



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

DETERMINATION

Case reference: VAR724

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Buryfields Infant School, Odiham, Hampshire

Date of decision: 1 August 2017

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variations to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Buryfields Infant School, Odiham, Hampshire.

I determine that for admissions in September 2017 the published admission number shall be 70 and for admissions in September 2018 the published admission number shall be 70.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the local authority) has referred two variations to the Adjudicator about the admission arrangements for Buryfields Infant school, Odiham (the school), a community school for September 2017 and September 2018. The variations have been requested because of an unexpected lack of growth in the population projections in the local area and the need for the school to be able to reduce the number of classes that it runs in order to manage its budget.

Jurisdiction

2. The referral was made 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, guidance and the School Admissions Code.

The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:

- a) the local authority's letter of referral of 3 July 2017 and supporting documents;
- b) the determined arrangements for Buryfields Infant School and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c) a copy of the council's booklet for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September 2017; and
- d) a copy of the letter notifying the appropriate bodies about the proposed variation.

Background and consideration of factors

4. Buryfields Infant School is located within the village of Odiham. The school's catchment area includes the Royal Air Force base at Odiham. Prior to September 2016, the published admission number (PAN) at the school was set at 70. The resulting maximum number of pupils was 210 and the school was organised into seven classes – each having no more than 30 pupils, in order to meet the requirements relating to infant class sizes. Due to an increased demand for places for Reception Year (Year R) in September 2015, 81 places were offered. Forecasts at that time showed that this growth was expected to continue with 85 forecast for each of the next two years. As a result, the school was expanded to eight classes (with the potential for a ninth class if needed) and the PAN raised from 70 to 75 for admissions to Year R from September 2016. Unfortunately, the forecast growth has not occurred as anticipated and under 70 children were recruited into Year R in both 2016 and 2017.

	Admission number	Number admitted	Number of applications (number of first preferences in brackets)	Number of appeals
2013/2014	70	62	98 (59)	0
2014/2015	70	68	89 (66)	0
2015/2016	70	81	109 (76)	0

2016/2017	75	65	95 (64)	0
2017/2018	75	69 allocated for Sept 17	90 (67)	0

5. As a result of this lack of growth, the funding provided to the school has fallen (as funding is based on pupil numbers) and the continued operation of an eighth class is presenting significant financial challenges for the school. The total number of pupils on roll only supports the cost of seven classes, which would be commensurate with a PAN of 70. The local authority reports that it has now become clear based on the actual pupil numbers at the school and the future growth projections for the catchment area that it is unlikely that extra pupils will materialise.
6. The projection figures provided by the local authority, which are based on health data and take into account any proposed new housing, show 75 children projected for 2018; 70 for 2019 and 87 for 2020. These show that the number of children forecast to take up places will exceed 70 (as it did in the attached spring 2015 and 2016 forecasts). However, the local authority says that historically, apart from the bulge in 2015, actual numbers have always been lower than forecast. The local authority does not think that this pattern will change and believes rather that actual numbers will continue to be lower than those forecast.
7. In these circumstances, the school and local authority agree that an eighth class school would be unsustainable. A sub committee of Hampshire's School Forum members is being formed to review a request from the school for additional funding to address the school's budget deficit. Any decision will be based on the school returning to its original seven class structure as soon as is practicably possible.
8. The local authority seeks to reduce the PAN for both 2017 and 2018 from 75 to 70, thus enabling the school to return to seven class structure from September 2017. The variation for 2017 is sought to ensure that the school can reduce its number of classes from September 2017. 69 places have been allocated for September 2017 and the variation will ensure that the school is not required to admit over 70 as a result of in year applications for places. There will no impact of this decision on the children who have already been offered places and it is not known if there will be any in year applications. The local authority would, if required, ensure that new arrivals are allocated places in other schools.
9. The school governing body considered the local authority's offer to seek a variation to reduce the PAN for 2017 and 2018 at a meeting on 19 May 2017. Initially the governing body wanted to ensure that the PAN reduction was agreed at the same time as budget protection resulting from the additional class was agreed. Following further discussion between the school and the local authority, the governing body re-considered its position and supports the local authority's request for these PAN variations so that it can manage its budget.

10. The local authority says that this reduction will have no impact on any other schools and will allow this school to manage its budget. The local authority has consulted with neighbouring schools and there have been no comments about the proposed variation.

Conclusion

11. This request to reduce the PAN in 2017 and 2018 is proposed by the local authority and supported by the school governing body. It follows an unexpected lack of growth in the anticipated number of applications for places at the school. The school needs to manage the number of classes that it runs in order to manage its budget and had agreed to increase the number of classes on the basis that pupil numbers would increase. This growth has not happened and the local authority agrees that it is unlikely to happen in the next two years. The request to reduce the PAN from 75 to 70 in 2017 and 2018 is therefore justified and with fewer allocated places for September 2017 than the revised PAN for 2017 there will be no impact on children at that time and the reduction for 2018 is well ahead of application date for 2018. I therefore approve the requested variations.

Determination

12. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variations to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Buryfields Infant School Odiham, Hampshire.

13. I determine that for admissions in September 2017 the published admission number shall be 70 and for admissions in September 2018 the published admission number shall be 70.

Dated: 1 August 2017

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: David Lennard Jones