



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case references: VAR2341, VAR2346, VAR2347 and VAR2348

Admission authority: Northumberland County Council for Belford Primary School, Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School, Berwick Middle School and The Duchess's Community High School

Date of decision: 1 September 2023

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements for Belford Primary School, Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School, Berwick Middle School and The Duchess's Community High School determined by Northumberland County Council for September 2024.

I determine that the arrangements shall be as set out in this determination.

I have also considered the arrangements under section 88I(5) of the Act and find that they do not comply with requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the admission authority. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of the date of the determination unless an alternative timescale is specified by the adjudicator.

In this case I determine that all matters should be rectified within two months of the date of this determination except that the changes required to address the use of 'greater catchment areas' in the oversubscription criteria should be made by 28 February 2024.

The referral

1. Northumberland County Council (the local authority) has referred proposals for variations to the admission arrangements for September 2024 (the arrangements) for

Belford Primary School (Belford), Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School (Lowick), Berwick Middle School (Berwick) and The Duchess's Community High School (the high school) to the adjudicator.

- 1.1. Belford is a community school for children aged two to eleven in Belford;
 - 1.2. Lowick is a voluntary controlled school with a Church of England religious character for children aged two to nine in Lowick;
 - 1.3. Berwick is a community school for children aged nine to thirteen in Berwick and is deemed a secondary school; and
 - 1.4. the high school is a community school for children aged 11 to 18 in Alnwick.
2. The proposed variations are related changes to the catchment areas for the four schools.

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 schools’ governing boards have been consulted on the proposed variations. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variations are within my jurisdiction. I am also satisfied that it is within my jurisdiction to consider the determined arrangements in accordance with my power under section 88I of the Act as they have come to my attention and determine whether or not they conform with the requirements relating to admissions and if not in what ways they do not so conform.

5. In considering these matters I have had regard to all relevant legislation, and the Code. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
- a. the referral from the local authority dated 6 June 2023, supporting documents and further information provided at my request;
 - b. the determined arrangements for 2024 and the proposed variations to those arrangements;
 - c. comments on the proposed variations from the governing boards for Belford, Lowick and the high school;
 - d. maps showing the location of the schools, other relevant schools, the current catchment areas for the schools, the proposed catchment areas for the schools and the home addresses of students in years 7 and 8 attending either Berwick or the high school in the 2022/2023 academic year;
 - e. a previous determination on the community and voluntary controlled schools in the local authority's area with case reference REF4069 (the previous determination);
 - f. information about the planned reorganisation of educational provision in the area; and
 - g. information available on the websites of the local authority and the Department for Education (DfE).
6. I have also taken account of the information I received during a meeting I convened on 21 July 2023 via Microsoft Teams attended by representatives of the local authority.

The proposed variations

7. The proposed variations are:
- 7.1. the catchment area for Lowick is extended to include an area that is currently in the catchment area for Belford;
 - 7.2. the catchment area for Belford is reduced to exclude the area which the local authority propose should instead be in the catchment area of Lowick;
 - 7.3. the catchment area for the high school is extended to include the proposed smaller catchment area for Belford (the catchment area for the high school not having previously included either the existing or the proposed Belford catchment area); and

7.4. the catchment area for Berwick is reduced to exclude the proposed smaller catchment area for Belford (the catchment area for Berwick having previously included the existing Belford catchment area).

8. The local authority has provided a map which illustrates the proposed changes and this is provided below. As these proposed variations are linked, I have considered them together in this one determination.

9. The geography of Northumberland is important to note. The county of Northumberland is a large and mainly rural area. It is the least densely populated local authority area in England and borders Scotland to the north. The town of Berwick is at the northern most point of the county and has, at times, been part of Scotland. A glance at a map shows that large areas of the county have few roads or villages. While the east side, where the schools under consideration are situated, is the more populated part of the county, it remains common there for children to travel at least 15 miles to their secondary school.

10. The local authority's school transport policy, while not part of my jurisdiction, is an important part of the context, affecting as it does the ability of children to attend their preferred school, given the distances involved. The school transport policy is, to a large extent, based on whether or not children live in the catchment areas of the schools to which they wish to be admitted. In other words, if a child does not live in the catchment area of the school to which they wish to be admitted and they need to travel by vehicle to school, their family will have to pay for transport to school.

11. At the meeting I convened, I was also made aware that there are cultural patterns of school preference that cannot be seen on a map. This means, for example, it may be common for a family to prefer a school that may be further away than their nearest school; it is also quite possible that whether or not they choose their nearest or, say, second nearest school, there could be a considerable distance to travel and preference will be linked to other factors such as family connections.

12. Historically there was a first, middle and high school system in Northumberland, which I will refer to as the middle school system. The middle school system in Northumberland was designed so that children attended a first school until the end of year 4 (Y4) when they joined a middle school and could stay until the end of year 8 (Y8). The child would move onto a high school for year 9. There have been changes to the organisation of schools in the local authority's area over years and so there is now a variety of types of school with some primary (in this instance I mean reception year to year 6) and secondary (meaning year 7 to either year 11 or year 13) schools, which I will refer to as the primary/secondary system. In some areas both a middle school and a primary/secondary school system operate, and this is the situation for the schools considered in this determination. According to the DfE website, 'Get information about schools', there are 30 secondary schools in Northumberland including 14 middle and 16 secondary schools.

13. Changes to the school systems continue and are subject to consultation and much debate. The local authority told me that “A statutory proposal was published on 11 May 2023 setting out a proposal for community schools in the Berwick Partnership to reorganise to a primary/secondary structure, involving the closure of the 3 middle schools in the partnership with effect from 31 August 2026 and the change of age range of the first schools to primary with effect from 1 September 2025.”

14. At the meeting I was told that the local authority had made decisions the day before (Thursday 20 July) including that Berwick should close from 31 August 2026. A linked decision made the same day was to extend the age range at Lowick so that it provides for children aged two to eleven. The change to Lowick will start in September 2025 with Y4 able to stay on for Y5 and then Y6 from September 2026.

15. Other linked changes are proposed, including to academy schools and, as changes have been in hand for some time, the pattern of parental preference has also changed. It is my understanding that the variations proposed are to recognise the patterns of attendance and to make it possible for more children to benefit from home to school transport provided by the local authority.

16. There are two sets of arrangements for the community and voluntary controlled schools for which the local authority is the admission authority. One is for primary admissions and one is for secondary admissions. The oversubscription criteria for both are, in summary:

- 1) Looked after and previously looked after children
- 2) Children who live in the catchment area for the school
- 3) Children with a social or medical need to attend the school
- 4) Children living in the greater catchment area for the school with a sibling attending the school
- 5) Children living in the greater catchment area
- 6) Children with a sibling at the school
- 7) “Requests on behalf of children which are based on the need to maintain continuity of educational provision within the feeder pattern of Northumberland’s schools” – middle, high and secondary schools only
- 8) Other children.

17. In the arrangements as originally determined for 2024, the catchment area for Berwick contains the catchment areas for Lowick and Belford.

18. 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 variations requested are justified by the change in circumstances.

Consideration of proposed variations

19. There is no formal consultation required for a variation and so parents and others do not normally have the opportunity to express their views. It is desirable that changes to admission arrangements 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 normally afforded by the variation process.

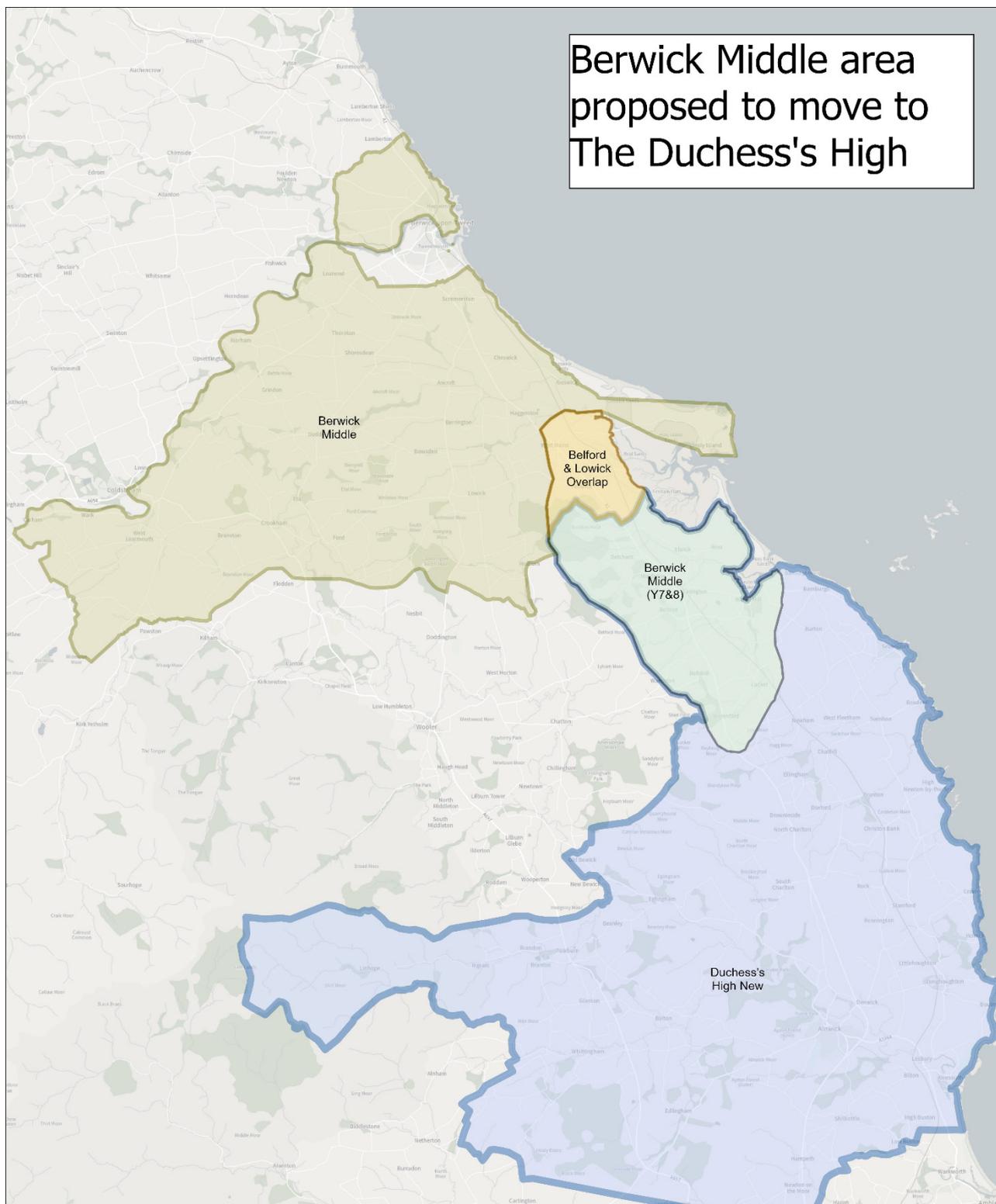
20. In this instance the proposed variations in effect form part of a much wider set of changes to the local pattern of provision. Many of the other changes which have already been agreed or are under consideration have been or will be subject to the formal consultation required when changes to publicly funded schools, whether local authority maintained or academies, are made. As a result, there has been a major consultation on the changes to the school organisation proposals with many responses made. A thorough summary of the consultation, which was provided to me, contains 156 pages and includes feedback from governing boards, school staff and the public, including parents. While some of the changes requested via these proposed variations were not consulted on specifically, there has been considerable engagement with schools and the public.

21. Separately to the consultation described above, there was a consultation on the admission arrangements for 2024 which included the proposal that the catchment area for the high school should be changed so that it included the majority of the catchment area for Belford. This change was not made when the arrangements for 2024 were determined as the decision to extend the age range of Lowick and close Berwick had not been made. The Cabinet for the local authority met on 23 May 2023 and considered the wider consultation on the changes from a middle school system. At that meeting the local authority agreed that the variations I am considering be requested. The map below illustrates the changes proposed.

Key to map:

- 1) The area in brown and labelled 'Belford and Lowick Overlap' is currently in the catchment area for Belford and the proposal is that this would become part of the catchment area for Lowick (and thus also in the catchment area for Berwick).
- 2) The area in green labelled 'Berwick Middle Yr 7&8' would be the revised catchment area for Belford and is proposed to be in the catchment area for the high school.

- 3) The area in moss green and labelled 'Berwick Middle' is the current catchment area for Berwick excluding the catchment area for Belford.
- 4) The area in blue and labelled 'Duchess's High New' is the current catchment area for the high school.



22. In considering these linked variations I will look first at the catchment areas for Belford and Lowick. The local authority said in its referral that it asks for a “small part of the current catchment [of Belford], to the north, is re-allocated to Lowick Church of England First School.” The effect would be a smaller area for Belford and a larger area for Lowick. This change appears to be a ‘tidying-up’ exercise that makes sense to the area concerned.

23. The governing board for Belford said that it was content with the proposal as, “The change is likely to make minimal or no difference to our numbers on roll as we have in the past - i.e. over the last 10 years - only had one or two children from that area, and we do not anticipate that this will change in the future.”

24. The governing board for Lowick said, “we agree that the change in catchment boundary has been shared with the governors as part of the Berwick Partnership consultation. The governors are in favour of such a change. However, we have not seen a map of the precise change so we are unable to comment further on the anticipated impact as that would depend on what was included in our new boundary.”

25. The next part of the variation I consider is that the catchment area for the high school is extended to include the revised catchment area for Belford. The local authority and the governing board for the high school explained that this change will reflect what happens in practice, that is children from that area are admitted to the high school and not Berwick. The change is requested because currently the children admitted from that area do not meet the requirements of the policy for school transport which is based on catchment areas. As the governing board for the high school explained,

“we currently receive nearly 100% of Belford and Glendale families. Any change to the catchment for the families currently at [the high school] would be a huge financial benefit to them, and in a cost of living crisis this is welcomed. We believe the benefit to this move would be that school transport would be provided to students that already attend here. Capacity is not an issue as we already receive the entire Year 6 cohort from both at the moment, so there would be no detrimental impact on the school.”

26. A map provided to me by the local authority showed that no children who lived in the Belford area had been admitted to Berwick in the last two years. I asked that the governing board for Berwick commented but no response was received. I note that Berwick is due to close by September 2026 following the local authority’s decisions around restructuring and so I did not pursue my request for a comment.

27. The changes proposed by the local authority are logical and reasonable in the circumstances and in the context of the larger reorganisation of schools. The changes reflect the pattern of school admissions and will provide benefits to families regarding school transport. I find that the variations are justified by the circumstances and I approve the proposed variations.

Consideration of the arrangements

28. Having considered the arrangements as a whole it appeared to me that the following matters may not conform with requirements of the Code and so I brought them to the attention of the local authority. I have listed these matters below setting out the relevant paragraphs of the Code and where the arrangements did not conform to requirements. Some of these matters were considered in the previous determination (case reference REF4069). Other matters raised in that previous determination have been addressed as required by section 88K(2) of the Act.

Clarity

29. I will make several references below to a lack of clarity in the arrangements and this relates to paragraph 14 of the Code which requires that admission arrangements are clear. Paragraph 14 says,

“In drawing up their admission arrangements, admission authorities **must** ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear, and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated.”

30. The arrangements say that they are ‘part’ of the arrangements. It is not clear what other things are part of the arrangements and where they may be found. The arrangements are therefore not clear in this regard.

31. The arrangements refer to ‘proposed’ published admission numbers and to a planned consultation on catchment areas. It is therefore not clear if the information provided is proposed, and if so when it would come into force, or if decisions have been made. The arrangements are not clear in this regard.

32. The first oversubscription criterion must be for looked after and previously looked after children as stated in paragraph 1.7 of the Code. The arrangements include definitions of looked after and previously looked after children, which echo the definitions provided in the Code definitions but without always making sense as they are provided out of context. For example, footnotes are provided in continuous text without the references to which they relate. This makes the arrangements unclear, including the oversubscription criteria, and so in addition to paragraph 14 of the Code, the arrangements do not meet the requirement of paragraph 1.8 of the Code that oversubscription criteria must be clear.

Catchment areas

33. The oversubscription criteria include the use of catchment areas. Problems with the information on catchment areas, the use of ‘greater catchment areas’ and the lack of information overall were raised in detail in the previous determination. The difficulties raised have not been fully addressed and I will describe them here starting with the information on

catchment areas. The admission arrangements say, “The following link provides information re: catchments relevant to the 2024/25 academic year: [Digital catchment maps](#)”

34. The link provided takes one to a page of the local authority’s website headed, “School catchment and school transport eligibility maps” with the opportunity to click for instructions. The instructions do not help one find information about school catchment areas. At the meeting the local authority was able to explain to me how it was possible to get information on catchment areas but agreed that this would not be clear to most people trying to do so. The information on catchment areas is therefore not clear. The catchment areas are part of the arrangements and so the arrangements do not meet the requirements of paragraphs 14 and 1.8 of the Code to be clear. Paragraph 1.14 of the Code requires that catchment areas are clearly defined. A clear definition will include being able to see the catchment areas and so the arrangements also do not comply with paragraph 1.14 of the Code.

35. I note that parents can put in their post code and can learn that their address is in the catchment area for a particular school. As the previous determination said, and I agree, “Stating that a named location is in a particular catchment area does not define the catchment area any more than stating that Bellingham is in Northumberland defines the boundaries of the county.”

36. The oversubscription criteria include criteria which are based on children living in what are described as “greater catchment area[s]”. The arrangements for both primary and secondary schools say,

“The greater catchment area for a school is the catchment area of the high or secondary school i.e all schools in a partnership that feed into a particular high or secondary school. The Local Authority cannot determine catchment areas for Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools or Academies, however for the purpose of this criteria, the Council has determined a greater catchment for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools. Parents can find details of this using the digital catchment maps link above.”

37. I discussed the use of ‘greater catchment areas’ at the meeting and it was agreed that their use related to a previous time when all secondary schools had catchment areas and these were agreed with the local authority so there was a pattern across the local authority’s area covering all addresses. This is not the case now as schools have a variety of arrangements including some secondary schools with no use of catchment areas in their arrangements. At the meeting it was also explained that this criterion for secondary schools was only meant to apply to middle schools although this was not stated in the arrangements. This alone made the arrangements unclear.

38. The previous determination said that the use of greater catchment areas as oversubscription criteria for the 2023 arrangements did not meet the requirements of the Code for the reasons given in that determination. The reasons given in the previous

determination related to the use of catchment areas of secondary schools for admission to community and voluntary controlled schools when the local authority was not the admission authority for all secondary schools and where the relevant admission authority may or may not determine arrangements which included the use of catchment areas in the oversubscription criteria.

39. The local authority tried to address the lack of coherence of catchment areas for secondary schools, and therefore for greater catchment areas, in the 2024 arrangements. One change made was that the arrangements now say (as above), “The local authority cannot determine catchment areas for Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools or Academies, however, for the purpose of this criteria, the Council has determined a greater catchment for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.” The arrangements then direct the reader to the digital maps. There are different layers to the digital maps including “High and Secondary Catchment View” and “Middle Catchment View”. As the explanation of ‘greater catchment areas’ specifically refer to high and secondary schools, I looked at the high and secondary school layer.

40. The “High and Secondary Catchment View” appears to show catchment areas for 15 secondary schools in the local authority’s area. The arrangements imply that these are the ‘greater catchment areas’ as well as catchment areas for secondary schools. There are 16 secondary schools (excluding middle schools) in the local authority’s area and only three of these are community or voluntary controlled schools, so the maps are not consistent with the statement in the arrangements. The “High and Secondary Catchment View” provided by the local authority on its website shows catchment areas for secondary schools across its area, giving the impression that secondary schools, whether community, voluntary aided, foundation or academy, have catchment areas. This is not the case. I have studied the maps for some time and remain confused by their content and what they are showing. The arrangements are unclear.

41. In addition, the arrangements say that the local authority has created ‘greater catchment areas’ on the basis of the three community secondary schools for which it is the admission authority. This would be irrational for a local authority the size of Northumberland as the distances to the schools for some children would be longer than would be acceptable. In addition, the catchment areas of the three community schools are not what is provided on the maps which are part of the arrangements. This makes the arrangements unclear.

42. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no provision in the legislation to prevent a school from having two catchment areas with different levels of priority afforded to children from one or the other, as attempted by the local authority. However, it must be possible for parents and others to establish easily whether an address is in a given catchment area, including whether it is in the “catchment area” or the “greater catchment area” for a particular school.

43. The use of greater catchment areas in the oversubscription criteria is therefore unclear. The local authority agreed that this was a matter that needed to be addressed. I realise that such a change to the oversubscription criteria will need consultation and so have reflected this in the dates I have set by which the matters I raise in this determination are addressed.

Unclear oversubscription criterion

44. For secondary schools there is a criterion, as above, which says, "Requests on behalf of children which are based on the need to maintain continuity of educational provision within the feeder pattern of Northumberland's schools." The arrangements for secondary schools then name feeder schools for nine middle and secondary schools. I would therefore assume that this criterion means that children who attend a named feeder school would meet this criterion. The wording used does not make this clear as it is open to interpretation. The criterion is not clear and so the arrangements do not meet the requirement of paragraph 1.8 of the Code that oversubscription criteria are clear.

Home address where parents live at different addresses and share the care of the child

45. Paragraph 1.13 of the Code says:

"Admission authorities **must** clearly set out how distance from home to the school and/or any nodal points used in the arrangements will be measured. This **must** include making clear how the 'home' address will be determined and the point(s) in the school or nodal points from which all distances will be measured. This should include provision for cases where parents have shared responsibility for a child following the breakdown of their relationship and the child lives for part of the week with each parent."

46. The arrangements say:

"The address of the parent or carer with whom the child is normally resident, Mondays to Fridays term time only, will be used in the allocation process. In some cases, for example where shared parental living arrangements are in place, a child's address may be difficult to determine. In these circumstances the address used for child benefit purposes will normally be used, i.e. the address of the parent claiming the benefit. If that is not available, then the address on the NHS medical card can be used."

47. Several paragraphs later, the arrangements say:

"The management of school applications may be severely delayed during the main admissions round where separated parents of the child each submit an application for different schools or one parent does not agree with the application made by the other parent. The School Admissions Code states that only one offer of a school

place per child can be made by the Local Authority. In this situation the Local Authority asks that parents and/or carers resolve matters between themselves before informing the Local Authority in writing of which application should be processed/their agreement to an application. In case of dispute between parents, where more than one parent has parental responsibility and they do not agree to an application being made to a particular school, a temporary school place will be offered until any dispute is resolved by both parents as a personal matter and this will be based on the address of the parent or carer with whom the child is normally resident, Mondays to Fridays term-time only.”

48. The use of the word ‘only’ as in “The address of the parent or carer with whom the child is normally resident, Mondays to Fridays term time only” and “this will be based on the address of the parent or carer with whom the child is normally resident, Mondays to Fridays term-time only” is not only redundant but also reductive as it implies that, if the child were also living with the parent outside of term time, it would not count as the home address. It would also not cover circumstances where a child spent one week with one parent and the second with the other.

49. If there is any doubt about the home address where parents share care, it is my view that the first step is to ask the parents. This is suggested in the later paragraph provided above but this paragraph is in a separate section to the first and so its application and relevance may not be apparent. This renders the provision unclear contrary to paragraph 14 of the Code. Child benefit may be an indicator of the home address to use but there are problems with this approach as described in the Chief Adjudicator’s annual report for 2018/19. This says in paragraph 20:

“We have received objections about the way some admission authorities decide which parent’s address is to be used as the child’s address for the purpose of school admissions where the parents do not live together. In these cases, the approach being used was to use the address of the parent who received child benefit as the child’s address, with no provision for the address of the other parent to be used. Adjudicators found this approach unacceptable and non-compliant with the Code and I thought it would be helpful to say something in this report about their reasons. In the first place, in some families, child benefit is not received. Secondly, there is no requirement that child benefit be paid to the parent with whom the child lives during the school week, term or year or with whom the child lives for most of the time. It is perfectly possible for child benefit to be paid to a parent with whom the child lives only during the school holidays or weekends. The use of the address of the parent who receives child benefit as the sole permitted indicator of a child’s address where parents live apart is not suitable for school admissions. It is not a reliable indicator of where a child actually lives for most of the time Monday to Friday during school terms which is a key factor in considering the most appropriate address for the purposes of school admissions. Its use with no scope for other indicators to be used

to establish the address of a child of parents who do not live together is likely to be found to be unreasonable and unfair and not in conformity with the Code.”

My view is that the use of child benefit eligibility as the primary method to determine a child’s home address is unreasonable.

Right to part-time education or deferring education before the child reaches compulsory school age

50. Paragraph 2.17 of the Code says:

“Admission authorities **must** provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. The authority **must** make it clear in their arrangements that where they have offered a child a place at a school:

a) that child is entitled to a full-time place in the September following their fourth birthday;

b) the child’s parents can defer the date their child is admitted to the school until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age and not beyond the beginning of the final term of the school year for which it was made; and

c) where the parents wish, children may attend part-time until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age.”

51. The arrangements say that “a parent does not have to send their [child] to school until they reach compulsory school age” which is in line with the Code (the word ‘child’ is missed from this sentence, so it is unclear). However, the arrangements also say,

“For children under compulsory school age, once a school place has been offered and accepted, parents may, if they wish, request that their child attends school part-time until later in the school year, or starts full time, later in the school year, but not later than the start of the summer term.”

52. I have underlined the word ‘request’ here for emphasis. Its use implies that the right to part time education or to start education when the child has reached compulsory school age as provided in paragraph 2.17 above, can only be requested. This is not the case and so makes the arrangements unclear and not meet the requirements of the Code. This area was raised in the previous determination and has not been fully addressed.

53. The local authority has told me that it will address these matters, as permitted by paragraph 3.6 of the Code, which is welcomed. As the local authority has accepted that changes are required, I will not discuss them further other than to make clear that the Code requires that the arrangements be amended to address the points set out here.

Summary

54. The proposed variations to the arrangements are rational and reasonable changes to the catchment areas of the schools concerned with benefits to families living in the areas. They are justified in light of the major change of circumstances identified by the local authority.

55. The other matters I have raised above must be addressed within two months of the date of this determination, but I have decided that the changes to the oversubscription criteria relating to 'greater catchment areas' requires consultation and so I determine that this matter must be addressed by 28 February 2024 to allow time for consultation.

Determination

56. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements for Belford Primary School, Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School, Berwick Middle School and The Duchess's Community High School determined by Northumberland County Council for September 2024.

57. I determine that the arrangements shall be as set out in this determination.

58. I have also considered the arrangements under section 88I(5) of the Act and find that they do not comply with requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

59. By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the admission authority. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of the date of the determination unless an alternative timescale is specified by the adjudicator.

60. In this case I determine that all matters should be rectified within two months of the date of this determination except that the changes required to address the use of 'greater catchment areas' in the oversubscription criteria should be made by 28 February 2024.

Dated: 1 September 2023

Signed:

Schools adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard