

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON SCHOOL ADMISSIONS AND SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEALS

This document has been produced as information for parents of children who will be applying for a place in the Reception class of an infant, primary or middle school.

Applying for a nursery place is separate from applying for a place in school and you should contact your local authority for information on how to do this.

We refer to 'catchment areas' but not all admission authorities use catchment areas, but they offer places based on the distance from your home to the school you have said you would like your child to attend. You should contact your admission authority if you are unclear which they use.

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

Q 1. I have just had a child; should I put their name down with a school?

No: Putting your child's name down on a list for a school place when they are born will not entitle your child to a place at that particular school or give them an advantage over anyone else applying for a place. You must still apply for a place at the same time as everyone else, and all the applications will be assessed together after the closing date. However, there is no harm in getting in touch with the admission authority fairly early on to know who to send application forms to when the time is right. Please see question 2 for further information on who to contact.

Q 2. I am looking for a school place for my child, what should I do?

You can find information about Welsh medium and English medium schools in your area from the local authority website. If you don't have a computer, you may use the computer in your local library. Some local authority websites can help you find your nearest/catchment schools when you enter your postcode or the area where you live, but if you are interested in a faith school you may need to look at the booklet that lists all the schools which will be on the website, or ask for a paper copy of the booklet from the local authority.

Q 3. If I am interested in a specific school, what do I do next?

You must complete an application form for each stage of your child's education (e.g. primary and secondary).

If you decide to apply for voluntary aided or foundation schools you must normally contact the school directly, but you should check the local authority booklet to make sure. For community schools (Welsh medium or English medium) or voluntary controlled schools you must contact the local authority, who will provide you with the information and admission application forms for you to fill in and return by the closing date.

Some local authorities prefer applications to be filled in on line. You can find out about school admissions, including on line application forms, on each of the local authority websites. If you do not have access to a computer at home, you may be able to use one at your local library or other facilities such as community centres supported by the local authority. You can still put an application in on paper if that is what you prefer.

Q 4. Do I have a choice of school for my child?

Many parents prefer their catchment or nearest local school because that often means that children can make more local friends and will be able to walk to school. Parents and Carers have a right to say which school they would like their child to go to, and give reasons for that preference.

Q 5. Am I guaranteed a school of my choice?

No. You can say which school you would like your child to go to but if there are more applications than there are places available you may not be successful in being offered a place.

Q 6. My child is in a nursery attached to a primary school; do I still have to apply for a place in the reception class?

Yes you have to apply for a place in the school separately. A place in a nursery does not mean you have a place in the school.

Q 7. Do I have to name more than one school on the application form?

You should name more than one school that you would prefer your child to attend. If you only name one school and are not successful in being offered a place there, you could fail to get a place at any other school that you may also like. You may say which one you like best.

Q 8. What forms do I need to complete?

The admission authority for the school will provide you with the right application form. You can have a paper form to fill in or you can complete it on line depending on your local authority.

Q 9. When do I have to apply for a place?

The timetables will be in the Information for Parents Booklet and on the local authority website. Some local authorities announce in a local newspaper or on local radio when you can make an application for your child to be admitted to school. There are often notices in the local library, baby clinic, your doctors' surgery as well as in schools, nurseries and on social media such as Facebook. Most admission authorities open their school admission round during September and October and these stay open for at least six weeks.

Q 10. Do I still have to apply, even though I live in the catchment area or close to the school and I am happy to send my child to the local school?

Yes. You will not be considered for a place unless you apply, even if it is your local school.

Q 11. Will everyone in the catchment area or living close to the school have a place if they apply for one?

Not necessarily. Whilst living in the school catchment area or close to the school gives you a very good chance of getting a place, some areas have high populations and some children may not be offered a place.

Q 12. What happens if there are more applications than places available?

Admission authorities must admit children up to the number of school places available (admission number). If there are more applications than the admission number then the admission authority will offer places to children according to the list of rules for admitting children to school. The rules, known as oversubscription criteria, are applied to every application for a school with more applications than places. They may include things such as how close you live to the school, or if you have a brother or sister already in the school; the admission authority information for parents should have the full list either in a booklet or on their website.

Q 13. Are the oversubscription criteria the same for all schools?

No. For faith schools there are usually criteria relating to the Church that the school belongs to. It is important to check what the criteria are when you make an application. Voluntary controlled schools usually have the same oversubscription criteria as the local authority schools.

Q 14. What should I do if I miss the closing date for applications?

You must do your best to get your application in to the admission authority by the published deadline. If you are late sending in your application it may not be looked at with the ones that were on time. This could mean that your child will miss out on a place at your preferred school.

If there is a really good reason that your application is late, contact the admission authority who may consider it with the others if that is their policy.

Q 15. Who makes decisions about school admissions?

In the case of community and voluntary controlled schools the local authority is responsible for making the decisions. For voluntary aided and foundation schools decisions are made by the governing body, which usually sets up an admissions panel to decide on the applications.

Q 16. I have given in my application form and have been asked to attend an interview; should I go?

Representatives of schools are not allowed to interview parents to decide whether or not they should offer a place.

Q 17. The headteacher of my favourite school has told me my child has a place. Is this right?

Headteachers are not responsible for deciding who can attend their school or any other school. Admission authorities, as explained in the answer to question 15, are the only ones who can allocate places.

Q 18. When will I find out if my child has got a place?

All admission authorities set out a timetable for notifying parents of decisions about primary school applications. A National Offer Day has been set for primary schools as 16 April or the next working day but this will not come into effect until 2018/19. Until then, you should check the timetable provided in the booklet for parents or on the local authority website.

