



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2618

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Shipton Bellinger Primary School, Tidworth

Date of advice: 25 July 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 Shipton Bellinger Primary School for 2025/26.

I determine that for admission to Reception Year in 2025/26 the published admission number shall be 17.

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 Shipton Bellinger Primary School (the School) for 2025/26.
2. The School is a community school for children aged four to eleven years. It is a co-educational, non-selective school with no designated religious character. The School is located near Tidworth, Hampshire.
3. The School was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2025. It was judged as requiring improvement for the quality of education and early years provision, and good for behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management.
4. Parties to the request are the Local Authority and the Governing Body of the School.
5. The proposed variation is to reduce the published admission number (PAN) from 30 to 17 for admissions to Reception Year (YR) in September 2025.

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, on 20 February 2024.
8. The Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code.
9. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
10. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
- the referral from the Local Authority dated 15 July 2025 and supporting documents;
 - the determined Arrangements for 2025/26 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
 - 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.
11. 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.

12. I note 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 PAN determined for 2026/27 is 30.
13. I have not needed to seek any information from the LA or the School in addition to that provided as part of the original referral.

Consideration of proposed variation

14. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School is reduced from 30 to 17 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 Published Admission Number (PAN) at Shipton Bellinger Primary School for the 2025/2026 academic year is currently 30. On the national notification day for September 2025, the school offered 17 places for Year R children. As of 15 July 2025, the school still only has 17 offers.

Only 138 offers were made in the Andover Rural Primary year R planning area on national offer day. However, there are 165 Year R places within this school place planning area, so there is capacity and sufficient places to accommodate demand in the area, even if this reduction is agreed. As of 15 July 2025, there is only 142 offers in the Andover Rural Primary year R planning area, so there will still be capacity within the planning area.

The school currently only have 143 pupils on roll. The lower than PAN cohort in year R is currently creating a lot of financial difficulties for the school. Please see the below table for the current numbers on roll in each class and year group.

The school are currently operating 6 classes of under 30 across the school.

Current Class Organisation

Class	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
1	22							22
2		21						21
3			20					20
4				19	9			28
5					9	19		28
6							24	24
Total	22	21	20	19	18	19	24	143

If the school are unable to reduce their PAN for the 2025/2026 academic year, they may need to continue their 6 class organisation structure, as they will need to admit children up to 30 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.

The School, supported by the Local Authority, wish to reduce the PAN to 17 for September 2025 admissions into year R to ensure their continued financial viability by running a total of 5 classes. The school does not have the budget to run 6 classes with their projected numbers, as this would leave 50 surplus places across the school.

Future Class Organisation

Class	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
1	17	13						30
2		9	21					30
3				19	7			26
4					8	17		25
5							18	18
Total	17	22	21	19	15	17	18	130

The reduction of the PAN to 17 will protect the school from financial difficulties and will enable them to plan their staffing and accommodation with certainty for future academic years.”

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 30 to 17 for 2025/26. 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.

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 part of the Andover Rural planning area. There are eight schools in the planning area that admit children into YR.
19. Table 1 summarises the data supplied to me by the Local Authority for each of the schools in the planning area; 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 YR

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
The total PAN	165	165	165	165	165
The number of children admitted to YR or forecast to be admitted	138	137	130	142*	161
The number of vacant places	27	28	35	23	4
The number of vacant places as a percentage of the total number of places	16.4	17.0	21.2	13.9	2.4

* Number of places offered as of 15 July 2025

20. Table 1 shows that there has been a high number of vacant places for children entering YR in the planning area since 2022. This is forecast to be the case for children starting YR 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 per cent in recent years
21. If I were to agree to the proposed variation for September 2025, there would still be 10 YR places available in the planning area, or the equivalent of 6.6 per cent surplus capacity.
22. I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 17 for 2025, there would be sufficient places available in the planning area for any parents seeking a YR place for their child.
23. I will now consider the demand for places at the School. Table 2 summarises admissions to the School.

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

	2022	2023	2024	2025
The PAN for the School	30	30	30	30
The number of first preferences	-	34	26	18
The number of children admitted to YR (places offered for 2025)	22	28	23	17
The number of vacant places	8	2	7	13
The number of vacant places as a percentage	26.7	6.7	23.3	43.3

24. 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.
25. If the PAN were to be reduced to 17, there would be no vacant places at the School. However, as set out earlier, there are YR places in other schools within the planning area.
26. The School 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). As schools are largely funded based on the number of pupils on their rolls, it is more efficient financially for primary schools to have classes of 30 or near to 30. Classes that are significantly smaller than 30 can create financial strain upon a school.
27. As set out by the Local Authority, from September 2025, the School proposes to create two mixed-age infant classes: Class 1 containing a mix of YR and Y1 children and Class 2 containing a mix of Y1 and Y2 children. Each class will have 30 children and will, therefore, be at the maximum class size allowed by the Infant Class Size Regulations.
28. If the PAN remains at 30, the School will be required to admit any child during the academic year whose parents request a Reception place at the School until 30 children have been admitted. This could mean that classes would need to be reorganised and additional staff recruited during the year. This creates uncertainty as the School would not know if or when an additional class would be required. As well as being potentially disruptive and unsettling for both children and staff, it would also be financially inefficient. If the number of children in YR is limited to 17, then the School can be

certain that for the 2025/26 academic year it will need staffing for the five class structure set out by the Local Authority.

29. With regard to the School's financial situation, the FBIT website shows that, in March 2024, the School had an in-year balance of -£70K and a revenue reserve of -£72K. Extracts from the minutes of the May 2025 Governing Body meeting show that pupil numbers have fallen and the School's budget will reduce accordingly. .
30. The Governing Body state:
- This [the proposed reduction in PAN] would support the school to run 5 classes from September 2025 (rather than 6), and ensure the school remains financially viable, following the falling numbers on roll. Were the school be required to continue running 6 classes across 7 year groups, this would have serious implications for the finances of the school, due to the per pupil funding model."
31. Taking everything into consideration, I am of the view that the variation is justified by the circumstances, and I approve the proposed variation to reduce the PAN for 2025/26 to 17.
32. I note that the Governing Body meeting minutes referred to above mention the PAN for year groups other than YR. For the sake of transparency, I would like to clarify that the PAN only applies to the 'relevant age group'¹, in this case YR. A PAN does not, therefore, exist for other year groups. An admissions authority may refuse admission to a year group where the admission of another child would prejudice the provision of efficient education or efficient use of resources. For example, it may be possible to show that admitting another child into a particular year group, such as Year 2, would require the School to reorganise its classes and incur additional staffing costs, therefore having a disproportionate effect on the efficient use of resources.

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 Hampshire County Council for Shipton Bellinger Primary School for 2025/26.

¹ This is the age group at which pupils are or will normally be admitted to the school e.g. reception, year 7 and year 12 where the school admits external applicants to the sixth form (Section 142 of the SSFA 1998)

34. I determine that for admission to Reception Year in 2025/26 the published admission number shall be 17.

Dated: 25 July 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Catherine Crooks