

School Admissions – Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ is intended as a guide to assist schools and should be read in conjunction with the provisions of the Education Acts 1998-2018, the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018, the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

The purpose of this FAQ is to provide guidance to patron(s), schools and parents on the arrangements required by the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act, 2018 for admissions to schools. The FAQ covers the steps that must be followed by the school's board of management and patron(s), from preparation of the revised draft policy to the point of an offer of a school place being made and accepted, in addition to sections for parents and other general information relating to school admissions.

[Templates for an Admission Policy](#) and [Annual Admission Notice](#) for schools are available

Note: This FAQ is not a legal interpretation of the legislation and the information/guidance in this document does not constitute legal advice. It is the responsibility of each school authority to read and familiarise themselves with the requirements of the legislation. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of each school authority to satisfy itself, having regard to its own legal advice, if required, that it has met any obligations that arise under the legislation.

It should also be noted that many of the issues addressed in this FAQ are linked and readers should therefore be careful not to read individual questions in isolation but should read this document in its entirety and in conjunction with the associated documents and information and the relevant legislative provisions.

Key Dates

- 1 October - The first day that schools can start accepting applications for the intake group for the following school year
- 15 September - In the event that a school decides to amend or redraft their school Admission Policy, the Admission Policy must be fully approved and returned to the board by the patron by this date in order to be effective for the following school year

Key Documents

- School's Admission Policy
- Annual Admission Notice
- Application Form for admission to school

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Section 1 – Re-Drafting the Admission Policy – Guidance for Boards of Management and Patrons

1. What steps do boards of management and patron(s) need to take when preparing and approving the school’s Admission Policy?

- (a) The board of management (‘the board’) must consult with the patron(s), parents of students attending the school and staff of the school when preparing the draft Admission Policy.**

Section 62 of the act provides the process required for Admission Policies. This section requires the board to consult with parents, staff and the patron(s) before drafting the policy. This is a process that is only required where a school decides to review its policy. Where a board decides to review its Admission Policy at a future date it must repeat the process of consultation and approval as if it was drafting the policy for the first time.

A template Admission Policy document can be found at [link](#):

- (b) The board must forward the draft Admission Policy to the patron(s) for approval.**

The patron(s), upon receipt of the draft Admission Policy, must approve the policy. However, if the patron(s) wishes to make modifications to the draft policy they should return the policy to the board so that the modifications can be completed. The board must then make any specified modifications within 2 weeks and return the policy to the patron(s) for approval.

The patron(s) must approve the draft policy or the modified draft policy, as soon as practicable but in any case no later than 15th September in order for the policy to be effective for the following school year.

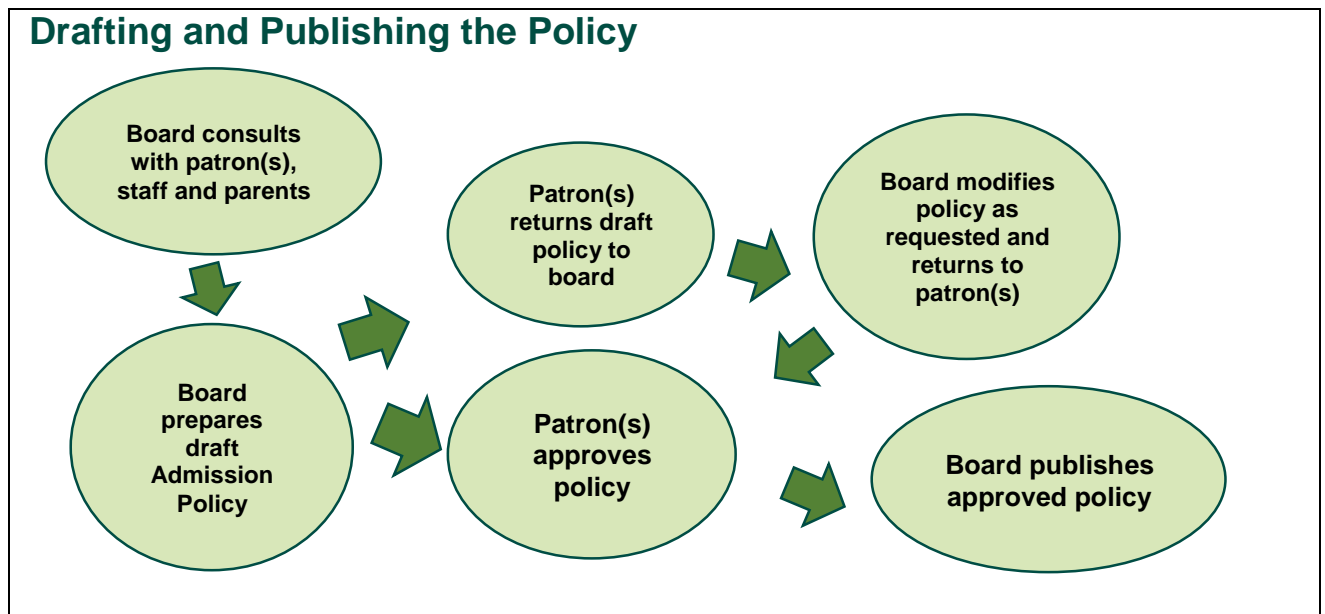
The patron(s) must then forward the approved Admission Policy to the board of management for publication.

