



Determination

Case reference: VAR2574

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Herne Junior School, Petersfield

Date of decision: 1 October 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 Herne Junior School for 2025/26

I determine that for admission in 2025/26 the PAN shall be 96.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the admission authority, the LA) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the arrangements) for Herne Junior School (the school) for 2025/26.
2. The school is a community school for children aged 7 to 11 in Petersfield, Hampshire. The normal year of admission is therefore Year 3. The school is co-educational with no designated religious character. It is located in the Hampshire County Council area.
3. Parties to the request are the school's governing body and the LA.
4. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (the PAN) for admissions to Year 3 in 2025/26 be reduced from 120 to 96.

Jurisdiction and procedure

5. 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”.

6. The arrangements were determined by the LA on 20 February 2024 and it has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code, and that the governing body of the school has been consulted about it.
7. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation 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 LA dated 28 May 2025 and supporting documents
 - the determined arrangements for 2025/26 and the proposed variation to those arrangements
 - responses from the LA and the school to my requests for further information
 - a map showing the location of the school
 - information available on the websites of the DfE (including the ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS) and ‘Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool’ (FBIT) websites), and the LA.
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 the arrangements for 2026/27 have been determined. This means that if I agree to the LA’s request to vary the arrangements for 2025/26 by approving the

requested PAN reduction as proposed, it will be for that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years. The LA has told me that a PAN of 120 has been determined for 2026/27.

Consideration of proposed variation

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 arrangements set out the following (summarised) oversubscription criteria:
 - a. After the priority given to looked after and previously looked after children (as defined), priority is given first to children or families with an exceptional medical or social need for a place at the school.
 - b. The next priority is given to children of staff (as defined).
 - c. The next priority is given to children living within the school's catchment area who have a sibling (as defined) on the roll of the school or on the roll of the linked Infant School (Petersfield Infant School) at the time of admission. An equal priority is given if the child lives outside the catchment area but their sibling was admitted to either the school or to Petersfield Infant School in the previous year because they were not able to secure a place at the school in whose catchment area they reside.
 - d. Priority is then given to children who live out of the catchment area but who were admitted to Petersfield Infant school in the previous year because they had not been able to secure a place at the school in whose catchment area they reside.
 - e. Other children living in the school's catchment area are the next priority, followed by children living out of the catchment area who are on the roll of Petersfield Infant School, followed by any other children.
14. The LA has proposed that the PAN for admissions to Year 3 be reduced from 120 to 96, and has told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the school is that since there were only 97 places in Year 3 at the school offered on national offer day, the school only needed to operate with 3 classes in Year 3 from September 2025. It said that if the PAN were not reduced, the school could be required to create a fourth class and that this would "place significant financial pressure on the school". When it wrote to me on 8 August the LA said that the LA as admission authority would honour the 97 offers of places that had been made, and that the school would start the year with three classes in Year 3, whether or not the variation was approved. The latest information (provided on 25 September 2025) is that there are 97 children on roll at the school in Year 3. The PAN for Year 3 remains relevant to any further admissions to the school in this year group for the remainder of the school year.

15. The LA has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty the LA assesses the likely future number of places to be needed and plans to meet that need. The LA uses planning areas, which are geographical areas and the schools within those areas, for this purpose. There are nine primary phase schools in the planning area which includes the school. Of these, seven are primary schools for children from the ages of 4 to 11.
16. The other two schools in the planning area are Petersfield Infant School and Herne Junior School, which the LA describes as “linked”. I estimate from postcode data that the two schools are about 1 mile apart as the crow flies, or a little further by the available driving route. Herne Junior School is the only school in the planning area for which the normal year of admission is Year 3, and Petersfield Infant School is the only school from which children normally transfer at the end of Year 2. So while the forecast of need for the planning area as a whole is relevant to the need for Year 3 places at Herne Junior School, it is the number of children progressing from Petersfield Infant School that is clearly of particular importance in understanding the need for places there.
17. Although the LA had given me its forecast that the number of Year 3 admissions to the school which were anticipated at the time it made its request was, for September 2025 and September 2026, 102 and 85 respectively these did not seem to me to bear a sufficiently clear resemblance to the numbers of children known to be on roll currently at Petersfield Infant School (as also provided by the LA). I therefore sought a better understanding of how the LA had forecast the intake figures for Herne Junior School.
18. Following a number of rounds of correspondence, the picture which I have is as follows:
 - (i) The LA agrees that the need for Year 3 places at the school can be seen to be comprised of:
 - a. the children transferring from Petersfield Infant School in September each year, plus
 - b. the number of children transferring from Year 2 in primary schools in the area in September each year, plus
 - c. any children admitted from elsewhere and in-year admissions.
 - (ii) The figures for the last three years, and the current information available about the next two years is shown below:

Data	September 2023	September 2024	September 2025	September 2026	September 2027

Year 2 leavers from Petersfield Infant School	121	106	90	Currently 111	Currently 104
The number of Petersfield Infant School leavers admitted to Herne Junior	113	104	85	?	?
Number of other children	6	4	12	?	?
Total September NOR	119	108	97	?	?

19. The LA uses a three-year weighted average of the number of children leaving Petersfield Infant School to forecast the need for Year 3 places at the school. It seems to me, based on the information in the table above, that over 100 children are likely to transfer to Year 3 at the school from Petersfield Infant School in both 2026 and 2027, and that these children are likely to be joined by something like 7 to 10 others (if places are available to them), based on recent trends. The LA has told me that in 2025, there were more children than in recent years who did not live in the locality who secured a place at the school (as can be seen from the table).
20. In other words, a PAN of 96 for 2026 or beyond would seem to be insufficient even for the number of children transferring from Petersfield Infant School, and more children can also be anticipated to seek a place. The LA has told me that a PAN for 2026 has been determined as 120, referring to the number of children expected to leave the infant school, but saying no more. I take it from this that the LA does not intend to seek to vary the PAN which it has already set for admissions in 2026. I note here that the minute of the meeting of the school governors in May 2025 at which the variation request was made record that the governors also approved that the school's PAN be reduced in future to 90. While this is not a matter before me, and while the PAN for

2026 admissions is 120 and remains so, I can see from the above that if the PAN were to be reduced to 90 in 2026, it would mean that there would almost certainly be too few Year 3 place at the school to provide for children leaving Perersfield Infant School. Children whose parents had clearly preferred an infant/junior schooling for their children to an all-through primary route would be frustrated in 2026 and 2027.

21. What I am left with, then, is a picture which shows that the number of children coming through from the school's linked infant school was particularly low for September 2025, but that these numbers are likely to recover to the point where it would not be possible for the school to operate with three Year 3 classes in 2026 or beyond, unless the PAN were to be set in order to achieve this.
22. The LA has told me that "Before submitting this application, the LA took steps to understand the capacity in current Year 2 in primary schools, to check there would still be capacity in the school place planning area." It said that there are eight such places (which would now be available as Year 3 places from September 2025) "which allows for in-year and late applicants to be placed locally where necessary."
23. I have considered alternatives to the PAN reduction. When the LA made its request, it also told me that there had been only 102 admissions to Year 3 at the school in September 2024, and that whereas the other three year groups at the school (Years 5, 6 and 7) were fully subscribed in having 120 children on roll at that time, the school had organised the teaching of Year 3 in 2024/25 as four classes of 24, 25, 26 and 27 children. This is the group that forms Year 4 in 2025/26.
24. Given that there have been 97 Year 3 admissions in 2025 and that there were 102 in 2024, there are a total of 199 children at the school across the two years. If the school were to operate mixed-age classes across these two year groups, it would be possible to have seven classes of 30 children and therefore to accept many more children into Year 3 than the proposed PAN of 96 (up to 108 children in fact). The PAN could remain at 120 for admissions to Year 3 in 2025/26, and the school would not have to open an eighth class.
25. The LA has said that the school currently organises its three classes in Year 3 with 33, 32 and 32 pupils. I can see that the school could not easily take more pupils without creating a fourth class, or without the expedient of moving to mixed-age teaching across Years 3 and 4 (or at least across a part of each of the two years) as described above. It must be a possibility that the admission of more children to Year 3 would be necessary if the PAN remains at 120. Mixed-age classes would avoid the additional cost associated with creating an extra class, but while I do not regard mixed-age teaching in itself as necessarily educationally unsound, it would in this case mean that children and staff who have been used to single-age classes in Year 3 at the school would have to adapt to a new system for the remainder of the primary education phase, which is less than ideal.

26. I have considered the financial imperative which the LA has said exists for the school. It told me that a fourth teacher in Year 3 would “create a deficit” of £30,000, but I am afraid I do not agree with this calculation, since I believe it uses false assumptions. Based on what the LA has told me about the average cost of employing a teacher and what I understand the Year 3 age-weighted pupil funding to be (from what it has also said to me), 97 pupils will generate enough income to pay for 6.5 teachers, although I have not pursued this with the LA. I have also taken account of the information which is available about the school’s financial position on the GOV.UK website referred to above. This shows there to be a current revenue reserve of over £165,000 at the school.
27. If I agree the PAN reduction, the school will know that it need not admit more children to the current Year 3. While I do not consider the matter critical to the state of the school’s budget, being able to ensure that there will only be three classes in Year 3 throughout 2025/26 does provide a financial benefit. At the same time any further Year 3 children needing a school place in the area during 2025/26 would, crucially, not be children who had attended Petersfield Infant School, since all those who did are already at the school if this was their parent’s wish. I am content that the LA’s assessment of the availability of other Year 3 places locally is accurate.
28. I have considered one further matter, which is the question of parental preference. If I approve the variation and admissions to Year 3 at the school are “capped” at 96 for 2025/26, there will effectively be no available places in the area for children moving from another part of the country who have attended the equivalent of Petersfield Infant School elsewhere, and whose parents are seeking a Year 3 place in a junior school for them during 2025/26. Given the overwhelming preponderance of all-through primary schooling however, I consider this to be a remote possibility. The likelihood of any such parental preference being denied if the schools PAN is 96 is therefore very small.
29. On balance, I approve the requested variation.
30. I note here that reducing the PAN does not reduce the overall capacity of the school unless accommodation is being removed from the premises. It is not being suggested that accommodation is being removed and so the physical capacity of the school remains the same. Reducing the PAN will not change that. What this means is that should there be a need for the school to increase its PAN and / or admit more children in future years, there remains the capacity in the building for it to do so.

Determination

31. 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 Herne Junior School for 2025/26
32. I determine that for admission in 2025/26 the PAN shall be 96.

Dated: 1 October 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Dr Bryan Slater