



Office of  
the Schools  
Adjudicator

## DETERMINATION

**Case reference:** VAR689

**Admission Authority:** The Governing Body of St Benedict's Roman Catholic Middle School, Ashington, Northumberland

**Date of decision:** 2 August 2016

### **Determination**

**In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variation to the admission arrangements determined by the governing body of St Benedict's Roman Catholic Middle School.**

**I determine that for admissions in September 2016 the published admission number shall be 30.**

### **The referral**

1. The governing body of St Benedict's Roman Catholic Middle School which is the admission authority for the school, has referred a variation to the Adjudicator about the admission arrangements for St Benedict's Roman Catholic Middle School (the school), a voluntary aided, middle deemed secondary school for pupils aged 9 to 13 for September 2016. The variation requested is to reduce the published admission number (PAN) of the school from 60 to 30 as it is intended that the school will close on 31 August 2017.

### **Jurisdiction**

2. 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**

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

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

- a. the governing body's form of referral of 8 July 2016 and supporting documents;
- b. the minutes of the meeting on 12 May 2016 at which the governing body decided to request this variation;
- c. a copy of the Northumberland County Council's, the local authority (the LA), composite prospectus for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September 2016;
- d. documents relating to the proposal to discontinue the school;
- e. correspondence from the LA supporting the decision to request a variation;
- f. correspondence from the faith body, the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle; and
- g. a copy of the letter notifying the appropriate bodies about the proposed variation.

### **Background and consideration of factors**

5. The school is a middle school, in Ashington in Northumberland and is part of a three tier system of schools which is being reorganised. In this system, children change school at the end of Year 4 in their first school to join a middle school. They leave middle school at the end of Year 8 to join a high school. Other schools in the area have changed to a two tier system where pupils remain in a primary school from Year R to Year 6, then move to secondary school from Year 7. The community schools in Ashington changed from a three tier system to a two tier system in September 2015. The only two schools in Ashington which are not two tier are this school and its linked school, St Aidan's Roman Catholic First School (St Aidan's). The governing body is consulting on a proposal to close the school and expand St Aidan's to be a primary school on the St Benedict's site. The statutory consultation was published on 30 June 2016 and ended on 28 July 2016; there were no reported objections to the closure from any party.

6. The roll of the school has been falling in recent years. The governors report that budgetary implications have made it *"increasingly difficult to offer high quality specialist teaching in KS3. The majority of teaching is not from specialists and the quality is diminishing."* From September 2016, Key Stage 3 pupils, (Years 7 and 8) will be taught on the school site of the nearby High School, St Benet Biscop, Bedlington. This means that from the start of next

term, the school will have 75 pupils in Key Stage 2, 36 Year 6 pupils and 39 Year 5 pupils.

7. The governing body considers the proposed closure of the school to be a major change in circumstance requiring a variation. The governing body wishes to ensure that the final year at the school is as stable as possible and request that the PAN is reduced from 60 to 30. There are already 39 pupils and there are plans to accommodate these pupils. The governing body does not want to admit further pupils during the year as those pupils will have little time to settle before they have to transfer to another school when the school closes. In addition the *“governing body is doing everything possible to ensure that the education of those 75 pupils on the site is protected and is of the highest quality ....it is essential that routines and practices are maintained as much as possible. This will be affected if there is a continuous movement of pupils new to the school”*.

9. The school is part of three tier provision in an area which has become predominately two tier. Rolls have been falling for some years and the governing body had brought forward plans to close the school as part of a reorganisation to a two tier structure. It is intended that the school will close in August 2017. The governing body is seeking to manage the education of pupils remaining at the school as efficiently and effectively as it can and to that end does not wish to admit any further pupils during the year into Year 5 who will spend less than one year at the school before it closes. The LA who is responsible for ensuring there are sufficient school places is content with this proposed variation. The governing body has provided evidence that it has notified all the parties required. In these circumstances I think it sensible that that the PAN should be 30. I approve the variation.

### **Summary**

10. It is proposed that the school will close in August 2017 as part of a reorganisation to a two tier structure. The governing body will have 75 pupils in the school next year and wishes to offer as stable a situation as possible. I think that reducing the PAN to 30 could help them to do so.

### **Determination**

11. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variation to the admission arrangements determined by the governing body of St Benedict's Roman Catholic Middle School.

12. I determine that for admissions in September 2016 the published admission number shall be 30.

Dated: 2 August 2016

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Miss Jill Pullen