



22 April, 2020.

Dear Parents/Guardians/Students

The current Admissions policy of the school is under review in line with the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 which will apply to admissions for 2021/22 school year. The key sections which have become operative are section 61 Admission Statement, section 62 Admission Policy and section 63 Annual Admission Notice.

The main changes to the act are outlined below (Extract from Citizen's information).

As we review our Admissions policy in line with the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018, we invite any comments and or opinions from the teaching staff of Mercy Secondary School

A copy of our current Admissions Policy is available on our website which can be accessed at the link: [Admission Policy](#)

You can submit your opinions by Monday April 27th to principal@mercyballymahon.ie or gary.kenny@mercyballymahon.ie

Thank you in advance.

Changes under the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018

The [Education \(Admission to Schools\) Act 2018](#) aims to make the rules around admissions to schools more structured, fair and transparent. Some of the provisions of the Act have been commenced and are in operation and others are expected to come into operation from 2021.

Schools cannot charge fees or ask for contributions as a condition for admission or continued admission, with the exception of fee-charging secondary schools, boarding schools and admission to post leaving certificate or further education courses run by post-primary schools.

Since 2018, primary schools are not allowed to use religion as a basis for admission and are not allowed to prioritise students based on their religious beliefs. However, there are some exceptions to this:

A school that provides religious instruction or education in a minority religion can prioritise a student of that religion who is looking for admission to a school that provides religious instruction or education consistent with or similar to, their religious beliefs

A school that aims to promote certain religious values can refuse to admit a student who is not of that religious denomination – provided it can prove that the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school

Changes from 2021

The Act introduces several changes to the admission process for schools. These changes are expected to come into effect in 2021 and will include the following:

First come first served basis: Schools will no longer be allowed to use the time and date on which they received an application as a basis for admission. This means that applications will no longer be accepted on a first-come first-served basis.

Admissions notices: A school's board of management will have to publish an annual admissions notice before accepting any applications for a given year.

This admissions notice must give information about how to get a copy of the school's admission policy and the application form for admissions. It must include the date from which the school will accept applications and the deadline for receiving them for the year concerned. If a school is not over-subscribed the school should continue to accept all applicants, even after that deadline has passed. The annual admissions notice must include the date by which the school will inform you of their decision and the date by which you must accept an offer of admission.

Waiting lists: Schools will be given 5 years to phase out their existing waiting lists. In the future, schools will be allowed to keep lists for any vacancies that might arise in the current school year.

The Act will stop schools prioritising applicants for the following reasons:

- A student's attendance at a pre-school (although they may take into account attendance at an early-intervention class or early-start pre-school)
- A student's academic ability, skills or aptitude (although these may be taken into account in applications for post-leaving certificate courses or further education courses)
- The occupation, financial status, academic ability, skills or aptitudes of a student's parents
- Attendance by the students or their parents at an interview (although an interview may be taken into account for admission to the residential element of a boarding school)
- The date and time the application was received by the school, provided the application was received during the period set out for receiving applications in the annual admission notice of the school for the year concerned

Note that these changes are expected to be commenced in 2021. However many schools currently comply with these rules.

The Act will also introduce rules about **withdrawal of applications**. These changes are expected to commence in 2021.

A school may refuse to make an offer or may withdraw its offer of acceptance if:

- You have provided wrong or misleading information in the application
 - You fail to confirm acceptance of the offer by the date set by the school in its annual admissions notice
 - You fail to confirm in writing that you accept the school's behaviour policy and that you will make all reasonable efforts to ensure compliance with the policy, when required to do so by the school
 - You do not inform the school about any offers from other schools
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How schools select and prioritise students who apply

In general, schools must accept all students who apply to them unless they receive more applications than there are places (that is, if the school is over-subscribed).

All schools must have an admissions policy. This outlines the criteria that will be applied if the school is over-subscribed. These selection criteria will help the school to decide which students to accept and the order for placing the remaining students on the waiting list.

