



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	VAR2590, VAR2591
Admission Authority:	Reading Borough Council for Micklands Primary School in Caversham, Reading
Local Authority:	Reading Borough Council
Date of advice:	16 July 2025

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by Reading Borough Council for Micklands Primary School for 2025/26 and 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2025/26, the published admission number will be 30 and that for admission in 2026/27, the published admission number will be 30.

The referral

1. Reading Borough Council (the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator proposals for variations to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Micklands Primary School (the School) for 2025/26 and 2026/27.
2. The School is a community school for children aged four to eleven in Caversham, Reading and the Local Authority is the admission authority for the School.
3. The proposed variations are that the published admission number (the PAN) for 2025/26 is reduced from 60 to 30 and that the PAN for 2026/27 is reduced from 60 to 30.

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 Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variations in line with the Code. The proposed variations have the support of the governing body of the School.
6. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variations are within my jurisdiction.
7. In considering the variation requests, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
8. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
- the referral from the Local Authority dated 17 June 2025, supporting documents and further information provided by the School and the Local Authority at my request;
 - the determined Arrangements for 2025/26 and 2026/27 and the proposed variations to those Arrangements;
 - a map showing the location of the School and other relevant schools; and
 - information available on the websites of the Department for Education, the Local Authority and the School.

Consideration of proposed variations

9. 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.
10. I note here that if I decide to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the PAN from 60 to 30 as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years, so that the PAN could be set at 30 without any need for consultation.
11. 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 variations are justified by the change in circumstances.
12. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Local Authority is set out in the referral, which states:

"Micklands Primary School [has] been working closely with the Local Authority to ensure future sustainability of the school.

Over the last 6 years the School [has] seen a falling number of children on roll. This has resulted in budget pressures and a reduction on the school staff. The school currently [has] a high number of vacancies in Reception to Year 2. The school [is] anticipating a £628,000 deficit for financial year 2025-26.

There is currently a falling roll across a number of planning areas in Reading in primary and therefore we are seeing a surplus of places across the borough.

The reduction of the PAN will help to reduce the surplus of places in the North of Reading".

13. 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 PANs are reduced as proposed. I have also considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the changes in demand, the potential effect on parental preference of the proposed PAN reductions and whether the proposed reductions are justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.

Overall demand for Reception Year (YR) places in the area

14. The Local Authority has a duty to make sure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty, it 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 sits within the North Planning Area (NPA).

15. The Local Authority has provided me with data showing the actual and projected YR intakes for NPA schools from recent years through to 2027. This is shown in the following table.

Table 1: Number of children admitted, or forecast to be admitted, to reception year (YR) at NPA schools

	2023/24 (actual)	2024/25 (actual)	2025/26 (offered)¹	2026/27 (projected)	2027/28 (projected)
Number of children	341	357	336	355	350
Sum of PANs for YR	440	440	440	440	440
Vacant places in YR	99	83	104	85	90
Sum of PANs for YR, if proposed variations are approved	N/A	N/A	410	410	410
Vacant places if proposed variations are approved	N/A	N/A	74	55	60
Proportion of places vacant if proposed variations are approved	N/A	N/A	18%	13%	15%

16. From the above data, I am satisfied that a reduction of the School's PAN to 30 for 2025/26 would not leave a shortage of places in the local planning area for children whose parents are seeking a place for their child to be admitted to YR in 2025/26. I am also satisfied that a reduction of the PAN to 30 for 2026/27 would leave sufficient surplus capacity in the area for admissions in 2026/27, and that, if the PAN for 2027/28

¹ As at National Offer Day 2025

were also to be set at 30, there would be sufficient surplus capacity for admissions in 2027/28.

Places at the School

17. I now turn to the number of children at the School and the reasons given by the School in support of the variation requests. The requests for the variations refer to the governing body's wish to align its staffing and budget to the reducing number of children. 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 school teacher, except in specific exceptional circumstances.
18. The School has helpfully provided me with a detailed breakdown of how its classes will be organised in 2025/26 if the proposed variation for 2025/26 is agreed. It tells me that it is expecting to have a YR class of 29 children for September 2025, which means that if no more than one additional child is admitted to YR, it will be able to operate a single YR class. However, with the PAN of 60 currently in place for YR for 2025, any late applications to YR between now and September 2025, and any in-year applications to YR during 2025/26, would have to be admitted. If this were to happen, the impact of the infant class size regulations could well be that the school would be required to reorganise its classes and put on an extra YR class. The effect of the proposed variation for 2025/26 would be to avoid this scenario. A similar argument applies for admission to YR in 2026/27. In short, both of the proposed variations are necessary if the School is to plan with certainty for a single reception class in each of 2025/26 and 2026/27.
19. The School has provided me with a further statement from its governing body to accompany the proposed class structure for 2025/26, which states:

“Reducing to one class in EYFS will allow us to make a significant saving on staffing costs. This is important to us as we are currently in a financial deficit position. With natural wastage as teachers and staff leave at the end of the academic year, our new class structure for next year would mean that we would not need to replace the three teachers that are leaving, saving us approximately £160k per year.

The extra classroom space that a reduction in PAN would give us would also improve our provision for children with SEN, many of who need their own safe and well-resourced provision that they can use when required, while still accessing mainstream provision.”

Summary of findings

20. Having considered all the matters above, my reasoning can be summarised as follows:
- a. The proposed variations do not give rise to any concerns about the sufficiency of YR places in the area for 2025/26, 2026/27 or 2027/28.
 - b. There is no indication of any frustration of parental preference.
 - c. There is compelling evidence that the proposed variations will make a significant difference to the School's financial position, and hence to its ability to meet the needs of the existing children on roll. If the proposed variations are not approved, there will be a significantly negative financial and organisational impact on the School, with detriment to those children already at the School, and to others who may lose out if funding is diverted to pay for the provision of an extra infant class for 2025/26 and for 2026/27.
21. After carefully weighing up the above factors, I conclude that the proposed variations are justified by the circumstances, and I approve them.

Determination

22. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by Reading Borough Council for Micklands Primary School for 2025/26 and 2026/27.
23. I determine that for admission in 2025/26, the published admission number will be 30 and that for admission in 2026/27, the published admission number will be 30.

Dated: 16 July 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Clive Sentence