiveness as church schools, particularly recognising the heritage of those established before the 1870 Schools Act which were set up for the education of the poor of the parish.

ODBE encourages its schools to remain as inclusive as possible and strongly recommends that church affiliation criteria are not used in admissions policies.

ODBE model policies do not include faith-based/church affiliation admissions criteria. Should you wish to retain them, please contact ODBE and local clergy for advice. If faith-based/church affiliation criteria are included these should be placed at a lower priority to those children who live in the catchment/designated area. **If you continue to use church affiliation criteria, you should include in your policy the reasons for not following the Diocesan guidance.**

D) Social and medical criteria

ODBE recommends a social/medical criterion immediately after the looked-after children criterion. This is in line with the practice in most LAs.

The onus is on the parent to provide evidence that clearly demonstrates why your school (and only your school) can meet their specific needs; there are likely to be very few cases which will meet these requirements. ODBE recommends that the medical or social needs of a parent should be considered under such a criterion and reference is made in the model policies to ‘families’.

E) Catchment/designated Area/priority area

The catchment/designated area should be clearly defined and the form of measurement described. Where the same method as the LA is used to measure distances, the policy should use the exact wording used by the LA to avoid confusion.

In line with the expectation that schools recognise their foundation and are primarily intended for the education of the ‘poor of the parish’, ODBE expects catchment/designated area to be prioritised in any oversubscription criteria.

F) Pupil premium, service premium and early years premium

Priority may be given to children eligible for pupil premium, service premium or early years pupil premium. The policy must make clear the categories of eligible premium.

G) Children of staff

Schools can prioritise children of staff where either they have been employed at the school for two or more years at the time of the application for admission and/or the member of staff is recruited to fill a vacant post at the school for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage.

Academy schools must take great care when including children of staff as an oversubscription criterion. A 2023 decision of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (ADA4125) confirmed that such a criterion must be ‘explicitly applied or limited to members of staff at the school’ ie members of central staff will not qualify even if based in the school. The Trust Board must also consider whether inclusion of such criterion in admissions arrangements will disproportionately disadvantage some members of staff eg those working in the central team.

Where criteria are included for children of staff, these should be placed at a lower priority to those children who live in the catchment/designated area.

Supplementary information forms (SIFs)

Where the LA does not include an appropriate question on their Common Application Form (CAF) a SIF should be provided eg eligibility for pupil premium, previous siblings, etc. To avoid confusion, SIFs should only be used where there is a need to obtain information not available from the CAF. The admissions authority must provide a SIF to parents to use in their application. The SIF must only request additional information that has a direct bearing on decisions about oversubscription criteria.

Published Admission Number (PAN)

An admission number must be set for each ‘relevant age group’ ie the number of places available in the normal round intake. The number is calculated considering the physical capacity of the school, the level of demand expected from local children living in the catchment/designated area and sensible, lawful school organisation. Once set, all applications will be accepted up to the PAN.

The PAN relates only to the normal year of intake and not other year groups in the school even if these usually have the same number of pupils.

Subject to the infant class size limit, a school may admit children above PAN without a formal change to the admissions policy. Decisions are likely to be made on an individual basis where circumstances indicate that to do so will not prejudice efficient education at the school.

Infant Class Size Limit

Classes where the majority of children will attain the age of 5, 6 or 7 during the school year (infant classes) **MUST NOT** contain more than 30 pupils with a single school teacher. There are limited

exceptional circumstances where additional children may be admitted. Contact ODBE for further guidance where required.

Waiting list

When oversubscribed, the admission authority must maintain a waiting list for at least one term in the academic year of admission ie until December 2024 for this policy ie parents cannot be required to request to be placed on the waiting list. The oversubscription criteria must be used to rank children on the waiting list; priority must not be given to children on the basis of the date that their application was received or when their name was added to the list.

Deferred entry

Parents may request that their child's entry be deferred until later in the year where they are still below compulsory school age. The admission authority must consider the circumstances of the case. It is not possible to defer entry beyond the beginning of the term after the child's fifth birthday nor beyond the year for which the original application was accepted. This means that for children attaining the age of five before 1 September 2026, the latest date of deferred entry is the start of the Summer term in 2026.

