



Guidance on School Admissions for Parents and Carers

Updated April 2012

Archdiocese of Southwark
Education Commission

St Edward's House, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington BR5 2SR
Tel 01689 829331 Fax 01689 829255
E-mail: office@rcsouthwark.org.uk
Web Site: www.rcsouthwark.org.uk

Director of Education: Dr Anne Bamford

ADMISSIONS

Choosing a Catholic School

Guidance on School Admissions for Parents and Carers

- Introduction

'Schooling has been, and remains, an important part of the mission of the Church. The aims of our schools are to help everyone within the school community to grow in faith; to make the most of every ability they have been given; to achieve academic excellence and to prepare well for adult life in a modern and diverse society. These tasks are, of course, carried out in close cooperation with local and national government.'

'We urge all members of the Catholic community to value our schools. So we encourage Catholic parents to send their children to the local Catholic school and to be actively involved in its life. We encourage people to work in our schools as Catholic head teachers, teachers, classroom assistants or in other roles. We encourage people to serve as foundation governors to continue supporting and promoting the vision of education on which our schools are founded. We encourage teachers, at their union meetings, and parents or parishioners, in their dealings with politicians, to speak up positively, on the basis of evidence, about the achievements and nature of our schools.'

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES
Pastoral Letter on Catholic Schools - 2nd September 2007

Before choosing a school parents and their children are encouraged to visit all of the Catholic schools in their area. Schools welcome visits from parents and can answer your questions. All schools will produce a prospectus and most schools have a web-site. Both the prospectus and the web-site will give a good overview of the school but only by visiting the school will you get a feeling for the ethos and how the teaching and learning environment will benefit your child. Most secondary schools, and many primary schools, organise open days for parents and their children to see the school 'in action' will encourage children to take part in learning and other activities.. Information about the dates of the 'open' sessions should be obtained direct from the school.

Schools, colleges and academies must publish a Prospectus. The Prospectus contains details of the admission arrangements for the school and it will explain the criteria used to allocate places when the school is oversubscribed. The local authority will also publish a composite prospectus listing all the schools within its area. The information in this document may be summarised and should be read in conjunction with the individual school's prospectus.

In the Archdiocese of Southwark the governing body is responsible for admitting children to Catholic schools, colleges and academies. The governing body of each Catholic voluntary aided school must review, agree and publish a policy each year which explains how places are offered if there are more applications than places available. This is called the admissions policy and will be printed in the school prospectus, available on the school website or from the school on request. It is important to remember that there may be differences between the admission policies for each school for each school you may wish to apply for. It is the responsibility of parents to read the admissions policies carefully and to seek clarification direct from the school if they are unsure about any part of the policy. Do not assume that because one of your children has attended your preferred school in a previous year that the

same admission arrangements will apply to the current year. Always check that you have the current document.

The Archbishop expects Catholic schools to give priority to Catholic applicants who want a place at a Catholic school. Catholic schools exist to assist parents in handing on the Catholic faith to their children. However, in some areas where there are not enough places for all baptised Catholic children, governing bodies may decide to give a higher priority to children from practising Catholic families. Practice is interpreted as attendance at Sunday Mass. The governing body will require confirmation of practice from a priest at the church where the family normally worship.

Support from a priest is not a guarantee of a place in a particular school. Governing bodies will take into account the information given by the priest and use it to prioritise applications using their published admission criteria. It is the governing body of the school, and not the priest, that makes decisions on who will be offered a place.

Where a school is oversubscribed (when there are more applications than places available) with baptised Catholic applicants, the governing body may apply criteria where a higher priority of admission will be given to those who attend Sunday Mass more frequently. Governing bodies may also use other criteria, such as giving priority to applicants who have a brother or sister in the school at the time of admission, living in a named parish, living near the school, or who have social or medical needs.

How to apply for a place in a Catholic school, college or academy in the Archdiocese of Southwark

- **What parents or carers must do to apply for a place at a Catholic school.**
1. You must complete a **Common Application Form (CAF)** which is the legal application form for all schools. This form is available from the school admissions office of the local authority where the child lives. This is not necessarily the same local authority of the school to which parents are applying.
 2. Parents or carers who want their child to attend a Catholic school must list **all** the Catholic schools in their area in order of preference. They must make sure they follow the instructions given with the form about its completion and return. It is possible in most local authorities to complete the CAF on-line via the authority's web site. Whether you complete a paper copy of the form or apply on-line the application must be received by the local authority by the date specified. If you do not complete and return a CAF your child may not be able to attend one of your preferred schools.
 3. You should also complete a **Supplementary Information Form** which is available from each of the Catholic schools to which parents are applying. **A separate form may have to be completed for each Catholic school you wish to apply for.** The form will require parents to provide information regarding baptism and, where required in the school's admission policy, information about attendance at Sunday Mass. Some schools will ask for the completed form to be returned to them so they can send it to the priest, others will ask the parent to take it to the priest. Once this is done, the priest of the parish where the family attend Sunday Mass will complete a section on the form that confirms the frequency of Mass attendance. Where a family are new to a parish, or where they frequently attend Mass at a church outside the parish where they live, it will be necessary to obtain this information about their Mass attendance from more than one priest. The priests will either send the form back to the school or give it to the parents who then have the responsibility for returning the form to the school.

4. It is for the parents to ensure that the form is returned to the school as explained on the form. Not all schools will have the same date for return. If a form is not returned, the governing body must still consider the application. However, as the governors will not have all the information they need to assess the application against their criteria, it is probable that applicants who do not return the form will be ranked lower than those who do return a form.

▪ **Notes to help with completing the Supplementary Information Form**

1. The terms 'parent' or 'carer' are used for all persons who legally have parental responsibility for the child. 'Parents' or 'carers' should enter details for each person who has parental responsibility and if any one of them is not the child's mother or father, the relationship to the child should be explained in the box asking for parents' comments.
2. The address of the child's main place of residence should be given. In the case of those children who spend part of the week at a different address the address given must be the one where the child spends most of the weekdays. A definition of what is considered the home address will be given in the school's admission policy or in the local authority's composite prospectus.
3. Catholic applicants must give the name of the parish in which they live even if they attend Mass in a different parish, giving the name of the church and its location, *e.g. Holy Innocents, Orpington*.
4. Parents should also give the name and location of the church or ethnic chaplaincy where they normally attend Sunday Mass if it is different from the parish in which they live. Sunday Mass includes the Saturday evening vigil Mass.
5. If parents attend more than one church on a regular basis, they should give details in the box asking for parents' comments and complete a form for a priest at each church to endorse.
6. Parents should indicate the length of time they have been worshipping at the church or churches they attend.
7. Parents will be required to provide proof of the child's baptism. The priest or school will ask for the original or certified copy of the baptismal certificate. If a baptismal certificate is not available the parish priest at the church where the child was baptised should be able to provide a copy of the entry in the church's baptism register.
8. Parents should indicate how often they attend Sunday Mass by ticking the box that best describes their attendance as a family at Sunday Mass (Saturday evening vigil Mass counts as a Sunday Mass). Weekly attendance means attendance at Sunday Mass every week except for illness. Occasional attendance means that Mass attendance has been once or twice a month over a period of time. Irregular Mass attendance means less than once a month over a period of time and the reasons could be explained in the box asking for parents' comments. If none of these apply, reasons could be given in the box that asks for parents' comments.
9. Parents may give any information they think is relevant to the application in the box on the form. This is particularly the case where the child has medical, social or pastoral needs that make it important for the child to attend a particular school. Where a child has these needs it is important to provide supporting documents from a doctor, social worker, professional welfare officer or priest. The type of supporting evidence required will be explained in the school's admission policy or in the local authority's composite prospectus.
10. Applicants from other denominations or faiths should complete what is applicable to their circumstances and ensure a minister or faith leader completes part 3 of the form.
11. As forms may vary in detail from school to school. It is important that you complete the form relating to the school where you are applying for a place.

- **What happens next?**

Each local authority co-ordinates all the applications for the children resident in its area, no matter where the schools you apply for are situated. The authorities enter your preferences onto computerised registers that cover the County of Kent, Medway Council and one covering all the London Boroughs. Each Catholic school which you have listed on the CAF will then receive your basic details from the local authority. The school will then match up these details with the Supplementary Information Form that you have sent to the school. Using the information from both of these forms the school governors will then use their own oversubscription criteria to rank all applicants in the order of how well they match the school's criteria. The ranked order is returned to the local authority which will use the information to offer places. They will offer child a place at only one school. This will normally be the school that is ranked highest on your list of preferences that is able to offer a place to your child. Sometimes it is not possible for a place to be offered at your first preference school and for this reason it is important that where possible an alternative Catholic school is named on the CAF.

- **Notification to Parents**

On or about 1st March, for secondary schools, and on or about 16 April, for primary schools, your local authority will write to you telling you which school your child has been allocated a place. If the place allocated is at voluntary aided Catholic school, college or academy the offer will be made on behalf of the Governing Body of the school. You will be given a short time to write back to the local authority to accept the offer. If you are one of the few who have not been offered a place at one of your preferred schools, the local authority may allocate you a place in a school which you have not listed on the CAF. In this case you will be provided with information about your preferred school's waiting list and about how you may appeal against the decision.

- **What to do if you do not get a place at the school you wanted.**

If your child has been refused a place at the school you wanted you may ask the school to put your child's name on their waiting list. Placing a child's name on the waiting list does not guarantee that a place will become available.

You also have the right to appeal against the decision not to offer a place to your child. Appeals are heard by an appeal panel that is independent of the school and of the local authority. Placing a child's name on a waiting list does not prevent parents or carers from exercising their right to appeal. Appeals must be made in writing and must set out the reasons on which the appeal is made. Appeals should be made to the Admissions Appeal Clerk at the school address and a form may be available for you to complete. Parents/Carers have the right to make oral representations to the Appeal Panel.

Separate appeals advice leaflets for parents are available from the school or on the Commission's web site. <http://www.rcsouthwark.org.uk>

Further information – Reference documents:-

- School Admissions Code (DFE) – 2012.
 - School Admission Appeals Code of Practice (DFE) – 2012.
- both are downloadable from the Department for Education website :
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/schooladmissions>