- (c) The board must publish the approved policy.**

The board must publish the new policy on a publicly available website maintained by the school i.e. the school’s website.

The board has 2 weeks from the date of receipt of the approved policy from the patron(s) to publish the policy on the school’s website. The Admission Policy must be maintained on the school’s website until such time as it is updated and replaced by a new policy. The policy must also be available on request from the school.

The process of preparing and seeking approval for the draft Admission Policy is set out below:



Section 2 – Admission Process

2. How do schools run their Admission Process?

(a) The board must prepare and publish the school's Annual Admission Notice.

Boards must prepare and publish an Annual Admission Notice which must contain certain information around the admissions process, as set out in the response to question 8.

The notice must be published at least 1 week before a school can accept applications for admission.

Schools cannot accept applications for admission before 1 October in the year preceding the school year for which application to the intake group is being made.

The notice must be published on the school's website and must remain there for the duration of the school year.

The notice must also be made available on written request.

Further information on the Admission Notice can be found at question 9 below and a template document can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/197595/?page=1>

(b) The school accept applications for admission.

Schools must accept applications in accordance with the dates set out in their Annual Admission Notice. They must also accept any late applications.

(c) The school makes decisions on applications for admission.

Decisions by schools in respect of applications for admission to the intake group must be notified to the applicant within 3 weeks of the closing date for receipt of applications as set out in the notice.

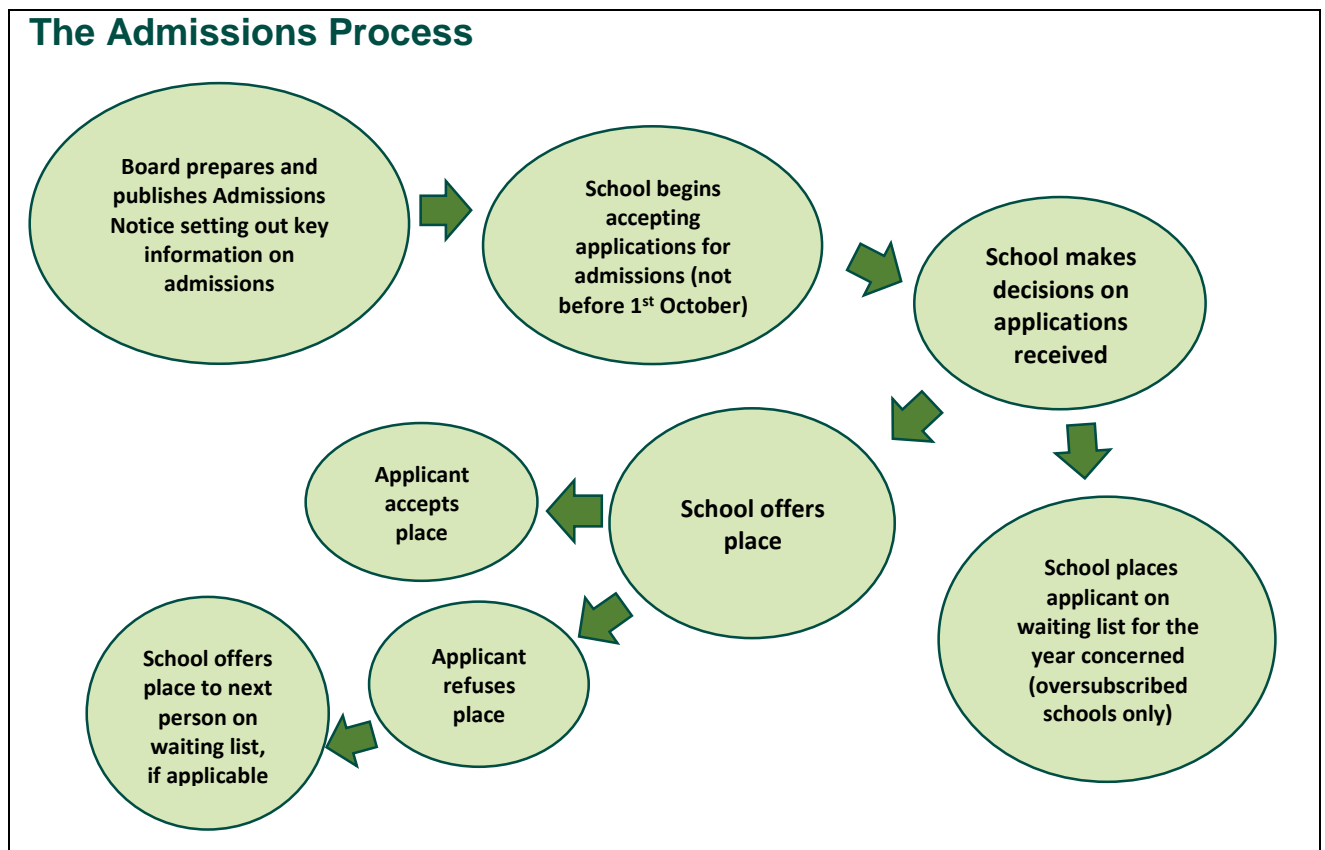
Decisions in relation to applications to the intake group received after the closing date set out in the notice should be notified to the applicant within 3 weeks of receiving the application.