Admission of children outside of their normal age group

Where parents seek a place for their child outside the normal age group, the admission authority must make a decision on the basis of the circumstances of the case and in the best interests of the child. Applications are rarely likely to succeed and subsequent schools that a pupil applies to join are not bound by the decision to agree delayed admission ie meaning that the child may have to join their chronological year group.

While parents retain the statutory right to appeal against the refusal of a place at their preferred school, they cannot appeal if a place is offered but not in the preferred age group.

Co-ordination of in-year admissions

Many LAs provide for in-year co-ordination of applications though VA schools and academies do not have to participate unless they wish to do so. Details of any applications and their outcomes must be provided to the LA to enable the LA to keep up-to-date figures on the availability of places.

Catchment/designated area

Whilst either 'catchment area' or 'designated area' can be used, ODBE recommends that the model policy is amended to use the same term used by the Local Authority in which the school is based.

The catchment/designated area must be reasonable and clearly defined by means of a map which shows its boundaries clearly or by some other means such as a definitive list of road names or post codes. Where a map is used to define the area, a copy should be appended to the Admissions Arrangements in a clearly accessible format. Catchment/designated areas do not prevent parents who live outside the catchment of a particular school from expressing a preference for the school.

Appeals

For VA schools, the governing board is responsible for arranging/ providing for an appeal against refusal of a place at a school. For academies, it is the academy trust board. Consideration should be given to how the appeals process will be managed. Academies should refer to their academy trust board for direction.

MODEL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2026/27

NOTE: This policy must be tailored to the school's individual requirements.

Insert a paragraph setting out the school's ethos.

The governing board have made every effort to ensure that these arrangements comply with the School Admissions Code 2021 and all relevant legislation, including that on infant class sizes (**DELETE IF NOT APPLICABLE**) and equal opportunities.

There are ___ places (the published admission number or PAN) available.

DELETE THIS SECTION FOR ALL BUT PRIMARY, INFANT OR FIRST SCHOOL ADMISSION:

Admission arrangements to the Reception Year in September 2026

Even if a child already attends the nursery class at [XYZ School], a new application must be made to start Reception year group for the first time.

Pupils are normally admitted at the beginning of the school year (1 September – 31 August) in which they reach their fifth birthday. Parents whose child was born between 1 September 2021 and 31 August 2022 may apply for them to be admitted to the Reception Year in September 2026.

Parents of a child born between 1 September 2021 and 31 March 2022 may defer entry until their child reaches compulsory school age (the term beginning in January or April after his or her fifth birthday). The school will hold the deferred place for the child (provided it is taken up during the school year 2026/27), although children may benefit from starting at the beginning of the school year, rather than part way through it.

For children born between 1 April 2022 and 31 August 2022 (summer born children) parents can defer the date that their child is admitted to school but not beyond the beginning of the final term of the school year.

Until the child reaches compulsory school age, s/he may attend part-time. If parents wish to exercise this right, they should discuss detailed arrangements with the head teacher.

Parents (see Note 1) wishing to apply for the Reception [Foundation] Year in September 2026 must complete the common application form provided by their home local authority (the home LA). The home LA is the LA in whose area the parents live at the time of the application. The form must be returned to that LA no later than 15 January 2026. Applications received after this date will normally only be considered after all those received on or before the cut-off date. Offers and refusals of places will be given to parents on 16 April 2026.

DELETE THIS SECTION FOR ALL BUT JUNIOR SCHOOL ADMISSION:

Admission arrangements to Year 3 in September 2026

Parents (see Note 1) wishing to apply for a Year 3 place in September 2026 must complete the common application form provided by their home local authority (the home LA). The home LA is the LA in whose area the parents live at the time of the application. The form must be returned to that LA no later than 15 January 2026. Applications received after this date will normally only be considered after all those received on or before the cut-off date. Offers and refusals of places will be given to parents on 16 April 2026.

DELETE THIS SECTION FOR ALL BUT MIDDLE SCHOOL ADMISSION:

Admission arrangements to Year 5 in September 2026

Parents (see Note 1) wishing to apply for a Year 3 place in September 2026 must complete the common application form provided by their home local authority (the home LA). The home LA is the LA in whose area the parents live at the time of the application. The form must be returned to that LA no later than 15 January 2026. Applications received after this date will normally only be considered after all those received on or before the cut-off date. Offers and refusals of places will be given to parents on 16 April 2026.

