



Office of  
the Schools  
Adjudicator

## Determination

**Case reference: VAR2540**

**Admission authority: Hampshire County Council for Petersfield Infant School, Petersfield**

**Date of decision: 25 March 2025**

## 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 Petersfield Infant School for September 2025.**

**I determine that the published admission number shall be 90.**

## The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the local authority) has referred a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for September 2025 (the arrangements) for Petersfield Infant School (the School) to the adjudicator. The School is for children aged four to seven. It is located in Petersfield.
2. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) be reduced from 120 to 90.

## 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 and supports it. 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. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:

- a. the referral from the local authority received 14 February 2025, supporting documents and further information provided at my request on 14 March 2025;
- b. the determined arrangements for 2025 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c. comments on the proposed variation from the governing body and further information provided at my request;
- 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 DfE) including ‘Get information about schools’ (GIAS) and ‘Find and compare schools and colleges in England’ (the DfE website).

6. 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.

## The proposed variation

7. The local authority has requested that the PAN for the School is reduced from 120 to 90 for admissions in 2025 and said in its referral,

“The reduction of the PAN to 90 will protect the school from the financial difficulties associated with the employment of a 4th teacher in Year R when there are insufficient children to justify this on a per pupil funding basis. This reduction will

enable them to plan their staffing and curriculum with certainty for future academic years.”

## 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. Once the PAN has been set for a particular year then no body, except the governing body of a community or voluntary controlled school, can object if that PAN remains the same in subsequent years. 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.

9. The PAN for 2026 has been set at 90. Therefore, my decision in this determination will only affect admissions for the 2025/26 academic year.

10. I am conscious that parents have applied for places in reception year (YR) in the expectation that the PAN for the School would be 120. In these circumstances, if parental preferences were to be frustrated by the reduction in PAN, there would need to be strong justification.

11. I will first consider if there would be sufficient school places in the area if I were to agree the variation, then the demand for places at the School and then the reasons for the variation request. In considering whether there would be sufficient school places in the area if the PAN were to be reduced to 90 for 2025, I will begin by exploring the geographical context and the information available relating to the demand for places at the School. GIAS describes the School as being in an “Urban city and town”. The DfE website, which measures distances in straight lines, shows five primary schools which admit children to YR within three miles of the School and none within one mile.

12. Local authorities have a duty to make sure that there are sufficient school places for the children in their area. Normally they assess need and provision on the basis of geographical areas known as planning areas. The School is in a planning area with seven other schools which admit children to YR.

13. Parents can apply for admission wherever they wish and will make their decisions based on their circumstances. They will consider factors such as convenience, family connections and reputation. Parents will take no account of planning areas when applying for a school place.

### **Table 1: numbers of school places and numbers of children admitted to YR in the planning area**

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
<b>Sum of PANs of schools for YR</b>	236	236	236
<b>Number of first preferences</b>	204	221	181
<b>Number of children admitted</b>	208	213	N/A
<b>Vacant places</b>	28	23	N/A

14. When applying for school places, parents can state preferences for different schools. A first preference is the school to which a parent would most like their child to be admitted. Table 1 shows that the number of first preferences for schools in the planning area has reduced since 2023 by 23 places. Table 1 also shows a correlation between the number of first preferences and the number of children admitted. The children will have been admitted to the highest preference school that could be achieved. If the PAN for the School had been set at 90 in 2023 and 2024, there would not have been sufficient school places in YR in the planning area to meet demand.

15. However, the number of first preferences for 2025 is 181, which is 55 fewer than the sum of the PANs. If the number of first preferences continues to reflect the likely number of children to be admitted and if the PAN for the School were to be reduced by 30 places, there would still be sufficient places in the planning area to meet demand.

16. I will now consider the demand for places at the School and the reasons why the governing body supports the reduction in the PAN. Table 2 summarises the admissions to the School.

**Table 2: the number of first preferences and the number of children admitted to the School**

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
<b>The PAN for the School</b>	120	120	120
<b>The number of first preferences</b>	102	97	71
<b>Number of children admitted to YR</b>	111	105	N/A
<b>Number of vacant places</b>	9	15	N/A

17. Table 2 shows that more children have been admitted to the School than the number of first preferences in 2023 and 2024. The local authority has forecast that 88 children will be admitted to YR at the School in 2025. This would be in line with previous patterns. If the PAN were to be 90, then all 88 children could be admitted.

18. I am conscious that the School is an infant school. That means that every class is affected by the provisions of the School Admissions (Infant Class Size) (England)

Regulations 2012 (the infant class size regulations) which require that infant classes (those where the majority of children will reach the age of five, six or seven during the school year) must not contain more than 30 pupils with a single qualified school teacher except in specific exceptional circumstances. The infant class size regulations apply to YR, year 1 (Y1) and year 2 (Y2).

19. As schools are largely funded on the number of pupils on roll and the highest costs to a school budget are staff, it is financially efficient to have infant classes that have 30 pupils or close to 30 pupils. If a school has classes that are many less than 30, then this can mean that the income from the number of pupils is less than the costs of providing a class. If this happens over several classes, it can cause a school to have severe financial challenges.

20. If, as the local authority forecasts, 88 children are admitted to the School for 2025, the School could arrange the children into three YR classes of nearly 30 pupils, which would make sense. However, if the PAN remains at 120, more children could join the School and the local authority could not refuse to admit any children to YR until that minimum figure is reached. This could mean that the School could have to re-arrange its classes mid year if the number of children in YR were to increase to, for example, 91. Rearranging classes mid year is not desirable educationally and the costs to the School of providing four classes with only 91 pupils on roll would be high. The alternative could be establishing four YR classes for September 2025 without sufficient pupils to cover the cost. This could create serious financial difficulties for the School.

21. I have considered the number of places in the planning area for YR, the data provided by the local authority and the demand for places at the School. It is unlikely that parental preference will be frustrated by a reduction in the PAN to 90 and reducing the PAN to 90 will provide certainty for the School which will enable it to organise its classes in an efficient manner. I therefore find that the variation is justified by the circumstances and approve the proposed variation.

## **Determination**

22. 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 Petersfield Infant School for September 2025.

23. I determine that the published admission number shall be 90.

Dated: 25 March 2025

Signed:

Schools adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard