



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	VAR2624
Admission Authority:	Hampshire County Council for St Thomas' Church of England Infant School, Woolton Hill
Local Authority:	Hampshire County Council
Date of advice:	28 August 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 St Thomas' Church of England Infant School, Woolton Hill for 2025/26.

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

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for St Thomas' Church of England Infant School, Woolton Hill (the School) for 2025/26.
2. The School is a voluntary controlled school for children aged five to seven in Woolton Hill, Newbury, and the Local Authority is the admission authority for the School. The School has a Church of England religious character, and the religious authority for the School is the Diocese of Winchester (the Diocese).
3. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (the PAN) for 2025/26 is reduced from 45 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 variation in line with the Code. The proposed variation has the support of the governing body of the School and of the Diocese.
6. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
7. In considering the variation request, 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 “July 2025”, supporting documents and further information provided at my request;
 - the determined Arrangements for 2025/26 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
 - 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.

Consideration of proposed variation

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 the Arrangements for 2026/27 have already been determined. This means that if I approve the Local Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2025/26 as proposed, it will be for that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.
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 variation is 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:

“The Published Admission Number (PAN) at St Thomas' CE Infant School for the 2025/2026 academic year is currently 45.

On the national notification day for September 2025 admissions the school offered 22 places for Year R children. At the time of writing this had increased to 25 offers.

[...]

The school are currently operating one discrete year R class of 27, (the PAN is 30 in this year group following a variation decision made by the OSA in July 2024) and 3 mixed classes across the school.

[...]

As offers for September 2025 are so low, failure to reduce the PAN could result in the school needing to operate 4 classes to comply with infant class size regulations when there are only enough pupils for 3 classes and there are sufficient school places within the planning area and also the local proximity.

[...]

If the school are unable to reduce their PAN to 30 for the 2025/2026 academic year the school would be at risk of needing to run two Year R classes in early years to accommodate a 31st child, when the overall school numbers do not support this. This

would not be financially viable when the school does not have the pupil numbers or forecast data to support this.

[...]

The reduction of the PAN to 30 will protect the school from financial difficulties and will enable them to plan their staffing with certainty for future academic years. It is worth noting that the forecast for 2026 supported a reduction to 30 for September 2026, and this has been determined by the Local Authority meaning there is a sustained plan for a viable one form entry infant school.”

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

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 PAN is 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 reduction and whether the proposed reduction is justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.
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 is one of seven schools in the “Kingsclere/Burghclere Planning Area” which admit pupils into YR.
15. The Local Authority has provided me with data showing the actual and projected YR intakes for this planning area from 2023 onwards, as shown in the following table.

Table 1: Number of children admitted, or forecast to be admitted, to YR at the schools in the Kingsclere/Burghclere Planning Area

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 (offered)
Number of children	125	109	117
Sum of PANs for YR	162	162	162
Vacant places in YR	37	53	45

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 (offered)
Sum of PANs for YR if proposed variation is approved	N/A	N/A	147
Vacant places if proposed variation is approved	N/A	N/A	30
Vacant places if proposed variation is approved, as a proportion	N/A	N/A	20%

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 might be seeking a place for their child to be admitted to YR.

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 request. The request for the variation refers 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. At the time of the variation request, 25 offers had been made for admission to YR in September 2025. There is, therefore, no evidence that a PAN of 30 would impact on parental preference for this cohort.
19. The Local Authority has helpfully provided me with a detailed breakdown of how the School's classes will be organised in 2025/26 if the proposed variation for 2025/26 is agreed. If there are no more than 30 children admitted to YR, it will be able to operate a single YR class and hence operate with a total of three classes overall (with numbers currently projected to be 25 in YR, 27 in Year 1 and 27 in Year 2). However, with the PAN of 45 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, 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.

20. The Local Authority has provided me with information about the School's financial position to support the variation request. It has told me that the School had a cumulative surplus of £29,040 at the end of the 2024-25 financial year. However, it is not entirely clear from the email trail, which includes information from the School as well as the Local Authority, exactly what are the projections for the end of the 2025-26 financial year depending on whether the variation is approved or not. Nevertheless, it is clear that the cost of staffing an extra class for a whole year would be significant, being well in excess of the cumulative surplus as at the end of the 2024-25 financial year. Therefore, I consider that there is a strong financial argument in favour of the proposed variation.

Summary of findings

21. Having considered all the matters above, my reasoning can be summarised as follows:
- a. The proposed variation does not give rise to concerns about the sufficiency of YR places in the area for 2025/26.
 - b. There is no indication of any likely degree of frustration of parental preference.
 - c. There is strong evidence that the proposed variation 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 variation is not approved, there remains a risk of 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 has to be diverted to pay for the provision of an extra class for 2025/26.
22. After carefully weighing up the above factors, I conclude that the proposed variation is justified by the circumstances, and I approve it.

Other matters

23. 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.

Determination

24. 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 St Thomas' Church of England Infant School, Woolton Hill for 2025/26.
25. I determine that for admission in 2025/26, the published admission number will be 30.

Dated: 28 August 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Clive Sentance