Further information around the decision making process is available at section 5 below.

An offer of a school place must be accepted within the timeframe set out in the Annual Admission Notice. Schools must provide applicants with details of the period during which they must accept the offer.

Schools that are oversubscribed must compile a waiting list of students whose application to the school was unsuccessful. This waiting list must remain valid for the duration of the school year concerned only and must be used to fill any vacancies that arise during that year.

All schools must accept and decide on late applications to the intake group. Places must be offered where there are still places available. Schools that are oversubscribed must place unsuccessful applicants on the waiting list for the school.



3. What are the key dates for the school Admission Process?

Schools cannot accept applications before 1 October in the year preceding the school year for which application to the intake group is being made. Schools have discretion as to when they start their admission process provided it is on or after 1 October in the year preceding the year in which admission is sought. However, in the case of the residential part of boarding schools the admission process can commence in the October two years preceding the year in which admission is sought.

The publication of the school's Annual Admission Notice will provide parents with all of the key information on the school's admission process. The notice must be published on the school's website at least 1 week before a school can begin accepting applications for admission for the year concerned and the notice must remain there for the duration of the school year.

Section 3 – School Admission Policies

4. Is there any guidance on what a school's Admission Policy must include?

As an aid to boards in preparing their Admission Policy, the Department has published a template Admission Policy which is available [here](#).

The act requires that a school's Admission Policy must contain certain mandatory elements. All schools should have all these elements in their existing policy. The template will assist schools in ensuring that their new policy meets all of the requirements of the legislation.

5. Is it a requirement that every school's Admission Policy contain an Admission Statement?

Yes, the act requires an Admission Statement to be included in every school's Admission Policy. Every school must provide in its Admission Statement that it will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on any of the specified grounds as follows: the gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, disability, race, member of traveller community or special educational needs. The Department's [template Admission Policy](#) sets out what this statement must entail.

In addition the categories of schools set out at (a) to (f) below must include additional information in their statement.

Note: Some schools may need to include statements under more than one of these headings as set out below:

- (a) A school that admits students of one gender only** must include a statement that the school does not discriminate in relation to the admission of students where it refuses to admit as a student a person who is not of that gender
- (b) A denominational post-primary school** must include a statement that the school does not discriminate in relation to the admission of students where it admits persons of a particular religious denomination in preference to others

- (c) **All denominational schools (primary and post-primary)** must include a statement that the school does not discriminate in relation to the admission of students where it refuses to admit as a student a person who is not of a particular religious denomination and it is proved that the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school
- (d) **A minority religion primary school** must include a statement that the school does not discriminate in relation to the admission of a student who is a member of a minority religion in accordance with section 7A (inserted by section 11(b) of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018) of the Act of the Equal Status Act 2000
- (e) **Special schools** - a school providing education exclusively for students with a category or categories of special educational needs must include a statement that the school may refuse to admit a student who does not have the specified category of special educational needs concerned
- (f) **Schools with a special class** - a school that has established a special class providing education exclusively for students with a category or categories of special educational needs must include a statement that the school may refuse to admit to the class concerned a student who does not have the specified category of special educational needs concerned