Q 19. Can my child go on a waiting list?

Any child who is not given a place will be added to a waiting list: you may be asked to agree to this. Children must be kept on this list until the 30 September in the school year in which they applied. Sometimes a place will become available in early September, because children expected at schools have gone to another school for some reason. Sometimes no places become available.

Q 20. If my child was on the waiting list early, will this affect whether a place is offered?

No. If any places can be offered, admission authorities will look at all the children on the list in the light of the oversubscription criteria/rules for allocation.

Q 21. What should I do when I find out my child has been allocated a place?

If you have been offered a place for your child at your chosen school, the admission authority or school will provide you with a starting date and any other information you need. You may also be asked to return a slip indicating that you wish to take up the place being offered. It helps the local authority and the school prepare for your child starting school if this is returned promptly.

Q 22. What if I am not happy with the school I have been offered?

If you have not been offered a place at your chosen school you have the right to appeal to an independent appeals panel. The panel will consider your case for your child attending and the admission authority's case for turning down your application. The appeals panel will be responsible for making the final decision.

When applying for a place at school it is always a good idea to think about other schools that you would also be happy with in case your first choice is not available. If you only ask for one school then you could be offered a place at a school you may not wish them to attend.

Q 23. When does my child have to start full-time school?

By law children have to be in school full-time in the term after they are five. Before that time you can ask the admission authority if your child can go to school part-time or put off starting school until later in the school year. This is known as deferred entry. Your child will have to go to school before the end of the summer term or they will lose their place in the class and you will have to reapply for a place.

If you do not take up the place offered in the same school year, your child would not normally join the next Reception class but would join the class in which they were originally offered a place.

Q 24. My child has special educational needs. How do I apply for a school place?

If your child has special educational needs (SEN) you will need to apply along with everyone else as set out in Q1 above.

However, if your child has a statement of SEN then the application form will ask you whether or not the child has a statement and if a school is named on the statement, you will normally have been consulted about the school named on the statement. Where a local authority issues a final statement of SEN they will set out under Part 4 of the statement, the type of school and any particular school which the LA consider appropriate for your child. This follows consultation by the LA with the school to ensure it is suitable for the admission of your child.

Q 25. Who gets first priority for places in any school?

Children with a statement of SEN which names a particular school will definitely be admitted before any other places are allocated. Looked after children and previously looked after children must then be the first in the list of oversubscription criteria.

SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEALS

This section only applies to children of school age, that is, those in Reception class (who are or will be 5 during the school year) through to Year 11. If your child is nursery age you can not appeal about a refusal to offer a nursery place.

Q 26. How do I appeal?

Any parent (except one whose child has been permanently excluded from two schools) whose child is refused a place has the right to appeal to an independent appeal panel.

Your letter of refusal will explain the reasons for refusal, information about your right of appeal, details of how to make an appeal and details about where you should send your notice of appeal. There is usually a limited time to make an appeal.

Q 27. What happens at the appeal?

Your appeal will normally be heard in private, but, if there are a lot of appeals for one school the first stage of the appeal may be done as a group and have other parents present who have also appealed. The appeal hearing will follow the pattern set out below:

- The presenting officer will explain why the admission authority turned down your/the application(s) (e.g. the school would be too crowded).
- You will have an opportunity to question the admission authority's reasons for refusal.

If at this stage the panel decides that there was no need to refuse a place, for instance, if the school would not be too crowded, the hearing will end and you will be informed that the appeal has been successful.

If the panel decides that there were reasons for refusal on the grounds that the school would be too full, then a second stage will follow, these will be individual (private) appeals.

- You will explain why your child should be provided with a place at the school even though it is full
- The admission authority will have an opportunity to question your reasons
- The admission authority will then sum up the case
- You will also have an opportunity to sum up your case

The panel will listen to all sides of the case and may ask questions at any time if they need clarification or more information to reach a decision.

You should be sent written notification of the panel's decision within 5 working days.

The decision of the appeal panel is final and can only be overturned by the courts where either yourself or the admission authority are successful in applying for Judicial Review of that decision.

Q 28 . Are there specific rules about Infant Class Size Appeals?

Yes. There are only a few cases where appeals made by parents may be upheld, as in law one infant teacher is to have no more than 30 pupils in the class.

These are:

- The admission arrangements did not comply with the law and the child would have been offered a place if they had been.
- There was a fault with applying the arrangements in the case of the child
- The decision not to offer a place was not a reasonable one. Unreasonable in this case means wholly irrational.

Q 29. Can I reapply for a school place if I have been turned down?

Admission authorities may consider a new application if there has been a significant change in your circumstances. You can reapply for a place again in another school year and also have a fresh right of appeal if you are not successful in obtaining a place.

You would not normally have a right to a second appeal for the same school and the same school year, but may have a fresh appeal if:

- The admission authority agrees to arrange a second appeal because there were faults in the first appeal and there is a significant possibility that the outcome might have been affected by the faults, or
- The admission authority had accepted a fresh application because there has been a significant change in circumstances but have decided that the fresh application should also be turned down.

Q 30. If I believe my case has not been heard fairly who can I contact?

The Public Service Ombudsman can only investigate written complaints about bad management by an appeal panel. They cannot comment on or change a decision that you may disagree with or feel is wrong. If you feel that your appeal was managed badly they can be contacted at:

Public Service Ombudsman for Wales
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae
Pencoed
Cardiff
CF35 5LJ