DELETE THIS SECTION FOR ALL BUT SECONDARY ADMISSION:

Admission arrangements to Year 7 in September 2026

Parents (see Note 1) wishing to apply for a Year 7 place in September 2026 must complete the common application form provided by their home local authority (the home LA). The home LA is the LA in whose area the parents live at the time of the application. The form must be returned to that LA no later than 31 October 2025. Applications received after this date will normally only be considered after all those received on or before the cut-off date. Offers and refusals of places will be given to parents on 2 March 2026.

Over-subscription criteria

Children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan naming [XYZ School] will always be offered places.

If there are fewer applications than places available, all children will be offered places. If there is greater demand for admission than there are places available, the following criteria will be applied in the order set out below:

- 1 Looked-after children and children who were previously looked after, including those children who appear to have been in state care outside England but ceased to be so as a result of being adopted. (See Note 2)
- 2 Families who have exceptional medical or social needs that make it essential that their child attends [XYZ School] rather than any other. These needs must be fully supported by written evidence from the appropriate professional person involved with the family. (See Note 3)
- 3 Children with a normal home address (See Note 4) in the catchment/designated area set out in the map below [alternatively include description] and with a sibling (see Note 5) on the roll of the school at the time of application or whose parent has accepted an offer of a place at the school and who is expected still to be in attendance at the time of entry to the school.
- 4 Children with a normal home address in the catchment/designated area.
- 5 Children with a normal home address outside the catchment/designated area and with a sibling on the roll of the school at the time of application or whose parent has accepted an offer of a place at the school and who is expected still to be in attendance at the time of entry to the school.
- 6 Other children.

Proximity of the child's home, as measured by the straight line distance (see Note 6) between the home and the school with those living nearer being accorded the higher priority, will serve to differentiate between children in criteria 1 to 6 should the need arise. In the event that two distance measurements are identical, the school will use random allocation to decide which child should be offered the place. The process will be conducted in the presence of a person independent of the school.

All Other Admissions

Admission to the school during the school year depends on whether or not there are places available. Applications must be made directly to the school on a form available from the school. [There may be

voluntary co-ordination arrangements in place in [ABC LA] in which case the school must decide whether it wishes to participate in these.].

If there is a vacancy, and there is no child on the relevant waiting list with a higher priority (according to the over-subscription criteria 1-6 above), a place will be offered.

In-year admissions or admissions at the beginning of school years other than Reception will only be considered by the Governing Board up to half a term [using the three term year] in advance of the desired date for entry. For example, for entry in January, the application will not be considered until after the October half term break.

Admission outside normal age group

Requests from parents for places outside a normal age group will be considered carefully, eg for those previously educated abroad or those who have missed education due to ill health. Each case will be considered on its own merits and circumstances and a decision made based on what is in the pupil's best interests. It is recommended that parents discuss their wishes with the head teacher in advance of applying for a place. The governing board may ask relevant professionals for their opinion. If a place in the requested age group is refused, but one in the normal age group is offered, then there is no right of appeal.

Waiting Lists

The school maintains waiting lists for those children who are not offered a place. For those applying through the normal admissions round for entry, the Waiting List will be maintained from shortly following initial allocation in the year preceding the start of the academic year in September until 31 December following the start of the academic year in their [Reception/Year 3/Year 7] year.

The order of priority on the waiting list is the same as the list of criteria for over-subscription and does not depend on the date on which an application is received.

Multiple births

In cases where there is one place available, and the next child on the list is a twin, triplet, etc., we would admit both twins (and all the children in the case of other multiple births) even if this meant exceeding the agreed admission number.

Fair Access

The school participates in [ABC LA]'s Fair Access Protocol. Children qualifying under the Fair Access Protocol may be offered a place even if there are no places available in the relevant year group and also take priority for admission over any child on the waiting list.

Appeals

Any parent not offered a place for their child at their preferred school has the right of appeal to an independent appeals panel. Details of appeals arrangements are available from the school, including the date by which an appeal should be submitted. In the event of an unsuccessful appeal against non-admission to the school, the school will not consider any further application for a child in the same school year (1 September–31 August) unless there has been a material change in circumstances, for example a change of address which results in a move from outside the catchment/designated area to inside it.