Note: The act does not require special schools and special classes providing for a category or categories of special educational need (SEN) to change their current status. The current arrangements in relation to the category or categories of SEN provided by schools will continue as in previous years unless otherwise directed by the NCSE or the Department. The school must also specify in its Admission Policy the category or categories of SEN catered for in the special school/class concerned.

6. What selection criteria are schools allowed to include in their Admission Policy?

Schools will continue to have discretion in relation to their admission criteria and how they are applied. However, there are certain criteria that are specifically prohibited by the act (See 8 below).

Otherwise, the criteria to be applied by schools and the order of priority are a matter for the schools themselves. However there are two key points to note:

- Firstly, the selection process and the Admission Policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants
- Secondly, selection criteria not included in the school's Admission Policy cannot be used to determine whether a student can gain admission to a school

7. Can schools use religion as a selection criterion?

Section 11 of the act amended the Equal Status Act 2000 to remove, in the case of recognised primary schools, the provision that permitted such schools to use religion as a selection criterion in school admissions.

However, there is a provision to ensure that a child of a minority faith, can access a school of their faith. The amended act provides that a recognised primary school does not discriminate where it admits as a priority a student from a minority religion who is seeking admission to a

school that provides religious instruction or religious education which is of the same religious ethos as the minority religion of the student concerned or is a similar religious ethos to the minority religion of the student concerned.

Section 61(2) (b) of the act provides that a denominational post primary school can prioritise applicants based on their religious denomination in their selection process should they wish to do so.

Admission Policies must include details of school's arrangements for students who do not want to attend religious instruction.

8. What selection criteria are schools prohibited from including in their Admission Policy?

When deciding on an application to the school or placing a student on a waiting list a school **cannot** take into account the matters listed below whether as selection criteria or otherwise as part of its admission process or in its decision making on applications. There are a limited number of exceptions which have been highlighted in blue:

- (i) a student's prior attendance at a pre-school or pre-school service
(other than in relation to a student's prior attendance at—
 - (a) an [early intervention class](#), or
 - (b) an [Early Start Preschool](#),
specified in a list published by the Minister from time to time.)

- (ii) the payment of fees or contributions (howsoever described) to the school
(other than in relation to:
 - (a) fees charged by fee charging post-primary schools, which schools are specified in a list of fee charging post-primary schools published by the Minister;
 - (b) fees charged by boarding schools, specified in a list of boarding schools published by the Minister from time to time, insofar as those fees relate solely to the cost of providing residential boarding places;
 - (c) fees charged by schools that provide post leaving certificate courses (PLCs), insofar as those fees relate to the cost of providing those courses;
 - (d) fees charged by schools that provide further education and training courses, in respect of those courses.)

- (iii) a student's academic ability, skills or aptitude
(other than:
 - in relation to admission to (a) a special school or (b) a special class but only insofar as it is necessary in order to ascertain whether or not the student has the category of special educational needs concerned and/or
 - where an Irish language school gives priority, in accordance with the provisions of section 62(9) of the act, to a student who has attained a level of fluency in the Irish language.)

- (iv) the occupation, financial status, academic ability, skills or aptitude of a student's parents

- (v) a requirement that a student, or his or her parents, attend an interview, open day or other meeting as a condition of admission
(other than in the case of admission to the residential element of a boarding school or to a PLC or further education and training course run by a school.)

- (vi) a student's connection to the school by virtue of a member of his or her family attending or having previously attended the school
(other than, in the case of the school wishing to include a selection criteria based on (1) siblings of a student attending or having attended the school and/or (2) parents or grandparents of a student having attended the school.

In relation to (2) parents and grandparents, a school may use this criterion to fill a maximum of 25% of the available places as set out in the school's Annual Admission Notice.)

- (vii) the date and time on which an application for admission was received by the school

This is subject to the application being received at any time during the period specified for receiving applications set out in the Annual Admission Notice of the school for the school year concerned. This means that a school cannot apply a selection criterion based on the date of application but it does not prevent the school from requiring applications to be submitted within the timeframe set out in their Annual Admission Notice.

Note: A school may apply a selection criterion based on a pre-existing waiting list (a waiting list that was in existence prior to 1 February 2020), provided that that school had, prior to 1 February 2020, confirmed in writing to a person who had made an application or an expression of interest in applying for a place in the school and the student concerned had been placed on a waiting list for the allocation of places in the school year concerned. This exception will cease to exist on 31 January 2025.

Section 4 – Annual Admission Notice

9. What is the Annual Admission Notice?

Section 63 of the act requires all boards to prepare and publish an Admission Notice each year. This notice must be published on the school's website at least one week prior to the school commencing its annual admission process.

The notice must provide details about how to obtain a copy of the school's Admission Policy and application form for admission. The notice must also provide the following information regarding the admission process for the intake group of the school for the school year concerned:

- The date on which the school shall commence and cease accepting applications for admission to the school for the school year concerned (there must be a minimum period of 3 weeks)
- The date by which the applicant shall be notified of the decision in relation to their application, (this must be within 3 weeks of the closing date, or within 3 weeks of the application date for late applications)
- The date/period by which the applicant shall confirm acceptance of the offer of admission
- That the offer may be withdrawn if the applicant does not accept the offer of admission within the timeframe set out
- In relation to the school year concerned:

- The number of school places available in the intake group,
- In the case of a boarding school, the number of residential and the number of non-residential places available
- In the case of a school with a special class the number of school places available in the special class concerned
- In the case of a school where the intake group or special class was oversubscribed in the year prior to the year for which admission is sought, the Admission Notice must include a statement setting out the number of applications received and the number and order of offers made in that school year in respect of each of the school's selection criteria
- In the case of a school, where offers have been made and accepted for the school year concerned, prior to the commencement of section 62, (i.e. prior to 1 February 2020), that the school should include the number of such school places offered and accepted
- In the case where a school has a waiting list that was drafted prior to section 62, and they intend to make offers from this list, they should include the number of students on this list for the school year concerned. This provision will cease to exist in 2025

A [template Annual Admission Notice](#) has been provided and may be used when drafting this document.

Section 5 – Further Information in relation to the Admissions Process for Schools

10. How can schools manage their admission process where applicants have applied to more than one school?

In order to facilitate an efficient admission process for schools and applicants, the act allows schools to share the following information:

- The date an application was received
- The date an offer was made
- The date an offer was accepted
- A student's identifying personal details (to ensure that it is the same person applying to both schools)

It is a matter for the schools concerned to agree and put in place arrangements for any sharing of information under the act.

The Department's primary online database (POD) has a pending enrolment list function which, if used by primary schools in a timely manner, will provide a conflict notification if the student is listed as pending for another primary school. More information on the 'pending enrolment' function is available on the Department's website at the following link: <https://assets.gov.ie/72895/0c51695e182849f4a79eb7ff6deb7308.pdf>

This facility is not available for post primary schools on the Post-Primary online database (PPOD).

11. What happens to waiting lists in existence prior to the commencement of the relevant provision on 1 February 2020?

Where applications or expressions of interest were received by the school before 1 February 2020 and where a school had also before 1 February 2020, confirmed in writing that the applicant had been placed on a list for the purposes of allocating school places in the year concerned, places on such waiting lists may remain valid and a school may apply a selection criterion based on such a waiting list. However, such waiting lists will cease to exist, as set out in the act, five years from the commencement of section 62 i.e. on 31 January 2025.

12. What happens to school places that were offered and accepted before 1 February 2020?

Places in schools which were offered and accepted by applicants before the commencement of section 62 remain valid.

13. How will new waiting lists operate?

Where a school is oversubscribed in any particular year, it will be required to compile a waiting list of students whose applications for admission to the intake group were unsuccessful due to the school being oversubscribed. The school must use this list to fill any vacancies arising during the school year in question only.

14. Can Irish Medium Schools give priority to Irish speaking students?

The act makes provision for Irish medium schools (where it is their policy to do so) to give priority in admission to students where the school is satisfied that the student has attained a level of fluency in the Irish language, and where such fluency would be likely to regress if the student were not admitted to an Irish medium school.

Key points to remember:

- An applicant may, when making an application for admission to an Irish language school include a statement confirming that -
 - The student has attained a level of fluency in Irish and
 - That the student's fluency in Irish would be likely to regress if the student were not admitted to an Irish medium school
- An applicant may provide whatever evidence they consider appropriate in relation to the student's fluency in Irish and may make the student available for interview or a meeting to demonstrate their level of fluency in Irish if they so wish
- The Irish medium school cannot compel a student or his or her parents to attend for interview or a meeting for this purpose
- The Irish medium school can only take into account the evidence provided by the applicant regarding the fluency of the student
- The Irish medium school may not rank applicants on the basis of their relative fluency against other students who have also demonstrated their level of fluency in Irish. The school's selection criteria, as set out in their policy, must be applied where the number of such students is greater than the number of places available
- Schools will also be required to take into account the special needs of the child in the context of the child's oral language fluency

15. Can a post-primary Irish medium school give priority to students who attended a primary Irish medium school?

An Irish medium post-primary school may, should it wish to do so, provide for the inclusion of students that have attended an Irish medium primary school.

Section 6 – General Information for Parents

16. Where will I find information on a school's Admission Policy and other details like the application form, closing dates etc.?

A copy of the school's Admission Policy must be made available on the school's website.

The Annual Admission Notice will contain information on a number of practical details regarding the admission process of a school that change from year to year. For example:

- How to obtain the school's Admission Policy and application form for enrolment
- Dates when the school will begin and cease accepting applications for admission to the school for the school year concerned
- Dates by when offers will be notified to applicants and dates by when acceptance should be confirmed to the school
- In oversubscribed schools, information in relation to the number of applications received and the number and order of offers made in the previous year

The school's Annual Admission Notice must be published annually on the school's website. More information on the Annual Admission Notice is available at 0 above.

17. Who must be consulted when a school decides to revise its Admission Policy?

Schools are required to consult with patron(s), parents of students attending the school, and staff of the school in drafting and revising their school Admission Policy.

18. What if my child has already been offered and has accepted a place in a school or has been given a number on a waiting list for a school place?

The current requirements apply to admission for September 2021 onwards.

In relation to school admissions for September 2021 and subsequent years the following applies:

- If you have, before the 1 February 2020, been offered and accepted a school place for September 2020 the act will not change or impact this offer
- If you have been informed in writing before 1 February 2020 that your child is on a waiting list for a school or a special class in a school, the act allows schools to continue to use existing waiting lists to allocate school places for a period of 5 years from the

date of commencement of the relevant section of the act i.e. school may continue to offer places from such waiting lists until 31 January 2025

19. Can a school charge a fee for admission?

Section 64 of the act **prohibits the charging of fees or seeking payment or contributions** for an application for admission to or for continued enrolment in a school. Exceptions are included in relation to fee charging post-primary schools, the boarding element in boarding schools and admission to post leaving cert or further education courses run by post-primary schools.

20. How much time do I have to notify a school when accepting an offer?

The period upon which you will have to accept any offer will be set out in the school's Annual Admissions Notice for the year concerned.

Upon accepting an offer you must outline to the school if you have accepted a school place(s) in another school(s)/are awaiting an offer from another school(s). Failure to do so may result in a school withdrawing an offer of a school place.

21. Can an offer of a school place be withdrawn?

An offer of a place in a school can be withdrawn by the school for the following reasons:

- Failure to accept a place within the period set out in the school's Annual Admission Notice
- If you provide false or misleading information in the application form for admission
- If you, as the parent/guardian of a student do not confirm in writing that the code of behaviour of the school is acceptable to you and that you will make all reasonable efforts to ensure compliance of the code by the student, having been requested by the school to do so
- If when accepting an offer you did not inform the school that you have accepted an offer or offers in other schools and provide details of same. This also applies if you did not inform the school that you have applied to another school(s) and are awaiting confirmation of a place

22. What information can schools share in relation to an application for admission?

Schools can share certain data in order to facilitate the efficient admission of students. Should they wish to do so, a board may provide a patron or another board of management with a list of the students in relation to whom -

- (i) an application for admission to the school has been received
- (ii) an offer of admission to the school has been made or
- (iii) an offer of admission to the school has been accepted

The list may include any or all of the following:

- (i) the date on which an application for admission was received by the school
- (ii) the date on which an offer of admission was made by the school
- (iii) the date on which an offer of admission was accepted by an applicant

(iv) a student's personal details including his or her name, address, date of birth and personal public service number (within the meaning of section 262 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005)

23. Does the Education (Admission to Schools) Act place any further publication requirements on schools?

Boards are required to publish their code of behaviour. Section 10 of the act amended the Education Welfare Act 2000 to provide for this requirement.