



Department
for Education

Faith school admission arrangements variation

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

July 2020

Summary

Admission authorities for schools designated as having a religious character may use faith based oversubscription criteria in their admission arrangements and allocate places by reference to faith where the school is oversubscribed. The decision about whether to include such criteria, and how parents must demonstrate membership or practice of the faith, is a decision for the admission authority, in consultation with the relevant body or person representing the religion or religious denomination. Some admission authorities define children's or families' membership or practice of the faith for this purpose through regular attendance at a place of worship over a specified period. Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, there have been restrictions on the opening of places of worship (especially for communal worship) and parents and their children may have been unable to attend their place of worship as normal. This has meant that faith schools with admissions arrangements that prioritise applicants based on membership or practice of the faith, evidenced through regular attendance at a place of worship and/or at communal worship, may find their admission arrangements have been affected for the September 2021 intake. As a result, some admission authorities may need to seek a variation to their admission arrangements to ensure parents are clear on what they need to do to meet the relevant criteria.

This guidance is for admission authorities who consider that they will need to make changes to their admissions arrangements to account for the period where access to places of worship and/or to communal worship has been restricted as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Expiry or review date

This guidance applies to admission arrangements for the 2021-22 school year.

Who is this publication for?

This guidance is non-statutory. It is intended for state-funded schools designated as having a religious character.

It is also relevant to local authorities as coordinating bodies for school admissions.

Admission Arrangements Variations

The admission arrangements relevant to children entering school in September 2021 will have been determined before the end of February 2020. In normal circumstances, once admission arrangements have been determined for a particular school year, they cannot be revised by the admission authority. However, in accordance with paragraph 3.6 of the [School Admissions Code](#) (the Code), admission authorities may propose variations where they consider such changes to be necessary in view of a major change in circumstances.

The Schools Adjudicator (for maintained schools) or Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) on behalf of the Secretary of State (for academies) will consider each application for an admissions variation on its merits. The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is a major event so it is likely that the Schools Adjudicator or RSC would consider this as justification for necessary changes to arrangements.

If an admission authority for a faith designated school considers that they need to vary their 2021 admission arrangements, as a result of the closure of places of worship or restriction of access to those places, they may first wish to contact the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination (we recognise that some schools with a religious character do not have a designated faith body). The Department for Education is aware that some religious bodies have already considered the implications of the closure of places of worship and will be able to offer further guidance and support.

- To undertake the variation, admission authorities must follow the process set out in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the Code. The admission authority should inform the appropriate bodies/persons listed in footnote 61 and paragraph 1.44 (c), (d) and (f) of the Code as to which changes will be requested and how these will change the admission arrangements. It should provide evidence these groups have been informed with its application. Where the local authority is the admission authority it must consult the school's governing body.
- When requesting variations on the basis of coronavirus (COVID-19), admission authorities should provide information on what changes they want to make to their admission arrangements and Supplementary Information Form and when they want changes to come into effect. If the religious body has provided views on the proposed variation then they should make this clear. For maintained schools, the religious bodies are set out in schedules 3 and 4 of the [School Admissions \(Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) and for academies, the religious body is usually named in their funding agreements.
- Academy school admission authorities would need to seek a variation from their relevant Regional Schools Commissioner (who makes this decision on behalf of the Secretary of State). The admission authority should send its request to Academy.QUESTIONS@education.gov.uk.
- Maintained school admission authorities would need to seek a [variation from the Schools Adjudicator](#).

Proposed variations will need to be submitted as soon as possible. Each local authority must publish its composite admissions prospectus by 12 September, and it will be helpful

to parents if varied arrangements are in place by the deadline for publication, so that parents can begin to consider their options on the basis of up to date information. Because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the volume of variations the RSC/Adjudicator will be considering is likely to be large, and so submitting a request early will enable it to be processed in a timely manner.

If the RSC/Schools Adjudicator approves the variation, the changes must be published as revisions to the admission arrangements and the amended arrangements must be displayed prominently on the school's website (see paragraph 3.7 of the Code). The admission authority should also inform parents of changes.

The local authority must be informed promptly of any varied admission arrangements. The local authority should amend its online admissions prospectus to include the varied admission arrangements. The admission authority and the local authority should ensure that what is published on the school's website and the local authority's website is consistent.

Admission authorities are asked to note that if, having varied their admission arrangements for 2021 entry, they want the variation removed from their arrangements for 2022 onwards, they will need to consult on removal for these changes for the 2022 admission arrangements for any 6 weeks between 1 October 2020 and 31 January 2021, in accordance with the provisions set out in paragraphs 1.42-1.49 of the Code.