Further information

Further information can be obtained from the Admissions Secretary at the school [contact details – phone and email]

Notes

Note 1:

'Parent' is defined in law (The Education Act 1996) as either:

- a) any person who has 'parental responsibility' (defined in the Children Act 1989) for the child or young person; or
- b) any person who has care of the child or young person.

Note 2:

A 'looked-after child' is one in the care of a local authority or being provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of its functions. Previously looked after children are children who have been adopted, subject to child arrangement orders or special guardianship orders. Adopted children are those for whom an adoption order is made under the Adoption Act 1976 (Section 12) or the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Section 46). A 'child arrangements order' is one settling the arrangements to be made as to the person with whom the child is to live (Children Act 1989, Section 8, as amended by the Children and Families Act 2014, Section 14). A 'special guardianship order' is one appointing one or more individuals to be a child's special guardian/s (Children Act 1989, Section 14A).

Applications under this criterion must be accompanied by evidence to show that the child is looked after or was previously looked after (eg a copy of the adoption, child arrangements or special guardianship order). A 'looked-after child' includes any child who appears to have been in state care outside England if they were in the care of or were accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other provider of care whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.

Note 3:

Applications under criterion 2 (exceptional medical or social needs), must be supported by evidence from an independent professional person which clearly demonstrates why the school is the most suitable and must illustrate the difficulties that would be caused if the child had to attend another school. The person supplying the evidence should be a doctor, health visitor, social worker, etc. who is aware of the circumstances of the case. The school reserves the right to ask for further evidence or clarification where necessary and may seek the advice of appropriate professionals where necessary.

Note 4:

The home address is where the child normally lives. This will be where the parent or legal carer of the child lives with the child unless it is shown that the child is resident elsewhere with someone else who has legal care and control of them. The address should be a residential property that is owned, leased or rented by the child's parent/s or person with legal care and control of the child.

Where a child lives with parents with shared responsibility, each for part of a week or month, the address where the child lives will be determined having regard to a joint declaration from the parents stating the exact pattern of residence. If the residence is not split equally, then the relevant address used will be that at which the child spends the majority of the school week. Where there is an equal split or there is any doubt about residence, the home address will be assumed to be the address at which the child is registered with a GP.

Evidence of the normal home address may be requested in the form of a recent bill, for example, the most recent Council Tax bill, utility bill no more than three months old, a current TV licence, buildings and contents insurance, mortgage statement or rent book which shows the address concerned.

If a place at the school is offered, and it later becomes clear that the offer was made on fraudulent or intentionally misleading information (eg a false claim to living in the catchment/designated area), and the school has denied a place to a child with a stronger claim, the school will withdraw the offer of a place. The offer can be withdrawn even after the child has started at the school.

If parents are moving house, evidence of the move will be requested when considering any application for a place. Documentary evidence in the form of a solicitor's letter to confirm exchange of contracts, or a rental agreement for at least a period of six months will be required.

If parents move house after the application has been made, but before any offer of a place has been made, the home LA must be informed.

An address of a second home with the main home being elsewhere will not be accepted. If there are two or more homes, or where a family is returning from elsewhere, evidence will be required of the main home. An allocation of a place based on an address which might be considered only temporary or where the address given is a second home will not be made.

An address where the child was resident other than with a parent or carer unless this was part of a fostering or formal care arrangement will not be accepted.

There are special arrangements for families of service personnel with a confirmed posting or crown servants returning from overseas. If the application is accompanied by an official letter that declares the relocation date, and if there is a place available, it will be offered even though there is not an intended address or the family is not yet living in the area.

Note 5:

‘Sibling’ means a natural brother or sister, half-brother or sister, adopted brother or sister, step-brother or sister, or the child of the parent’s/carer’s partner where the child for whom the school place is sought is living in the same family unit at the same address as that sibling. It is helpful if parents make it clear on the application form where the sibling has a different family name. Where there is more than one sibling at the school, only the youngest should be listed on the application form.

Note 6: The straight line distance used to determine proximity of the home to the school will be measured by [ABC LA]’s Geographical Information System.

[Append catchment/designated area map in accessible format if relevant]