



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	VAR2617
Admission Authority:	Surrey County Council for St Ann's Heath Junior School in Virginia Water, Surrey
Local Authority:	Surrey County Council
Date of advice:	4 September 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 Surrey County Council for St Ann's Heath Junior School for 2026/27.

I determine that the published admission number for admission in 2026/27 will be 45.

The referral

1. Surrey County Council (the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator proposals for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for St Ann's Heath Junior School (the School) for 2026/27.
2. The School is a community school for children aged 7 to 11 in Virginia Water, Surrey. The Local Authority is the admission authority for the School.
3. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (the PAN) for admission to Year 3 in 2026/27 is reduced from 60 to 45.

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.
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 11 July 2025, supporting documents and further information provided by the School at my request;
 - the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 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.
9. 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 variation

10. 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.
11. I note here that if I decide to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the PAN from 60 to 45 as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years, so that the PAN could be set at 45 without any need for consultation.
12. 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.
13. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Admission Authority is set out in the referral, which states:

"There have been several significant changes in both pupil demand and forecasting methodology that now necessitate a variation to this school's Published Admission Number (PAN). While previous forecasts had indicated a rising demand for school places within the planning area, actual pupil numbers at the school have been steadily declining, with fluctuations observed across all year groups.

This revised outlook is the result of improved forecasting methods. In collaboration with local district and borough councils, we have refined our housing trajectory assumptions, leading to more realistic and locally informed projections. Additionally, the integration of GP registration data into our forecasting model has begun to embed more reliable trends, offering a more accurate reflection of local population changes. These improvements in methodology provide a more robust evidence base for future demand and highlight the need to adjust the PAN accordingly.

In 2024, the Published Admission Number (PAN) for St Ann's Heath Junior was reduced from 90 to 60 to reflect the removal of one of its infant feeder schools, which had been extended to become an all-through primary school. This PAN reduction was a planned adjustment in response to that change.

However, despite this, the school is experiencing falling rolls and fluctuating pupil numbers across all year groups. Forecasts currently indicate a sustained surplus of approximately 1FE over the medium-term. Additionally, the school's remaining feeder school, Trumps Green Infant School, is also experiencing fluctuating pupil numbers, which is likely to impact future admissions.

These ongoing changes in pupil demand make it necessary to request a variation to the PAN to ensure the school's financial and operational sustainability."

Overall demand for Year 3 places in the area

14. 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.
15. 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 located in the "Virginia Water, Lyne & Longcross" planning area. The other two schools in this area are Lyne and Longcross CofE Primary School and Trumps Green Infant School, the latter being the main feeder to the School.
16. The Local Authority has provided me with the following table showing the numbers of pupils on roll at the Census date in January 2025 in the three schools in the planning area.

Table 1: Number of children on roll in January 2025 at schools in the "Virginia Water, Lyne & Longcross" planning area

Name of school	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Lyne & Longcross CofE Primary School (PAN of 30)	25	29	28	30	27	28	30
Trumps Green Infant School (PAN of 60)	42	40	49	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
St Ann's Heath Junior School	n/a	n/a	n/a	51	74	81	78

17. The above data suggests that, as of January 2025, there were projected to be 49 children who might require a Year 3 place at the School in September 2025, with the corresponding figures being 40 in September 2026 and 42 in September 2027. The Local Authority has supplied me with figures to show that the actual demand for September 2025 has turned out to be lower than the projected demand from the census data. There were 43 offers for places at the School on National Offer Day, and the School tells me that they are now expecting there to be only 38 pupils in Year 3 for September 2025.
18. Taking into account this pattern and considering the actual numbers in table 1 for those currently on roll in Year R and Year 1 in the other schools in the local planning area, I am satisfied that a reduction of the School's PAN to 45 for 2026/27 would not leave a shortage of places in the local planning area for children whose parents are seeking a place for their child. I am also satisfied that, if the PAN for 2027/28 were also to be set at 45, there would be sufficient surplus capacity for admissions in 2027/28.

Places at the School

19. I now turn to the number of children at the School and the reasons given by the Local Authority in their referral. The request for the variation refers to the wish to align the School's staffing and budget to the reducing number of children.

"The proposed variation will reduce the school's PAN from 60 to 45 for the September 2026 intake. This will allow for the implementation of vertical grouping, which will directly address challenges related to changing pupil movement patterns and resource constraints. By consolidating pupils into fewer, vertically grouped classes¹, the school can reduce the overall number of classes and teaching staff required. This adjustment enables more efficient allocation of resources, mitigating budgetary pressures that have arisen due to fluctuating pupil numbers. Additionally, this approach supports the sustainability of other local schools, thereby fostering a more resilient and adaptable educational environment in response to evolving circumstances. It will support the long-term sustainability of the local education system by helping to address surplus capacity across the area, ensuring that available places are matched more closely to actual need.

By adjusting the PAN in line with falling rolls, the school will be better positioned to manage its resources efficiently, reducing financial pressure and supporting the delivery of a high-quality education. The change will help stabilise staffing structures and avoid the need to run underfilled classes, which are financially unsustainable."

¹ The School tells me that it in 2025/26, it will be organising Year 3 (38 pupils) and Year 4 (48 pupils) into three classes. If it can be certain that no more than 45 pupils are admitted to Y3 in 2026/27 and beyond, it will be able to plan with certainty for a similar model for the organisation of Year 3 and Year 4 into three classes rather than four.

20. The School tells me the following:

“The governors had previously noted the falling numbers on roll in 25/26 and the prediction that this trend would only get worse in 26/27 due to the current number of pupils in the school's feeder school. The agreed budget for 25/26 already included serious cuts in spending that affected school structure. Governors agreed with the Headteachers that a more drastic longer-term solution would be required to ensure the financial sustainability of the school. The suggestion to introduce vertical grouping was agreed by governors as the best way of managing the budget in a way that would enable us to continue to invest in the future development of the school. However, class sizes will not be viable unless the school's PAN can be reduced in 26/27. If this doesn't happen, there is a significant risk that class sizes will be too big to manage vertical grouping with the appropriate staff complement, but that income will be too small for us to run an extra class.”

21. I have been provided with information regarding the School's financial position to support the variation request. This shows that whilst at the end of the 2024-25 financial year, the School had a cumulative surplus of £55,000, the projections are for an in-year deficit of £36,000 for the 2025-26 financial year and for further in-year deficits in 2026/27 and 2027/28 if the School is unable to re-organise its classes as proposed.

Summary of findings

22. Having considered all the matters above, my reasoning can be summarised as follows:

- a. The proposed variation does not give rise to any concerns about the sufficiency of Year 3 places in the area for 2026/27 or 2027/28.
- b. There is no indication of any potential for the frustration of parental preference.
- c. The proposed variation will allow the School to plan with certainty for the long-term re-organisation of its classes and the implementation of vertical grouping. This 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 2026/27.

23. After carefully weighing up the above factors, I conclude that the proposed variation is justified by the circumstances, and I approve it.

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 Surrey County Council for St Ann's Heath Junior School for 2026/27.
25. I determine that the published admission number for admission in 2026/27 will be 45.

Dated: 4 September 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Clive Sentence