



Office of  
the Schools  
Adjudicator

## Determination

**Case reference:** VAR2434

**Admission authority:** Hampshire County Council for Woolton Hill Junior School, Newbury

**Date of decision:** 17 July 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 Woolton Hill Junior School, Newbury for September 2024.

I determine that for September 2024 the published admission number will be 31.

## The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the local authority) has referred a proposal to the adjudicator for a variation to the admission arrangements for September 2024 (the arrangements) for Woolton Hill Junior School (the school). The school is a community school for children aged seven to eleven years in Woolton Hill near Newbury. It is federated with St Thomas' Church of England Infant School, Woolton Hill.
2. The proposed variation is to reduce the published admission number (PAN) for September 2024 from 45 to 31.

## 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 body 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 14 June 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 governing body;
  - d. a map showing the location of the school and other relevant schools; and
  - e. information available on the websites of the local authority, the school and the Department for Education.

## The proposed variation

7. The proposed variation is to reduce the PAN of the school from 45 to 31 for admissions to Year 3 (Y3) in September 2024. The arrangements for the school for 2024/25 were determined by the local authority on 21 February 2023.
8. The referral states:

“On the national notification day for September 2024 admissions the school offered 31 places for Year 3 children. The planning area of Kingsclere/Burghclere Primary made a total of 31 Year 3 offers, however there are 45 Year 3 places available within that planning area currently. Based on these figures, there are sufficient places to accommodate the demand in the area.”

9. The referral states that the school currently has five mixed-age classes. There are two classes comprising children in Years 3 and 4 and three classes with children in Years 5 and 6.

**Table 1: Woolton Hill Junior School 2023/24 arrangement of classes and pupil numbers**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Y3</b>	<b>Y4</b>	<b>Y5</b>	<b>Y6</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1</b>	14	16			<b>30</b>
<b>2</b>	15	16			<b>31</b>
<b>3</b>			9	12	<b>21</b>
<b>4</b>			9	13	<b>22</b>
<b>5</b>			11	10	<b>21</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>125</b>

10. The LA has confirmed that the school intend to move to a four class model from September 2024 with two mixed age Year 3 and 4 classes and two mixed age Year 5 and 6 classes.

11. The referral states:

“Because the offers for September 2024 are low, failure to reduce the PAN could result in the school needing to operate 5 classes when there are sufficient school places within the planning area and also the local proximity.

If the school is unable to reduce their PAN for the 2024/2025 academic year, they may need to continue their 5-class organisation structure, as they will need to continue admitting children up to 45 if applications are made naming the school. This would not be financially viable when the school does not have the pupil numbers or forecast data to support this.”

12. 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**

13. 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.

14. It is, therefore, particularly important that the proposed variation is properly scrutinised. I have accordingly considered the latest available data to form a view about whether there will be a sufficiency of school places in the local area if the PAN for September 2024 is reduced from 45 to 31. I have also considered the demand for places at the school, the reasons given for the change and the potential effect on parental preference.

15. Before I consider the proposed variation, I note that the local authority determined the 2025/26 arrangements, including a PAN of 45, for the school on 20 February 2024. As the arrangements have already been determined, my decision affects only admissions to Y3 at the school for 2024. If the local authority and the school wish to vary the arrangements for 2025 there will need to be a further request for a variation submitted. The local authority has indicated that they intend to consult on a reduction of the PAN for admissions in 2026.

16. 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 plans to meet that need. The local authority uses planning areas, which are geographical areas each containing a number of schools, for this purpose. The school is one of eight schools providing primary education in the Kingsclere / Burghclere planning area of Hampshire. Of the schools in the planning area, six are primary schools providing education for children aged four to eleven; one is an infant school providing education for children aged four to seven; one is a junior school providing education for children aged seven to eleven. In the infant and primary schools, the normal year of entry is Reception. In the junior school (the school) the normal year of entry is Y3. The infant school, St Thomas' Church of England Infant School, is federated to the junior school. It is subject to a separate application to vary its PAN for 2024.

17. Table 2 summarises the data supplied to me by the local authority for junior school places in the planning area; the number of children admitted to a junior school in each of the previous three years; the number of places offered at a junior school for 2024 and the forecast numbers for 2025. I note that the school is the only junior school in the planning area and therefore the only school for which Y3 is the normal year of entry.

**Table 2: The number of places available at a junior school in the planning area; the number of children admitted each year since September 2021; and those forecast to be admitted for 2025 (data provided 14 June 2024)**

**Year of Entry**

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
<b>The total PAN for the junior schools in the planning area <sup>a</sup></b>	45	45	45	45	45
<b>The total number of children in the planning area admitted to Y3 in a junior school</b>	27	33	29	31 <sup>b</sup>	35 <sup>c</sup>
<b>Vacant places in Y3 at a junior school in the planning area</b>	18	12	16	14	10
<b>Vacant places in Y3 at a junior school in the planning area as a proportion of total number of places, expressed as a percentage</b>	40.0	26.7	35.6	31.1	22.2

<sup>a</sup> Woolton Hill Junior is the only junior school in the planning area and therefore the only school for which Y3 is the normal year of entry.

<sup>b</sup> Number of children allocated a place for September 2024

<sup>c</sup> Forecast data.

18. Table 2 shows that there are currently 14 vacant Y3 junior school places for children in the planning area in September 2024. These are all at the school. There would be zero places available in the school if the proposed reduction in PAN is agreed. However, the LA has confirmed that there are currently 36 places available across the six primary schools in the planning area for any children seeking a place in Y3 in September 2024.

19. In each year since 2021/22, all first preference requests for a place at the school have been met. The majority of children move from the infant school to the school. For September 2024, 31 on time applications were made for a Y3 place in the planning area, all of them were for the school. In all cases, the school was the parents' first preference for a Y3 place for their child.

20. All parents seeking a place for their child at the school for September 2024 have been offered one. I am also assured that if the PAN for the school were to be reduced from 45 to 31, there would be sufficient vacant places in the area for those seeking a place in Y3 during the academic year. Although any parents who make an in-year application for a Y3 place at the school may no longer be offered one, I have also been assured that they will be able to secure a place at a local school as there are likely to be Y3 places available at a number of primary schools in the planning area.

21. Information provided by the school states that:

“Due to low pupil numbers, the school is looking to run a four class structure in 2024/25. Because the offers for September 2024 at Woolton Hill Junior School are

low, failure to reduce the PAN could result in the school needing to operate 5 classes when there are sufficient school places within the planning area and also the local proximity. If the school is unable to reduce their PAN for the 2024/2025 academic year, they may need to continue their 5-class organisation structure, as they will need to continue admitting children up to 45 if applications are made naming the school. This would not be financially viable.”

22. Subsequent to their initial application, the local authority has said:

“As at 25 June 2024, the school have 32 offers for Year 3 for September 2024. Any offers above 31 will be honoured and the school will manage back to 31 at the earliest convenience.”

23. Minutes of a governing body meeting from 13 June 2024 confirm the financial imperative to operate a four-class model and that an additional place has been offered:

“[The proposed reduction is] needed to protect the classes at WHJS from becoming increasingly large. The structure agreed for the 24/25 academic year is two mixed yr3/4 classes and two mixed yr 5/6 classes. The year 3/4 classes will be made up of 29 year 4 children and 31 year 3 children leading to two classes of 30 children.... With the PAN currently at 45 the LA will continue to offer places to any year 3 applicants and one further place has been offered and accepted. Should further applications be made this will lead to the yr3 /4 classes of potentially 32+ children which is not practical. The financial situation of the school means it is not possible to have an additional class.”

24. For admission in September 2024, all applicants have been offered a place at the school. I have expressed my concern about the lack of consultation when changes are made to admission arrangements by means of a variation. However, in this case the concern appears unwarranted in the sense that all parents seeking a place for their child at the school have been offered a place.

25. After consideration of all the factors above, I find that the variation is justified by the circumstances, and I approve it. The PAN for the academic year 2024/25 will be 31.

## Determination

26. 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 Woolton Hill Junior School, Newbury for September 2024.

27. I determine that for September 2024 the published admission number will be 31.

Dated: 17 July 2024

Schools adjudicator: Catherine Crooks