



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	VAR2614
Admission Authority:	Hampshire County Council for Ringwood Church of England Infant School, Ringwood, Hampshire.
Local Authority:	Hampshire County Council
Date of advice:	22 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 Hampshire County Council for Ringwood Church of England Infant School for 2025/26.

I determine that the published admission number for admission in 2025/26 will be 70.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator proposals for a variation to the admission arrangements (the arrangements) for Ringwood Church of England Primary School (the School) for 2024/25 and 2025/26.
2. The School is a voluntary controlled Church of England infants' school for children aged five to seven in the Diocese of Portsmouth, which is the religious authority for the School. 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 Reception Year (Year R) in 2025/26 is reduced from 90 to 70.

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 the Diocese of Portsmouth.
6. The PAN for 2024/25 was determined and implemented during the last academic year. The Code is clear that the PAN refers to “the age group at which pupils are or will normally be admitted to the school e.g. reception”. The PAN only applies to the year of entry but is often treated by admission authorities as if it applies to every year and as if it provides a maximum number for admission, this is incorrect. It is the responsibility of the School and admission authority to agree how many pupils to admit in years other than Year R. An admission authority may only refuse to admit a child where the admission would prejudice the efficient provision of education or the efficient use of resources. Therefore, I will not consider a proposed variation to “the 2024/25 PAN” as no such PAN can exist.
7. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation for 2025/26 is within my jurisdiction.
8. In considering the variation request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
9. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
 - the referral from the Local Authority dated 11 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;
 - information available on the websites of the Department for Education, the Local Authority and the School; and
 - the response from the Dioceses of Portsmouth to the proposed variation.
10. 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

11. There is no formal consultation required for a variation and so parents and others do not have the opportunity to express their views. Clearly it is desirable that changes to arrangements are made via the process of determination following consultation as the consultation process allows those with an interest to express their views. It also allows for objections to the adjudicator. None of this is afforded by the variation process.
12. I note here that if I decide to vary the arrangements for 2025/26 by reducing the PAN from 90 to 70 as proposed, it will have not have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years, because the 2026/27 arrangements have already been determined. There is no indication of the PAN in the 2026/27 arrangements as there should be, given that the PAN is an integral part of any school's admission arrangements. However the Hampshire County Council website includes confirmation that the PAN for the School has been set at 90 for admissions in September 2026. This determination does not change the PAN for September 2026.
13. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code (as above) requires that admission arrangements, once determined, may only be revised, that is changed or varied, if there is a major change of circumstance or certain other limited and specified circumstances. I will consider below whether the proposed variation is justified by the change in circumstances.
14. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Admission Authority is set out in the referral, which states:

“...the School has only made 65 offers on national offer day and currently has 80 children on roll in year R. At the time of writing, the school has only 63 offers for September 2025 admission.”

The 80 pupils in Year R referred to will be in Year 1 in September 2025.

“The school is currently undersubscribed in all three-year groups, but especially Year R, and this is creating financial difficulties for the school.”

“if the PAN reductions are approved the school is proposing to operate an eight-class structure in 2025/26. This reduction in classes would be achieved by running a mixed YR/Y1 class of 23 children, with 3 children from YR and 20 children from Y1.”

Overall demand for Year R places in the School

15. I have considered the latest available data in order to form a view about 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.
16. 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 several schools, for this purpose. The Local Authority as the admission authority has provided assurance that a reduced PAN of 70, with 63 admissions to Year R in September, provides sufficient capacity in the school for parents moving to the area or expressing an interest mid-year to have an opportunity to gain a place at the school for their child.
17. The Local Authority has confirmed that the school currently has 253 pupils on roll as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Number of children on roll in Sept 24 and Sept 25.

-	Year R	Year 1	Year 2
Number of children on roll in Sept 24	80	87	86
Number of children on roll in Sept 25	65	80	87

18. Table 1 shows the number of children on roll at the school has declined by 21 children since September 2024. Information from the Local Authority has confirmed that there are now 63 children in Year R and no waiting list.
19. I now turn to the reasons given by the Local Authority for the proposed PAN reduction in their referral. The request for approval of the proposed variation refers to the budget challenges faced by the school following the reduction in pupil numbers. If the variation is approved for 2025/26 and numbers in Year 1 remain consistent the School will change the curriculum structure from 9 classes to 8 by delivering one group of mixed age Year 1 / Year R pupils. The intention is that the class of 23 will include 3 selected pupils from Year R to create a class of 23. This maintains the capacity across Year R and Year 1 to respond to any additional applications for places during the year. They state that:

“The proposed reduction of the PAN ... will protect the school from financial difficulties and enable them to plan their staffing and curriculum with certainty for future academic years”
20. The Local Authority has provided confirmation that it is seeking a variation for one year (2025/26) at this time because demand for 2026/27 is not yet clear. Should the need arise, they will seek another variation next academic year. I am bound to say that this is not particularly satisfactory. As we say in all of our determinations on applications for approval of proposed variations, local authorities have better pupil planning forecasts in place. It is not satisfactory for local authorities to be submitting multiple requests for approval of proposed variations to the Schools Adjudicator each year.
21. The School provided information from the governors’ meeting where the variation request was approved that illustrates careful consideration given by the headteacher and governors to the impact of changing the PAN. They note the School's experience of working with mixed age classes alongside the need for effective communication with parents.
22. I have been provided with information from the Diocese of Portsmouth that confirms their support for the proposed reduction for 2025/26.

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 R places in the school for 2025/26.
 - b. There is no indication of any potential for the frustration of parental preference because there will remain places available for in-year applicants in the Year R / Year 1 mixed age class.

- c. The proposed variation will allow the School to plan with certainty for its long-term plans to re-organise its classes and implement a mixed age group. This will make a significant improvement 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 Ringwood Church of England Infant School for 2025/26.
26. I determine that the published admission number for admission in 2025/26 will be 70.

Dated: 22 September 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Philip Lloyd