



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR901 Alderman's Green Community Primary School, Coventry

Admission authority: Coventry City Council for Alderman's Green Community Primary School

Date of decision: 13 January 2020

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 Coventry City Council for Alderman's Green Community Primary School for September 2020.

I determine that for admissions in September 2020 the Published Admission Number will be 60.

The referral

1. Coventry City Council (the local authority) has referred a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for September 2020 for Alderman's Green Community Primary School (the school), to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. The school is a community school for children aged 3 to 11 in Coventry.
2. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) is reduced from 90 to 60 for admissions in 2020.

Jurisdiction

3. 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".

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

Procedure

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

6. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:

- a. the referral from the local authority sent on 20 November 2019 and supporting documents;
- b. the determined arrangements for 2020/21 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c. a copy of the local authority's booklet for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September 2020;
- d. a copy of the minutes of the governors' meeting on 30 October 2019 confirming the governors' agreement to the application to vary the PAN;
- e. a map showing the location of the school and other relevant schools; and
- f. an email sent to all primary schools in July 2019 recording a meeting on primary place planning and taking account of the proposal to reduce the PAN at the school.

The proposed variation

7. The local authority has applied for a variation to reduce the PAN at the school following primary planning area meetings and workshops and further analysis in the context of school place planning. The local authority wrote "*There has been a significant decrease in numbers of children living in the catchment area/and surrounding area for the school in the planning area. This has been highlighted by GP registration data, this decrease has been mirrored in all pre-school year groups. This has resulted in changes to the forecasting number for Alderman's Green with the intake number suggested to be lower than 2FE [forms of entry]. This decline is also apparent in other schools across the planning area.*" Also, "*The school is experiencing a significant level of financial difficulty, which has been exacerbated by the reducing demand in their normal year of entry.*" The local authority has explained by way of context that the school is located with seven other schools in the Longford planning area.

8. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code requires that admission arrangements, once determined, may only be changed, that is varied, if there is a major change of circumstance or certain other limited and specified circumstances. I will consider below whether the variation requested is justified by the change in circumstances.

9. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code also requires that relevant parties be notified of a proposed variation. The local authority has provided me with details about the materials it sent to the email group *Education Consultations* about the planning area meetings in which the reduction to the PAN at the school was noted.

10. The minutes of the school’s governing board meeting on 30 October 2019 record *“The Governors were informed that the Local Authority require confirmation that Governors have agreed to proceeding with our application to reduce the PAN number from September 2020. The application was agreed and approved by the Governors.”*

11. I am satisfied that all relevant bodies have been notified and that views expressed have been taken into consideration. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed.

Consideration of proposed variation

12. The local authority notified all primary schools in March 2019 about the impact of reductions in the birth rate on forecasts for primary school admissions. Meetings in planning areas with a significant forecast surplus of places and a workshop took place in July 2019 to discuss changes in forecast numbers starting school. The local authority also carried out a more detailed analysis of the information which was sent to each school by the beginning of the Autumn Term 2019.

13. The table below sets out the number of children admitted to schools in the planning area for each relevant year of entry for the last three years.

School	Published Admission Number 2019	2017	2018	2019	Forecast 2020	Forecast 2021
Alderman’s Green Community Primary	90	73	89	63	73	65
Courthouse Green Primary	90	90	89	90	90	90
Good Shepherd Catholic School	30	30	30	30	30	29
Grangehurst Primary	60	60	57	60	60	60

School	Published Admission Number 2019	2017	2018	2019	Forecast 2020	Forecast 2021
Holbrook Primary	90	82	83	76	80	77
Little Heath Primary	30*	31	30	30	30	30
Longford Park Primary	30	30	30	30	30	28
St Laurence's Church of England Primary	60	54	60	52	57	51
TOTAL	480**	450	468	431	450	430

*PAN reduced from 60 in 2017 to 30 in 2018 and onwards

**PAN total of 450 in 2020 and 2021 if Alderman's Green variation approved

14. The table above sets out the number of children admitted to the Reception Year at the school in September each year. I also wanted to know about the number of preferences made to the school and, in particular, how many first preferences had been expressed for places at the school in recent years. This information is set out in the table below. Whilst it is not possible to offer places to all children whose parents express a preference for a school, the pattern of preferences for 2019 shows that a reduced PAN of 60 would have enabled parents who made the school their first preference to be offered a place. There is clearly a large drop between preferences and admissions in 2018 and those of 2019.

Number of preferences made for Alderman's Green Community Primary School

	2017	2018	2019
First preference	64	79	53
Second preference	43	34	37
Third preference	22	23	28

15. The forecast predicted numbers for the school show that thirteen pupils in 2020 and five pupils in 2021 whose parents express a preference (but possibly not a first preference) for the school are unlikely to be offered a place. The forecasts for the planning area show places are likely to be available at St Laurence's Church of England Primary School and Holbrook Primary School. Both schools are within a one-mile walking distance from Alderman's Green and the local authority has said that they are both safe-walking routes. I am therefore assured that if this variation is agreed, there will be sufficient places for

children living in the area. It is also clear to me from the figures supplied both that there is an oversupply of places in the Longford planning area and that Alderman's Green is the school with the highest number and proportion of empty places in the current Reception Year.

16. The local authority has commented "*By organising as a 2 form of entry school, the school be able to maximise their financial and educational effectiveness and ensure an improvement in the stability of the school.*"

17. Although the closing date for parents to submit on time applications setting out their preferences for primary school places for admission in September 2020 is 15 January 2020, the local authority has advised parents in the primary admissions booklet "*Primary education in Coventry 2020*" that the PAN for the school will be reduced for 2020 subject to the agreement of the Schools Adjudicator. This has helpfully enabled parents to make a preference for the school in the knowledge that there may be fewer places than in previous years.

18. Taking account of all the information provided to me, I am satisfied that the proposed variation is an appropriate response to the circumstances of the school and the area and I approve the variation.

Determination

19. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Coventry City Council for Alderman's Green Community Primary School for September 2020.

20. I determine that for admissions in September 2020 the Published Admission Number will be 60.

Dated: 13 January 2020

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Lorraine Chapman