

July, 2020

## **Application to Blue Coat for Admission to Year 7 in September 2021: Completing the Supplementary Form in relation to Church Attendance**

Dear Parents and Carers

As Blue Coat is a designated Church of England School, it is allowed by law to give priority in the allocation of places when the school is oversubscribed to actively committed and worshipping children of faith communities. The oversubscription criteria at Blue Coat group children in three categories.

1. Church of England.
2. Other Christian denominations in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.
3. Children of Other Faiths within the Interfaith Network.

In the context of COVID-19 the admissions authority for the school, which is the Trust Board of the Cranmer Education Trust, has decided to make changes to the Supplementary Form for **Christian pupils applying for Year 7 entry in 2021**. These changes uphold the spirit of the policy, whilst adjusting attendance thresholds in the light of reality.

### **1. Christian Children – CofE and other Christian denominations in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland**

The oversubscription criteria for admission to Year 7 at The Blue Coat School are based on categories of church attendance over time. Churches have been closed for collective worship since 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020. We therefore need to adjust the number of attendances for each category for the school year 2019 – 20.

The Cranmer Education Trust (CET), which in law is the Admissions Authority, has decided that the simplest and fairest way to do this is on a pro-rata basis.

There were 28 possible weekly attendances from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 to 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020, when lockdown began.

In our policy:

- a) The threshold for weekly attendance in a normal year is 45. For the school year 2019-20, that will be pro-rated to 24.
- b) The threshold for fortnightly attendance in a normal year is 24. For the school year 2019-20, that will be pro-rated to 12.
- c) The threshold for monthly attendance in a normal year is 12. For the school year 2019-20, that will be pro-rated to 6.

Our Supplementary Forms for admission to Year 7 in 2021 have been adjusted to reflect these adjustments. An additional page has been added to the Admissions Policy and Guidance for Parents to explain that this is the how we propose to proceed. We have sent our proposed adjustments to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

We have taken advice from Manchester Diocese and are notifying admission authorities in the area. This information is also being sent to clergy.

The Prime Minister announced on 23<sup>rd</sup> June that churches may open again for public worship from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020 but the government and the Church of England and other churches have emphasised that this is permissive, not prescriptive, and that a church or other place of worship will only be able to reopen for public worship if appropriate measures for social distancing are in place. Further guidance is awaited, but at this stage it is understood that not all churches will reopen immediately, that there may be limits to the number of people allowed to attend, and that there may be some restrictions on public transport. It is also recognised that some people in high risk groups who are shielding or who need to isolate will be unable or unwilling to attend public worship at present. In view of this, the CET does not consider it appropriate to take account of attendance at public worship from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020 for the purposes of admissions in September 2021.

## CONSULTATION

We have been unable to consult in the normal way on this adjustment to the admission arrangements for September 2021, since under the School Admissions Code consultations on changes to admission arrangements for September 2021 should have taken place for six weeks during the period between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019 and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 which was, of course, pre-COVID. The normal consultation requirements cannot therefore be fulfilled in the current circumstances, which could not have been foreseen.

We will, however, consult later this year on similar consequential changes that will be required for admissions in September 2022 and beyond. The consultation will include:

- a) The adjustments for church attendance in 2019-20 which will be part of the attendance history of children who apply in the next 3 years.
- b) Provision to make similar pro-rata adjustments to the attendance thresholds if there is another period of lockdown.

## KEEPING THE SPIRIT OF THE POLICY, WHILST ADAPTING TO THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

We hope that parents and guardians will appreciate that we are seeking to make our arrangements as fair and transparent as possible, in what are difficult circumstances for everyone. The law is clear, that it is the Trust Board that is the admissions authority and we are not changing the spirit of the policy but adapting it in the context in which we find ourselves.

Transition to secondary is an important milestone for young people and can cause some anxiety for parents in normal times. After the last few months, and indeed with more challenges likely to come, the last thing the CET wants to do is to compound the pressures on families through uncertainty about secondary school applications.



Inevitably there may be some people with exceptional circumstances. If that is the case, please remember there is an Appeals process where individual circumstances can be considered. The Admissions Committee must apply the objective criteria – the number (and frequency) of attendances, which have been adjusted to reflect the effects of the pandemic, but the Appeals Panel can, and does, weigh the prejudice to the individual.

## 2. Children of other faiths in the Interfaith Network

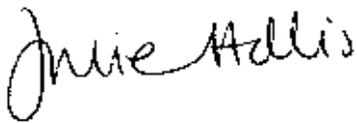
Category 14 of the oversubscription criteria which relates to children of other faiths is unchanged. For clarity, the Cranmer Education Trust, as the Admissions Authority, wishes to assure parents, and leaders of worship, that when confirming that the applicant and family are active and practising members of their faith, it is not expected that the leader of worship will take into account the period during which their place of worship was closed due to COVID-19, nor the period from 4<sup>th</sup> July – 31<sup>st</sup> August.

## 3. Admissions to Year 12

These arrangements are unaffected.

We all earnestly hope that normality will soon return, that churches and places of worship will open, and that Christians and those of other faiths can worship together again. That gives us so much hope, courage and comfort. In the meantime, we must do what we can and ensure that the admissions process for parents who specifically want an education for their children at Blue Coat can apply with clarity and confidence.

Yours sincerely



**JULIE HOLLIS**  
**CEO**  
**The Cranmer Education Trust**

