



Office of  
the Schools  
Adjudicator

## Determination

**Case reference:** VAR2269

**Admission authority:** Hampshire County Council for Chalk Ridge Primary School, Basingstoke

**Date of decision:** 31 August 2022

## 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 Hampshire County Council for Chalk Ridge Primary School for September 2022.**

**I determine that the published admission number for admissions in September 2022 will be reduced from 60 to 30.**

## The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the local authority) has referred a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for September 2022 (the arrangements) for Chalk Ridge Primary School (the school) to the adjudicator. The school is a community school for children aged four to eleven in Basingstoke.
2. The proposed variation is to reduce the published admission number (PAN) from 60 to 30.

## Jurisdiction and procedure

3. The referral was made to me in accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) which deals with variations to determined arrangements. Paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the School Admissions Code (the Code) say (in so far as relevant here):

“3.6 Once admission arrangements have been determined for a particular school year, they cannot be revised by the admission authority unless such revision is necessary to give effect to a mandatory requirement of this Code, admissions law, a determination of the Adjudicator or any misprint in the admission arrangements. Admission authorities may propose other variations where they consider such changes to be necessary in view of a major change in circumstances. Such proposals **must** be referred to the Schools Adjudicator for approval, and the appropriate bodies notified. Where the local authority is the admission authority for a community or voluntary controlled school, it must consult the governing body of the school before making any reference.

3.7 Admission authorities **must** notify the appropriate bodies of all variations”.

4. The local authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified. I have seen confirmation that the school’s governing board has been consulted on the proposed variation. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am also satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation, and the Code.

5. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:

- a. the referral from the local authority dated 1 August 2022, supporting documents and further information provided at my request;
- b. the determined arrangements for 2022 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c. comments on the proposed variation from the school;
- d. a map showing the location of the school and other relevant schools; and
- e. information available on the websites of the local authority and the Department for Education.

## The proposed variation

6. The proposed variation is to reduce the PAN of the school from 60 to 30 for September 2022. The local authority’s email, dated 12 July 2022, providing notification to the relevant bodies of the proposed PAN reduction, commented:

“Chalk Ridge Primary School currently has a PAN of 60, organised across a 14 class structure. The continued operation of a 14th class is presenting significant financial challenges for the school, and based on the actual pupil numbers at the school, offer data for September 2022 and the future growth projections for the catchment area, it is unlikely that a PAN of 60 will be filled. The recommendation is to reduce the school’s PAN to 30 for 2022/23.”

7. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code (as above) requires that admission arrangements, once determined, may only be revised, that is changed or 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.

## Consideration of proposed variation

8. There is no formal consultation required for a variation and so parents and others do not have the opportunity to express their views. Clearly it is desirable that PAN reductions are made via the process of determination following consultation as the consultation process allows those with an interest to express their views. It also allows for objections to the adjudicator. None of this is afforded by the variation process which makes it particularly important that proposed variations are properly scrutinised, and I have accordingly given careful consideration to the data to try to ascertain if there will be sufficient school places in the local area if the PAN is reduced from 60 to 30 for September 2022. I have also considered the demand for places at the school, the reasons given for the change, the potential effect on parental preference and whether the change is justified in these circumstances.

9. I should also add that the local authority determined the admission arrangements for the school for admission in September 2023 on 28 February 2022; the PAN will be 60. As the arrangements for 2023 were determined before the application to reduce the PAN for 2022, the application will impact only on the 2022 PAN.

10. The local authority told me, in the application to reduce the PAN,

“For the September 2022 admissions round, the school have made 28 offers. The planning area of Basingstoke E has made 320 offers, but there are 390 places in the planning area, therefore there are sufficient places to accommodate the demand in the area.”

11. There are four other schools in the planning area which admit to the Reception Year (YR). Based on the figures above provided by the local authority, there will be approximately 18% surplus places for admission to YR in the planning area. The local authority updated the numbers for the school on 18 August 2022:

“Currently the school has 30 offers for September 2022. There is one late application that has been received and once processed will take the school to 31 offers. We will honour that offer if the OSA approve the reduction in the PAN to 30 and will aim to work the school down to 30.”

12. The local authority sent me details about the current 14-class structure as of September 2021:

	Foundation	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	
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Class	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3		29						29
4		29						29
5			26					26
6			25					25
7				23				23
8				22				22
9					26			26
10					26			26
11						22		22
12						24		24
13							30	30
14							30	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>362</b>

The numbers submitted make clear that most year groups are below the current PAN of 60. A PAN of 30 (albeit with 31 now accepted) would result in one class for YR and a 13-class structure with other year groups retaining two classes per year group

13. I asked the school to comment on the impact if the application to reduce the PAN was successful and if it was not successful. The chair of governors sent me helpful information and I set out below part of his response:

“It may assist the adjudicator to know that the decision to seek a variation in our PAN from 60 to 30 for 2022-23 was influenced by the following:

1. A clear view that, as a result of demographic changes, reducing numbers of children, and a significant excess of capacity in our local school planning area, it was extremely unlikely that our school would see sufficient new starters (September 2022) in Year R to enable us

to set a viable budget over the next 3 years (and potentially beyond), without the PAN reduction.

2. Governors felt that the introduction of certainty in the number of admissions (a maximum of 30 children) would enable the following:
  - a. The ability to plan and make necessary adjustments to school staffing and supporting structures that would enable significant improvements to the schools' financial viability. A lack of such certainty would have meant that the school would have to retain the capacity to run 2 classes (both in 2022-23 and in subsequent years), with associated costs.
  - b. Certainty in class allocation for our youngest children. The potential scenario of starting the school year with a single class (assuming admission numbers of 30 or less), and subsequently having to open a second class should new joiners come during the year was discussed. It was felt likely that in such an eventuality, it would be sensible to balance pupil numbers across the classes, with associated disruption to the children. This issue was raised by staff governors, but governors as a whole felt strongly that continuity and a lack of disruption to children was of vital importance.

In summary, Governors believe that the variation being agreed will protect the school from significant budget difficulties by allowing it to properly plan and manage school staffing and facilities with a high degree of certainty. It will also have benefits in terms of allowing a proper, planned engagement with staff and parents, together with minimising disruption to our children.”

14. Schools are largely funded by the number of children and one of the highest costs is staffing. If the number of children in YR is over 30, even by one child, then the school may decide for educational reasons to establish a second class with the costs that this would entail. By the PAN being changed so that it is 30 then the governing board can plan on that basis which is why it supports the proposal. The drop in pupil numbers over the last few years has meant financial difficulties for the school but the reduction in PAN to 30 will enable them to plan their staffing with more certainty. I am also assured that there are sufficient vacant places in the planning area if there are further requests for places. I find that the variation is justified by the circumstances and approve the proposed variation.

## **Determination**

15. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Chalk Ridge Primary School for September 2022.

16. I determine that the published admission number for admissions in September 2022 will be reduced from 60 to 30.

Dated: 31 August 2022

Signed:

Schools adjudicator: Lorraine Chapman