

DETERMINATION

Case reference: VAR/000500
Admission Authority: Warwickshire County Council
Date of decision: 18 March 2011

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variation to the admission arrangements determined by Warwickshire County Council.

I determine that for admissions in September 2011 the admission number shall be 60.

The referral

Warwickshire County Council (the Council) has referred a variation to the Adjudicator about the admission arrangements for Cawston Grange Primary School.(The School). The Council is seeking a one year only increase to the published admission number from 30 to 60 for the September 2011 reception intake. Cawston Grange Primary School serves the area of Cawston. The School will be unable to meet the demand for places from within its priority area in the 2011 intake year without an increase in its admission number.

Jurisdiction

The referral was made to me in accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) which states that:

“where an admission authority (a) have in accordance with section 88C determined the admission arrangements which are to apply for a particular school year, but (b) at any time before the end of that year consider that the arrangements should be varied in view of a major change in circumstances occurring since they were so determined, the authority must [except in a case where the authority’s proposed variations fall within any description of variations prescribed for the purposes of this section] (a) refer their proposed variations to the adjudicator, and (b) notify the appropriate bodies of the proposed variations”.

I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.

Procedure

In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation, guidance and the School Admissions Code.

The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:

the Council's letter of referral of February 17th and supporting documents;

the determined arrangements for Cawston Grange Primary School and the proposed variation to those arrangements;

a copy of the council's booklet for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September 2011 ;

minutes of meetings at which appropriate bodies were notified of the proposed variation and consulted about it and emails relating to the meetings;

a letter from a local infant school in response to the consultation;

a copy of the paper discussed at the Admissions Forum;

the 2009 Ofsted inspection report for Cawston Grange Primary School;

maps showing the location of schools in the area and their priority areas; and

a ground plan of The School.

Background and consideration of factors

A process of discussion and consultation about admissions arrangements in the West Rugby area overall has been underway since July 2010. The geography of the current priority areas and the consequent interchange of pupils between West Rugby and adjoining areas has meant that, even though there may appear to be sufficient places for pupils living in the area, not all the pupils living across West Rugby have had a higher claim to a place in a West Rugby school than those living outside the West Rugby Area. As a result, 50 children came into the West Rugby area schools in 2010 whilst 24 went out. There is now a fully formed proposal to create a merged common priority area for the 6 local primary and infant schools from September 2012. The purpose of this proposal is to ensure that pupils from the West Rugby area are able to secure places in West Rugby schools if they so wish, which is currently not always the case.

In the meanwhile pupil forecasts show that in 2011 there will be insufficient reception places in Cawston Grange Primary School to meet the demand from within its existing priority area. The local authority regards this as a major change of circumstances. The projected shortfall is for 2011 and not for subsequent years when forecasts show a decrease in demand. The variation is therefore proposed for one year only. Cawston Grange Primary School currently has a large Yr 6 cohort of 45 pupils. Their departure in July 2011 will free up a spare classroom. The school would therefore be able to accommodate additional pupils and is willing to do so.

Among the factors I have considered are the following:

This variation is sought in response to an increase in the numbers of children from the Cawston area requiring school places. Births have been rising in the

area and forecasts show that new housing is now expected to yield additional demand for places in 2011, after which demand will fall back. In September 2010, five pupils living in Cawston failed to obtain places in local schools. The proposed variation would address the short term problem for admissions in 2011. The projected merged priority area would then provide a medium term solution.

The proposal is for an additional 30 places, whilst the projected shortfall is for 6-7 places. One school responded formally to the consultation voicing the worry that this might leave them with unfilled places. Figures for 2010 admissions show that, of the reception cohorts for the 4 local infant schools, 2 were full, one was 3 over its admission number and one fell one short of its admission number. In addition, the information given to me shows 24 pupils going out of the area and 50 coming in, against a backdrop of rising reception numbers in Rugby as a whole.

Thus the possibility of unfilled places cannot be discounted, but the figures could also suggest that any available places might be taken up by children who currently have to go outside the area or by additional incomers.

The proposal was discussed by the Admissions Forum on January 27th. The Forum supports the increase.

Cawston Grange School is popular and it has been consistently heavily over-subscribed for the last few years. Ofsted has judged the school to be outstanding. There are currently 230 pupils on roll. Last year there were 114 applications for 30 places. Eight appeals were held.

Were the variation to be agreed, the second reception class would be housed in the existing year 1 classroom which is adjacent to the existing reception class and suitable for reception aged pupils. Both reception classes would have timetabled access to the outside reception area and to appropriate toilets.

The deadline for application for school places was January 17th. Consultation about the proposal was still underway at that point. In the view of the local authority, the prospect of a number of children being left without local school places constituted a major change of circumstances since the admission arrangements were determined, making the request for a variation unavoidable.

Conclusion

Those concerned with school admissions in the wider West Rugby area have taken time to discuss and reflect upon how best to ensure that children in the area have access to local schools in the medium term. In the meanwhile, it has become clear that immediate action is needed to ensure local places for Cawston children in 2011. More foresight might have avoided this situation, which could arguably prejudice parents who have already expressed their preferences without having been consulted about the proposed increase in admission number. On the other hand, the school is heavily oversubscribed

and the proposed variation will benefit many parents who did express a preference for the school and who will now have a much greater chance of being allocated a place at the school.

My overriding consideration is ensuring that reception aged children in Cawston are not left without places in their local school.

Cawston Grange School will have a classroom free and is prepared to accept additional pupils. The wider area does not currently have surplus reception places. It is not unreasonable to assume, on the basis of the figures available, that additional children may be attracted into the West Rugby schools from outside and fewer from West Rugby may need to go outside the area. Thus though the increase might lead to a small number of places being left unfilled in other schools, this is preferable to a situation in which some local children who want them fail to secure local school places at all. Furthermore it is clear that Cawston Grange is the preferred school for many parents.

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variation to the admission arrangements determined by Warwickshire County Council.

I determine that for admissions in September 2011 the planned admission number shall be 60.

Dated: 18 March 2011

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Janet Mokades