



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2562

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Marchwood Junior School

Date of advice: 21 May 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 Marchwood Junior School for September 2025.

I determine that the published admission number for admissions to Year 3 in 2025 shall be 66.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Admission Authority; the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for Marchwood Junior School (the School) for 2025 (the Arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged seven to eleven in Marchwood, Southampton. It is a co-educational school with no designated religious character. The School was judged to be 'Outstanding' by Ofsted at its last inspection in June 2024.
3. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) of the School, which applies to admissions to Year 3, be reduced from 90 to 66 for 2025.

Jurisdiction and procedure

4. Section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) makes provision for variations to determined arrangements. Paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the School Admissions Code (the Code) say (insofar as is 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”.

5. The Arrangements were determined by the Local Authority on 20 February 2024.
6. The Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code, and that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variation.
7. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
8. In considering the variation request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
9. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
 - the referral from the Admission Authority, received on 28 April 2025, and supporting documents;
 - the determined Arrangements for 2025 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
 - responses from the School, received on 13 May 2025, to my requests for further information;
 - maps, including Google Maps and those showing the location of the School; and
 - information available on the websites of the Department for Education (DfE) (including the ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS) and ‘Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool’ (FBIT) websites), the Local Authority, the School, and Ofsted.
10. 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 changes to

arrangements 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.

11. I note here that the Arrangements for 2026 have been determined, and the PAN is set at 66. This means that if I agree to the Admission Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2025 by reducing the PAN as proposed, it will be for that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.

Consideration of proposed variation

12. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School is reduced from 90 to 66 for entry to Year 3 in 2025. The proposed variation has the support of the School's governing body.
13. 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 proposed variation is justified by the change in circumstances.
14. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Local Authority is set out in the referral, which states:

“On the national notification day for September 2025 admissions the school offered 58 places for Year 3 children, a whole form of entry below its PAN. The planning area of Dibden/South Waterside Primary made a total of 226 Year 3 offers, however there are 292 Year 3 places available within that planning area currently. Based on these figures, there are sufficient places to accommodate the demand in the area.”
15. I have given careful consideration to the latest available data in order to form a view about the sufficiency of school places in the local area if the PAN of the School is reduced from 90 to 66 for 2025. I have also considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given the change in demand, the potential effect of the proposed PAN reduction on parental preference, and whether the proposed reduction is justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.
16. The Local Authority has a duty to ensure 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 and the schools within those areas, for this purpose. The School is based in the planning area of Dibden/South Waterside, and I have considered the data that the Local Authority has provided for that area.

17. In the planning area there are three junior schools, including the School, for which the usual year of entry is Year 3. There are also two primary schools (namely, Cadland Primary School and Blackfield Primary School) which do not have a PAN for Year 3 but whose arrangements for 2025 state that they will admit additional children into that year group; and offers have been made for Year 3 places for September 2025 at the two schools. In my consideration of the capacity in the area I have, therefore, included the PANs for the junior schools plus the 52 total spaces at these two primary schools.
18. In this connection, the data set out in Table 1 show the number of Year 3 places and the number of pupils admitted to, or offered a place at, the five schools described in the last paragraph (including the School). Table 1 also demonstrates the effect of the proposed PAN reduction for the School on surplus places in the planning area. I note that approval was given by an adjudicator, on 15 August 2024, for the variation to the admission arrangements determined by the Local Authority for the School for September 2024 to the effect that the PAN for admissions to Year 3 at the School in 2024 was reduced from 90 to 66 (case reference: [VAR2436](#)).

Table 1: Places available at schools within the planning area, and the number of children admitted to, or offered places at, those schools

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of places in Year 3 at schools in the planning area (with a PAN of 90 at the School in 2025)	292	292	268	292
Number of children admitted (2022, 2023, and 2024) or offered places (2025)	245	257	241	226
Vacant places	47	35	27	66
Vacant places as a percentage	16.1	12.0	10.1	22.6
Number of places in Year 3 if variation approved (with a PAN of 66 at the School in 2025)	NA	NA	NA	268
Vacant places if variation approved	NA	NA	NA	42
Vacant places as a percentage if variation approved	NA	NA	NA	15.7

19. The DfE document, “Basic need allocations 2025-26: Explanatory note on methodology”, refers to the need for two per cent surplus capacity “to provide an operating margin for local authorities. This helps to support parental choice, pupil

population movement, and general manageability of the system”. From the data above I note that the proportion of vacant places in the planning area has been far higher than this in recent years and would, according to the forecast, remain well above this percentage if I agree the proposed variation.

20. I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 66 for 2025, there would be sufficient places in the planning area for any children who might be seeking a Year 3 place.
21. I turn now to the demand for places at the School. Table 2 shows the number of children admitted to the School in recent years, plus the number of places offered in 2025. This table uses the revised PAN of 66 for 2024, and the proposed PAN of 66 for 2025.

Table 2: The number of children admitted to the School in recent years, with the number of offered places for 2025

	2022	2023	2024	2025
The PAN for the School	90	90	66	66
Number of children admitted (2022-2024) or offered places (2025)	63	75	64	58
Surplus places	27	15	2	8

22. I note at this point that 58 children were offered places, on National Offer Day in April 2025, for admissions to the School in September 2025. The proposed variation will, therefore, have no effect on parental preference in respect of applications received during the normal admissions round, as all applicants have been accommodated. The concern, if at all, relates to late or in-year applicants whose preference could be frustrated if the PAN is so varied.
23. Local Authority data show that none of the schools in the planning area offering Year 3 places is forecast to be oversubscribed for 2025. The School currently has a surplus of eight places to accommodate any late or in-year applicant. Furthermore, according to the Local Authority, the four other schools in the same planning area shown in Table 1 will have a number of vacancies for admissions to Year 3 (around 34 places); and they are located within four to six miles of the School. This will mean that, if the proposed PAN reduction is approved, any parents unable to secure an in-year place at the School will be able to secure a place for their child at an alternative local primary school within the planning area. For these reasons, I am satisfied that any adverse effect for late and in-year applicants will be minimal.

24. I will now consider the impact on the School of my approving, or not approving, the proposed variation.
25. The Local Authority has provided me with a breakdown of how the School's classes are currently organised. At present, the School has 66 children in Year 3 (grouped into two classes), 72 children in Year 4 (grouped into three classes), 65 children in Year 5 (grouped into two classes), and 78 children in Year 6 (grouped into three classes). The request for the variation refers to financial pressures faced by the School and the wish to align class organisation and staffing to the number of children. The request stated that if the variation request was not approved, the School may be required to create an additional class, and described the associated implications of this as follows:

“Because the offers for September 2025 are low, failure to reduce the PAN could result in the school needing to operate 3 classes in Year 3 when there are sufficient school places within the planning area and also the local proximity.

If the school are unable to reduce their PAN for the 2025/2026 academic year, they may need to run an additional class 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 or forecast data to support this.”

26. The Local Authority also stated:

“The reduction of the PAN to 66 will protect the school from financial difficulties and will enable them to plan their staffing with certainty for future academic years.”

27. The FBIT website shows that for the financial year ending March 2024, the School had an in-year balance of -£38.3K and a revenue reserve figure of £512.5K. The School provided financial information which shows that a sizeable in-year deficit, caused by “the falling roll and exponential increase of expenditure”, is forecast for 2025/26 financial year and four subsequent years. It is almost always the case that the largest proportion of a school's expenditure is on staffing. The situation the Local Authority and the School wish to avoid is staffing classes of a size that is not financially viable.
28. The intention of the School is to arrange its Year 3 children into two classes in 2025, as they are doing now for the 2024 cohort. If the variation is agreed, this would result in a maximum of 33 children in each Year 3 class. If the PAN of 90 remains in place, then the School would be obliged to admit up to 90 children if additional applications were received during the year. If numbers were to exceed 66, then it is likely that the School would need to reorganise its class structure, potentially resulting in logistical and financial challenges for the School.

29. Having considered all the matters above, my reasoning can be summarised as follows.

- If the proposed variation is approved, there will be no frustration of parental preference as those who applied were offered a Year 3 place at the School on National Offer Day; some frustration could potentially arise in the future as the reduced PAN may result in detriment to the children whose parents make a late or in-year application for entry to the School. However, I do not anticipate that there will be a large number of such applications. In any event, if any parents were unsuccessful in securing a place for their child at the School, they will likely be able to secure a place at another nearby school in the planning area. In time, the PAN reduction may help the School re-organise itself fully into a two-form entry structure, thereby achieving greater fiscal health.
- If the proposed variation is not approved, the School would be obliged to offer a Year 3 place up to the existing PAN of 90 for late and in-year applicants during the rest of the 2025/26 academic year.
- There is compelling evidence that a reduction in the PAN to 66 would, in the longer term, improve the School's financial position. The reduction should also improve the School's ability to plan its organisational structure in order to meet the needs of the existing children on roll.

30. For all the reasons above, I have concluded that a reduction of the PAN to 66 for 2025 would provide greater stability for the School and its pupils and benefit the School financially, and that this outweighs any potential frustration of parental preference in the longer term.

31. I find that the variation for 2025 is justified by the circumstances and approve the proposed variation.

Determination

32. 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 Marchwood Junior School for September 2025.

33. I determine that the published admission number for admissions to Year 3 in 2025 shall be 66.

Dated: 21 May 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Jackie Liu