

When is a school full?

Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 has been signed into law but, as yet, is not enacted. It is expected to be operational for the school year 2019-20. One mandatory element will be for schools to 'Prepare and Publish an Admission Policy to include an Admission Statement'.

The other 'Mandatory Elements of an Admissions policy' are listed below:

- **All applicants shall be admitted unless:**
 - School is oversubscribed
 - Parents fail to give written undertaking to accept Code of Behaviour.
- Schools must outline the characteristic spirit of the school.
- Give details of arrangements for students not wishing to attend religious instruction.
- Selection criteria details where there are excess applications over applications.
- Procedures for appealing refusal to admit student.
- **Siblings rule** continues to apply but cap of 25% on places allocated to children of past pupils.
- Schools provide waiting list in priority order, **valid for 1 school year**. Inform unsuccessful student with reason for refusal, number on waiting list and appeal procedures information. (Existing lists to be phased out in 5 years).
- **Annual admission notice** must be published---application form, date for acceptance, closing dates, acceptance date

If you are operating a waiting list or if you refuse an enrolment based on the fact that your school is full – what does this mean in reality? The first question is to clarify if your Board of Management (BoM) has specified in your Admissions Policy, a clear and unambiguous statement outlining when your school is full. When the new 'Admission to School Act 2018' is enacted, almost certainly in time for the next school year, then schools will be governed by that. Section 63(c)(i) and (iii) of the new Admission to School Act 2018 (not yet commenced) state that the 'Annual Admission Notice' which the BoM will prepare each year, will set out 'The number of places being made available in the intake group' or in the case of a school with a special class 'the number of places being made available in the special class concerned'.

Based on this, a BoM may endeavour to keep each class as close as possible to the current DES recommended class average of 26:1 and will take all matters into consideration on a yearly basis e.g. accommodation needs, level of SEN needs in each class. The dilemma for schools will be to have a definitive policy, but yet not tie their hands to such an extent that there would be no flexibility in taking an extra child, to protect the number of classes or possibly to gain one the following year. For many schools the new Admissions Act will make very little difference. The vast majority of primary schools take everyone and are usually glad to have them.

IPPN will seek advice on the practicalities of an admission policy/statement and produce templates and a resource bundle.