

Diocesan Priests' Reference Form: Guidance Notes for Parents

INTRODUCTION

Responsibility for the admission of pupils to Catholic maintained schools rests with the governing body of each school. The governing body determines and publishes an admissions policy each year, which is included in the school prospectus. Where there are more applications than places available, the policy must state how the places are to be allocated. **Parents should read the admissions policy carefully.** It will vary from school to school, and from year to year.

The bishops expect all Catholic schools to give first priority to Catholic applicants. Catholic schools exist to assist parents in handing on the Catholic faith to their children. So where there are insufficient places in an area for all Catholics, governing bodies may decide to give priority to children from practising Catholic families. Where schools do so, they should use, as evidence of practice, the priest's reference supplied with these notes (**Part B**). Please note, however, that **a supportive reference from a priest is no guarantee of a place in any particular school.**

This reference form is intended to give all priests a framework in which they can let schools know whether an applicant for a place at a Catholic school is from a practising Catholic family.

Where a school is over-subscribed with Catholic applicants, all of whom have provided evidence of Catholic practice, the governing body will apply other criteria such as proximity to the school, or whether there is an older sister or brother attending the school at the same time. These factors are likely to be crucial in deciding how places are to be allocated. These points will be explained in detail in the school prospectus.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Fill in the two pages marked **PART A: YOUR SELF-ASSESSMENT** following carefully the notes below (you also fill in the first part of the page marked **PART B. PRIEST'S REFERENCE**). You may need to fill in more than one **Part B** if you are making application to more than one Catholic school.
2. Give both Part A and Part B of the form to the appropriate priest (see below). Part B will be completed by the priest and returned to you for you to include with your application to the school. The priest will fill in extra copies of **Part B** if necessary. He will **keep** Part A for reference but **it will not be supplied to the school.**
3. Get your Parish Priest to countersign the form if necessary (see below), then return the form to the School. It is your responsibility to make sure each school which requires one receives a **Part B.**

Which Priest should complete the form?

The reference should be given by the appropriate priest, who is normally either:

- your own Parish Priest (i.e. the Parish Priest of the Parish in which you **live**); or
- the Parish Priest of the Parish where you worship regularly (if different).

If you worship at a church which does not have a Parish Priest, then the priest who is the equivalent of a Parish Priest is the appropriate priest (e.g. Administrator, Ethnic Chaplain etc.). **If your Parish Priest is not giving the reference, he must sign the form as well.** If the priest giving the reference is not one of the priests described above, an explanation will be required.

HOW TO FILL IN THE FORMS

PART A: YOUR SELF-ASSESSMENT requires you to consider your responsibilities. It will be used by the priest when he completes Part B. All the questions are designed to help the priest give you the most accurate reference possible in the circumstances. So it is important that you give him as much relevant information as you can. Please answer all the questions as fully as possible, filling in the forms clearly in capital letters and in black ink.

1	Name of Father and Mother. Throughout this form we have used the terms 'Mother', 'Father' and 'Parent' to include all persons who legally have parental responsibility for the child. Please enter the details of each person who has parental responsibility, and if any of them is not the child's mother or father, please state clearly for each the relationship with the child. There may be more than two people with parental responsibility. If so please give details on a separate sheet.
2	Address of Father and Mother. Please give the address of the family home. If the parents do not live together, give both parents' addresses.
3	Parish of Residence. This is the Parish in which each parent normally lives . Please give the geographical name of the parish (e.g. Brixton). If the parents do not live together, give both parishes of residence (if different).
4	Are you a Catholic? You are a Catholic if you have been baptised into the Catholic Church (or have been received into it after being baptised in another Christian church).

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5	Which church do you normally attend? Some people regularly attend a church other than their Parish Church. If you often attend more than one church, please give as much detail as you can here. Always give both the title of the church (e.g. St Joseph's) and the geographical parish (e.g. Chigwell).
6	How often do you normally worship at Mass? Please circle which statement you feel best describes your attendance as a family: weekly, fortnightly or monthly. If you do not think any of these statements accurately describes your attendance, please circle 'other' and describe your practice in your own words.
7	For how long has this been your practice? Please indicate how long you have been practising at the level described in the previous question. Please give the answer in years or months. If this is a relatively short time, you may wish to give the priest further information about your practice before then to assist his assessment.
8	If you do not go to Mass regularly , it will be helpful for the priest to know why. It is therefore helpful if you give reasons in the space provided. Please also give any other details which you think may help the priest decide whether you are a practising Catholic family or whether there are exceptional pastoral circumstances.
9/10	Please give the child's name and date of birth.
11	Child's Normal Address. State the address where the child lives. If only one address is given at question 2 , you may simply refer to question 2. If the child lives at more than one address, please give both and give full details of the arrangements.
12	Baptism. Fill in the date and place of baptism . If the child was not baptised in the Catholic Church, you must also give the date and place of reception into full communion with the Catholic Church.
13	First Holy Communion. If appropriate, fill in the date and place of the child's First Holy Communion (if received). For primary school children this question is unlikely to be relevant and can be ignored.
14	Sacrament of Reconciliation. If appropriate, fill in the months or year and the place of child's preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (sometimes called "First Confession"). For primary school children this question is unlikely to be relevant and can be ignored.
15	Please let the priest know if you or your child participate in or contribute to parish and other church activities, or have done so in the past (whether in his parish or other parishes). This will help the priest build up his picture of you and your family's practice.
16	It may help the priest to understand if there are any particular reasons why you wish your child to attend a Catholic school.

Your Declaration

Unless there is a good reason, each parent should sign and date the form. This is to affirm that the contents of the form are true, and that you understand and accept that:

- the information you have given will remain confidential to the priest and will not be shared with the school, and
- the information will not be used in any way except for purposes connected with your pastoral care within the Catholic Church.

Warning: making a false statement in order to gain entry to a school is both immoral and illegal, as it might deprive another child of a place which is rightfully his or hers. **Making a false statement is a good reason for a school to withdraw any place which has been offered and could leave you without a school place.**

PART B: PRIEST'S REFERENCE identifies your child and allows the priest to confirm whether you are a practising Catholic family. This judgment will be based on your Mass attendance. In very exceptional circumstances, Part B also allows the priest an opportunity to let the school know about particular pastoral circumstances which may affect an application. In these cases the **school** and not the priest will make a judgment whether such circumstances will have any effect on your application. The school's decision will be based on its published criteria.

17/20	Child's Name and your Names. You need to give the child's name and your names again. This is because the school will only see this part of the form.
19/20	Child's Address. As before, if the child lives at more than one address, please give both and give full details of the arrangements.