



Determination

Case reference: VAR 2643-2644

Admission Authority: London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham for Brackenbury Primary School

Date of decision: 22 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 the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham for Brackenbury Primary School for 2025/26. I determine that for admission to Reception Year in 2025/26, the published admission number shall be 30.

I also approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham for Brackenbury Primary School for 2026/27. The published admission number for 2026/27 shall be 30.

The referral

1. The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (the Admission Authority, the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator proposals for variations to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Brackenbury Primary School (the School) for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027.
2. The School is a community school for children aged three to eleven years. It is a co-educational, non-selective primary school with no designated religious character.
3. The School was judged to be 'good' by Ofsted at its most recent inspection in December 2022.
4. Parties to the request are the Local Authority and the School.
5. The proposed variations are that:

- the published admission number (PAN) be reduced from 60 to 30 for admissions to Reception Year (Year R) in the academic year beginning in September 2025 (VAR2643); and
- the PAN be reduced from 60 to 30 for admissions to Year R in the academic year beginning in September 2026 (VAR2644).

Jurisdiction and procedure

6. 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”.

7. The 2025/26 Arrangements were determined by the Admission Authority on 25 March 2024. This is after the deadline for determining arrangements which was 28 February 2024. This does not affect the standing of the Arrangements or my power to consider them or the proposed variation.
8. The 2026/27 Arrangements were determined on 4 February 2025.
9. The Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variations in line with the Code.
10. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
11. In considering the variation request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
12. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
 - the referral from the Admission Authority dated 3 October 2025 and supporting

documents;

- the determined Arrangements for 2025/26 and 2026/27 and the proposed variations to those Arrangements;
- responses from the LA and the School to my requests for further information;
- a map showing the location of the School; and
- information available on gov.uk websites (including 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS), 'Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool' (FBIT) and Ofsted) and the websites of the School and the Local Authority.

13. 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.
14. I note that the Arrangements for 2026/27 have been determined. This means that if I agree to the Local Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2025/26 by reducing the PAN as proposed, it will be for that year only and it will not have a bearing on subsequent years.
15. I also note that the Arrangements for 2027/28 have not yet been determined. This means that if I approve the proposed variation for 2026/27, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years. If the proposed variation for 2026/27 were to be approved, the PAN for 2027/28 and subsequent years could be set at 30 without objection save from the Governing Body of the School.
16. The referral included a request to reduce the PAN for Year 1. Such a matter is not within my jurisdiction. There is no PAN for Year 1, because the PAN only applies to the year group (or groups) that are the normal point of admission, which in this case is Year R. For the sake of completeness, I draw the Admission Authority's attention to paragraph 1.4 of the Code which states, in part:

"The PAN only applies to the relevant age group. This means that admission authorities may not refuse admission to other age groups on the grounds that they have already reached their PAN. They may, however, refuse admission where the admission of another child would prejudice the provision of efficient education or efficient use of resources."

Consideration of proposed variation

17. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School is reduced from 60 to 30 for entry to Year R in September 2025. It has also proposed that the PAN of the School is reduced from 60 to 30 for entry to Year R in September 2026. The proposed variations have the support of the School's Governing Body.

18. 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.

19. The Local Authority told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the School is:

"Brackenbury Primary School has for the last 5 year remained undersubscribed. In the last 2 years, the school secured less than 30 children into reception, and rolls are falling in the remaining year groups.

The school cannot sustain maintaining 2-form with the on-roll numbers across all year groups significantly lower. The reduction in PAN will enable the school to plan with greater certainty in terms of staffing, curriculum planning and delivery as well as financial viability."

20. The Local Authority also stated:

"The main reason for declining numbers at Brackenbury Primary School is the falling birth rates in the inner-London region and parental preference. We have seen an improvement in the number of offers in 2025 for identified schools but not including Brackenbury. More broadly, across the last 3 years, there has been a real decline in both reception offers and in-year."

21. To clarify the reasons for the proposed reductions in PAN, the School said:

"Reception numbers have declined over the past two years due to a combination of local and wider demographic factors:

- Falling birth rates in the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham and surrounding areas.
- Reduced local demand as family-sized housing is increasingly unaffordable, leading to fewer families with young children remaining in the area.
- Post-pandemic population movement, with many families relocating outside London.
- Increased surplus capacity at neighbouring schools, giving parents a wider range of available places."

22. The Governing Body stated:

“We believe this reduction:

- reflects the current and projected demographic context;
- provides the best means of securing the school's long-term financial and educational sustainability; and
- allows the school to maintain class sizes that support high-quality teaching and learning.”

23. 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 of the School is reduced from 60 to 30 for 2025/26 and, separately, for 2026/27. I have also considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the change in demand, the potential effect of the proposed PAN reduction on meeting parental preference, and whether the proposed reduction is justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.
24. The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty the Local Authority 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 based in the South planning area of the Local Authority. There are 25 schools in the planning area, including the School, which admit children into Year R.
25. Table 1 summarises the data supplied to me by the Local Authority for the schools in the planning area; the number of children admitted in each of the previous three years, including 2025; and the forecast numbers for 2026.

