



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

DETERMINATION

Case reference: VAR745

Admission Authority: The Governing Board of Hormead Church of England (Voluntary Aided) First and Nursery School, Great Hormead, Hertfordshire

Date of decision: 17 January 2018

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 Governing Board for Hormead Church of England First and Nursery School, Hertfordshire for September 2017.

I determine that for admissions in September 2017 the published admission number shall be 15.

The referral

1. The board of governors of Hormead Church of England (Voluntary Aided) First and Nursery school (the school) has referred a proposal for a variation to reduce the published admission number (PAN) for the school, for September 2017 to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. The school is a voluntary aided school with a Church of England religious character for children aged three to nine in Great Hormead near Buntingford, Hertfordshire. The local authority is Hertfordshire County Council and the school's religious authority is the Diocese of St Albans (the diocese).
2. The proposed variation is to reduce the PAN for September 2017 from 20 to 15.

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.

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

- the Chair of Governors' referral dated 4 December 2017 and supporting documents;
- the determined arrangements for 2017 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- a copy of the council's booklet for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September 2017;
- a copy of the letter notifying the appropriate bodies about the proposed variation; and
- comments received on the proposed variation from the appropriate bodies.

Background and Consideration of Factors

7. The proposed variation was received on 3 December 2017. The effect of the variation would be to reduce the PAN for 2017 from 20 to 15. As explained below this would bring the 2017 PAN into line with that of 15 already determined for 2018.

8. The school has explained that in the recent past it has admitted below its PAN. It has also re-organised its provision from four classes to three. Thus it has one class for children in its nursery and Reception (YR); one for children in Year 1 (Y1) and Year 2 (Y2), and one for children in Year 3 (Y3) and Year 4 (Y4). The school has been able to balance its budget despite the low pupil numbers in the years up to September 2015, when the school roll was 26. The school has also explained that the PAN of 20 dates from when the school was an infant school and provided for children in years R to Y2 only. In 2014 the school became a first school and now provides also for Y3 and Y4 children. The PAN was not adjusted at the time of this change.

9. Housing expansion in Buntingford, which is a community about three miles from the school, over the last two years has resulted in an increase in the number of parents requesting a place at the school. YR intake was 14 in both 2016 and 2017, compared to only five in 2015. The school has also experienced an increased number of in-year admissions, particularly in key stage (KS) 1. By October 2017 the school roll had risen to 64 with five children joining the school since 4 September 2017 and there were 16 children in YR.

10. The school is concerned that if further children apply for YR places in the current school year and the school admits up its PAN of 20, it will could have, in September 2018, as many as 35 children in its class for Y1 and Y2 children. This size of class would, the school believes, compromise the quality of education available to these children, and place a significant financial burden on the school budget. A Y1 and Y2 class of this size could also contravene the Infant Class Size Regulations and require the school to take qualifying measures which also carry a financial cost. The school has already appointed additional staff to meet the needs of the increased number of pupils, and would need to appoint further staff to support a class of this size.

11. In January 2017 the Governing Board of Hormead School consulted to reduce the PAN to 15 from September 2018. The arrangements that were subsequently determined set this lower PAN. However, the recent increase in applications has prompted the school to seek to reduce the PAN immediately by means of this application for a variation to the arrangements determined for 2017. This will help manage in year admissions in the current year group in order to prevent a problem with the school's organisation in September 2018 if the combined Y1 and Y2 class exceeds the limits imposed by the Infant Class Size Regulations.

12. While the increase in numbers is a result of housing growth in the area, the local authority has confirmed that there are sufficient places in the area to meet demand and it supports this proposal. The diocese also supports the proposal.

13. There is no anticipated impact on other local schools.

14. The local parish council has said that it does not support this reduction in PAN, because it wishes to ensure that children from the village can gain places at the school. It asks whether the school gives priority to local children. I have looked at the school's admission arrangements and I am satisfied that the oversubscription criteria give priority to children living in the local Hormead parish. The housing growth in Buntingford referred to above is about three miles distant and in an area served by two other first schools and a middle school.

Conclusion

15. The school is now taking action to manage its overall numbers. It has not previously needed to do this and as a small school was keen to admit as many children as sought places to help it manage its budget. The school has already determined that its admission number will be 15 from September 2018 and it is requesting that its PAN for the current year group be changed to 15 so that it can manage in year admissions and avoid a potential class size problem in September 2018. The school has taken the necessary steps in requesting this variation and I approve it.

Determination

16. 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 Governing Board for Hormead Church of England First and Nursery School, Hertfordshire for September 2017.

17. I determine that for admissions in September 2017 the published admission number shall be 15.

Dated: 17 January 2018

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: David Lennard Jones