‘Catholic certificate’ breaches admissions rules, says Schools Adjudicator

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The Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) has upheld several complaints against a "Certificate of Catholic Practice" (CCP) required for school admissions.

Schools Week reported that two councils and at least one parent lodged objections with the OSA over the new "Certificate of Catholic Practice" used to evaluate a pupil's religious faith for the purpose of school admissions.

The Catholic Education Service backed the certificates which were considered "The only measure of an applicant's practice", rather than other measures such as mass attendance.

But the Office of the School Adjudicator upheld a series of complaints, criticising the certificates and the lack of clarity about what was needed to obtain one.

Schools Adjudicator Dr Bryan Slater ruled: "It is the duty of the admission authority to construct its admission arrangements and in doing so to comply with the law and the Code. It has failed to do so."

"The School Admissions Code requires the admission authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of the date of the determination."

The adjudicator concluded that St Paul's Catholic College in Surrey was "relieved of the duty to have regard" to diocesan guidance on admissions because the diocese had failed "to be compliant with statutory provisions within the [Admissions] Code."

Dr Slater said that the admissions policies and the requirement for a Certificate of Catholic Practice (CCP) did not meet the requirement to be "reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation".

"Instead of there being clear criteria for being given priority on the grounds of religious practice, the school's admission arrangements give priority to those in possession of a CCP, the issue of which is in the gift of an applicant's parish priest."

The Adjudicator ruled that the requirements for securing a Certificate of Catholic Practice were opaque to parents: "Even those parents who know, because they are 'practising Catholics' 'that Canon Law requires that they attend Mass on a weekly basis from at least 7 years of age' (to use the diocese's words) and who attend Mass in accordance with those requirements cannot be certain that they will be 'granted' (the term used in a letter to me from the diocese) a CCP."

NSS campaigns officer Alastair Lichten said: "Faith schools often devise opaque and complex admissions policies. But schools funded by the taxpayer should be open and accessible to all."

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