

Jewish School Admissions Criteria

Following the judgment handed down by the Court of Appeal in July 2009, and subsequently confirmed by the Supreme Court in December 2009, Jewish schools under the religious authority of the Chief Rabbi requested guidance on the religious criteria to be used in their admissions policies.

Until then, the only religious criterion in relation to schools admission, in the event of oversubscription, had been that the applicant is halakhically Jewish. Jewish schools were able to give priority to those children who were members of the Jewish faith, and through education develop their knowledge, understanding and practice of the Jewish faith. The Court of Appeal's decision meant that this criterion could no longer be used. In light of this decision schools set their admissions criteria for 2010 entry onwards, faithfully applying the law as declared by the Courts.

In considering alternative criteria, schools should be guided by the principle that there is a religious obligation to provide Jewish education to all Jewish children. Individual schools may formulate their own criteria in accordance with their specific ethos, but those criteria should be inclusive rather than exclusive. Inclusive Orthodoxy has been the ethos of the Chief Rabbinate throughout its history, and of the United Synagogue. This should not be changed.

The Chief Rabbi views Jewish schools as transformative institutions. They should aim at raising the level of their pupils' knowledge and observance of Jewish law, regardless of their level at admission.

The Chief Rabbi's view is that, consistent with the ethos of each school, any religious criteria should be designed to be as inclusive as possible. They should reflect the rabbinic principle that "The world stands on three things: Torah (Jewish study and knowledge), Avodah (the life of religious observance and prayer) and Gemillut Chassadim (acts of kindness and social responsibility). Evidence of practice should normally be considered as positive evidence of religious commitment. Otherwise, schools risk denying the opportunity for an orthodox Jewish religious education to many children who would greatly benefit from it.

Designing tests which are inclusive and also meet the School Admissions Code is difficult, and schools must continue to take their own specialist advice. This guidance was initially given to help schools with their practical and immediate needs in light of the Courts' ruling in 2009. It remains in place, subject to any relevant legal developments in the future.

The Chief Rabbi wishes to make clear that the criteria adopted by schools in line with this guidance do not confirm the Jewish status of any individual.

