



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case references: VAR2543 and VAR2546

Admission authority: Hampshire County Council for Church Crookham Junior School, Church Crookham, Fleet

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 Church Crookham Junior School for September 2024.

I determine that the published admission number shall be 120.

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 Church Crookham Junior School for September 2025.

I determine that the published admission number shall be 120.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the local authority) has referred proposals for variations to the admission arrangements for September 2024 and September 2025 (the arrangements) for Church Crookham Junior School (the School) to the adjudicator. The School is a school for children aged seven to eleven in the village of Church Crookham adjacent to the town of Fleet.
2. The proposed variations are that the published admission numbers (PANs) be reduced from 150 to 120 for both 2024 and 2025.

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 variations and supports them. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variations are 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 on 18 February 2025, supporting documents and further information provided at my request on 14 March 2025;
- b. the determined arrangements for 2024 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c. the determined arrangements for 2025 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- d. comments on the proposed variations from the governing body;
- e. a map showing the location of the School and other relevant schools; and
- f. 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 variations

7. The local authority has requested that the PAN for the School is reduced from 150 to 120 for admissions in 2024 and 2025 and said in its referral,

“The reduction of the PAN to 120 in both year groups will protect the school from financial difficulties and will enable them to plan their staffing and curriculum with certainty for future academic years.”

Consideration of proposed variations

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. Year 3 (Y3) is the year of admission to this junior school. The current Y3 pupils at the School were admitted in September 2024 and it is my understanding that the variation requested for 2024 is to prevent more children joining the current Y3 before the end of the school year in July 2025.

10. I am conscious that parents have applied for places in Y3 for 2025 in the expectation that the PAN for the School would be 150. 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 the applications and admissions overall and then consider separately the requests for the PAN to be reduced for 2024 and 2025. This will include whether there would be sufficient school places in the area if I were to agree the variations, then the demand for places at the School and then the reasons for the variation requests.

12. In considering whether there would be sufficient school places in the area if the PAN were to be reduced to 120 for 2024 and 2025, I will begin by exploring the geographical context. GIAS describes the School as “Urban city and town”. The DfE website, which measures distances in straight lines, shows eleven primary schools which educate Y3 children within three miles of the School and none within one mile. Four of these 12 schools are junior schools meaning that their year of entry is Y3, like the School. Pupils at schools which educate children between four and eleven are likely to stay at their schools and generally will not be seeking a place in Y3.

13. 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 three other schools which admit children to Y3; there are also four other schools that educate

children in Y3. There are five infant schools in the planning area which children leave at the end of Y2, mainly to join a junior school. This means that there is relatively reliable information about the number of children likely to require a place in Y3.

14. Parents can apply for admission wherever they wish and will make their decisions based on their circumstances and 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 Y3 in the planning area

	2023	2024	2025
Sum of PANs of junior schools for Y3	482	482	482
Number of first preferences	451	444	393
Number of children admitted	447	444	N/A
Vacant places	35	38	N/A

15. Parents make preferences when applying for a school place for their child. A first preference is the school to which a parent would most like their child to be admitted and often a broad indicator of the demand for school places across a planning area. Table 1 shows that the number of first preferences reduced considerably for admissions in 2025 from 2024. In 2023 and 2024 there would have been very few vacancies if the PAN for the School had been reduced by 30 places to 120.

16. Table 1 also shows a correlation between the number of first preferences and the number of children admitted. The number of first preferences for 2025 is 393 and, if this became the number of children admitted, there would mean 89 vacant places and there would still be 59 vacant places if the PAN for the School were reduced by 30 to 120.

17. The local authority also provided data which showed that primary schools in the area also had some vacant places for Y3 in the year group admitted in 2024 and that this was an ongoing pattern. I am therefore assured that if the PAN for the School were reduced to 120 for 2024 and 2025 then there would be sufficient school places in the area.

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

19. The local authority told me in its request that there were 126 pupils in Y3 at the School. This is the year group admitted in September 2024. These are arranged in five classes which vary in size between 23 and 27. The local authority wants the PAN for 2024 changed to 120 so the local authority would not have to admit any more children to the

School if there were applications before the end of July 2025. The School could then arrange its current five Y3 classes into four year 4 (Y4) classes for September 2025. This would mean that each class would have around 31 or 32 to a class which would be financially advantageous.

20. This is because schools are largely funded on the number of pupils, and staff are the highest cost to a school budget. Small classes are therefore expensive as the pupils within them may not cover the cost of providing the class. A class of just over 30 pupils would be beneficial overall to the school budget while maintaining many smaller classes could create financial problems. This is possible for a junior school as it is not subject to the provisions of the School Admissions (Infant Class Size) (England) Regulations 2012 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.

21. If I agree the reduction in the PAN for 2024, the pupils currently at the School could continue. The local authority could refuse to admit any more children and so the class organisation for Y4 planned for September 2025 could be achieved. I do note that the PAN is the minimum number that the admission authority must admit if there is sufficient demand. If refused a place, because the PAN has been reached, parents could still appeal that decision and the appeal would be based on whether the admission of the child would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources.

22. Children have already been admitted to the School for Y3. In these circumstances, reducing the PAN to 120 for the 2024/25 academic year is highly unlikely to frustrate parental preference. The local authority has provided an argument that such a reduction will be beneficial to the School and there is little evidence that there is any reason not to support the variation to the PAN for 2024. I therefore believe that the variation that the PAN for 2024 is justified by the circumstances and approve the variation for 2024.

23. I will now consider the case for reducing the PAN for admissions to Y3 from September 2025.

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

	2023	2024	2025
The PAN for the School	150	150	150
The number of first preferences	129	122	95
Number of children admitted to Y3	132	124	N/A
Number of vacant places	18	26	N/A

24. Table 2 shows that the number of first preferences in 2023 and 2024 was similar to the number of children admitted. The local authority has forecast that 125 children will be admitted to Y3 at the School in 2025 if the PAN remains at 150. This would be five children over the requested PAN of 120. The School wishes to arrange this year group into four classes, as it would for the current Y3 group, with the same reasons applying around economies of scale.

25. If the PAN for 2025 remains at 150, up to that number of children would have to be admitted (up until the end of the summer term in 2026) if applications were made. In either instance, additional children would be likely to cause disruption to class organisation as well as additional costs to the School if additional classes were required. It seems to me, based on previous patterns, that it is quite unlikely, if the PAN remained at 150, that 125 children would be admitted. I think it is more likely that under 120 would be admitted given that there were 97 first preferences and the previous patterns of admissions are that the number of first preferences is close to the number of admissions.

26. I conclude that the variation to the arrangements for 2025 is justified by the circumstances. This is because of the low likelihood of frustrating parental preference and the advantages to the School, and the children it educates, if the PAN were set now at 120 for 2025.

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 Church Crookham Junior School for September 2024.

28. I determine that the published admission number shall be 120.

29. 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 Church Crookham Junior School for September 2025.

30. I determine that the published admission number shall be 120.

Dated: 25 March 2025

Signed:

Schools adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard