



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2615

Admission Authority: Merrow Junior School, Guildford, Surrey

Local Authority: Surrey County Council

Date of advice: 17 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 Merrow Junior School for 2025/26.

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

The referral

1. Merrow Junior School (the School) has referred to the adjudicator proposals for a variation to the admission arrangements for 2025/26.
2. The School is a foundation school for children aged 7 to 11 in Guildford, Surrey. The governing body 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 2025/26 is reduced from 60 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 Admission 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 Local Authority.
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 School dated 4 July 2025, supporting documents and further information provided by the School 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.
9. In the interests of dealing speedily with this and the many other requests for variations currently, 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 2025/26 by reducing the PAN from 60 to 30 as proposed, it will not impact on the admission arrangements for 2026/27 that have been determined with a PAN of 30.
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:

“Since our admissions were determined for the September 2025 Year 3 cohort, the number of children within the current Year 2 group moving to Merrow Junior School has reduced – currently at 30.

As a Federation, our priority is for the children at Merrow C of E Infant School (our federated school) to continue their education at Merrow Junior School.

This year we had 37 first choice applications for September 2025, 35 of whom were for children currently attending Merrow Infant School. At this point, I asked the Local Authority to support an In Year variation to admissions as we are able to go over 30 in a Junior class, rather than having two small classes, with all the attendant costs. The reduction was not supported by the Local Authority in January as there were 37 first preferences and 35 of those attended the infant school.

The Local Authority have now confirmed that admissions only show 32 accepted offers (including two children with an EHCP), with no children on the w/list for a place. It is clear that demand has dropped. Further to this, I can now confirm that there will be 30 children joining in September.

We have therefore needed to employ 2 full time teachers for this cohort, a considerable cost when schools are facing funding issues.”

Overall demand for Year 3 places in the area

14. I have considered 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 considering 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 five located in the “East Guildford” planning area who have children in year 3. The other four schools in this area are Boxgrove Primary School, Burpham Foundation Primary School, Clandon CoE Primary School and St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School. The School is in federation with Merrow CoE Infant School which is the only feeder 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 schools in the planning area.

Table 1: Number of children on roll in January 2025 at schools in the “East Guildford” planning area

Name of school	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Boxgrove Primary School	87	90	91	94	96	95	95
Burpham Foundation Primary School	60	60	60	59	60	60	60
Clandon CoE Primary School	12	7	9	11	9	12	18
Merrow CoE Infant School	33	37	37	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Merrow Junior School	n/a	n/a	n/a	55	49	63	66
St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School	60	55	60	63	64	64	63
Total	252	249	257	282	278	295	302

17. The above data suggests that, as of January 2025, there were projected to be 37 children who might require a Year 3 place at the School in September 2025, with the corresponding figures being 37 in September 2026 and 33 in September 2027. The local authority has supplied me with figures to show that for the School, the projected demand from the census data has turned out to be higher than the reality. There were 32 offers for places at the School on National Offer Day, and the School tells me that they are now expecting there to be only 30 pupils in Year 3 for September 2025.
18. *Possible alternative wording for here....* The Local Authority tells me that there are currently 21 vacancies in year 3 in other schools within the planning area. Whilst the School will be at capacity if I approve the variation request, I am satisfied that a reduction of the PAN to 30 for 2025/26 does not leave a shortage of places in the local planning area for children whose parents are seeking a place for their child in Y3.

Places at the School

19. I now turn to the number of children at the School and the reasons given by the admission authority for seeking a PAN reduction as set out in their referral.
20. The School tells me the following:

“Earlier this year, we completed a consultation and will officially change the PAN at Merrow Junior School to 30 in September 2026. The main question from the community is regarding whether their child from the infant feeder school will get a place. Our Admission Policy clearly states that pupils from Merrow Infant School are a priority and we would want to guarantee a place for them.

Numbers in the infant school are also reducing in line with the falling birth rate. An in year variation was submitted by the Local Authority to reduce the PAN at Merrow CofE Infant School from September 2025 to an intake of 30 into Reception – this has been approved.”
21. Having completed the consultation above, determined arrangements for 2026/27 confirm a published admission number of 30. The number of children admitted to the school in September 2025 is 30. The school currently has no pupils on a waiting list.
22. 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, the projections are for an in-year deficit for the 2025-26 financial year and for further substantially higher in-year deficits in 2026/27 and 2027/28 if the School is unable to re-organise its classes as proposed.

Summary of findings

23. 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 2025/26.
 - b. There is no current indication of any potential for the frustration of parental preference, although this may arise if in-year applications are made and there remain 30 children on roll in the year of entry.
 - c. The proposed variation will allow the School to plan with certainty for its long-term plans to accommodate a reduced number of pupils. 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 2025/26.
24. After carefully weighing up the above factors, I conclude that the proposed variation is justified by the circumstances, and I approve it.

Determination

25. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by the admission authority for Merrow Junior School for 2025/26.
26. I determine that the published admission number for admission in 2025/26 will be 30.

Dated: 17 September 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Mr Philip Lloyd