



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2404

Admission authority: Hampshire County Council for Guillemont Junior School,
Farnborough, Hampshire

Date of decision: 14 May 2024

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 Guillemont Junior School for September 2024.

I determine that the published admission number (PAN) shall be 60.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the local authority) has referred a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for September 2024 (the arrangements) for Guillemont Junior School (the school) to the adjudicator. The school is a community school for children aged seven to eleven in Farnborough.
2. The proposed variation is to reduce the published admission number (PAN) for admission in September 2024 from 90 to 60.

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.
5. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation, and the Code.
6. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
 - a. the referral from the local authority dated 26 March 2024, supporting documents and further information provided at my request;
 - b. the determined arrangements for 2024 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

7. The local authority made a request on 26 March 2024 that the PAN for the school for September 2024 be reduced from 90 to 60. They stated that there were 49 first preferences for the school. In their request they state that:

“The planning area of Farnborough North Primary has 319 spaces, but there are currently only 260 first preference applications naming the schools in the planning area, therefore there are sufficient places to accommodate the parental preference demand in the area even if the reduction was agreed.”

This indicates that there could be 59 surplus places across the planning area.

8. The school is one of 15 schools within the planning area in the town of Farnborough which serves the primary age range. A planning area is a construct used by the local authority for school place planning purposes. It will not necessarily reflect the needs or

desires of families within the planning area. Some families may express a preference for schools outside the planning area because they better suit their specific circumstances. The local authority has stated that the first preference data for the planning area is low and that there are sufficient school places “within the planning area and also the local proximity.”

9. Of the schools in the planning area, six are infant schools, providing education for children aged four to seven. Two of these infant schools have nurseries attached. There are five primary schools providing education for children aged four to eleven. The school is one of four junior schools. A junior school provides education for children aged seven to eleven.

10. The local authority has indicated that the other junior schools in the planning area are all undersubscribed in terms of first preferences for September 2024 although two of the four schools have now made offers up to their respective PANs.

11. The local authority has explained that the school is currently operating with twelve classes, with three classes in each of the four year groups. As a junior school, the school is not affected by the requirement in the School Admissions (Infant Class Size) (England) Regulations 2012 that infant classes must not contain more than 30 pupils with a single class teacher. The local authority states in its request

“If the school is unable to reduce its PAN for the 2024/2025 academic year, they may need to continue their 12-class organisation structure as they will need to continue admitting children up to 90 if applications are made naming the school. This would not be financially viable when the school does not have the pupil numbers of forecast data to support this.”

12. I note that the local authority, as the admission authority for the school, have determined a PAN of 90 for the school for 2025 which would accommodate the pupil numbers forecast for that year of entry.

13. I note also that the local authority can admit over PAN should they need to do so, and that no class at the school would be limited to 30 children.

14. 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

15. There is no formal consultation required for a variation and so parents and others do not have the opportunity to express their views. 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 be made to the adjudicator once admission arrangements have been determined. None of this is afforded by the variation process.

16. The major change of circumstance that has given rise to this variation request is the unexpectedly low number of applications for the school giving rise to a high level of surplus places in the planning area for the 2024/2025 school year.

17. The local authority has a duty to make sure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty, the local authority assesses the likely future number of places to be needed and plan to meet that need. The local authority uses planning areas, which are geographical groups of schools, for this purpose. As described above, there are four junior schools admitting children to Y3 in the school's planning area. Table 1 below summarises the number of children admitted to the schools in the planning area in recent years, the number of offers made for 2024 and the forecast numbers for 2025.

Table 1: numbers of school places and numbers of children admitted, offered places and forecast figures for Y3 in school in the planning area in which the school is located.

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Sum of PANs of schools in the planning area for Y3	320	320	291	319	315
Number of children admitted, offered a place or forecast	304	313	280	271	313
Vacant places	16	7	11	48	2
Vacant places as a percentage of Y3 places	5	2.2	3.8	15	0.6

18. The DfE document, "Basic need allocations 2025-26: Explanatory note on methodology", refers to the need for two per cent surplus capacity in the number of school places "to provide an operating margin for local authorities. This helps to support parental choice, pupil population movement, and general manageability of the system".

19. The figures in the above table indicate a surplus place level of 15 per cent for September 2024 with the school's current PAN of 90, which is far in excess of the DfE recommended figure.

20. If the PAN for the school were to be reduced from 90 to 60, there would be a total of 289 places available across the four junior schools, with 271 places having been offered. If the PAN reduction was approved, the surplus capacity would be 18 places (6.2 per cent), still well above the figure recommended by the DfE.

21. Table 2 shows the number of children admitted to each junior school in the planning area from 2021 to 2023, the number of Y3 places currently offered for 2024 and the forecast of need for 2025

Table 2

Y3 Intake	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Cove Junior School	70	75	71	75	69
Grange Community Junior School	60	60	55	60	80
Guillemont Junior School	98	94	92	57 (plus 5 for the specialist unit)	89
Manor Junior School	76	84	62	74	75
Total Y3	304	313	280	271	313
Total PAN	320	320	291	319	315

22. Table 2 shows that, based on the current number of offers made, there would be 48 vacancies across the four junior schools in the planning area. If the PAN for the school were to be reduced to 60 then there would still be 18 vacancies across the four schools. I am therefore satisfied that if the PAN for the school were to be reduced to 60 that the local authority could meet its duty to provide sufficient school places.

23. I note that five places have been offered at the school for the specialist unit. The admission arrangements for 2024 state:

“The PAN for Guillemont Junior School for 2025-2026 is 90. A further 16 places are available across Key Stage 2 for children with an EHCP admitted to the resourced provision for speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and 8 places available across Key Stage 2 for children with an EHCP admitted to the resourced provision for autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).”

Therefore the additional five children offered places at the resourced provision do not affect the number offered for mainstream places.

24. The governing board is concerned that, if the PAN is not reduced to 60, a few more children might seek places, resulting in the year group having over 60 children at some point before the end of July 2025 when the relevant year of entry for 2024 would end. It is for the governing board and the school leadership to decide on the class structure of the school and they can reduce the number of classes to 11 if they so wish without the requested variation. However, the reduction in the PAN would reduce the risk of any significant number of additional children being admitted that would necessitate class sizes of over 30. Although the school is not precluded from having classes of more than 30 children, this is not considered desirable.

25. In my view, the local authority's proposal to reduce the school's PAN from 90 to 60 will give the school confidence in changing its class structure for this unexpectedly low intake year. I can see no evidence that parental preference would be frustrated by the proposed reduction in the PAN. I can also see the benefit to the school and to the children it educates if the PAN were to be reduced to 60 for 2024.

26. I find that the variation is justified by the change in circumstances and approve the proposed variation.

Determination

27. 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 Guillemont Junior School for September 2024.

28. I determine that the published admission number (PAN) is 60.

Dated: 14 May 2024

Signed:

Schools adjudicator: Tess Gale