



## Determination

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| <b>Case reference:</b>      | <b>VAR2285</b>  |
| <b>Admission authority:</b> | <b>Hampshire County Council for Grange Junior School, Gosport</b> |
| <b>Date of decision:</b>    | <b>25 November 2022</b>   |

### Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Grange Junior School for the 2022/2023 academic year.

I determine that the school's Published Admission Number for admissions in the 2022/2023 academic year shall be 60.

### The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the local authority) has referred a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for the 2022/2023 academic year (the arrangements) for Grange Junior School (the school) to the adjudicator. The school is a community school for children aged 7 to 11 in Gosport.
2. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) be reduced from 75 to 60.

### Jurisdiction and procedure

3. The referral was made to me in accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) which deals with variations to determined arrangements. Paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the School Admissions Code (the Code) say (in so far as relevant here):

"3.6 Once admission arrangements have been determined for a particular school year, they cannot be revised by the admission authority unless such revision is necessary to give effect to a mandatory requirement of this Code, admissions law, a

determination of the Adjudicator or any misprint in the admission arrangements. Admission authorities may propose other variations where they consider such changes to be necessary in view of a major change in circumstances. Such proposals **must** be referred to the Schools Adjudicator for approval, and the appropriate bodies notified. Where the local authority is the admission authority for a community or voluntary controlled school, it must consult the governing body of the school before making any reference.

3.7 Admission authorities **must** notify the appropriate bodies of all variations”.

4. The local authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified. I have seen confirmation that the school’s governing board has been consulted on the proposed variation. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am also satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation, and the Code.
5. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
  - a. the referral from the local authority dated 7 November 2022, supporting documents and further information provided at my request;
  - b. the determined arrangements for the 2022/2023 academic year and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
  - c. minutes of the meeting of the school’s governing board at which the proposed variation was considered;
  - d. responses from the local authority to my queries about the proposed variation, collated with the assistance of the school;
  - e. a map showing the location of the school and other relevant schools; and
  - f. information available on the websites of the local authority and the Department for Education.

## The proposed variation

6. The local authority has requested that the PAN be reduced from 75 to 60 for admission in the 2022/2023 academic year. Significantly fewer children than the PAN were admitted to the school in September 2022 which, according to the local authority, “has created a financial difficulty for the school.” A reduction in the PAN will, it says, “provide some certainty for...the school’s planning for 2023.”
7. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code (as above) requires that admission arrangements, once determined, may only be revised, that is changed or varied, if there is a major change of

circumstance or in certain other limited and specified circumstances. I will consider below whether the variation requested is justified by the change in circumstances.

## Consideration of proposed variation

8. Following consultation, the school’s PAN was reduced for admission in September 2021 from 90 to 75. Table One shows the number of children in each year group and the arrangement of classes, of which there are three in each year group, making 12 in total.

**Table One: Number of children in each year group and arrangement of classes (November 2022)**

|              | Key Stage 2 |           |           |           |            |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Class        | Y3          | Y4        | Y5        | Y6        | Total      |
| 1            | 20          |           |           |           | 20         |
| 2            | 20          |           |           |           | 20         |
| 3            | 21          |           |           |           | 21         |
| 4            |             | 25        |           |           | 25         |
| 5            |             | 24        |           |           | 24         |
| 6            |             | 26        |           |           | 26         |
| 7            |             |           | 28        |           | 28         |
| 8            |             |           | 27        |           | 27         |
| 9            |             |           | 28        |           | 28         |
| 10           |             |           |           | 24        | 24         |
| 11           |             |           |           | 25        | 25         |
| 12           |             |           |           | 24        | 24         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>61</b>   | <b>75</b> | <b>83</b> | <b>73</b> | <b>292</b> |
| <b>PAN</b>   | <b>75</b>   | <b>75</b> | <b>90</b> | <b>90</b> |            |

NB: “PAN” in Table One above refers to the PAN when the year group in question was the relevant year group for entry, that is, Year 3.

9. As Table One shows, there are only 61 children in Year 3 (Y3), which is the cohort admitted to the school in September 2022. These children are taught in three classes of 20 or 21 children. These classes are considerably smaller than those in the other year groups. The PAN for admission in September 2023 was determined as 75 on 28 February 2022; the local authority is not requesting any variation to this figure. At the school’s request, the local authority is currently consulting on a reduction in the PAN for admission in September 2024 from 75 to 60.

10. The smaller size of the Y3 cohort, which the local authority states represents a major change in the circumstances in the school, has, it says,

“created a financial difficulty for the school, as they are required to run three small classes in case further admissions are made, and this will continue to create difficulties into September 2023 if they are forced to run three classes for this cohort due to further admissions.”

As schools’ funding is principally determined by the number of children on roll, I recognise the financial benefit to the school of moving to a two-class structure for this cohort with 30 children (or very nearly so) in each class. The minutes of the meeting of the school’s governing board, at which this matter was considered, confirm that a reduction in classes from 12 to 11 from September 2023 would,

“significantly help towards protecting our decreasing budget, delaying us moving into a deficit budget, as is currently forecast for 2023/24 at approx. £31,000.”

11. The local authority explains that the school’s longer-term plan is to reduce to an eight-class structure (two classes in each year group) over time, following the anticipated reduction in PAN to 60 for admission in September 2024. This, it says, “will protect the school from financial difficulties and will enable them to plan their staffing with certainty for the coming academic years.” However, three classes are expected to be necessary for the Y3 intake in September 2023, as it is forecast that 68 children will require places at the school. For the avoidance of doubt, my decision relating to the request to reduce the PAN for the remainder of the 2022/23 academic year to 60 will not affect the determined PAN of 75 for admission in September 2023.

12. In summary, the purpose of the request for a reduction in the school’s PAN for the current academic year is, therefore, to ensure that a two-class arrangement in Year 4 (Y4) for September 2023 can be planned for with certainty. A reduced PAN for 2022/23 will not of itself accelerate progress towards an eight-class structure, as the following cohort is expected to require three classes, but it will help to relieve the school’s financial concerns. The local authority says that if the request is approved,

“The school will then aim to work down to the PAN by not offering out spaces to children when places become available until their numbers on roll are lower than 60.”

13. I consider that the school and the local authority’s strategy is sound, but it would, in fact, be possible to achieve the outcome they are seeking without a reduction of the PAN to 60 for the current academic year. Even in the unlikely event of the current Y3 cohort increasing to 75 pupils, it would not be necessary to have more than five classes (of 30 children or fewer) across Y3 and Y4 in September 2023 as the total for the two year groups would not exceed 150. It would be likely that at least one of the classes would have to include pupils from both Y3 and Y4. When I put this scenario to the local authority, it commented as follows:

“The school’s curriculum and school improvement journey is such that they do not want to have mixed age classes. Due to the complexities around missed learning due to Covid 19, there is already a huge difference within classes in the level of

ability of children. Mixed age classes would make it very difficult to effectively meet the needs of learners, therefore having a detrimental effect on outcomes for children.

I am satisfied with this response.

14. My remaining consideration relates to children in Y3 who might move into the catchment area during the course of the current academic year and find themselves unable to obtain a place at the school. I would be concerned if the effect of a reduction in the PAN would be to require such children to make an extremely long journey to an alternative school.

15. The school is located in the local authority's Gosport Central planning area. This is a largely urban area and includes five pairs of infant and junior schools and one primary school. There is a total of 345 places available in Y3 at the schools in the planning area; the combined roll is currently 276. None of the five junior schools admitted to its PAN for admission in September 2022, meaning that places are available at all of them. Two junior schools (Alver Valley and Rowner) are less than 0.6 miles from Grange Junior School. This reassures me that any children moving into the area will be able to access places in Y3 relatively close to their homes.

16. The local authority has responded to the changed circumstances in which the school finds itself by supporting its desire to plan with confidence for a two-class arrangement in Y4 from September 2023. This arrangement will benefit the school financially and will also, it believes, support school improvement. The proposed reduction in PAN will, to a modest extent, help to ensure that it can be put in place. Alternative school places are available within an acceptable distance. I consider that, in these circumstances, the reduction in PAN is justified. Therefore, I approve the proposed variation.

## Determination

17. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Grange Junior School for the 2022/2023 academic year.

18. I determine that the school's Published Admission Number for admissions in the 2022/2023 academic year shall be 60.

Dated: 25 November 2022

Signed:

Schools adjudicator: Peter Goringe