



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: ADA4492 Parkside Community College

Objector: A member of the public

Admission authority: United Learning Academy Trust

Date of decision: 3 September 2025

Determination

In accordance with section 88H(4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I partially uphold the objection to the admission arrangements for September 2026 determined by United Learning Academy Trust for Parkside Community College, Cambridgeshire.

I have also considered the arrangements in accordance with section 88I(5) and find there are other matters which do not conform with the requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the admission authority.

In this case I determine that admissions authority must revise its arrangements by 30 September 2025.

This deadline will ensure arrangements for 2026 are clear and transparent in time for the applications process for 2026 entry.

The referral

1. Under section 88H(2) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act), an objection has been referred to the adjudicator by a member of the public (the objector), about the admission arrangements (the arrangements) for Parkside Community College (the school, Parkside), a non-selective secondary academy for children aged 11 to 16 years for September 2026.
2. The objector has identified themselves as a member of the public but states that the objection is "submitted on behalf of the Friends of Park Street C of E Primary School."

3. The local authority (LA) for the area in which the school is located is Cambridgeshire County Council. The LA is a party to this objection. Other parties to the objection are United Learning Academy Trust (the Trust), the objector, the governing body of Park Street C of E Primary School (Park Street Primary), and Eastern Learning Multi-Academy Trust as the admission authority for Chesterton Community College (Chesterton).

4. Although the objection is specifically in relation to the admissions arrangements for Parkside, the objector makes clear that the reasonableness and fairness of the arrangements for the school can only be assessed in the context of the arrangements for nearby schools, and those of Chesterton in particular. A separate determination (ADA4493) is being made in a related objection to the admission arrangements of Chesterton.

Jurisdiction

5. The terms of the academy agreement between the Trust and the Secretary of State for Education require that the admissions policy and arrangements for the school are in accordance with admissions law as it applies to maintained schools. These arrangements were determined by the Trust, which is the admission authority for the school, on that basis.

6. The objector submitted their objection to these determined arrangements on 14 May 2025. I am satisfied the objection has been properly referred to me in accordance with section 88H of the Act and it is within my jurisdiction. I have also used my power under section 88I of the Act to consider the arrangements as a whole.

7. The objection is in relation to the school's admissions arrangements for 2026/27.

Procedure

8. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the School Admissions Code (the Code).

9. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:

- a. Confirmation from the school that the admissions arrangements for 2026/27 were determined by the local governing body on 30 September 2024;
- b. a copy of the 2023 consultation document regarding the discontinuation of 6th form provision which was prepared by the school and distributed to stakeholders;
- c. a copy of the determined arrangements for 2026/27, both those which have been submitted to me by the school, and which appear on the school website, and those which are displayed on behalf of the school on the LA school admissions website (the two sets of arrangements are not worded consistently);
- d. a previous determination (case reference ADA4351) on the admission arrangements for Chesterton;
- e. a copy of the determined admission arrangements for Chesterton and Park Street Primary;

- f. the objector's form of objection dated 14 May 2025 along with supporting documents and other correspondence;
- g. the responses of the school, the LA, Chesterton, and Park Street Primary to the objection and supporting documents;
- h. the LA's response to the objection and supporting documents and its home to school transport policy;
- i. information on the school's and LA's websites;
- j. the "Get Information About Schools" (G.I.A.S.);
- k. mapping of indices of deprivation using the website http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/iod_index.html;
- l. property search websites;
- m. Ofsted reports on the schools concerned;
- n. "The Case for Cambridge", HM Government 2024;
- o. media reporting of problems in meeting the local need in Cambridge for secondary school places; and
- p. oral submissions from all parties made at a meeting I called of all parties held on 9 July 2025.

10. I am grateful for the information provided and the time given by all parties in this matter and to the local authority for hosting the meeting. The response of each party to requests for information has been exemplary. Although I may not directly refer to it in my determination, I have read and taken account of all the information provided to me.

The Objection

11. The objection is in multiple parts:

- that Parkside's admission arrangements, when considered alongside the arrangements for neighbouring schools, are unreasonable and unfair to children living in the catchment area for Chesterton but attending Park Street C of E Primary, a school which is listed in Parkside's admissions arrangements as a feeder school for Parkside. I will refer to these children as "the alleged disadvantaged group."
- that consultation on the admissions arrangements for 2026/27 should have taken place and did not; and the arrangements once determined were not distributed as required by the Code to other authorities nor published on the school's website in a timely and accurate way.
- that arrangements are unclear because they are not consistently worded on the school website and the LA website.

- that the arrangements fail to meet the requirements of the Code, specifically paragraph 1.15 “The selection of a feeder school or schools **must** be transparent and made on reasonable grounds” and paragraph 14 “admission authorities **must** ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of places are fair, clear and objective.” The Code also says in paragraph 1.9b that feeder schools **must** be named, and that admission authorities **must not** take into account any previous school attended unless it is a named feeder school. In one version of the arrangements the school’s feeder schools are not clearly identified.
- that the determined catchment area of the school does not meet the requirement of paragraph 1.14 of the Code that “Catchments **must** be designed so that they are reasonable and clearly defined.”

Other Matters

12. Having considered the arrangements as a whole, it would appear that the following matters also do not, or may not, conform with requirements:

- 12.1. The arrangements refer to “applications of equal merit.” I note that this term features in the admission arrangements for more than one school in the area, but I will need to consider whether it meets the Code’s requirements in terms of clarity.
- 12.2. The use of straight-line distance to rank applications would seem to operate within each criteria, the arrangements stating that “in cases of equal merit, priority will go to children living nearest the school according to the shortest straight-line distance.” However, there is also a criterion which separately ranks “Children who live nearest the college by the shortest straight-line distance by measuring a straight line from the reference point of the home to the main pupil entrance to the secondary school”. I will need to consider whether this is clear.
- 12.3. For in-year admissions, the school website details that “You can now apply directly to us for an ‘in year’ place for your child/children at Parkside Community College by completing our application form via the link below and emailing the required documents.” One of the documents that appears to be required is a “Student Details Form”, which asks for a variety of information about the child’s attendance, SEND, behaviour record and so on. It is not clearly apparent who is to fill in this form, and what part information included on it might play in decisions to offer or not offer an in-year place. I will consider whether this constitutes a breach of the requirement of the Code for clarity in how places are allocated (paragraph 14 stating that “In drawing up their admission arrangements, admission authorities must ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear, and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be

allocated.”) The Code states at paragraph 1.9 (g) that admission authorities **must not** “take account of reports from previous schools about children’s past behaviour, attendance, attitude, or achievement, or that of any other children in the family”, and the website arrangements may give the impression that such information will be a factor in whether a place is or is not offered. I have considered whether this is a breach of the Code.

Background

13. Parkside is a non-selective secondary academy for children aged 11 to 16 years. It has a published admission number (PAN) of 120 which matches its indicative admission number (IAN). A school’s IAN is based on capacity. The school’s funding agreement states that its capacity is 607 students. It became an academy in 2012 and joined the United Learning Trust in September 2019 and was last rated by Ofsted as Outstanding in April 2023. It is to the south of the River Cam in central Cambridge.

14. The nearby secondary school, Chesterton, first opened as an academy in 2011. It is a non-selective secondary academy for children aged 11 to 18 years old. It was part of the Cambridgeshire Educational Trust before joining Eastern Learning Alliance (then known as Morris Education Trust) in September 2019. According to G.I.A.S, the school has capacity for 1,100 pupils, while the LA designates its capacity at 1144. It has a PAN of 180, with the LA suggesting that its IAN based on its net capacity assessment is 211. It was last inspected by Ofsted in February 2025 when it was judged to be outstanding. It is to the north of the River Cam in central Cambridge. Chesterton and Parkside are located about 1.07 miles apart.

15. Park Street Primary is a small voluntary aided school for children aged four to eleven years old situated just to the south of the River Cam in central Cambridge. It has a PAN of 18, and in the last four years has generally admitted at or just below that number of children. It is named as a feeder school for Parkside and is located in the Parkside catchment. The boundary of the Parkside catchment and the neighbouring Chesterton catchment is 180 metres to the north of the school, following the river. Park Street Primary is almost equidistant between Chesterton and Parkside, which are located 0.52 and 0.53 miles away respectively. The objector has described the characteristics of Park Street Primary as follows:

“Park Street Primary is a small ‘village’ style school (with approximately 120 pupils on roll) with rich social and cultural significance in the heart of Cambridge. It offers a uniquely nurturing environment, with mixed year group classes. It is a school in which every child knows each other, and every adult knows every child. Parents choose the school for their children because they feel that this especially close-knit environment is particularly important for their children - it is simply a set-up which is not available at any other school nearby. Park Street Primary pupils have a wide range of backgrounds and disadvantage, including 26% with SEND, 14% Pupil Premium (and many more close to this) and 45% EAL.”

16. In spite of oversubscription criteria which give priority to children living close to Park Street Primary, only a minority of children on roll at Parkside actually live in the immediate area around that school. In the 2024/25 Year 5 (who will be transferring to secondary school in September 2026), only two children out of 18 live in the Park Street Primary's catchment area. Looking slightly more broadly, Park Street Primary's catchment area is one of four primary school catchment areas which together comprise the catchment area for Parkside. Eight of the 18 children in Park Street Primary Year 5 live in that area. The next most common place of residence for Park Street Primary Year 5 children in terms of secondary school catchments is the catchment for Chesterton, where five children live. These are the group of children identified by the objector as liable to face unfair treatment under the 2026 arrangements (the alleged disadvantaged group). According to the objector, overall 51 per cent of the families of children on the roll of Park Street Primary live in the catchment area for Chesterton, and this is confirmed by data provided to me by the LA.

17. The objector suggests this pattern in residence and school placement is the result of a scarcity of family residential properties in the area surrounding Park Street Primary. Park Street Primary is 200 metres from the geographical centre of Cambridge. Much of the local area is taken up by colleges of the University, or student accommodation, or the commercial retail centre of the city. There are also extensive open spaces close to Park Street Primary. Such property in the area as is suitable for residential dwelling is often expensive.

18. Having visited the area around the school, I consider that the geography makes it a viable choice to live to the north of the River Cam, in the catchment of Chesterton, but select Park Street Primary to the south of the river as your child's primary school. The bridges across the river and routes onward to Park Street Primary are pedestrianised. The journey to Park Street Primary from much of the catchment of Chesterton Community College is short and safe. Housing north of the River Cam is more available, diverse in nature, and affordable in price compared to the area around Park Street Primary. The pattern of application to Park Street Primary and the place of residence of its pupils reflect this reality.

19. After the admission of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which names the school, the oversubscription criteria for Parkside are in summary as follows:

- i. Looked after children and children who were previously looked after.
- ii. Children who live in the catchment area, who have a sibling at college at the time of admission.
- iii. Children who live in the catchment area.
- iv. Children who have a sibling at the college at the time of admission.
- v. Children who attend a [feeder] primary school within the catchment area.
- vi. Children who live nearest the college by the shortest straight-line distance by measuring a straight line from the reference point of the home to the main pupil entrance to the secondary school.

In cases of equal merit, priority will go to children living nearest the school according to the shortest straight-line distance.

As will be detailed below, in a version of Parkside's arrangements on the LA website, feeder schools are described as being Park Street Primary, Newnham Croft Primary School, St Mathews Primary School, and St Paul's C of E VA Primary School.

20. After the admission of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which names the school, the oversubscription criteria for Chesterton are in summary as follows.

- i) Looked after children and children who were previously looked after.
- ii) Children of staff who have been employed at the academy for at least two years or have been recruited to fill a vacant post for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage.
- iii) Children who live in catchment area, attend primary schools* within the catchment area and who have a sibling at the school at the time of admission.
- iv) Children who live in the catchment area with a sibling at the school at the time of the admission.
- v) Children who live in the catchment area who attend the primary schools* within it.
- vi) Children who live in the catchment area.
- vii) Children who live outside the catchment area, who attend primary schools* within it and who have a sibling at the school at the time of admission.
- viii) Children who live outside the catchment area who have a sibling at the school at the time of admission.
- ix) Children who live outside the catchment area who attend the primary schools* within the catchment area.
- x) Children who live outside the catchment area, but nearest the school as measured by a straight line.

Within each criterion, priority is given according to the distance the child lives from the school site with the nearest having the highest priority.

* There are four primary schools within Chesterton's catchment area. They are its named feeder schools. The four schools are: St Luke's Primary School, Milton Road Primary School, Mayfield Primary School and Arbury Primary School.

21. Parkside's arrangements therefore have in common with Chesterton a catchment area element, sibling element, and named feeder schools.

22. However, what might appear to be minor differences are more material than would be at first apparent.

- Parkside prioritises applicants living in the school catchment area third in its list of oversubscription criteria, and within that criterion attending a "feeder school" makes no appearance as an advantaged characteristic: rather distance from home to school is used to determine priority.

- Being a sibling of a current Parkside student is a characteristic giving significant advantage, both for those living in catchment but also for those outside catchment.
- Living outside catchment but with a sibling at the secondary school ranks as criterion 8 in Chesterton's over-subscription criteria, but for Parkside this is the fourth criterion, coming above applicants who attend a feeder primary school.
- Parkside has no "children of staff" criterion.

23. For the moment, the key feature worth emphasis is the differential value Parkside and Chesterton place on catchment area versus feeder school enrolment. In the case of Parkside, living in the catchment area becomes highly determinative of a place being allocated, and attending a listed feeder school has no significant effect. In the case of Chesterton, attending a feeder school is one of a number of factors which in combination with living in catchment have proved determinative of a place being allocated, with catchment residence alone being insufficient. The contention of the objector is that this leaves the alleged disadvantaged group unable to secure a place at either of their closest secondary schools.

24. Both the secondary schools mentioned in the objection are heavily over-subscribed in terms of first preferences, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 First preference applications for Parkside and Chesterton

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Parkside (PAN 120)	155	197	184	167
Chesterton (PAN 180)	311	340	343	345

Demand for secondary school places versus capacity

25. In considering the objection and assessing the reasonableness and fairness of Parkside's arrangements, it is necessary to consider the local context of a shortage in the number of Year 7 places needed to meet historic and future levels of demand.

26. This is not a new problem. As long ago as 2021, the LA reported that 60 students were having to be transported 19 miles to St Neots as the nearest available Year 7 placement. LA data published on its website in April 2023 and April 2024 showed no, or almost no, Year 7 place availability in central Cambridge for late application entry in September of those years. In July 2025, a parent making a late application for a Year 7 school place for September would have found that every single secondary school in the city had already allocated places in that year group at least up to their PAN. A new school is planned but no date has been set for its opening, and that school is designated to meet

emergent local need from housing development which is yet to happen, not to resolve existing problems.

27. The overall satisfaction of parental preferences in Cambridgeshire is high with 96.5% of applicants in 2025 getting one of their preferred schools on National Offer Day. However, this was achieved to a degree by schools offering additional places over their PAN. Even with these additional places in 2025 there were 122 children resident in central Cambridge postcodes (CB1,2,3,4,5) who were not allocated any of their preferred schools on National Offer Day.

28. In 2025 six children living in CB3 (west central Cambridge) were allocated places in CB25, the rural area on the eastern fringe, and six children were allocated from the former to the latter. Three children living in CB4 (northeast central Cambridge) were allocated places in CB23, the rural area to the west of Cambridge.

29. Overall, it is clear that children have, on occasion, been allocated places more than five miles away from their home address

30. There is a repeated shortfall in capacity for children needing a Year 7 place in Cambridge. The LA has had to approach schools every year in order to achieve a sufficiency of places and has stated that beyond finding sufficient places to meet demand, satisfying parental preferences by trying to create additional places local to where the demand is concentrated is only sometimes achievable. In the last three years every one of the eleven secondary schools within 5 miles of Park Street Primary has been involved in allocating places above their PAN at some point. Five schools have allocated places over PAN every year, with 366 additional places allocated over the three years. Without the action taken by the LA, and the supportive response of schools, the situation would be worse still.

Consideration of Case

31. Before dealing with the issue of whether or not the admission arrangements are unclear, unreasonable, or unfair, I will address the concerns about the determination of the school's admission arrangements for 2026.

32. The school did not consult on its admission arrangements for 2026/27 and had not made any changes to the arrangements determined for the previous year, which would have necessitated a consultation. The Code requires that admission authorities consult on their arrangements at least every seven years even if no changes are made, and I have sought clarity on whether this has happened. The school has stated:

“Parkside Community College joined United Learning in September 2019. Our records indicate that the school consulted on its admissions policy in 2018. However, while the Trust's due diligence documents show this clearly, records of this process and its outcomes do not appear to have been kept at school level. The admissions policy has not been changed since then, with the exception of the removal of KS5 provision which was subject to full consultation in line with DFE's

Significant Change guidance. Prior to this complaint to the adjudicator, Parkside had this year begun the process of reviewing and consulting on its admissions policy for 2027/28.”

33. If consultation was indeed undertaken in 2018, no consultation in 2024 for the 2026 arrangements would have been required.

34. **I find that no consultation was required.**

35. In connection with the determination of the arrangements, I asked Parkside for evidence that “subsequent to the 2026 arrangements being determined by the admission authority on 30 September 2024 the appropriate authorities were informed of those arrangements in compliance with the Code paragraph 1.50 and note 44.” Parkside commented:

“We are unable to provide evidence of this. We do not believe that this has been provided by the school to the local authority or asked for by the local authority.”

36. The lack of evidence of relevant authorities being informed appears to tally with my findings at an early stage of considering this objection, where I found that the arrangements on the school website for 2026/7 were labelled as applying for 2024/25.

37. A failure to inform relevant authorities of determined arrangements and a failure to publish them is a breach of paragraph 1.50 of the Code. It is the responsibility of the school to pro-actively distribute and publish its determined arrangements, and to do so by 15 March in the year of determination.

38. **I find that the admission authority did not meet this requirement.**

39. I now move on to explore whether Parkside’s over-subscription criteria are delivering fair, reasonable, and objective outcomes in accordance with the requirements of paragraphs 14 and 1.8 of the Code.

Oversubscription criteria

40. I have considered the oversubscription criteria as set out earlier in the determination. Both Parkside and Chesterton give priority to children living in the relevant school’s catchment area and to children attending one of the feeder primary schools within their catchment area.

41. Oversubscription criteria that prioritise children living in a particular catchment area and who also attend a named feeder school can be found in other schools in the LA and, indeed, across the country. All Cambridge city primary schools have catchment areas, as do all secondary schools apart from St. Bede’s. One primary school sits in overlapping catchments of two secondary schools. Feeder school elements to secondary school arrangements are common. Hardwick and Cambourne Community Primary School is a feeder for both Cambourne Village College and Comberton. Queen Emma is a feeder school for both Coleridge Community College and The Netherhall School.

42. Both designation of feeder schools and catchment areas are ways of ranking applications which are allowed by the Code.

Catchment area

43. The objector has not challenged the use of a catchment area by Parkside as part of its admission arrangements but does question the way that catchment is characterised and defined. No description of the catchment area is supplied in the Parkside admissions policy. Applicants must look to the LA co-ordinated admissions website for catchment area information. That website includes a map of the catchment. The map is interactive, clicking on a location triggering a pop-up stating what the catchment school is for that location. The LA website states “A map of the catchment area is available from the College or the LA Admissions Team. Details of which streets are in the catchment are also available from the Admissions Team.”

44. That website also states, “the area serving following primary schools fall [sic] within the catchment area: Newnham Croft, Park Street, St. Matthew’s and St. Paul’s. .”

45. The objector states that:

“...[the area] serving Park Street Primary’ overlaps much more significantly with Chesterton’s catchment than that of Parkside’s....The majority of children who attend Park Street Primary live in the catchment of Chesterton... the Head of Park Street Primary, has shared with us that “51% of the current cohort live in Chesterton catchment, 25% live in Parkside catchment and 24% live outside of both”.

46. One way of reading the situation created by the form of words used on the LA website is that all of those children live within the catchment area of Parkside because they all live “in the area serving Park Street C of E Primary”. This is at odds with the way the boundary line of the catchment area for Parkside is mapped. It is clearly the latter which has been used to allocate places. I find that the term “area serving” is misleading and consequently unclear as it implies that the Parkside catchment area includes the combined catchment areas of the four primary schools.

47. The catchment as shown on the map which is located on the LA website for co-ordinated admissions is well delineated and is clear. The inclusion of an ambiguous and possibly contradictory description undermines this. In any event, in failing to specify its catchment area, even in the form of an explicit direction to where it can be viewed, the arrangements are in breach of the Code.

48. **This is unclear and a breach of the Code. I therefore uphold the objection regarding the published catchment arrangements for the school being unclear.**

49. If you apply from a residence in the catchment area for Parkside, even with the school only offering to PAN, there is a high likelihood that your child will be allocated a place at Parkside; only addresses on the fringes of catchment may be likely to miss out on National Offer Day, and this only occurred in 2024. Conversely, if you do not live in the

catchment area it is possible you will be allocated a place, but in 2025 that relied on you being the sibling of a current student. The arrangements therefore achieve the principal goal of advantaging families living close to the school in allocation of places.

50. Overall, and taken in isolation, I view the catchment arrangements as applied, (utilising the mapped boundaries I have referred to on the LA's website) as reasonable. I therefore do not uphold that element of the objection.

Feeder School arrangements

51. The objector has contended that the feeder school element of the admission arrangements is unclear.

52. Parkside's oversubscription criteria refer only to "Children who attend a primary school within the catchment area". The feeder schools themselves are not named. Parkside has stated that its draft arrangements for 2027 will correct this.

53. The arrangements for 2026 are not compliant with paragraph 1.15 of the Code because they do not name the feeder schools. I uphold this element of the objection.

54. In 2025 the school ran out of places to allocate in the out of catchment sibling criterion. And other than in 2023 when the school offered 37 places over PAN, in only one year since 2020 has a child been allocated a place on the basis that while they lived out of catchment, they attended one of the four feeder schools. In five years, there has only been one year where the feeder school enrolment criteria from out of catchment gave a child sufficient advantage as to lead to the allocation of a place.

55. While listed as a feeder for Parkside, only around one child a year from Park Street Primary is allocated a place at Parkside.

56. However, it is not unusual, and in fact it is common, for school admission arrangements to include oversubscription criteria which may never lead in practice to the allocation of a place, because all places are allocated to children who meet a higher oversubscription criterion. That the feeder school arrangements for Parkside have not tended to come into play does not necessarily make their inclusion unreasonable. It could be, for instance, that the school decides to allocate places over PAN (as it did in 2022 and 2023) and needs a fair and rational way to allocate those additional places. It is reasonable to include the feeder arrangements as determined.

57. Since the feeder school element of the arrangements is largely devoid of effect, it cannot cause unfairness.

58. I therefore do not uphold the element of the objection that the feeder school element of Parkside's arrangements is of itself unreasonable or unfair.

The interplay of the arrangements of the school and neighbouring schools on children who live in the catchment area of Chesterton but who attend Park Street Primary

59. I need to also consider the operation of the arrangements in terms of fairness. Fairness is a concept that is used in the Code but is not defined. Fairness cannot be defined in universal terms as its requirements will depend on the circumstances. Fairness is focused on the effect of the arrangements on any relevant group. I re-state here that it is the purpose of oversubscription criteria to create advantage for some applicants and disadvantage to others.

60. At face value, it appears that the arrangements will not operate unfairly. The Code is clear that the use of catchment areas is legitimate. Looking at catchment areas alone, an applicant just over the north boundary of the school's catchment, around 0.7 miles from the school, is in the catchment of Chesterton, is close to Chesterton, and might be expected to have a solid chance of being offered a place there. Were they not offered a place, North Cambridge Academy (NCA) is relatively nearby and is a less oversubscribed school. Applicants to the south and southeast, where the boundary of Parkside's catchment is again around 0.7 miles away from the school would be in a similar position as regards their chances of being offered a place at Parkside. Anyone over that boundary would be in the catchment of Trumpington Community College (Trumpington) or Coleridge Community College (Coleridge), and both these schools have tended in recent years to be able to offer to all children living in their catchment areas and often to children beyond that boundary.

61. However the key element of the objection is the effect of the interplay of arrangements for Parkside with those for Chesterton, the other secondary school closest to Park Street Primary, and the effect of that interplay on those children who live within Chesterton's catchment area but attend Park Street Primary. Detriment to this group is the result of the combination of living in the catchment for Chesterton but attending a feeder school for Parkside. With both schools filling to their PAN before reaching a criterion which such children will meet, it is hard to see that such children will have any chance of securing a place at either school. This is in spite of the two secondary schools both being only half a mile away from Park Street Primary, and a similar short distance from the place of residence of most of the disadvantaged group.

62. The contention of the objector is that the degree of disadvantage this group suffer is unfair. They are likely on the determined arrangements to not be allocated either of their closest secondary schools, including their catchment school and a school for which they are listed as a feeder. They are likely instead to be allocated a place at a school as much as five miles from their home.

63. Parkside has made a written submission on this issue, and I quote it in full:

"As far as we can see, the over-subscription criteria of Parkside School are lawful and appropriate. On the face of it, however, the interaction between the over-subscription criteria for Parkside and those for Chesterton may unintentionally be creating a problem for a group of parents and families.

We recognise that in many ways admissions is a 'zero sum game' – there are only so many places in secondary schools in Cambridge and some are particularly popular. Any change which advantages one family in securing admission for their

child has an equal and opposite effect on another family. We need to be sure that any solution to the problem highlighted in the objection is not unfair to other families.

Equally, we recognise that catchment areas can have a valuable place in local admissions arrangements in giving clarity to parents. However, we would acknowledge that attending a local primary school which happens to lie across a catchment area line from the family home ought not to affect materially a child's odds of gaining admission to any local secondary school at all. If this is what is happening, then this is something that needs to be addressed."

64. This is supportive of the objector's view that arrangements are combining in an unintended and problematic way.

65. Data provided by the LA makes clear the recent pattern of successful applications to Parkside. This is set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Allocation of Year 7 places in Parkside, 2020-2025

Year	PAN	Number of places allocated	Criteria under which the final place was offered	Distance from Parkside of the final place offered
2020	120	120	Catchment	1.09 miles
2021	120	122	Catchment	1.37 miles
2022*	120	120	Out of catchment attending feeder in catchment	1.39 miles
2023	120	157	Out of catchment	0.86 miles
2024	120	120	Catchment	0.99 miles
2025	120	120	Out of catchment sibling	0.96 miles

*data as at National Offer Day. An additional 30 places were subsequently offered later in the admissions process.

66. By way of context, a reach of nearly a mile would cover all addresses in catchment to the north, east, and south of Parkside. It could cover the great majority of addresses to the west side of the catchment, but much of the remaining space in that direction is open land with no dwellings.

67. Table 2 shows that in only one year in the last five years, 2022, has Parkside been able to offer places within its PAN to children attending a feeder school in its catchment but living outside of catchment – including the alleged disadvantaged group identified by the

objector. In all other years where the school offered only to PAN, children in that group were not allocated a place.

68. Unless Parkside becomes markedly less popular in the future, there is good reason to expect that it will continue to run out of places within the group of applicants who live in its catchment area, with no places available to applicants living out of catchment but attending Park Street Primary, a Parkside feeder school. The expected demand for places at Parkside in 2026 and 2027 remains steady at around 140 places. Table 3 shows the number of children admitted to Chesterton under each of the oversubscription criteria for the last four years.

Table 3: number of children admitted to Chesterton by oversubscription criteria. Figures in brackets indicate outcome if the school had only offered places up to PAN.

Oversubscription Criterion	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
EHCP	4	4	3	9
i) LAC / PLAC	1	5	3	1
ii) Child of member of staff	0	3	1	2
iii) live in catchment, attend feeder primary, sibling at school	53	40	47	57
iv) live in catchment, sibling at school	21	11	24	23
v) live in catchment, attend feeder primary,	91	100	102	109(88)
vi) live in catchment	40 (10)	75 (15)	10 (0)	0
vii) live outside of catchment, attend feeder primary, sibling at school	0	2 (0)	0	0
viii) live outside of catchment, sibling at school	0	0	0	0
ix) live outside of catchment, attend feeder primary	0	0	0	0
x) live outside of catchment, nearest to school	0	0	0	0
Total admitted*	210	240	190	201
PAN	180	180	180	180

* including additional places allocated over PAN with agreement of the admission authority

69. Table 3 shows that for 2022, 2023, and 2024 had Chesterton admitted only up to its PAN, ten, then fifteen, then zero children would have been admitted who had been living in catchment alone as their highest criteria met. A better outcome for such children was achieved by offering over PAN. In 2025, even offering 21 places over PAN, there were no children offered places who had been living in catchment as the highest oversubscription criteria met without some other advantaging trait. All successful applicants in 2025 lived in catchment and also attended a Chesterton feeder school or had a sibling link.

70. In the case of the Chesterton, at no point in the last two years, has a child who had been residing in catchment as their highest qualifying criteria been admitted to the school within the school's PAN.

71. The expected demand for places at Chesterton in 2026 and 2027 is on an upward trend. Unless Chesterton becomes markedly less popular in the future, there is good reason to expect that it will continue to run out of places within the group of applicants who live in its catchment area and attend a feeder primary, with no places available to applicants living in catchment but attending Park Street Primary.

72. With both schools filling to their PAN before reaching a criterion which such children will meet, it is hard to see that such children will have any chance of securing a place at either school. This is the result of the combination of living in a catchment for Chesterton but attending a feeder school for Parkside. This is in spite of the two secondary schools both being only half a mile away from Park Street Primary.

73. This means that the majority of children attending Park Street Primary, who are resident in Chesterton's catchment area but not in Parkside's catchment area, are not highly enough prioritised in the oversubscription criteria for either of their closest secondary schools to gain a place. As a result, they are systematically unlikely to gain a place at either of the two local secondary schools closest to where they live. In year 5 at Park Street Primary at this time, which is the cohort who will be applying for places under the 2026 arrangements, there are 5 such children. I am reminded that over the whole of the Park Street Primary, 51% of the families whose children are on roll live in the Chesterton catchment area.

74. To be unfair in terms of paragraph 14 of the Code it is necessary to establish where such children might eventually be allocated a place; to establish that the allocation involves an unreasonable journey to school; and to establish that those affected or displaced in the process of resolving the unfairness would face a much more limited detriment.

75. In the meeting on 9 July, I was told that applicants in the group of Park Street Primary children who did not secure a place at one of the schools for which they had expressed a high preference have up to 2025 been allocated a place at a school which might be objectively viewed as suitable in terms of distance, such as NCA or Coleridge. I note the objector does not see such placements as suitable, stating "This year the children of Park Street Primary have been split between five schools (ordinarily, they are spread between Chesterton, Parkside and St Bede's, a faith school in the south of Cambridge)... This has left 25% of this cohort, living in Chesterton's catchment area, (within 10 minutes' walk from Chesterton) but allocated to two different schools a 30-minute bus ride away."

76. This outcome was only secured in 2025 by Chesterton admitting 21 children over PAN, which along with similar practice in other schools, concealed the potential unfair impact of arrangements. In previous years, the chance of children attending Park Street Primary but living in Chesterton catchment securing none of their preferences was reduced by schools in the city offering variously 163 places over PAN in 2023, 107 over PAN in 2024, and 96 over PAN in 2025.

77. That the unfairness has been mitigated in the last four years by Parkside and other schools also offering places over PAN, does not make the arrangements for 2026 fair. I have to consider the arrangements as they stand, including the PAN of 120 determined by the school and the PAN determined at other schools.

78. I cannot rely on the outcome secured in 2025 persisting in 2026, resting as it did on Chesterton and other schools voluntarily admitting over PAN.

79. Modelled on the basis of schools admitting to PAN, it is my view that the disadvantaged group of children would only secure a place at schools much further from their homes.

80. They might possibly be offered a place at NCA. However, there is a substantial risk that they will not be, and then the other nearest schools would not be likely to be able to offer a place. To the North, in 2025 Impington Village College (Impington) would have made offers to children living beyond catchment only out to 1.7 miles distance had it held to its PAN. This only just reaches the north of the Chesterton catchment, while Park Street Primary families are largely resident in the south of that catchment. On the same terms, to the South, Coleridge would not have made offers beyond 1.84 miles, which would only include a very small corner of Chesterton's southeast catchment. Trumpington and The Netherhall School (Netherhall) would not have offered beyond a mile. The disadvantaged group would be unlikely to be offered places at these schools.

81. Other Park Street Primary pupils who lived outside Parkside catchment would be affected differently. Park Street Primary children who lived in catchment for NCA or Impington or Coleridge would have been offered places to those schools. They would not have suffered the double detriment of failing to be allocated to either their catchment school or the school which Park Street Primary feeds into. They would have secured a place at a school near where they lived.

82. There is a high risk of students from Park Street Primary who live in the Chesterton catchment (the alleged disadvantaged group) being unfairly affected by the 2026 arrangements. Data for admissions in September 2025 indicate that applicants from this group had only a 50% chance of securing their first or second preference. There is also a likelihood of applicants from the disadvantaged group who have not secured a place at the Parkside as a third preference being assigned a school five miles or more from their home address. They would therefore be likely to be allocated a place at a school on the fringe of the city.

83. By way of testing my hypothesis of unfairness to this group, I considered an imaginary child, Darren, living in the extreme north of the catchment for Parkside, and attending Park Street Primary, a feeder for Parkside. He is the eldest child in his family with no other trait which would advantage him against the oversubscription criteria. He lives 0.35 miles from Park Street Primary, with a pedestrian walking route to that school. It is his closest primary school. Darren lives 0.6 miles north of Parkside, and it is his second closest secondary school.

84. On historic patterns of application and allocation of places, and projected demand going forward, he has a very high chance of being allocated a place at Parkside if he expresses a preference for it, as it will be likely to allocate to all or nearly all children who live in Parkside's catchment area. He lives relatively close to Parkside compared to some catchment children and would therefore be prioritised on the distance tie-break within the criterion for catchment children. His enrolment at Park Street Primary is irrelevant to his allocation of a place or chance of a place. Wherever he is schooled in Year 6 he will be likely to be allocated a place at Parkside. Attending a feeder school makes no difference.

85. However, if Darren's address is a matter of a few metres further north, his outcomes stand to be radically different.

86. He would now be in the catchment for Chesterton, his closest secondary school, living 0.4 miles to the south of it. On historic patterns of application and allocation of places, and projected demand going forward, he has no chance of being allocated a place at Chesterton, as its final allocation will be to a child who lives in catchment for that school and who also attends a primary school in catchment.

87. Because he does not live in the catchment area for Parkside and has no siblings at the school, he has very little chance of being allocated a place at Parkside, even though he attends a Parkside feeder school.

88. Even if he were to satisfy the faith criteria for St Bede's, he is not sufficiently close to have been allocated a place in 2023, 2024, or 2025 if that school offered only to PAN.

89. At 1.8 miles from Coleridge, he would be right on the line of where the final place in 2025 might have been offered had all schools offered only up to their PAN. At 2.4 miles from Impington, he is well beyond the point at which that school would have offered its final allocation in 2025 had schools held to PAN.

90. That leaves NCA at 0.8 miles from his home. On 2025 data, had schools held to PAN, he would have been just within the range of places the school would have allocated, at 0.98 miles.

91. However, the LA projects a need for 1072 places in 2026, compared to a combined PAN of 990. Consequently, competition for places is likely to be higher in 2026 than in 2025.

92. My conclusion is that in 2026, at least some children in the alleged disadvantaged group would be very likely to face a lengthy journey to their allocated school, which might be over five miles to Cottenham, or nearly six miles to Bottisham.

93. As an aside, I note here that if parents of those in the alleged disadvantaged group did as encouraged by the LA website, and included Chesterton as a preference because it is their catchment school, and in spite of having no chance of admission there, the LA would be liable for the cost of transport to and from the allocated school, adding to the £10.7 million school transport budget projected for 2025/26. If, on the other hand, such

parents did not express a preference for Chesterton and tried to focus on the nearest schools where they had some possible chance of admission, such as NCA, Impington, Coleridge or St. Bede's, then the LA School Transport Policy states that subsequent transport for their child would be at their expense.

94. Overall, I concur with the objector that the effect of the combination of the arrangements for Parkside and those of other schools operates to create a significant unfairness to the alleged disadvantaged group. The evidence is that on the arrangements as determined by Chesterton and Parkside, such children have a very high chance of facing unfair outcomes in 2026, having no chance of admission to either of their closest secondary schools, and a limited chance of being allocated a local alternative school at a reasonable distance from home.

95. I have to consider the detriment to those children compared to the detriment to other applicants which would result were the arrangements to be set differently to resolve unfairness to the disadvantaged group. My assessment is that such children who might not be allocated a place at Chesterton if arrangements were changed would be likely to be a group of students living in Chesterton's catchment, attending a feeder primary, and living a mile or so from the school. Such children living in the north part of the catchment are likely to be allocated a place at Impington. Children living in the east part are likely to be allocated a place at NCA. These schools would be a mile or so from their residence and may even be their closest secondary school. It is always regrettable if families do not secure their preferred choice of school, but these are not unfair outcomes.

96. It is therefore clear to me that there is an unfair disadvantage to the group identified by the objector; and that the detriment which would result from addressing that disadvantage would not be unfair on those affected by that change.

97. I cannot know what allocations above PAN schools might make in 2026. I make this determination on the published arrangements for Parkside and other schools, including their PAN.

98. I find that there is a lack of alignment between the arrangements of Chesterton and Parkside which leads to the arrangements for each school operating to cause an unfair disadvantage to the group of children identified by the objectors.

99. **In consequence I find that the effect of Parkside's arrangements is unfair and consequently the arrangements are in breach of paragraph 14 of the Code.**

100. I draw the parties' attention to a related determination of an objection to the admission arrangements of Chesterton Community College, ADA4493.

101. It is not the role of the Adjudicator to advise on, nor is it the role of the Adjudicator to propose, admission arrangements which they consider to be the best or most appropriate for a school. It is the role of the Adjudicator to consider whether existing arrangements comply with the Code and the law as it relates to admissions.

102. I was heartened by the willingness of parties attending our meeting to look at this in a constructive way. The intent of all parties to work to meet the needs of families and children in Cambridge was evident.

Other Matters

103. I will now exercise my power under section 88I of the Act to consider each of the other matters identified during my review of the admissions arrangements to determine whether these matters conform with the Code.

104. The arrangements refer to “applications of equal merit.” I note that this term features in the admission arrangements for more than one school in the area. Parkside clearly intends that this denotes applications which meet the same oversubscription criteria. I find that use of the term “equal merit” does not meet the requirement of paragraph 14 of the Code that criteria **must** be clear.

105. The use of straight-line distance to rank applications would seem to operate within each criterion, the arrangements stating that “in cases of equal merit (sic) priority will go to children living nearest the school according to the shortest straight-line distance.” However, there is also a criterion which separately ranks “Children who live nearest the college by the shortest straight-line distance by measuring a straight line from the reference point of the home to the main pupil entrance to the secondary school”. I consider the use of similar but different terminology to be confusing which renders this aspect of the arrangements unclear, and therefore not in accordance with paragraph 14 of the Code..

106. For in-year admissions, the school website details that “You can now apply directly to us for an ‘in year’ place for your child/children at Parkside Community College by completing our application form via the link below and emailing the required documents.” One of the documents that appears to be required is a “Student Details Form”, which asks for a variety of information about child’s attendance, SEND, behaviour record and so on. This is a Supplementary Information Form, consequently paragraph 2.4 of the Code applies. This says:

“In some cases, admission authorities will need to ask for supplementary information forms in order to process applications. If they do so, they must only use supplementary forms that request additional information when it has a direct bearing on decisions about oversubscription criteria or for the purpose of selection by aptitude or ability. Places must be allocated on the basis of the oversubscription criteria only. An applicant must not be given additional priority solely on the basis of having completed a supplementary form. Admission authorities must not ask, or use supplementary forms that ask, for any of the information prohibited by paragraph 1.9 above or for:

- a) any personal details about parents and families, such as maiden names, criminal convictions, marital, or financial status (including marriage certificates);
- b) the first language of parents or the child;

- c) details about parents' or a child's disabilities, special educational needs, or medical conditions;
- d) parents to agree to support the ethos of the school in a practical way;
- e) both parents to sign the form, or for the child to complete the form".

Paragraph 1.9 says:

"It is for admission authorities to formulate their admission arrangements, but they must not:

- a) place any conditions on the consideration of any application other than those in the oversubscription criteria published in their admission arrangements;
- b) take into account any previous schools attended, unless it is a named feeder school;
- c) give extra priority to children whose parents rank preferred schools in a particular order, including 'first preference first' arrangements;
- d) introduce any new selection by ability;
- e) give priority to children on the basis of any practical or financial support parents may give to the school or any associated organisation, including any religious authority. The exception to this is where parents pay optional nursery fees to the school or school-run nursery, for additional hours on top of their 15-hour funded early education, where children from the school nursery class or school-run nursery are given priority for admission to Reception;
- f) give priority to children according to the occupational, marital, financial, or educational status of parents applying. The exceptions to this are children of staff at the school and those eligible for the early years pupil premium, the pupil premium and the service premium who may be prioritised in the arrangements in accordance with paragraphs 1.39 – 1.42;
- g) take account of reports from previous schools about children's past behaviour, attendance, attitude, or achievement, or that of any other children in the family;
- h) discriminate against or disadvantage disabled children, those with special educational needs, or those applying for admission outside their normal age group where an admission authority has agreed to this under paragraphs 2.18 to 2.20;
- i) prioritise children on the basis of their own or their parents' past or current hobbies or activities (schools which have been designated as having a religious character may take account of religious activities, as laid out by the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination);
- j) in designated grammar schools that rank all children according to a pre-determined pass mark and then allocate places to those who score highest, give priority to siblings of current or former pupils;

