

Background Information for those applying for a place in a Catholic School in the State Sector

Parish website

<http://www.rcsjw.org.uk/information/schools.html>

This web page details of Catholic schools in the parish (Nursery, Primary and Secondary/6th Form). You can also download from the web page:

- A map of the local nursery and primary schools, with contact details and their website address.
- A list of the local Catholic Secondary Schools and their contact details.

Diocesan website

<http://www.rcdow.org.uk/education/>

This website gives you access to the *Catholic Secondary Prospectus*. This is important reading for those who are applying to Secondary Schools this year or next.

General Guidance on applying to schools

Get to know the schools. Visit the school if they have an open day. Study their website. You should find on the school website the link to the most recent *Ofsted* inspection report, and also to most recent published data about school performance on the *Ofsted* School Data Dashboard. And, of course, talk with other parents.

However, be aware that parents' comments are not always objective, and that *Ofsted* inspection reports can only tell you how things were at the time of inspection.

It is important to be realistic. Be aware that all local Catholic schools are oversubscribed. This is a good indication that all the local Catholic schools offer an excellent education to their pupils. That said, fashion or other circumstances mean that most families have a clear first preference of school for their child.

Please do **NOT** apply **ONLY** to your school of first preference. If you do, and they do not offer you a place, you will be at a serious disadvantage in looking for a place elsewhere. The Local Authority application process means that all available places are filled at the time of application. It is very rare for any place in a Catholic school to remain unfilled after initial applications have been considered. So, if you apply for a place only in one school and do not get it, your only options will be to go on the waiting list at the oversubscribed schools (with no assurance that a place will become available) or to accept a place in an under-subscribed school or to seek a place in a fee-paying school.

Applying to the full quota of schools ensures that you maximise the chance of getting a place in a school of your choice, even if you are unsuccessful in gaining a place at your school of first choice.

Each year some parents ignore this advice. Some are lucky and not disadvantaged by the fact. Those who are not lucky find themselves in a most stressful situation which is entirely of their own making.

Fr Allen makes himself available to meet parents by appointment in June/July each year to discuss the application process with parents. Details of how to make appointments will be given in the parish newsletter. Alternatively parents are free to use the regular Rector's surgery (details in newsletter) to come and discuss the matter throughout the year.

Please complete a Parish Information Form (available from the back of the church) before coming to meet Fr Allen. This will help him help you, and will mean you do not have to complete the part A section of the Priest's Reference forms that the schools will give you.

Westminster Common Application Form

If you are a Westminster resident you must complete the *Westminster Common Application Form* to apply for places in reception class at any state-sector primary or for a place in secondary school. This form allows you to apply to up to six schools, which may be in the Borough of Westminster or outside of it. Any applications to private schools are not made on this form, and do not count towards your 'up to six' applications.

The form is used by the Education Authority to process applications. It is an entirely value neutral system. The Education Authority simply serves as the messenger. Offers of places are made by schools, according to their admission criteria.

The Education Authority ensures that if you are offered a place by your first choice school that offer is made to you. If you do not get offered a place by your first place school, but are offered a place by your second choice school, then that offer will be passed on to you, and so on. Therefore it is important to rank your schools strictly according to your preference.

Please note that in addition to the *Westminster Common Application Form* you will also need for each Catholic school to complete

- The school's registration form
- A religious affiliation (priest's reference) form.

Nursery Schools

Nursery Schools are not covered by the Common Application scheme. For a place in a Nursery School you apply

directly to each school. Again all Catholic Nurseries are oversubscribed, so parents are encouraged to apply to all nurseries that would be tolerable to you. If offered several places you are free to accept the one that suits you best.

Again be aware that admission criteria are strictly applied, and that a religious reference is needed for applications to all local Catholic Nurseries.

Admission Criteria

Admission criteria vary from school to school. A school's Admission Panel is obliged by law to apply the stated criteria fairly to all applicants.

If you meet the school's published criteria, they work to your advantage. They give you priority over those other applicants who do not meet them.

However if you do not meet the published criteria your application is at a disadvantage. Others, who do meet these criteria, will be offered a place ahead of you. Most often priority is given to those with siblings already in the school, and practising Catholic families. Some schools have additional criteria such as giving priority to children baptised before their first birthday or even earlier.

Presenting special circumstances

You may feel that the reason you do not meet a school's stated criteria has been out of your control. If so, it is essential that you discuss this matter with Fr Allen and provide written details when submitting your completed Parish Information Form.

You must also provide the school(s) concerned with *full* details of the circumstances which contributed to your not meeting a particular criteria, *when you submit your application*.

Governors will not give *any* consideration to such particular circumstances if they are presented *after* places have been allocated, even at Appeal. You have your chance to make your case at the time of application, and if you do not make the most of it, you will have missed your opportunity.

Please note that it is rare for Admission Panels to make exceptions to their set criteria, even on compassionate grounds. So if you are aware that you do not meet a principal criteria for your first choice school it is all the more important to apply to other schools as well, particularly those where you do meet all their criteria.

These other applications in no way disadvantage your first choice application, but they do provide an important second string or a safety net.

Religious Reference

Fr Allen is of course willing to sign the religious reference forms that need to accompany parishioners' applications to local Catholic schools. The standard form used by most schools ask him to confirm whether or not the family is practising - ie whether or not the family attends Mass each Sunday and each Holyday of Obligation.

Information as to when Fr Allen will prepare these references is published in the parish newsletter and website from June each year.

To assist Fr Allen in preparing this reference parents are asked to "sign in" after Mass on the regular 'Signing in Sundays'. Again, for more details of this scheme please see the parish website.

Appeals

Places are allocated at Nursery school at the discretion of the Governors. There is no appeals process if you are not offered a place.

If you are not offered a place at a Primary or Secondary School you can appeal against the Governors' decision. However the only grounds for appeal are if the Admissions Panel has not applied its admission criteria fairly.

New circumstances: a fresh application?

If your circumstances change significantly after submitting your application then you may wish to make a new application to the school. For example, if you did not live within the parish boundaries, but now you do then contact the relevant authorities immediately and discuss whether they will simply amend your records (and place on the waiting list) or whether they want you formally to re-apply confirming the change in circumstances.

All the information on this sheet is accurate at the time of publication. However always check that you follow the requirements of the Council and individual schools.

The processes for applying to private Catholic schools are different and those schools will advise you of their procedures.

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Parish of St Johns Wood, 54 Lodge Road, London, NW8 8LA

Tel: 020 7286 3214 E-mail: stjohnswood@rcdow.org.uk Website: www.rcsjw.org.uk

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