



Aquinas Admission Arrangement Consultation 2021 – 2022

Aquinas consulted from 1 December 2019 to 24 January 2020 on the changes to the admission arrangement of the following academies:

Bishop Justus CE School
St John's CE Primary School
St Mark's CE Primary School
St Nicholas CE Primary School
Trinity CE Primary School

The majority of stakeholders have not commented on the changes. The Rochester Diocesan Board of Education supports the changes and has stated:

“Church of England school admission arrangements must comply with the School Admissions Code and are determined locally, after consultation with key stakeholders, including the local Diocesan Board of Education.

In line with national views, the Rochester Diocesan Board of Education (RDBE) agrees, as an expression of its pastoral responsibility intertwined with the Church of England's wider mission to society, that admissions based on religious faith criteria should be amended in order that Church of England schools serve all children in the community irrespective of faith. This also embraces the principles of the Church of England Vision for Education which states that ‘a deeply Christian vision of education is one that is generous and that seeks to allow the riches of Christian life to overflow to those of other faiths or no faith’.

Aquinas has received 11 objections/questions in relation to the consultation; 1 in relation to Bishop Justus, 8 in relation to St Mark's and 2 in relation to St Nicholas. They are detailed below together with the response from the relevant academy.

As admission authority, the Aquinas Trust Board will consider the objections/ questions together with the academies' responses and the views of the RDBE prior to making its final determination on the admission arrangements for 2021/22 for Bishop Justus CE School, St John's CE Primary School, St Mark's CE Primary School, St Nicholas CE Primary School and Trinity CE Primary School.

St Mark's CE Primary School (St Mark's):

Question 1: Clarification as to why the faith based oversubscription admission criteria has been removed.

Question 2: Why are the Church based criteria being removed?

Question 3: Why are the changes taking place and the context. The lack of information about the context for the changes means that stakeholders are not aware of how the school plans to maintain the strength of its Christian ethos.

Objection to the removal of the ‘admissions selection criteria based on faith’ as St Mark's is a Church of England School and thus should select based on faith in an over subscription year given that the local community is served by good non faith schools. Removing the faith based criteria will increase the families moving into the area in order to get their children into the school thereby eroding its uniqueness.

Objection to the removal of the faith based oversubscription criteria as it will erode the Christian ethos of the school being the reason why some families have chosen St Mark's. Removal of this will result in existing pupils being forced to attend a secular school and being denied the opportunity to flourish within a Christian community.



Objection to the removal of the faith based criteria as faith plays an integral part of the school displayed in the culture and values of the children and families and this must not be lost through potentially filling the school with a community who may not realise the importance of Christian values in their day to day life and that of their children and family.

Objection to the removal of the faith based criteria. The objector commented that parents are entitled chose their children's school for faith based reasons because the school reflects their beliefs and commitment to the Christian faith. This will be eroded by the removal of the faith based criteria. The objector appreciated that the change was to increase number but considered that this could be achieved by promoting the school's offer rather than diluting its admission criteria which impacts on its 'feel' which draws both Christian and non-Christian families to the school.

Objection to the removal of faith based criteria. The objector commented that, while several schools are geographically closer, they had chosen a Christian school for faith based reasons and to reinforce Christian values taught at home. By removing the faith based criteria, they would have been forced to send their child to a secular school. In addition, the objector commented that children resident in the local area that have identified with St Mark's and wish to apply in the next two to three years may be unlikely to be offered a place if the faith-based criteria are removed.

Response:

The changes have been proposed in consultation with the headteacher, representatives from the St Mark's advisory council and local clergy. They consider St Mark's to have a strong Christian ethos which is embedded in the values and vision of the school. Consequently, it is not necessary to have faith based oversubscription admission criteria to maintain its Christian characteristics and identity. This view is supported by the RDBE as the Church of England strongly advocates that a Christian education should be available to all children and Church of England schools should serve their local community regardless of religious affiliation.

Faith based selection is only applied when a school is oversubscribed. In the last 2 years this criterion has not had to be applied as the school has not been oversubscribed and yet the school has maintained its strong Christian community which is underpinned by its ethos and values which are evident in work and play of the pupils.

In order for the St Mark's to flourish it must continue to attract 60 pupils to its reception classes and remain full in all other year groups. This will enable the school maintain its current high standards and provision. The school, supported by Aquinas, exploits all opportunities to promote applications to its reception classes and vacancies.

Bishop Justus:

Objection to the decrease in the number of foundation places as it may affect the ethos of the school which is the unique selling point of the school.

Response: The changes have been proposed in consultation with the headteacher, the Bishop Justus' advisory council and local clergy. Bishop Justus' Christian ethos is deeply embedded through its ethos, values and visions. This also pervades the curriculum. The collective worship and chaplaincy work undertaken at the school ensures that the Christian ideals are advocated to the whole school community. This will not be affected by a decrease in the foundation places.



St Nicholas:

Question: what is the rationale for altering the priority of the oversubscription criteria in relation to children with acute needs and what is the financial impact?

Objection to the proposal to promote the priority given to siblings from below church attendance to above as it is contrary to the interest of St Nicholas's Church as it carries the risk of diminishing church attendance sooner as parents will no longer have to continue to attend church once the oldest child gains a place at the school. Instead, the connection between the church and the school should be strengthened, and not diminished by changes such as this proposal. It is contrary to the school's own website, which says "faith in God is central to the life of the school".

Suggestion: Priority should be given to children of clergy as is proposed for children of school staff.

Response:

The changes have been proposed in consultation with the headteacher, the St Nicholas' advisory council and local clergy. Giving priority to children with medical conditions supports the school's Christian values and is in line with the view of Diocese and local authority. In order to support the school community, it is important that siblings are prioritised as in some cases family circumstances may not allow for application under the Church criteria. The change in priority will not affect the Christian ethos and values of the school. The priority given to children of staff is permitted under the terms of the Admissions Code.