



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2541

Admission authority: Hampshire County Council for Chandler's Ford Infant School, Chandler's Ford, Eastleigh

Date of decision: 9 April 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 Chandler's Ford Infant School for September 2025.

I determine that the published admission number shall be 30.

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 Chandler's Ford Infant School (the School) to the adjudicator. The School is for children aged to five to seven.
2. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) be reduced from 60 to 30.

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;
- 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 60 to 30 for admissions in 2025 and said in its referral,

“The reduction of the PAN to 30 will protect the school from financial difficulties caused by having to run a class that is not supported by pupil numbers and 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. 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 60, as it was for 2025. Therefore, my decision in this determination will only affect admissions for the 2025/26 academic year. I am conscious that parents have applied for places in reception year (YR) in the expectation that the PAN for the School was 60. In these circumstances, if parental preferences were to be frustrated by the reduction in PAN, there would need to be strong justification.

10. 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 30 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 18 primary schools which admit children to YR within three miles of the School and five within one mile.

11. 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. 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, first preferences and children admitted to YR in the planning area

	2023	2024	2025
Sum of PANs of schools for YR	420	405	375
Number of first preferences	348	355	320
Number of children admitted	345	358	N/A
Vacant places	75	47	N/A

12. I note that the PANs for three other schools in the planning area have been reduced in recent years, as reflected in the reduction of the sum of the PANs from 420 to 375, and there remained vacant places for admissions in 2024. When parents apply for a school place for their child, they state preferences. A first preference is the school to which a parent would most like their child to be admitted. The children will have been admitted to the highest preference that could be achieved. Table 1 shows that the number of first preferences has been similar to the number of overall admissions.

13. However, the number of first preferences for 2025 is 320, which is 55 fewer than the sum of the PANs so, assuming that the number of first preferences does reflect the likely number of children to be admitted, 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. If there were 25 vacant places as a result of reducing the PAN for the School to 30, this would be about seven per cent of the total, which would still be generous.

14. 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: numbers of first preferences and children admitted to the School

	2023	2024	2025
The PAN for the School	60	60	60
The number of first preferences	40	46	27
Number of children admitted to YR	45	47	N/A
Number of vacant places	15	13	N/A

15. Table 2 shows a significant drop in the number of first preferences for the School for 2025. The local authority forecast that 46 children will be admitted to YR at the School in 2025. I questioned this figure in light of the request to reduce the PAN to 30 and the low number of first preferences. The local authority answered at some length including that it was confident that “there is not the demand for the school to run a second Year R class when considering the schools preference data and the preference data of other schools in the planning area.” I understand that the local authority is saying that there would not be sufficient demand for a financially viable second class. I was still not clear how many children the local authority would anticipate admitting if the PAN were to remain at 60.

16. The local authority reviewed its forecasts and in a response to my enquiries received on 3 April 2025, said that it anticipated that 32 children would be offered a place at the School if the PAN remained at 60. The local authority explained that if the PAN were reduced to 30 then two children could be displaced, although I note that there can be many changes between national offer day on 16 April and when children are admitted to schools in September. For these two children, one lives in another local authority area and the other

would be offered a place at a school much nearer to their home. In neither case was the School the first preference but, if the PAN were to remain at 60, the highest preference which could be achieved.

17. 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).

18. As schools are largely funded on the number of pupils 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, but below, 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, a school can have severe financial challenges.

19. There are 50 pupils in the current YR and 45 pupils in Y1. These children will become Y1 and Y2 respectively in September 2025 average of 24 pupils to a class with four classes for the 95 pupils. These four classes are unlikely to be financially cost effective. Y1 and Y2 could not be combined in September 2025 to have three classes. This is because the 95 children would not meet the infant class size regulations (no more than 30 to an infant class) in three classes. If just over 30 pupils were to be admitted to YR in 2025, it would not be desirable to combine YR with Y1 for curriculum reasons.

20. The governing body has provided financial information which shows that if the PAN is not reduced to 30 and more than 30 children are admitted so that it is necessary to have two classes for YR, that the School will have a deficit budget. I note that it is very hard for a school to address a deficit budget without it affecting the educational provision made.

21. I have considered the number of places in the area for YR, the data provided by the local authority, the demand for the School and the School finances. There is a possible frustration of parental preference caused by the reduction in the PAN to 30. However this is outweighed by the financial problems for the School and the children to whom it provides education if the PAN were to remain at 60. I therefore find that the variation is justified by the circumstances and approve the proposed variation.

22. I also note that the PAN for the School remains at 60 for admissions in 2026 unless the local authority requests another variation. If this were to be the case, it would be better that this were to be requested in a timely manner so parents knew the PAN before they made their applications for 2026.

Determination

23. 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 Chandler's Ford Infant School for September 2025.

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

Dated: 9 April 2025

Signed:

Schools adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard