



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR926

Admission authority: Hampshire County Council for Poulner Junior School, Ringwood, Hampshire

Date of decision: 28 April 2020

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Poulner Junior School for September 2020 and September 2021.

I determine that for September 2020, the published admission number shall be 65 and for September 2021, the published admission number shall be 64.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the local authority) has referred a proposal for variations to the admission arrangements for September 2020 and September 2021 for Poulner Junior School (the school), to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. The school is a community school for children aged 7 to 11 in Ringwood.
2. The proposed variations are that the published admission number (PAN) should be reduced from 87 to 65 in September 2020 and then to 64 in September 2021.

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 received on 1 April 2020 and supporting documents;
- b. the determined arrangements for 2020 and 2021 and the proposed variations 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. evidence that the governing board for the school has been consulted and copies of the relevant minutes of meetings;
- e. a map showing the location of the school and other relevant schools; and
- f. a copy of the letter notifying the appropriate bodies about the proposed variation.

The proposed variations

7. The school is a junior school which is paired with Poulner Infant School. Three years ago the local authority changed the admission arrangements for the infant school by reducing its PAN from 90 to 60 to reflect a reduction in the number of young people in the area. This reduction in admissions has now worked its way through the infant school and the first correspondingly smaller year group reached the junior school in September 2019. At the time the junior school thought that it might receive additional in-year applications for places and organised a three class structure in Year 3. There have, to date, been three additional in-year applications for places in the current Year 3.

8. The junior school has recognised that in order to balance its budget it will be necessary to reduce its class structure to two classes in a year group in the future. It has asked the local authority as the admissions authority to seek a variation to reduce its PAN for September 2020 from 90 to 65 and for September 2021 to set a PAN of 64.

9. 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 variations requested are justified by the change in circumstances.

10. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code also requires that relevant parties be notified of a proposed variation. The local authority has provided me with a copy of its notification on the proposed variation and the list of schools and other bodies to which it was sent. I have seen confirmation from the school's governing board that it supports the request for the variation. 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 variations

11. These variations have been made in response to a fall in the number of children applying for places at the school. The local authority took action to address the reduction in numbers to the infant school that feeds this junior school three years ago and reduced its PAN to 60. This reduction in numbers has now reached the junior school. This is a matter that could have been anticipated and addressed in the annual determination of arrangements. That would have allowed for the consultation that is required when a PAN is reduced in the normal course of events and thus for those with an interest to express their views and, indeed, object to the adjudicator if they wished to do so. However, the application for the variations explains that the school had hoped that it might receive in-year applications to increase the number of children and thus avoid the need for a reduction in the PAN. The school organised its Year 3 group of 61 children into three classes but has only received three in-year applications for places since September 2019 taking the numbers to 64 children.

12. The governing board has realised that this pattern of organisation is not financially sustainable and as a result has asked the local authority to seek variations to reduce its PAN so that it can organise with two classes in a year group as the infant school has done.

13. The local authority has confirmed that it has made 65 offers of places at the school for September 2020 and it is for this reason that the PAN requested is 65 so that if all the offers are taken up, there will be sufficient places for all those who have sought places. The reduced PAN will then allow the school to form one Year 3 class of 32 and one Year 3 class of 33 for the year.

14. The three year groups in the infant school are currently 59, 57 and 57 children, so for the next three years the number transferring to the junior school is likely to be fewer than 60 children; most of the other schools in the area are primary schools and there is only one other infant/junior pair so the likelihood of additional applications for places at Year 3 is limited. The local authority has confirmed that there are sufficient spare places across the planning area for it to feel confident that children moving into the area and seeking an in-year place will find a place in a local school.

15. The request to set a PAN of 64 for September 2021 will provide sufficient places for the children already in the appropriate year group in the infant school plus some additional places in case children move into the area. The junior school has confirmed that it would organise with two classes and could accommodate up to 32 in each class if required.

16. The only potential impact that these variations will have on other schools in the area will be a reduction in the junior school's ability to offer places to children who move into the area during the year. The local authority has confirmed that there are sufficient spare places across schools in the area for this not to be a difficulty.

17. The governing board for the school is actively seeking the variations proposed and the local authority in making the request says that it is fully supportive of the proposal. There have been no comments from the bodies who were notified about the proposals.

Summary

18. The variations requested are in response to a reduction in the PAN for the feeder infant school that was made three years ago. The reduced number of pupils within the PAN of 60 has now made its way to the junior school. The junior school had hoped to recruit other children as in-year admissions into Year 3 but this has not happened and the result is a class structure that is financially unsustainable. The reduction in PAN will allow the junior school to organise its year groups in the future with two classes for a year group. This will help to ensure that the school's budget can be balanced and provide stability for the school as it plans for the future.

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 Hampshire County Council for Poulner Junior School for September 2020 and September 2021.

20. I determine that for September 2020, the published admission number shall be 65 and for September 2021, the published admission number shall be 64.

Dated: 28 April 2020

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: David Lennard Jones