In their selection criteria, schools must not prioritise one student over another on any of the following grounds:

- Gender
- Civil status
- Family status
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Disability
- Race
- Membership of the Traveller community
- Special educational needs

There are some exceptions to these rules:

Gender

Where a school admits only students of one gender (such as all-girls or all-boys schools), it does not have to accept a student who is of a different gender.

Religious ethos

Many schools in Ireland promote certain religious values. These schools are not allowed to discriminate by admitting students of a particular religion in preference to others, except in the following circumstances:

A school that aims to promote certain religious values can refuse to admit a student who is not of that religious denomination – provided it can prove that the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school.

A school that provides religious instruction or education in a minority religion can prioritise a student of that religion who is looking for admission to a school that provides religious instruction or education consistent with, or similar to, their religious beliefs

Students have the right to attend a religious school without getting any religious instruction.

Applying to more than one school

Some schools may require you to notify them about applying for, or accepting, a school place in another school. You should check the schools admission policy for the requirements around this.

Under the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018, school boards of management are allowed to share information with each other about applications received, offers made and offers accepted

Changes from 2021

The Act introduces further rules around notifying schools where you have applied for, or accepted a place in more than one school. These changes are expected to come into effect in 2021 and will include the following:

You will be allowed to apply to more than one school but will not be allowed to accept more than one place.

If you accept an offer from one school and you have applied to one or more other schools, you will have to tell the school you are accepting the offer from about any offers you have or are expecting from other schools.

Changes to the selection criteria for Irish language schools

The [Education \(Admission to Schools\) Act 2018](#) will introduce rules for the selection criteria of Irish language schools. These changes are expected in 2021.

Irish language schools will be able to give priority to students who have a reasonable, age appropriate level of oral fluency in the Irish language and the school is satisfied that their fluency would be likely to regress if they were not admitted to the Irish language school. Schools will be required to take into account whether a child has a special educational need in the context of deciding a reasonable, age appropriate level of Irish.

Admission of students with a disability or with special educational needs

Schools are not allowed to prioritise students based on their having a disability or a special educational need. In theory, this means that you should be able to apply to any school and that school should be able to accommodate your child. However, in practice, some schools do not have the facilities to accept students with severe special needs.

You may prefer your child to attend a special school or a special class in a school that caters for specific types of disabilities. In considering your application for your child to be accepted into a special class or a special school, the selection criteria above apply.

The [Education \(Admission to Schools\) Act 2018](#) will introduce rules in relation to the acceptance of students with disabilities. These changes are expected to be commenced in 2021.

If the school you are applying to is a 'special school', it can refuse to admit your child if they do not have the specified category of special need concerned.

If you are applying for your child to enter a 'special class' in a school that was established to provide exclusively for students with certain categories of special needs, the school can refuse to admit your child to that class if they do not have the specified category of special need concerned.

I can't find an appropriate school for my child with special needs – what can I do?

Some schools do not have the facilities to accept students with severe special needs. If there is no school in your area with facilities for your child, the [National Council for Special Education](#) or [Tusla – the Child and Family Agency](#) can intervene to help you. They can designate a school in your area for your child and that school must make additional provisions for your child to attend.

What happens if my child doesn't get accepted into a school?

If your child does not get accepted to a school you have applied to, the school should write to you and give you the reasons for the refusal. It should also give you information about your child's place on the waiting list and explain your child's ranking against their selection criteria.

The school may recommend another suitable school for you to apply to if they cannot accept your child.

If you have difficulty finding a place for your child in a local school, the [Educational Welfare Service of Tusla – the Child and Family Agency](#) is the statutory agency that can help you. You can contact it on 01-7718500.

How do I appeal the decision of a school not to accept my child?

If you are unhappy with the decision of a board of management not to enrol your child, you can make an appeal to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills.

To do this, you must send a completed [Section 29 Appeals Application Form](#) and include a letter confirming the decision of the school's board of management. The letter must be signed by a member of the board of management and must clearly state their title (such as member of the board of management or secretary to the board). The appeal should be submitted within 42 calendar days of the date the board of management informed you of its decision. You send the form and letter to:

Yours sincerely,



Josephine Donohue
Principal