



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

DETERMINATION - Variation

Case reference: VAR 717

Admission Authority: Milton Keynes Council for Howe Park Infant School, Milton Keynes

Date of decision: 15 August 2017

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve two variations to the admission arrangements determined by Milton Keynes Council for Howe Park Infant School , Milton Keynes.

I determine that for admissions in September 2017 the published admission number shall be 60 and in September 2018 the published admission number shall be 60.

The referral

1. Milton Keynes Council, as the local authority, has referred two variations to the Adjudicator about the admission arrangements for Howe Park Infant School (the school), a community school for September 2018. The variations requested are a reduction in the school's published admission number (PAN) to reflect a fall in the projected pupil numbers in the area for September 2017 and September 2018.

Jurisdiction

2. The referrals were 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 variations are within my jurisdiction.

Procedure

3. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation, guidance and the School Admissions Code.
4. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:
 - a) the local authority's letter of referral of 20 June 2017 and supporting documents;
 - b) the determined arrangements for 2017 and 2018 and the proposed variations to those arrangements;
 - c) a copy of the council's booklet for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September 2018; and
 - d) a copy of the letter notifying the appropriate bodies about the proposed variations.

Background and consideration of factors

5. In February 2017 Milton Keynes Council determined its admission arrangements for the 2018/19 academic year, including the published admission number (PAN) for each community and voluntary controlled schools across Milton Keynes. This included the PAN for Howe Park School, an infant school in the south west of Milton Keynes. This PAN was set at 90.
6. The local authority reports that it has become apparent, since the PAN was determined, that it is greater than the anticipated demand for places in this area. As a result of this the school is forecasting a high number of vacancies for children who are due to start school for the first time. On national offer day in April 2017 the school was allocated 61 children to take up a place in September 2017. Since April this has reduced to 58 children due to start school in September 2017. This leaves the school with 32 reception year vacancies. The local authority says that this will have an adverse effect on the school budget and staffing requirements.
7. Projections show that in 2018 there will be around 49 children who will be living within the catchment area of Howe Park School who will require a reception year school place. In addition to this, across the wider school place planning area it is projected that there will be a considerable surplus of places with a projected surplus of two forms of entry. It is therefore likely that the current vacancies at the school will continue.
8. The local authority has asked if the PAN for the 2017 admission could be reduced to 60. 61 places were allocated for September 2017 on national offer day in April, this number has fallen to 58 and the local authority says that if the number can be limited to 60 then the school will be able to manage its budget more effectively.
9. The local authority is also seeking approval to make a variation to the

determined admission arrangements that have been published for 2018/19 that will reduce the PAN for the school from 90 to 60. The local authority would then consult to continue this arrangement in the 2019/20 arrangements.

10. The school governing body has been consulted about the variations requested and is fully in support of the proposals. The headteacher at the school comments that in recent years around half of the school intake has been out of catchment. Milton Keynes has been expanding rapidly and new schools have been built. This has enabled the local authority to offer many more parents their first preference of school in their locality rather than sending them out of catchment to this school as a second preference. One of the difficulties for the school is the uncertainty of how many children might be admitted. While 58 children can be accommodated within two classes, the requirements relating to infant class sizes mean that the possibility that the numbers might rise above 60 in September 2017 creates a dilemma about how to ensure stability for the children without making excessive and unnecessary demands on the budget. A reduction of the PAN of 90 to 60, would ensure educational stability for the children and economic stability across the whole of our school.

Conclusion

11. In considering this request I note that there are sufficient places in other schools in the area and that the reduction in admissions is largely a result of more parents being given their first preferences for other schools. The school suggests that in previous years second preference applications were received from families that had not received the first preference. The impact of the proposed reductions for 2017 and 2018 will not affect other schools and will assist this school in planning its budget and organising stable classes for the children in the school. If people move into the area during the school year beginning in September 2017, I am assured that there are sufficient places in the area to accommodate them. For these reasons I approve the variations requested.

Determination

12. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the two variations to the admission arrangements determined by Milton Keynes Council for Howe Park Infant School, Milton Keynes.
13. I determine that for admissions in September 2017 the published admission number shall be 60 and in September 2018 the publishes admission number shall be 60.

Dated: 15 August 2017

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: David Lennard Jones