



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2107

Admission authority: Wakefield Metropolitan District Council for Townville Infant School, Castleford, West Yorkshire

Date of decision: 5 March 2021

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 Wakefield Metropolitan District Council for Townville Infant School, Castleford for September 2021.

I determine that for September 2021 the Published Admission Number shall be reduced from 60 to 45.

The referral

1. Wakefield Metropolitan District Council (the local authority) has referred a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for September 2021 for Townville Infant School, Castleford (the school), to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. The school is a community school for children aged three to seven in Castleford, West Yorkshire.
2. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) for the school should be reduced from 60 to 45 for September 2021.

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 February 2021 and supporting documents;
- b. the determined arrangements for 2021 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c. a copy of the local authority's booklet for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September 2021;
- d. evidence that the governing board for the school has been consulted;
- e. a map showing the location of the school and other relevant schools; and
- f. a copy of the letter notifying the appropriate bodies about the proposed variation.

The proposed variation

7. The proposal is to reduce the school's PAN for September 2021 from 60 to 45.

8. 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.

9. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code also requires that relevant parties be notified of a proposed variation. The local authority has provided me with a copy 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 school's governing board 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 proposed variation

10. The school has financial pressures on its budget and Ofsted has identified school improvement issues. The budget deficit has increased since the admissions arrangements for September 2021 were determined in February 2020. The school was judged to “require improvement” by Ofsted at its inspection in April 2019. The school has a new headteacher who took up post in September 2020 and who has begun to tackle the budget situation and teaching standards across the school. The school has a current in-year budget deficit of £55,000 and is forecast to increase further unless action is taken in the current academic year and implemented September 2021.

11. The local authority reports that the school has 28 first preferences for admission to Reception in September 2021 as part of the primary admissions round, and that there are sufficient places to meet all parental preferences for the school in September with a PAN of 45. In recent years the school has been operating as a two form entry infant school with a PAN of 60 with six classes and six teachers with two in Reception, two in Year 1 and two in Year 2. The school also runs a separate detached nursery. Pupil numbers have been reducing for several years and the school has not been admitting up to its PAN.

12. In the current 2020/2021 school year the numbers in the school are as follows:

Reception class – 29 pupils

Mixed Reception/Year 1 class – 21 pupils (11 Reception and 10 Year 1)

Year 1 class - 23

Year 2 class - 23

Year 2 class - 18

13. The local authority and the school are agreed that this current school organisation is not financially sustainable with these class sizes. They are also agreed that because the school is also mixing teaching across the Foundation Stage Curriculum and Key Stage One this is impacting on teaching the curriculum and teaching standards.

14. In consequence the school intends to re-organise its staffing and class organisation to match the number of children in school better and to provide a better educational platform for teaching and learning. The school’s governing board has already agreed to reduce the PAN to 45 for 2022/23 academic year through the local authority’s annual process of setting community admissions arrangements and these arrangements have been determined by the local authority.

15. From September 2021 the school proposes to move to a one and a half class entry school with five teachers. This will comprise two teachers in a Foundation Stage Unit that incorporates the nursery class and then three teachers in three classes for the infant years of Year 1 and Year 2.

16. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code requires me to consider whether the variation requested is justified by the change in circumstances described. I am satisfied that the change will contribute to the financial and school improvement issues described. I also note that the local authority and the governing board have used the consultation period before the determination of the 2022 admission arrangements to consult on reducing the PAN for 2022 from 60 to 45. A reduction of the PAN by means of a variation request removes the need for consultation and the fact that the school has conducted a consultation on this matter for 2022 is helpful.

17. In addition to considering whether the change requested is justified I also have to consider the impact on the families applying for places at the school for September 2021 to ensure that there is no unfairness and that parents who have expressed a preference for their child to attend the school are likely to receive a place. The local authority has provided a summary of the number of children who have joined the school in the last three years as follows:

	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Townville Infant	43	38	40

The local authority has confirmed the following preferences that it had received by the closing date for admissions for September 2021:

	1 st Preference	2 nd Preference	3 rd Preference	4 th Preference	5 th Preference
Townville Infant	28	20	1	2	1

The local authority also provided its pupil number on roll (NOR) forecasts for schools in the area that includes Townville Infant School with two tables, one with the PAN at Townville Infant School at 60 and the second with the PAN at 45.

If Townville Infant School was to remain with PAN 60:

		Historic Census		Current Headcount	Forecast (2020)		
		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Airedale Infant School	PAN:	60	60	60	60	60	60
	NOR:	39	58	62	58	55	41

		Historic Census		Current Headcount	Forecast (2020)		
		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Fairburn View Primary School	PAN:	60	60	60	60	60	60
	NOR:	60	49	59	49	53	51
Oyster Park Primary Academy	PAN:	60	60	60	60	60	60
	NOR:	54	49	45	47	46	40
Townville Infant School	PAN:	60	60	60	60	60	60
	NOR:	43	38	40	45	42	45
Total	PAN:	240	240	240	240	240	240
	NOR:	196	194	206	199	196	177
Surplus places in the area		44	46	34	41	44	63

If Townville Infant School was to reduce to PAN 45:

		Historic Census		Current Headcount	Forecast (2020)		
		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Airedale Infant School	PAN:	60	60	60	60	60	60
	NOR:	39	58	62	58	55	41
Fairburn View Primary School	PAN:	60	60	60	60	60	60
	NOR:	60	49	59	49	53	51
Oyster Park Primary Academy	PAN:	60	60	60	60	60	60
	NOR:	54	49	45	47	46	40
Townville Infant School	PAN:	45	45	45	45	45	45
	NOR:	43	38	40	45	42	45
Total	PAN:	225	225	225	225	225	225

		Historic Census		Current Headcount	Forecast (2020)		
		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	NOR:	196	194	206	199	196	177
Surplus places across the area		29	31	19	26	29	48

18. Taking these tables into account I am satisfied that there are sufficient places for the first preferences for places to be met for September 2021 and given the number of additional places in the area it is clear that parents will be able to achieve their first preferences for places and there will still be places available for second preferences. In addition, the forecast numbers tables confirm that there will be sufficient places for the school to meet demand in September 2021 if the PAN is reduced as proposed. I am satisfied that the proposed reduction in PAN will not have a detrimental affect on the ability for parents to obtain a place for their child at this school in September 2021 through the current admission process.

Summary

19. I have considered whether or not the proposed variation is justified by the change in circumstance described and am satisfied that the reduction in PAN will contribute to the need for the school to manage its budget deficit and to allow a change in class organisation that will contribute to the school improvement required.

20. I have also considered the impact of the proposed PAN reduction from 60 to 45 on admissions and whether or not there will be families who are unable to attend the school as a result of the PAN reduction. I am satisfied that the information provided by the local authority shows that there will be sufficient places at the school to meet the demand for places for September 2021. In consequence I approve the proposed variation and determine that from September 2021 the PAN at the school should be reduced from 60 to 45.

Determination

21. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Wakefield Metropolitan District Council for Townville Infant School, Castleford for September 2021.

22. I determine that for September 2021 the Published Admission Number shall be reduced from 60 to 45.

Dated: 5 March 2021

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: David Lennard Jones