



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2140

Admission authority: London Borough of Havering for Parsonage Farm Primary School in Rainham

Date of decision: 01 June 2021

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 the London Borough of Havering for Parsonage Farm Primary School for September 2021.

I determine that the published admission number for 2021 will be 60.

The referral

1. The London Borough of Havering (the local authority) has referred a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for September 2021 for Parsonage Farm Primary School (the school) to the adjudicator. The school is a community school for children aged four to eleven in Rainham.
2. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) be reduced from 90, which has been the PAN in previous years, to 60.

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 information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:

- a. the referral from the local authority dated 6 May 2021, supporting documents and further information provided at my request;
- b. the determined arrangements for 2021 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c. confirmation that the governing board for the school has been consulted;
- d. a map showing the location of the school and other relevant schools;
- e. confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation; and
- f. information available on the websites of the local authority and the Department for Education.

The proposed variation

7. This is one of three requests that the local authority has made for the admission arrangements it determined for 2021 (the arrangements). All three requests are that the PAN set is reduced for 2021 following allocation of places. I am the adjudicator for the three cases. I will consider each case on the basis of the evidence available and no case sets a precedent for another case. In this case the local authority said in its proposal, “Unexpectedly, this year on National Offer Day Parsonage Farm Primary School only made 51 offers against a PAN of 90.” The local authority explained, “This low number of pupils allocated a reception place at the school for September 2021 is a significant reduction when compared to the number of pupils allocated a reception place on National Offer Day for previous years, and could not have been predicted in advance.”

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 apply. 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 the appropriate bodies in the relevant area be notified of a proposed variation. I have had confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified. I have seen confirmation from the school's governing board that it has been consulted on the proposed variation. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed.

Consideration of proposed variation

10. The PAN for the school for 2022 has already been set at 90 and so the only year of admission to be affected by the proposed variation is 2021. To put it a slightly different way and for the avoidance of doubt, unless there is a further variation approved by the adjudicator, the PAN for 2022 is 90. My consideration is therefore for 2021 only. I have scrutinised the data to try to ascertain if there will be sufficient school places in the local area if the PAN is reduced from 90 to 60 for September 2021. I have also considered the demand for places at the school, the reasons given for the change, the potential effect on parental preference and whether the change is justified in these circumstances.

11. The local authority has a duty to make sure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty the local authority assesses the likely future number of places to be needed and plans to meet that need. The local authority uses planning areas, which are geographical groups of schools, for this purpose. The school is one of six schools admitting children to reception year (YR) in its planning area which is known as Rainham and South Hornchurch planning area (the planning area).

Table 1: number of places in the planning area and the number of children allocated places

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Sum of the PANs of the schools in the planning area	360	360	390	390
Number of children allocated places in YR	318	299	341	318
Number of vacant places	42	61	49	72
Number of vacant places as a percentage	12%	17%	13%	18%

12. Table 1 summarises the number of children allocated places in YR at schools in the planning area including 2021. The evidence shows some variations in the number of children allocated places with the same number allocated for 2021 as for 2018 and higher and lower numbers in intervening years. If the PAN for the school were to reduce by 30 places for 2021 then the number of vacant places would reduce accordingly from 72 to 42 which would be 12 per cent of the whole.

13. The DfE website, 'Find and compare schools in England' shows four schools within one mile of the school which admit children to YR and the information provided to me by the local authority shows that two have vacant places after allocations have been made. I am therefore assured that there are sufficient places within a reasonable distance of the school

for a child seeking a place in YR after allocations have been made if I were to agree that the PAN is reduced to 60.

Table 2: the number of children allocated places to the school

	2018	2019	2020	2021
PAN	90	90	90	90
Number of children allocated places	86	73	74	51
Number of vacant places	4	17	16	39

14. Table 2 shows a sharp reduction in the number of children allocated places in 2021 compared to previous years. As there are 39 vacancies after all preferences have been considered, reducing the PAN by 30 would still leave nine vacancies. Reducing the PAN to 60 is unlikely to frustrate parental preference.

15. Schools are largely funded by the number of children attending and admitting multiples of just over 30 children to YR can provide significant challenges for schools. Infant classes are those where the majority of children will reach the age of 5, 6 or 7 during the school year. The School Admissions (Infant Class Size(England) Regulations 2012 require that such classes must not contain more than 30 pupils with a single qualified school teacher except in specific circumstances. It is advantageous, where schools seek to teach in classes all from the one year group, for the number of children in each year group to be either a multiple of 30 or close to that number. For example, in 2018 there were 86 children admitted to the school and they would have been taught in three classes of 28 or 29 children each, which is an economically efficient model.

16. If the PAN were to remain at 90 then it is possible that during 2021/22 other children could join YR so that the numbers increased beyond 60, say to 61, so that classes had to be re-arranged so that no infant class had more than 30 children. As the school has 74 children in its current YR classes, which will be Year 1 come September 2021, it would have some scope to admit up to 16 children and place some YR children into classes with Y1 children. This would minimise additional expense to the school, but would cause challenges in terms of teaching and learning. In addition, as children could join the school throughout the year the class structures might have to keep changing which is likely to be detrimental to learning. Another option for 61 children would be three classes of around 20 children which would be an expensive model.

17. It is not necessary to contemplate such an approach, which is not popular with parents or school staff, as the evidence shows that reducing the PAN to 60 would not prevent any child moving into the area getting a school place locally, it is highly unlikely to frustrate parental preference and the variation to the PAN is only for 2021. I accordingly approve the proposed variation that the PAN is reduced to 60 for 2021.

Consideration of the arrangements

18. The admission arrangements for this school are, with the exception of the PAN which is specific to each school, the same as those for those other primary schools in Havering for which the local authority is the admission authority. I have considered those arrangements previously in determination VAR2141 and determined that there were ways in which the arrangements did not conform with the Code. I will not duplicate those matters here.

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 the London Borough of Havering for Parsonage Farm Primary School for September 2021.

20. I determine that the published admission number for 2021 will be 60.

Dated: 01 June 2021

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard