

Primary Academy Admissions Policies

We thought it would be helpful for schools to be given feedback on aspects of admissions policies that have come under scrutiny during the last 12 months in admissions appeals hearings. Whether or not you have had appeals for your school you are likely to find this feedback useful as you prepare the 2021 policy for determination by Governors/Trust Boards.

The law on admissions contains an overall principle that policies must be fair, clear, objective and easily understood by parents. If panels believe that is not the case, then they can, and do, allow appeals whatever the circumstances of the child. With that in mind, please be aware of the following points. Full information is set out in the Schools Admissions Code of Practice (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2>) :

- **Determination and Publication of Admissions Policies**

- 1. Admission authorities must determine admission arrangements annually, whether or not any changes are to be made to the policy. If no changes are planned then you do not have to consult, except once every seven years. If you propose to make any changes then consultation must take place for a minimum of 6 weeks between 1st October and 31st January (consultation in this academic year will be for admissions in September 2021). Governors/Trusts must determine those arrangements, i.e. formally approve, by 28th February and publish them on the website.*
- 2. If you wish to adopt the LA policy then it is not sufficient to just provide a link through to the policy on the LA website. You must rebrand the policy for the school and remove anything that is not applicable; the LA policy is generic and covers arrangement for both primary and secondary schools. Please never try to cross reference the policy, i.e. do not say something like “the school has adopted the LA policy except for paragraphs” this really does cause confusion for parents especially if paragraph numbers change from year to year and the school has not updated the cross reference.*
- 3. An academy must have their own policy which is published on their website making clear which academic year it applies to. It is necessary, therefore, to have more than one policy on your website at certain times of the year, even if the policies has not changed. For example in June 2020, after the 2021 application process has opened, you should have on your website separate policies for 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 as a parent could effectively be applying under any of those policies at that point. Each one needs to be labelled for the correct year.*

- **Priority Criteria and Definitions**

- 1. Siblings: it is important to be clear about what a sibling is, e.g. do you include step-siblings and half-siblings, do they have to be living at the same address? When does a child qualify as a sibling – e.g. do they have to be at the school at the time of application or do they need to be attending at the same time?*
- 2. Children of Staff: This is an acceptable criterion but the Code does set out which staff can be included. It is important not to discriminate against support staff as the code does not limit this to teachers. The code is also clear that the staff that can be considered under this are staff who have been employed at the school for a minimum of two years and/or have been recruited to a post where there is a demonstrable skills shortage.*

3. *50:50 living arrangements: You must have in your policy a clear definition of what address you will accept for a child and most policies will say “parental address” or “main home address”. Increasingly in appeals we have parents claiming 50:50 living arrangements where the family is split. You need to say how you will deal with these.*
 4. *Distance Measurements: Be clear where these are to and from. If you are using the LA to undertake your measurements then the LA system uses the centre point of the home address to the main gate of the school, a straight line measurement.*
 5. *Tiebreaks: It is important that you have a tiebreak. The most common way of doing this is having the final criterion of distance with a random allocation process after that if all distances are equal. You also need to be clear how you separate within a category. So, for example, if you can’t get all of your catchment children in do you split them on distance then random allocation or do you use a combination of the lower criteria in the order they are set out. In doing the latter it will mean that siblings, for example, would be prioritised over children living nearer to the school. This is the method used in the LA policy.*
- **General Clauses and Definitions**
 1. *Admissions Numbers: It is important that your policy includes your admission number. If you have a different admission number for some year groups, e.g. because you are rolling a higher AN through from Reception, then it is important that this is also made clear on your website.*
 2. *Withdrawal of offers: The Code of Practice sets out the three circumstances where places can be withdrawn after offer is made. These are i) where they are fraudulently obtained, ii) where an error has been made, iii) where a parent has not responded to an offer within a reasonable time. Policies should set out in which circumstances you will withdraw an offer.*
 3. *In-Year applications: Whilst the main bulk of the policy will set out how you deal with First Time Admission applications, it is still important to set out how in-year applications will be dealt with and in which circumstances, if any, you will (or may) exceed the admission number. Vague statements are very problematic, for example a number of policies use the following or similar statement with no further explanation “if a child moves into the catchment area they will not necessarily be offered a place in the school if the planned admission number has been reached”. The policy should be clear what the circumstances would be where you will or won’t overfill.*

*Lisa Fish
Appeals Manager
School Admissions Service – 0116 305 4422*