k) in the case of schools with boarding places, rank children on the basis of a child's suitability for boarding – more information on boarding schools is set out at paragraphs 1.43 - 1.44 below;

l) name fee-paying independent schools as feeder schools;

m) interview children or parents. In the case of sixth form applications, a meeting may be held to discuss options and academic entry requirements for particular courses, but this meeting cannot form part of the decision making process on whether to offer a place. Boarding schools may interview children to assess their suitability for boarding;

n) request financial contributions (either in the form of voluntary contributions, donations, or deposits (even if refundable)) as any part of the admissions process – including for tests; or

o) request photographs of a child for any part of the admissions process, other than as proof of identity when sitting a selection test".

107. The "Student Details Form" requests the details which are prohibited by paragraph 2.4 and 1.9 of the Code. However, paragraph 3.10 of the Code says:

"Where an admission authority receives an in-year application for a year group that is not the normal point of entry and it does not wish to admit the child because it has good reason to believe that the child may display challenging behaviour, it may refuse admission and refer the child to the Fair Access Protocol.

Paragraph 3.11 then says: "An admission authority **should only rely on the provision in paragraph 3.10 if it has a particularly high proportion of either children with challenging behaviour or previously permanently excluded pupils on roll compared to other local schools and it considers that admitting another child with challenging behaviour would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources**". (my emphasis)

Footnote 76 says:

"For the purposes of this Code, behaviour can be described as challenging where it would be unlikely to be responsive to the usual range of interventions to help prevent and address pupil misbehaviour or it is of such severity, frequency, or duration that it is beyond the normal range that schools can tolerate. We would expect this behaviour to significantly interfere with the pupil's/other pupils' education or jeopardise the right of staff and pupils to a safe and orderly environment.

Paragraph 3.12 says:

"The provision in paragraph 3.10 cannot be used to refuse admission to looked after children, previously looked after children; and children who have Education, Health and Care Plans naming the school in question".

Footnote 77 says:

“A child with challenging behaviour may also be disabled as defined in the Equality Act 2010. When considering refusing admission on these grounds, admission authorities must consider their duties under that Act. Admission authorities should also consider the effect of the decision of the Upper Tribunal in *C & C v The Governing Body of a School, The Secretary of State for Education (First Interested Party) and The National Autistic Society (Second Interested Party)* (SEN) [2018] UKUT 269 (AAC) about the implications of the Equality Act 2010 when a pupil exhibits a tendency to physical abuse of other persons as a consequence of a disability.

Footnote 78 says:

“Paragraph 1.9(g) does not apply where an admission authority takes account of past behaviour as evidence for concerns about challenging behaviour, solely for the purpose of making a decision on whether it would be appropriate to refuse admission on the basis described in paragraph 3.10”.

In summary then, an admission authority may ask for reports from previous schools about children’s past behaviour, attendance, attitude, or achievement, but only where the school has a particularly high proportion of either children with challenging behaviour or previously permanently excluded pupils on roll compared to other local schools and it considers that admitting another child with challenging behaviour would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources. Footnote 78 only relates to the information specified in paragraph 1.9g. It does not refer to any of the other information in paragraph 1.9 or 2.4.

108. It is clear, therefore, that admission authorities should not routinely be asking for information, other than that which is necessary to establish whether an in-year applicant meets the oversubscription criteria, unless that school can establish that it meets the criteria under paragraph 3.11. Only in those circumstances could the possibility of a referral to the Fair Access Protocol arise. I will leave the school to reflect on this point. I am sure the relevant persons will be mindful of the need strictly to comply with the provisions of the Code and of their data protection obligations not to ask for children’s personal data unless it is legitimate to do so, and to make clear the purposes for which such data are being requested. There is a requirement for admission arrangements to be clear and it would be appropriate for the school to signal in its arrangements that the information in question will be requested should the admission authority consider it legitimate to ask for it, but the arrangements should also make clear the purpose of requesting this information, in order to meet the threshold for clarity required by paragraph 14 of the Code. Parents should be able to look at the arrangements and understand how the information in question may affect their application.

Summary of findings

109. I have found that consultation was not required ahead of the determination of the 2026 arrangements, but that the admission authority did not comply with the requirements of the Code regarding the publishing those arrangements.

110. I have found that the catchment and feeder school elements of the arrangements are not compliant with the requirement of the Code for clarity.

111. I have found that whilst the arrangements are reasonable, and fair when taken in isolation, the interplay of the arrangements of the school and neighbouring schools is unfair in effect. There is a lack of alignment between the arrangements of Chesterton and Parkside which leads to the arrangements of both schools causing an unfairness to the alleged disadvantaged group. In short, admission arrangements do not operate in isolation. Therefore, in order to ensure that the admission arrangements for Parkside operate fairly the admission authorities for Parkside and Chesterton will need to remedy the unfair effect by making the necessary amendments to their arrangements to ensure that a child living in the Chesterton catchment but attending Park Street Primary will be able to attend a secondary school within an acceptable distance of their home. This process may well need input and modelling expertise from the LA.

112. I have found that revisions need to be made to several other elements of the school's arrangements which I considered under section 88I(5)

Determination

113. In accordance with section 88H(4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I partially uphold the objection to the admission arrangements for September 2026 determined by United Learning Academy Trust for Parkside Community College, Cambridgeshire.

114. I have also considered the arrangements in accordance with section 88I(5) and find there are other matters which do not conform with the requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

115. By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the admission authority.

116. In this case I determine that admissions authority must revise its arrangements by 30 September 2025.

117. This deadline will ensure arrangements for 2026 are clear and transparent in time for the applications process for 2026 entry.

Dated: 3 September 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Patrick Storrie