



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2573

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Bartley Church of England Junior School, Southampton

Date of advice: 20 June 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 Bartley Church of England Junior School, for 2025/26.

I determine that for admission to Year 3 in 2025/26, the published admission number shall be 68.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Local Authority (LA)) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Bartley Church of England Junior School (the School) for 2025/26.
2. The School is a voluntary controlled school for children aged seven to eleven in Southampton. It is co-educational and has a Church of England religious character. The Diocese of Winchester (the Diocese) is the School's religious body. The School was judged to be 'good' by Ofsted at its most recent inspection in November 2023.
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 96 to 68 for admissions to Year 3 in 2025/26.

Jurisdiction and procedure

5. 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”.

6. The Arrangements were determined by the Local Authority, which is the Admission Authority, on 20 February 2024.
7. The Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code.
8. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
9. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
- the referral from the Local Authority dated 30 May 2025 and supporting documents;
 - the determined Arrangements for 2025/26 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
 - responses from the Local Authority, the School and the Diocese to my requests for further information;
 - a map 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.

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. This is the second consecutive year in which the Local Authority has made a request to reduce the School's PAN. For admission to Year 3 in 2024/25, a similar variation request was approved.
12. I note here that the Arrangements for 2026/27 have been determined. This means that if I agree to the Local 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. The Arrangements for 2026/27 have determined that the PAN will be 64.

Consideration of proposed variation

13. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School is reduced from 96 to 68 for entry to Year 3 in September 2025. The proposed variation has the support of the School's Governing Body. The Diocese also supports the request.
14. 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.
15. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Local Authority is set out in the referral, which states:

"For 2024/2025 the OSA approved a variation to 68 (see VAR2405) due to the low number of main round offers. For the 2025 admissions round, the school currently have only 67 offers at the time of writing.

The planning area of Totton Primary for Year 3 has 400 spaces, but there are currently only 335 offers for the four schools in the planning area, therefore there are sufficient places to accommodate the parental preference demand in the area even if the reduction was agreed.

The offers for the 2025/2026 academic year are low and therefore failure to reduce the PAN could result in the school needing to operate 11 classes when there are sufficient school places within the planning area and also the local proximity to allow them to run only two classes in Year 3, and operate 10 classes across the school. Offer data at the neighbouring schools, Calmore Junior School (52), Foxhills Junior School (66) and

Abbotswood Junior School (150) at the time of writing shows there is wider surplus in the school place planning area.

If the school is unable to reduce its PAN for the 2025/2026 academic year, it may need to continue with the eleven class organisation structure, as the school will need to continue admitting children up to 96 if applications are made naming the school. This would not be financially viable when the school does not have the pupil numbers to support this.”

16. 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 96 to 68 for 2025. I have also considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the change in demand, the potential effect of the proposed PAN reduction on meeting parental preference, and whether the proposed reduction is justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.
17. 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 Totton planning area of the Local Authority, and I have considered the data that the Local Authority has provided for that area.
18. In the planning area there are 13 schools providing primary education, eight are infant schools, providing education for children aged four to seven; four are junior schools providing education for children aged seven to eleven; and one is a primary school providing education for children aged four to eleven. In the infant and primary schools, the normal year of entry is Reception. In the junior schools, including the School, the normal year of entry is Year 3.
19. Table 1 summarises the data supplied to me by the Local Authority for each of the junior schools in the planning area that admit children into Year 3; the number of children admitted in each of the previous three years; the number of places offered for 2025 and the forecast numbers for 2026.

Table 1: School places in the planning area and allocation to Year 3

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
The total PAN	400	400	372	400	368
The number of children admitted to Year 3 or forecast to be admitted	360	347	328	332	322
The number of vacant places	40	53	44	68	46
The number of vacant places as a percentage of the total number of places	10.0	13.25	11.8	17.0	12.5

20. Table 1 shows that there is a high number of vacant places for Year 3 children in the planning area in September 2025. 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 considerably higher than 2% in recent years and would remain so if I were to agree to the proposed variation for September 2025.
21. From the data in Table 1, I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 68 for 2025, there would be sufficient places available in the planning area for any parents seeking a Year 3 place for their child.
22. 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 Year 3 at the School

	2023	2024	2025
The PAN for the School	96	68	96
The number of first preferences	83	59	67
The number of children admitted to Year 3 (places offered 2025)	82	60	67
The number of vacant places	14	8	29
The number of vacant places as a percentage	14.6	11.2	30.2

23. Table 2 shows that all the children whose parents identified the School as their first preference have been offered a place there for September 2025. The proposed variation will, therefore, have no effect on parental preference in respect of applications received as part of the normal admissions process for September 2025.
24. If the PAN were to be reduced to 68, there would only be space left for one additional pupil in Year 3 at the School. However, from information provided by the Local Authority, there are Year 3 spaces available in at least two of the other three junior schools within the planning area. I am, therefore, satisfied that there would be a Year 3 place available in the local area for any child who requires it.
25. 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 for the School to run two

classes of 33 or 34 pupils rather than three considerably smaller classes. If the PAN for the School were to remain at 96, then any late or in-year applications for Year 3 will have to be admitted until 96 children have been admitted. In the event of further admissions that take Year 3 above 68 children, it is highly likely that the School would have to create an extra class or reorganise the children into mixed age classes. This could present significant logistical and financial challenges.

26. With regard to the School's financial situation, the DfE's FBIT website shows that, in March 2024, the School had an in-year balance of £5K and a revenue reserve of £109K. The School's approved budget for 2025/26 and the following two financial years, indicates that the School must take action to minimise a budget deficit going forwards.
27. I agree that if the PAN is set at 68, then the School will be able to plan with certainty that in September 2025 it will need staffing for two Year 3 classes.
28. Taking everything into consideration, I am of the view that the variation is justified by the circumstances and I approve the proposed variation.

Determination

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 Bartley Church of England Junior School, for 2025/26.
30. I determine that for admission to Year 3 in 2025/26, the published admission number shall be 68.

Dated: 20 June 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Catherine Crooks