

## **DETERMINATION**

**Case reference:** ADA/002322

**Objector:** A parent

**Admission Authority:** Wokingham Borough Council

**Date of decision:** 16 July 2012

### **Determination**

**In accordance with section 88H (4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I do not uphold the objection to the admission arrangements determined by Wokingham Borough Council for Polehampton Church of England Infant School for admissions in September 2013.**

### **The referral**

1. Under section 88H (2) of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, (the Act), an objection has been referred to the Adjudicator by a parent, the objector, about the admission arrangements (the arrangements) for Polehampton Church of England Infant School (the School), a voluntary controlled school, for September 2013. The objection is to the nature of the School's designated catchment area.

### **Jurisdiction**

2. These arrangements were determined under section 88C of the Act by Wokingham Borough Council (the Council), which is the admission authority for the School, on 29 March 2012. The objector submitted the objection to these determined arrangements on 26 June 2012. I am satisfied the objection has been properly referred to me in accordance with section 88H of the Act and it is within my jurisdiction.

### **Procedure**

3. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the School Admissions Code (the Code).
4. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:
- a. the objector's form of objection dated 26 June 2012;
  - b. the School's response to the objection and supporting documents;

- c. the Council's composite prospectus for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September, 2012 together with details of those parts of the determined arrangements for 2013 that relate to the subject of the objection;
- d. maps of the area identifying relevant schools and their determined catchment areas;
- e. confirmation of when consultation on the arrangements last took place and details of that consultation; and
- g. a copy of the determined arrangements.

### **The Objection**

5. The objection is that, since the School 'sits at the front of its own catchment', the arrangements do not comply with paragraph 1.14 of the Code, which requires that catchment areas '**must** be designed to that they are reasonable and clearly defined'. The results, the objector claims, are that children are excluded who live across the road from the School's front gate or a short walk from it, and that newly constructed houses are included although they are 'beyond the current exclusions'.

### **Consideration of Factors**

6. The School is very close to the boundary of its designated catchment area (shared with Polehampton Church of England Junior School) and the catchment area for Colleton Primary School, as the objector has described.

7. The Council, while the admission authority for the School, is also the admission authority for some other schools in the vicinity, and the co-ordinating body for admissions across its area. The Council must therefore undertake the planning of school places across the whole area of its responsibility. I have considered carefully the explanation of why the School's catchment area and that of neighbouring schools are as they are. In particular, I have noted that the catchment areas often make provision for children from outlying areas where no alternative schools stand, and that, as recently as in planning for 2013 admissions, adjustments have been made in order to accommodate all children within the area of under-provision around the School and Colleton Primary School. The Council says that it has in the past considered increasing the School's designated catchment area, but has decided that doing so would further disadvantage children living in outlying areas.

8. I have noted the Council's statement that, until the current year, the School has been able to admit some children who live in Colleton Primary School's catchment area, but that for September 2012 there will be 21 children within the (Polehampton) School's catchment area who will not be able to attend the School, due to what the Council calls 'an unprecedented increase in demand'.

9. In response to my enquiry, the Council has provided details of the consultation that preceded its determination of the arrangements on 29 March

2012. I find the consultation to have been thorough.

10. The School has confirmed in its response that many children resident in its catchment area have not been able to obtain places at the School for admission in September 2012. The School's governing body considered the proposed arrangements with the adjustment to catchment areas at its meeting on 16 January 2012. However, no reference was made to the issue that is the subject of the present objection.

## **Conclusion**

11. I sympathise with the objector and with any parents who live very close to the School of their choice but are not able to obtain places, even though children from further away are allocated places. However, I also recognise the Council's duty to balance such factors against the need to ensure provision for *all* children. The evidence suggests to me that the Council has been diligent in this regard, and has been endeavouring to resolve difficult issues over the supply of school places and arising from the location of schools.

12. Although the objector does not believe the School's catchment area to be reasonable, I believe that it is reasonable in the context of the needs of families in the wider area and the overall availability of school places. My conclusion therefore is that the catchment areas for the School and for Colleton Primary School are designed to be reasonable and clearly defined, as the Code requires. I am therefore not upholding the objection.

13. However, the overall position is clearly fluid, as indicated by the 'unprecedented increase in demand' for places at the School in 2012 and the forthcoming enlargement of Colleton Primary School. I have noted from the School's response its willingness 'to work with the Local Authority to consider changes to our designated area so that the best solutions to admitting local pupils can be found'. I therefore suggest to the Council that, in consultation with the School, Polehampton Church of England Junior School and other schools and parties, it might keep the situation under careful review, and examine whether changes to catchment areas might be useful for 2014 admissions.

## **Determination**

14. In accordance with section 88H (4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I do not uphold the objection to the admission arrangements determined by Wokingham Borough Council for Polehampton Church of England Infant School for admissions in September 2013.

Dated: 16 July 2012

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Canon Richard  
Lindley