Table 1: School places in the planning area and allocation to Year R

-	2023	2024	2025	2026
The total PAN	928	928	928	928
The number of children admitted to Year R or forecast to be admitted	791	731	817	868
The number of vacant places	137	197	111	60
The number of vacant places as a percentage of the total number of places	14.8	21.2	12.0	6.5

VAR 2643 – PAN reduction for 2025/26

26. Table 1 shows that there has been a high number of vacant places for children entering Year R in the planning area since 2023. The DfE document, “Basic need allocations 2025-26: Explanatory note on methodology”, refers to the need for two per cent surplus capacity “to provide an operating margin for local authorities ... to support parental choice, pupil population movement, and general manageability of the system”. I note that the proportion of vacant places in the planning area has been considerably higher than two per cent in recent years and would remain so if I were to agree to the proposed variation for September 2025.
27. From the data in Table 1, I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 30 for 2025, there would be sufficient places available in the planning area for any parents seeking an in-year Year R place for their child.
28. I will now consider the demand for places at the School. Table 2 summarises recent admissions to the School.

Table 2: The number of children admitted to Year R at the School

-	2023	2024	2025
The PAN for the School	60	60	60
The number of first preferences	42	17	16
The number of children admitted to Year R (places offered for 2025)	60	25	29
The number of vacant places	0	35	31
The number of vacant places as a percentage	0	58.3	51.7

29. Table 2 shows that all the children whose parents identified the School as their first preference were offered a place there for 2025/26. The School has confirmed that on census day (2 October 2025), there were 24 children in Year R. If the PAN were to be reduced to 30, there would be six Year R places available at the School for any parent seeking an in-year place for their child at the School.
30. The School provided the following information about its current class structure and pupil numbers, as set out in Table 3.

Table 3: Current class structure and pupil numbers at the School (2 October 2025)

Year Group	Number of pupils	Number of classes
Year R	24	1
Year 1	27	1
Year 2	46	2
Year 3	42	2
Year 4	46	2
Year 5	43	2
Year 6	44	2
Total	272	12

31. The School explained that, over time, it plans to move from a two-form entry model to a single form of entry as larger cohorts move through the School. It said:

“Reducing to one form entry over time would align staffing and premises use with actual pupil demand and provide long-term financial stability.”

32. The School is affected by the provisions of the School Admissions (Infant Class Size) (England) Regulations 2012 (the infant class size regulations) which require that infant classes (those where the majority of children will reach the age of five, six or seven during the school year) must not contain more than 30 pupils with a single qualified school teacher except in specific exceptional circumstances. The infant class size regulations apply to Year R, Year 1 and Year 2.
33. As noted above, the School currently has 24 children in Year R. If more than six additional Year R children were to be admitted in-year, which would bring the Year R total to above 30, then the School would likely be required to create an extra class to accommodate them, otherwise it would be in breach of the Infant Class Size Regulations. As well as being potentially disruptive and unsettling for both children and staff, it would also be financially inefficient given that schools are largely funded based on the number of pupils on their rolls and classes that are significantly smaller than 30 can create financial strain upon a school. The proposed variation would significantly mitigate this risk.
34. Taking everything into consideration, I am of the view that the variation is justified by the circumstances, and I approve the proposed variation to reduce the PAN for 2025/26 to 30.

VAR 2644 – PAN reduction for 2026/27

35. As set out in Table 1, the Local Authority is forecasting that it will require 868 Year R places in 2026/27. Based on this data, if the proposed reduction in PAN is agreed, there would be 30 vacant Year R places in the area. This is equivalent to a surplus capacity of 3.2 per cent. While this is a much lower figure than in recent years, it is above the two per cent mentioned in the DfE's "Basic need allocations 2025-26: Explanatory note on methodology".
36. I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 30 for 2026/27, there would continue to be sufficient places available in the planning area for any parents seeking a Year R place for their child in that year.
37. As set out in Table 2, the number of parents selecting the School as their first preference for a Year R place for their child was 30 or fewer in 2024 and 2025. At the current time, there is no information relating to parental preference for the schools in the planning area for 2026/27. However, given the recent pattern of preferences, it is likely that the great majority of, if not all, parental first preferences would be satisfied with a PAN of 30. As the School is situated in an urban area and there are 16 other schools admitting children to Year R within two miles of the School, I am assured that a reduction in PAN would result in minimal frustration of parental preference.
38. With regard to the School's financial situation and the proposed reduction in PAN, the School said:
- "The school's budget is based on per-pupil funding, so falling pupil numbers have had a direct impact on financial stability.
- The school's income has reduced as Reception intakes have fallen below PAN, creating an annual shortfall. One pupil equates to around £7,200.
 - We are currently operating at 66% capacity. This means a reduction of £1,065,600 compared to when the school was full.
 - Operational costs for our large Victorian building have remained relatively fixed or increased due to inflation and higher utility costs.
 - Staffing costs have been unsustainable and we have undertaken various structural adjustments over recent years but without a further change more redundancies will be required.
 - Reducing the PAN to 30 would allow the school to plan staffing and class organisation more efficiently and ensure a balanced budget going forward. Without a reduction, the school's financial projections indicate that it will move into an overall deficit by 2026/27. This financial year we will have used up our contingency that has been carried forward from previous years. We have operated with an in-year deficit for the past two years, an overall deficit would negatively affect provision and staffing."

39. For the reasons set out above, I agree that a reduction in the PAN to 30 for 2026/27 would provide greater stability for the School and its pupils and benefit the School financially. On balance, I find that these benefits outweigh any potential frustration of parental preference should any arise.
40. Taking everything into consideration, I am of the view that the variation is justified by the circumstances, and I approve the proposed variation to reduce the PAN for 2026/27 to 30.
41. 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 than it currently expects to, there remains the capacity in the building for it to do so.

Determination

42. 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 London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham for Brackenbury Primary School for 2025/26. I determine that for admission to Reception Year in 2025/26, the published admission number shall be 30.
43. I also approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham for Brackenbury Primary School for 2026/27. The published admission number for 2026/27 shall be 30.

Dated: 22 October 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Catherine Crooks