



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2563

Admission Authority: London Borough of Harrow for Cedars Manor School

Date of advice: 27 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 the London Borough of Harrow for Cedars Manor School, for 2025/26.

I determine that for admissions to the Reception Year in 2025/26 the published admission number shall be 30.

The referral

1. The London Borough of Harrow (the Admission Authority, the Local Authority (LA)) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements), for Cedars Manor School (the School) for 2025/26.
2. The School is a community school for children aged three to eleven years in Harrow. It is a co-educational school with no designated religious character. The School was judged to be good by Ofsted at its last inspection in October 2019.
3. Parties to the request are the Local Authority and the Governing Body of the School.
4. The proposed variation is to reduce the published admission number (PAN) from 60 to 30 for admissions to the Reception Year (YR) in 2025/26.
5. This is one of three referrals made concurrently by the Local Authority. In each case, the request is to reduce the PAN for admissions to YR in the specific school by 30 places for September 2025. Each of the schools is located within a different planning area of the Local Authority. Each referral request is being considered independently of the others and on its own merits.

Jurisdiction and procedure

6. 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”.

7. The Arrangements were determined by the Local Authority, which is the Admission Authority for the School, on 23 February 2024.
8. The Admission Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code. The Governing Body of the School has confirmed that it was consulted on the proposed variation.
9. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
10. In considering the variation request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
11. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 14 May 2025 and supporting documents;
 - the determined Arrangements for 2025/26 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
 - responses from the Admission Authority and the School to my requests for further information;
 - maps showing the location of the School; and

- information available on the websites of the Department for Education (DfE) including 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS), and 'Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool' (FBIT); Ofsted; the LA and the School.
12. 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.
13. I note here that the Arrangements for 2026/27 have been determined. This means that if I agree to the Admission Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2025/26 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

14. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School is reduced from 60 to 30 for entry to YR in September 2025. The proposed variation has the support of the School's Governing Body.
15. 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.
16. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Local Authority is set out in the referral, which states:

"The number of applications for Reception are declining across Harrow and as a result we have been working with our schools and have reduced PANs at a number of schools through consultations on the admission arrangements. This year the overall number of applications received has fallen and the LA has spoken to 3 schools about reducing their PAN for September 2025 intake. Due to this dramatic change, the school and the LA have discussed a reduction in their PAN as the school has 35 vacancies with a PAN of 60.

... The London Borough of Harrow has received 106 less applications for Reception across the borough which is something that the LA was not expecting as it was not in line with our projections. We note that many other London Boroughs have received fewer applications than they were expecting."

17. 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 60 to 30 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.

18. 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 each containing a number of schools, for this purpose. The School is based in the 'North East' planning area of the Local Authority, and I have considered the data that the Local Authority has provided for that area.
19. In the planning area there are six primary schools, including the School, for which the usual year of entry is YR.
20. Table 1 summarises the data supplied to me by the Local Authority for each of the schools in the planning area that admit children into YR; the number of children allocated a place in each of the previous two years; the number of places offered for 2025 and the forecast numbers for 2026 and 2027.

Table 1: School places in the planning area and allocation to YR

| | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| The total PAN for the planning area | 360 | 360 | 360 | 360 | 360* |
| The number of children in YR in the planning area (from October census or forecast data) | 295 | 289 | 295 | 300 | 287 |
| The number of vacant places in the planning area | 65 | 71 | 65 | 60 | 73 |
| The number of vacant places in the planning area as a percentage of the total number of places | 18.1 | 19.7 | 18.1 | 16.7 | 20.3 |

* PAN forecast provided by LA. This has not been determined.

21. Table 1 shows that the number of children in the planning area has been relatively stable over time and is forecast to continue to remain so. However, it also shows that there is a high number of vacant places. 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 ... to support parental choice, pupil population movement, and general manageability of the system". I note that the proportion of vacant places in the planning area has been far higher than 2% in recent years and would remain so if I were to agree to the proposed variation for September 2025.

22. As stated by the Local Authority (above), the actual number of applications received for places in September 2025 was lower than it had projected. On National Offer Day, in April 2025, the Local Authority offered 254 places in the planning area compared to the 295 places it predicted would be needed. If this figure of 254 places is used in Table 1 instead of 295, there will be 106 vacant YR places in the planning area in September 2025. This equates to 29.4% of the total number of places in the planning area.
23. From the data in Table 1, I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 30 for 2025, there would be sufficient places available in the planning area for any parents seeking a YR place for their child.
24. I will now consider the demand for places at the School. Table 2 summarises the admissions to the School.

Table 2: The number of children admitted to YR at the School

| | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| The PAN for the School | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| The number of first preferences | 26 | 22 | 25 |
| The number of children admitted to YR (from October census or places offered (2025)) | 44 | 29 | 25 |
| The number of vacant places | 16 | 31 | 35 |
| The number of vacant places as a percentage | 26.7 | 51.7 | 58.3 |

25. Table 2 shows that the number of children being admitted to YR has fallen year on year since 2023.
26. All the children whose parents identified the School as their first preference have been offered a place there for 2025/26. The proposed variation will have no effect on parental preference in respect of applications received as part of the normal admissions process for September 2025 because all of the parents who applied for a place at the school have been offered one.
27. The provisions of the School Admissions (Infant Class Size) (England) Regulations 2012 (the infant class size regulations) apply to the School, and they 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 schoolteacher, except in specific exceptional circumstances. Therefore, with 25 places having already been offered, five vacant places are available at the School for any late

or in-year applicants.

28. As schools are largely funded in relation to 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 the proposed variation for 2025/26 is not agreed, then any late applications or in-year admissions will have to be admitted to the School until the number of children admitted to YR is 60. If such admissions resulted in there being more than 30 children in YR, the School would have to create an extra class or reorganise their infant children into mixed age classes. This could result in significant logistical and financial challenges for the School.
29. With regard to the School's financial situation, the DfE's FBIT website shows that, in March 2024, the School had a negative in-year balance of -£24K and a revenue reserve of £192K. Over the previous two years, the School's in-year balance had been -£71K and +£56K respectively. The Local Authority stated that the proposed reduction would:

"...give the school financial stability moving forward without having to open a new class with a small group of pupils and that will continue to cause a financial burden for many years."
30. This was echoed by the Governing Body who stated:

"Given the reduction in pupil numbers for the next academic year and the poor budget position of the school, the board considered that the reduction would assist in being able to better manage the schools' finances going forward."
31. I find that if the number of children in YR is limited to 30, then the School will be able to plan with certainty that in September 2025 it will need staffing for one YR class.
32. Taking everything into consideration, I am of the view that the variation is justified by the circumstances and I approve the proposed variation.

Determination

33. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by the London Borough of Harrow for Cedars Manor School, for 2025/26.
34. I determine that for admissions to the Reception Year in 2025/26 the published admission number shall be 30.

Dated: 27 May 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Catherine Crooks