

Admissions Arrangements Consultation Guidance – Sept 23

Statutory consultation process

- You must consult before changing any part of your arrangements. Keep copies of all your publicity in case of challenge later on.
- Where the admission arrangements have not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult, subject to the requirement that you must consult at least once every 7 years, even if there have been no changes during that period.
- **You MUST send a copy of your proposed admissions policy to the Diocese for checking prior to consultation.**

Timing

- Consultation must last for a **minimum of 6 weeks between 1 October and 31 January** in the determination year, i.e. before you make your final decision by 28 February.

The law requires you to consult with:

1. parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;
2. other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;
3. all other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools);
4. whichever of the governing body and the local authority who are not the admission authority;
5. any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority; and
6. in the case of schools designated with a religious character, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.

What you must include in the consultation

- Throughout the consultation period you must publish a copy of your full proposed admission arrangements (including the proposed PAN) on your website
 - Details of the person within the admission authority (or school) to whom comments may be sent
 - The areas of the policy on which comments are not sought because they aren't changing
- Admission authorities must also send a copy of the proposed admission arrangements to any of the persons or bodies listed above upon request.

Failure to consult effectively may be grounds for subsequent challenge and for a policy change to be overturned.

Our advice is to keep good records of all consultation activity, including copies of any letters, emails, posters, social media or local media articles, a screenshot of your webpage, and the responses. Remember that your website might be updated and you could lose your evidence if you don't record it!

If someone lodges an objection with the Adjudicator, the Adjudicator will request evidence to prove that your consultation met the statutory requirements.

Ensuring that your consultation process reaches the right people.

The Office of the School's Adjudicator has previously issued some examples of ways in which schools and local authorities have communicated about proposed changes to their admissions arrangements. In addition to a prominent and simple message on the front page of the school website, backed up with more detailed information, these have included:

- a) asking (other) schools and early years settings (including childminders) to pass on information about the consultation to parents;
- b) articles in the local press including free papers sent to every household in the area, magazines/newsletters published by voluntary groups in an area, family information directories and child focused magazines;
- c) use of local radio and social media including Twitter and Facebook and online parent forums (one local authority described a parental networking group with over 3,000 members);
- d) seeking feedback and responses online as well as in paper form;
- e) posters in schools, stay and play session locations, supermarkets, doctors' surgeries, children's centres, health centres, places of worship and the 17 local authority's own buildings;
- f) consultation meetings including drop in sessions targeting areas or groups which past experience showed were less likely to respond;
- g) use of personal contacts - talking to parents at the school gate or at parents evenings;
- h) asking local voluntary groups, parish councils and faith bodies to use their networks to pass on material and information;
- i) and direct emails to parents who have given permission and provided email addresses via their applications for admission in previous years; this had a high response rate.