



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2619, VAR2620

Admission Authority: Lincolnshire County Council for Caistor Church of England and Methodist Primary School in Caistor, Market Rasen

Local Authority: Lincolnshire County Council

Date of advice: 6 August 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 Lincolnshire County Council for Caistor Church of England and Methodist 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. Lincolnshire County Council (the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator proposals for variations to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Caistor Church of England and Methodist Primary School (the School) for 2025/26 and 2026/27.
2. The School is a voluntary controlled school for children aged three to eleven in Caistor, Market Rasen and the Local Authority is the admission authority for the School.
3. The school has a joint Church of England / Methodist religious character, and the relevant faith bodies are the Diocese of Lincoln and the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust.

4. The proposed variations are that the published admission number (the PAN) for 2025/26 is reduced from 45 to 30 and that the PAN for 2026/27 is reduced from 45 to 30.

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 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 and of the faith bodies.
7. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variations are within my jurisdiction.
8. In considering the variation requests, 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 Local Authority dated 20 July 2025 and supporting documents;
 - the determined Arrangements for 2025/26 and 2026/27 and the proposed variations to those Arrangements;
 - a map (Google Maps) 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.
10. In the interests of dealing speedily with this and the many other requests for variations at this time, I have not considered other aspects of the admission arrangements. Therefore, nothing in this determination should be taken as indicating that other aspects of the arrangements do or do not conform with the requirements relating to admissions.

Consideration of proposed variations

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 here that if I decide to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the PAN from 45 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.
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 variations are justified by the change in circumstances.
14. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Local Authority is that it has decided to establish a mainstream SEND hub at the School. The purpose of the hub is to assist the Local Authority with its statutory duty to ensure a sufficient number of places for children and young people with SEND. In their words:
- “...a mainstream SEND Hub would provide children and young people with SEND, who do not require a special school place, access to a provision in their local mainstream school, which is specifically designed and resourced to meet their specific needs. Pupils whose complexity of need means they do not require specialist provision, may require a type of education different to that of a standard mainstream school. They may require enhanced facilities to allow for regular breaks to help regulate, they may require a differentiated curriculum provided by teaching staff specifically trained in SEND and they may require smaller class sizes and a more nurturing ethos.”
15. The impact of this decision on the PAN for the School is set out in the referral, which states:

“The proposal to open a mainstream SEND hub (resource provision) has been agreed – to facilitate this, the PAN at the school will need to be reduced from 45 to 30. Full details of the decision are attached.

The hub will use two classrooms within the school. The school has projected intakes below 30, so we do not anticipate that there will be demand for 45 places. The school will still have capacity for a bulge class if needed. This is evidenced by the data provided.

The proposal to decrease the schools PAN as part of these proposals was communicated during the consultation¹ and representation periods, allowing the public chance to respond to this aspect of the proposals.

The SEND hub will use 2 classrooms which are currently empty. If the school receives applications to PAN and admits to 45 without the variation, there is no guarantee that these would remain empty for use by the SEND hub. Projections and admissions data put the school well below one class of 30, so whilst the likelihood of this occurring is low, the proposed variation will ensure that the school can operate a one form entry structure going forward, allowing for the SEND hub to utilise the spare classrooms.

The variation will ensure that the two classrooms required for the hub remain empty. If no variation were permitted, if the school had an influx of applications (which goes against what projections and birth data suggest) and is required to admit to 45, there will be no space for the SEND hub.”

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 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

17. 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 is one of three schools in its planning area that admit to YR.

¹ This is a reference to the specific consultation on the establishment of the mainstream SEND hub, rather than to any consultation that may have taken place prior to the original determination of the Arrangements

18. The Local Authority has provided me with data showing the actual and projected YR intakes for these 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 planning area schools

	2023/24 (offered)	2024/25 (offered)	2025/26 (offered)	2026/27 (projected)	2027/28 (projected)
Number of children	33	50	28	34	37
Sum of PANs for YR	70	70	70	70	70
Vacant places in YR	37	20	42	36	33
Sum of PANs for YR, if proposed variations are approved	N/A	N/A	55	55	55
Vacant places if proposed variations are approved	N/A	N/A	27	21	18
Proportion of places vacant if proposed variations are approved	N/A	N/A	49%	38%	33%

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

Places at the School

20. 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.
21. As of 15 July 2025, only 18 places have been offered for admission to YR in September 2025. The projected intakes for September 2026 and 2027 are 17 and 19 respectively. There is, therefore, no evidence that a PAN of 30 would impact on parental preference for any of those cohorts.
22. With the PAN of 45 currently in place for YR on 2025/26, 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, there is a possibility, albeit a low one, that the impact of the infant class size regulations might be such 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 completely remove the risk posed by this scenario. A similar argument applies for admission to YR in 2026/27. In short, both of the proposed variations would allow the School to plan its class organisation with certainty and to be sure that it has the physical space to operate the new mainstream SEND hub.

Summary of findings

23. 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 potential frustration of parental preference.
 - c. There is strong evidence that the proposed variations will make a significant difference to the School's ability to plan with certainty and to accommodate the much-needed mainstream SEND hub on its premises.
24. After carefully weighing up the above factors, I conclude that the proposed variations are justified by the circumstances, and I approve them.

Determination

25. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by Lincolnshire County Council for Caistor Church of England and Methodist Primary School for 2025/26 and 2026/27.
26. 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: 6 August 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Clive Sentence