



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR870

Admission authority: Reading Borough Council for The Ridgeway Primary School

Date of decision: 9 July 2019

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 Reading Borough Council for The Ridgeway Primary School for September 2020.

I determine that the published admission number will be 60.

The referral

1. Reading Borough Council (the local authority) has referred a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for September 2020 for The Ridgeway Primary School (the school) to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. The school is a community primary school for children aged 3 to 11 in Reading.
2. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) is reduced from 90 to 60.

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 (the Code).
6. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:
- a. the referral from the local authority dated 10 June 2019, supporting documents and further information provided at my request including information on forecasts of pupil numbers;
 - b. the determined arrangements for 2020 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
 - c. evidence that the governing board for the school has been consulted on the proposed variation;
 - d. a map showing the location of the school and other relevant schools; and
 - e. a copy of the emails notifying the appropriate bodies about the proposed variation and information on the responses received.

The proposed variation

7. The context for this proposed variation is that the local authority had some little while ago anticipated reducing the PAN for the school for 2020. The reduction was planned because a new primary school, Green Park Village School (the new school), was due to open in September 2020. The new primary school is to be located where a major housing development is taking place. Until the new school opens, children moving into the housing development are having to attend other schools, including the school. These children are expected to seek admission to the new school, when it is open, and thus reduce the need for places at the school. The local authority, with the support of the governing board for the school, therefore consulted on reducing the PAN for the school from 90 in previous years to 60 for admissions in 2020. The responses to the consultation showed overall support but a minority concern that there might not be enough places for local children.

8. In the event, no confirmation was given to the local authority that the new school would open for 2020. Against that background, and understandably, the local authority determined the PAN for the school at 90 so that it could be sure that it would have enough school places available. Since the determination of the arrangements, the local authority has had confirmation that the new school will be open for admissions in 2020 and has accordingly proposed a variation to reduce the PAN for the school from 90 to 60. The local authority says it believes that the additional places at the new school will “*better accommodate the children in the area*” and reduce demand for the school.

9. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code requires that admission arrangements, once determined, may only be changed, that is varied, if there is a major change of circumstance or certain other limited and specified circumstances. I will consider below whether the variation requested is justified by the change in circumstances.

10. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code also requires that relevant parties be notified of a proposed variation. The local authority has provided me with copies of its notification on the proposed variation and the list of schools and other bodies to which it was sent. I have seen confirmation from the governing board for the school that it supports the request for the variation. I am satisfied that all relevant bodies have been notified and that views expressed have been taken into consideration. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed.

Consideration of the case

11. The local authority has a statutory duty to make sure that there are sufficient school places in its area. In order to assist it in fulfilling this duty the local authority forecasts the need for school places locally on the basis of a planning area consisting of seven schools admitting children into the reception year (YR) including the school and the new school (the planning area).

12. In the housing development where the new school will be situated, 146 new homes are already being occupied with more planned to be built over the next few years so that by 2021 there will be 346 new homes. The local authority forecasts that with the addition of the places provided by the new school for admissions in 2020 there will be a surplus of 97 YR places across the planning area; this is over 20 per cent of all available places. If the PAN for the school were reduced to 60 (from 90) then the number of anticipated surplus places would be 67, which is over 15 per cent of the total number of available places and still a relatively high proportion of surplus places. I am assured therefore that if the PAN were to reduce to 60 then there would be sufficient places for children in the area seeking admission to YR.

13. I will now consider demand for the school itself and the potential effects of reducing the PAN to 60 on parental preference and the efficient running of the school. Table 1 shows the numbers of children admitted to YR in recent years at the school and the number of places allocated for 2019.

Table 1: number of first preferences and places allocated for YR at the school

	2016	2017	2018	2019 (as allocated 17 June 2019)
Number of first preferences	43	44	71	52
Number of places allocated	68	59	75	54

14. Table 1 shows that the number of admissions to the school have varied in recent years. For 2019 the number of children allocated a place is below 60, the proposed PAN, even before the new school opens. The governing board explained to me that they support the reduction in PAN. The PAN had been raised in previous years to 90 to meet an anticipated increase in need for places in the area. This anticipated increase did not fully materialise as the figures above show. Furthermore, the governing board explained that some children were admitted to the school who needed to travel by bus to the school from some distance away. These children leave if a school place becomes available to them nearer to their home. The school is over two miles from the new primary school and the new housing development; there are other primary schools situated between the school and the new school and these schools would also of course be closer to the housing development.

15. The school explained that it had found it difficult to manage financially as it has previously established three classes for YR without the number of children to sustain them. The school told me that a PAN of 60 would allow it to plan efficiently as it would create *“greater financial stability for our school”* which would lead to *“better outcomes for our children”*.

16. I am persuaded that the local authority’s analysis is correct. The data provided to me shows that there will be sufficient school places for children living in the area and that the demand for places at the school can be satisfied by a PAN of 60. The new school planned for 2020, which is located where the housing development is taking place, will meet any additional demand for school places created by the housing development.

Determination

17. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Reading Borough Council for The Ridgeway Primary School for September 2020.

18. I determine that the published admission number will be 60.

Dated: 9 July 2019

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard