



Determination

Case reference: ADA4424 Marple Hall School, Stockport

Objector: A member of the public

Admission authority: Helix Academies Trust

Date of decision: 23 October 2025

Determination

In accordance with section 88H(4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I do not uphold the objection to the admission arrangements determined by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council for the predecessor school to Marple Hall School as these now apply to it.

I have also considered the arrangements, and those for the schools for which the LA remains the admission authority, in accordance with section 88I(5) and find there are other matters which do not conform with the requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

By virtue of section 88K(2), the adjudicator's decision is binding on the respective admission authorities. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authorities to revise their admission arrangements within two months of the date of the determination.

The referral

1. Under section 88H(2) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, (the Act), an objection has been referred to the adjudicator by a member of the public (the objector), about the admission arrangements (the arrangements) for Marple Hall School (the school), an academy school for children between the ages of 11 and 16 for September 2026. The objection is to the catchment area which is used as part of the admission arrangements. The objector says that the catchment area is not reasonable.

2. The local authority (LA) for the area in which the school is located is Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council. The LA is a party to this objection. Other parties to the

objection are the objector, The Helix Academies Trust (the trust) which is now the school's admission authority and the school.

Jurisdiction

3. The terms of the Academy agreement between the academy trust and the Secretary of State for Education require that the admissions policy and arrangements for the academy school are in accordance with admissions law as it applies to maintained schools. The school converted to academy status on 1 March 2025. The school's arrangements were determined under section 88C of the Act by the LA for the predecessor school, which was a community school, on 4 February 2025. The school has therefore inherited the admission arrangements which the LA determined for it, but the trust is nevertheless now the admission authority for the school. The objector submitted their objection to these determined arrangements on 24 March 2025. The objector has asked to have his identity kept from the other parties and has met the requirement of regulation 24 of the School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 by providing details of his name and address to me. I am satisfied the objection has been properly referred to me in accordance with section 88H of the Act and it is within my jurisdiction.

4. I have also used my power under section 88I of the Act to consider the arrangements as a whole.

Procedure

5. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the School Admissions Code (the Code).

6. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:

- a. a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the LA's Cabinet at which the arrangements were determined;
- b. a copy of the determined arrangements;
- c. the objector's form of objection dated 24 March 2025 and subsequent correspondence;
- d. the school's and the LA's responses to the objection and subsequent correspondence;
- e. the GOV.UK website "Get Information about Schools" (GIAS);
- f. the local authority's home to school transport policy;
- g. the local authority's online composite prospectus for admissions to secondary schools;
- h. a map of the area identifying relevant schools and their catchment areas, and

- i. a map showing the location of nearby schools in neighbouring local authorities.

The Objection

7. The objector is of the view that the school's catchment area is unreasonable because there are "significantly more children in this catchment area than there are places at Marple Hall School and data suggests that this will continue to be the case until at least September 2028." He suggests that as a result the catchment area is not "fit for purpose". He says that "not all parents living in the Marple Hall School catchment area have a reasonable expectation of gaining [a] place at this school in September 2026".

8. The objector says that the current "absurd" situation is that children who live in the school's catchment area "are instead being offered Werneth School (accessed from Marple by travelling through the centre of Romiley) and children from Romiley are attending Marple Hall".

9. My understanding is therefore that the objector has objected that the school's catchment area has an effect which means that it is unreasonable, not simply that it is unreasonable because it gives priority to more children than can be accommodated by the school.

Other Matters

10. When I wrote to the parties setting out my jurisdiction concerning the objection, I made it clear to the LA that the arrangements for the school for 2026 were also those which it had determined for the other schools for which it is the admission authority and that these arrangements had therefore come to my attention.

11. I also said that it seemed to me that there were other aspects of the arrangements (both the school's and the LA's for the relevant schools) which did not, or may not, conform with the relevant requirements. These were:

- (i) paragraph 5.1 of the arrangements refers to "a community or voluntary controlled school", but the arrangements are entitled "determined admission arrangements for Stockport community high schools." I was concerned that this would be confusing to parents reading the arrangements and that this makes them unclear, in contravention of paragraph 14 of the Code.
- (ii) paragraph 1.40 of the Code when referring to priority for members of staff of the school states that:

"Admission authorities **must** specify in their arrangements how this priority will be applied, for example which groups of staff it will apply to."

The arrangements do not do this.

- (iii) paragraph 2.15 of the Code requires admission authorities to state in their arrangements that each child added to a waiting list will require the waiting list to be re-ordered in line with the published oversubscription criteria.

The arrangements do not do this.

12. I have used my power under section 88I of the Act to consider whether the arrangements as they apply both to the school (as explained above), and to the schools for which the LA remains the admission authority, conform with the requirements concerning admission arrangements.

Background

13. The trust told me that the LA had agreed to respond to my request to be given evidence of the determination of the arrangements because it had determined the arrangements and so was in possession of the necessary evidence of this. When the LA did so, it initially provided evidence of its determination of the school's arrangements for admissions in September 2025, not those for September 2026. It was not until 28 May that I was in possession of a readable version of the minutes of the LA's Cabinet meeting on 4 February 2025, which was the meeting at which the school's admission arrangements for 2026/27, which are those which are the subject of the objection, were determined.

14. I was unable to find a copy of the arrangements on the LA website, but it helpfully provided these on request, together with a list of the secondary schools in Stockport and a map showing their locations and catchment areas.

15. There are 14 secondary schools in the LA's area, three of which were community schools when the arrangements were determined, of which Marple Hall School is one. The other secondary schools are either academy schools or what the composite prospectus calls "denominational schools", all of which are Catholic schools. These latter, and some of the academy schools, do not have catchment areas.

16. Marple Hall School is situated near the settlement of Marple itself on the eastern side of Stockport. Its catchment area abuts neighbouring local authority areas further to the east but also extends towards the urban centre of Stockport. When the school was last the subject of a Section 8 (short) inspection, in 2023, it was rated as "good", but the inspectors noted that there was evidence that if it had received a Section 5 (full) inspection, this judgement would instead have been "outstanding".

17. The school's catchment area has boundaries with those of three other Stockport secondary schools: Werneth School (an Academy School) to the northwest, Stockport School (a Community School) to the west and Hazel Grove High School (an Academy School) to the south. Werneth School is the nearest of these to Marple High School, at a distance of about 1.5 miles by my own estimation using Googlemaps. When Werneth School was inspected by Ofsted in 2023 it was judged to have serious weaknesses but had made progress when there was a monitoring visit by inspectors earlier this year. The

school's catchment area was last amended in 2012 when Offerton High School, which was closer to the centre of Stockport than Marple Hall School, was closed, and its catchment area split between several schools including Marple Hall. This is the reason for the school's catchment area extending into the more urbanised part of Stockport.

18. The LA's composite prospectus states that "every address in Stockport falls within the catchment area of one primary school and one secondary school." The map which I have been given of secondary school catchment areas reflects this, with the LA's area being divided into nine areas, which are the catchment areas of the two community schools and the seven academy schools which use them in their admission arrangements.

19. The arrangements state that they are for "Stockport Community High Schools" and lists oversubscription criteria which are:

- (i) Looked after and previously looked after children (as defined).
- (ii) Children considered to have 'high exceptional medical/social reasons' (as explained in the arrangements).
- (iii) Children who live in the catchment area of the school who have a sibling (as defined) at the school at the time of admission.
- (iv) Other children who live in the catchment area. An explanatory note says: "Residence in the catchment area does not guarantee a place at the school".
- (v) Children of staff (as given limited definition).
- (vi) Children who have a sibling (as defined) at the school at the time of admission and [who] reside outside the catchment area.
- (vii) Any other applicants, in order of straight-line distance measured between home and the school.
- (viii) Late applicants ordered by the above criteria.

Within each oversubscription criterion, children are ranked in the order of the distance from their home to the school. A tie breaker of random allocation is provided if distances are equal.

20. The arrangements refer to waiting lists, but do not state that these will be re-ordered in accordance with the oversubscription criteria every time a new name is added, which is a requirement of the Code at paragraph 2.15.

21. The arrangements also say that the published admission numbers (PANs) for the three (then) community schools (although referring to "community and voluntary controlled schools") can be found on the LA's website. I was not able to find these for 2026 when I followed the link provided and so asked the LA to provide these, together with the PANs of the other secondary schools in Stockport, when I wrote to the parties setting out my

jurisdiction. It replied that these would be included in the composite prospectus, which would be published “before the deadline of 12 September 2025”. Although I have not taken this matter up with the LA, I am concerned that this means that the PANs are not available in published form until some months after the deadline of February 28 for their determination. Paragraph 1.2 of the Code makes it clear that the PANs which are determined for schools are part of their admission arrangements and paragraph 1.50 that arrangements must be published by admission authorities on their website “once admission authorities have determined their admission arrangements”.

22. The LA’s website gave the school’s PAN for 2026 as 300 when I looked on 2 October 2025.

23. I also invited the trust to comment on the matters in the objection and the other matters listed above, since it seemed to me that as the admission authority now responsible for the arrangements, it might wish to express its view concerning each of these. However, it replied saying that the trust had no comments to make on the objection other than to say that it supported the arguments which the LA had put forward in the latter’s own reply (which I shall deal with below), and that it considered the “other matters” as a matter for the LA.

Consideration of Case

Introduction

24. The objection is concerned with the school’s catchment area and the number of children who live within it. The objector provided in his form of objection his own analysis of the number of children at primary schools in the school’s catchment area who might be expected to seek a place there for each September from 2022 to 2028. This analysis was that the number had exceeded, or was set to exceed, the school’s PAN in each of these years. I shall refer to this below.

25. The objector told me that the LA had “acknowledged a population bulge in Marple catchment” and that it had agreed with the school that it would operate an ‘admission limit’ of 330 in each of the years 2022 to 2026. His point was that although this agreement about the size of the school’s intake was in place, no “accompanying changes to the catchment area have been considered”. His view was that “changes ...need to be made to the Marple Hall School catchment area in order to prevent future repeats of the present situation, in which material numbers of catchment children [are] unable to secure a place”.

26. Before I can consider the catchment area, I need to say something about what the objector and the LA have said to me about the ‘admission limit’ described above. The LA said that the school (in common with others) had agreed these increases with the LA and that they “are not intended to be permanent”. The LA said that paragraph 3.6 of the Code permits a variation to increase a school’s PAN without the need for reference to the adjudicator, and that the school “has agreed to take 30 pupils above its PAN of 300 for September 2022 – 2026”. It subsequently said (in the same document) that this agreement

was “for the next two years”, which I understand to mean for admissions in 2026 and 2027. It later (again in the same document) said that this was “until the spike in population has moved through the school”, without saying what this meant. I shall refer to this again below.

27. I am clear that it is the role of the adjudicator to consider admission arrangements as they have been determined, and not the process by which that determination took place. However, I am bound to point out that while paragraph 3.6 of the Code does say what the LA has told me it does, this is not relevant here since no variation to the PAN has been made. The published PANs for the school which are present in the relevant prospectuses remain at 300. Paragraph 3.3c) of the Code says that an objection to the determination of the PAN for a community school by its LA which is an increase in the PAN from that for the previous year may not be brought (other than by the school’s governing body), but that is also a different matter.

28. It is of course possible for an admission authority to admit more children than in its PAN (as stated in paragraph 1.4 of the Code), since a PAN represents the number below which prejudice to the provision of efficient education or efficient use of resources may not occur, for the normal year of admission. However, from the information which I have been given, the LA has been aware for some time that more places at the school would be needed, year-on-year, than are stated in the PAN, and I read the Code to assume that in such a case the admission authority would set a PAN accordingly, in line with the requirement to do so in paragraph 1.2. Otherwise, the PAN itself becomes meaningless.

Recent history

29. Stockport residents can express up to six preferences for school places. The table below shows the number of first and other preferences expressed by parents for a place at the school, both for those living inside and outside the catchment area, in the last three years.

	Parents living in Marple Hall’s catchment area (1 = first preference etc)						Parents living outside Marple Hall’s catchment area					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2023	306	49	3	1	1	0	42	132	82	31	16	8
2024	328	42	4	2	2	0	51	159	96	33	12	24
2025	324	37	4	0	1	1	46	162	94	25	9	16

30. It is evident that the school has been heavily oversubscribed with applications made by parents living within the catchment area alone. The LA has also provided the allocation data for the 330 places which were offered for September 2025 (the number of offers on national offer day, 1 March 2025). This is shown below:

2025 admissions	PAN	EHCP	LAC/PLAC	Highly exceptional	Sibling in Catchment	Catchment	Staff child	Sibling not in catchment	Distance	Total (including bulge places)
Number of places allocated	300	23	8	0	171	128	0	0	0	330

31. Unsurprisingly, the table shows that the school was oversubscribed at the point where children living in the catchment area were being allocated places. The LA has told me that subsequent movement has allowed a further 20 children living in the catchment area to be admitted, leaving 14 such children on its waiting list (on 31 July 2025) for places in 2025. The arrangements give priority to children who live closest to the school, so those children living in the catchment area whose home is furthest from the school will be those on the waiting list. I would have expected these to be those living near to the Stockport/ Derbyshire border, which I estimate to be about 4 miles away, but the objector said that this was not so and that of the children on the waiting list for September 2025 “a significant proportion” could walk to the school if admitted. The statutory walking distance for children over 8 years of age is 3 miles, meaning that any child living further away must be provided with home-to-school transport.

32. The LA has helpfully told me the number of children living in the school’s catchment area whose parents applied for a place at the school in recent years and the number of those who were not allocated a place there, together with the furthest distance from the school of the last child admitted in each year. This shows a fairly consistent number of children living in the catchment area, of which a high proportion (but not all) seek a place at the school. The relationship between the number of children living in the catchment area, the number of whose parents applied for a place at the school, the number who were not offered a place on national offer day, and the furthest distance from which a child was admitted has changed as follows:

Admission year	Number living in catchment area in Year 7 admission round	Number of these applying for a place at the school by 31 October each year	Number of catchment area children not offered a place on national offer day	Distance of last offered place (miles)
2021	335	327	7	3.1

2022	360	338	3	2.5
2023	367	360	27	3.0
2024	394	378	35	1.8
2025	386	367	33	1.7

33. At my request, the LA also supplied information about the effect of the arrangements on children living in the catchment area whose parents had sought a place at the school but who were not offered a place there in the last two years. I asked to be told the alternative school at which a place was offered and the distance of this school from the child's home. In each year, for each child, the nearest available school with a place (the school at which a place was offered if the child's parent did not exercise their own preference) was Werneth School. I have summarised this information in the following table:

Year (National offer day figures)	Number allocated nearest alternative school (max distance) [number over 3 miles]	Number admitted to parental preference school (max distance)
2024	20 (3.7 miles) [10 children]	15 (5.2 miles)
2025	16 (2.7 miles) [nil]	17 (6 miles)

34. What I take from this data is that all the children who were refused a place at the school and whose parents did not choose a more distant school as a parental preference were admitted to (or offered a place at) a school within 4 miles of their home, in each year. I have indicated in the table the number of such children living further from their allocated school than the statutory walking distance. There were 10 children in 2024 who lived beyond the statutory walking distance. In 2025, there were a number of children whose homes were just less than three miles from their allocated school (there were 11 whose homes were between 2 and 3 miles away) and therefore within walking distance, as the objector has pointed out.

Anticipated need

35. The LA said that the data above showing the increasing number of children living in the catchment area who were not offered a place at the school between 2021 and 2025 reflects the growing popularity of the school amongst those living in the catchment area and that it has responded by increasing the number of places there as described above. It also reflects a degree of growth in the number of children living in the catchment area since 2021. The LA's forecast of future need for Year 7 places indicates that the school will remain either fully subscribed, or nearly so, in future years.

Year 7	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Forecast	330	328	336	322	318

36. The objector has asked me to consider his alternative calculation of what these figures will be, based on what he has told me is the LA's own data of the number of children now attending primary schools in the school's catchment area and also living there. He challenges the LA's forecasts (above), saying that the basis on which they have been calculated is not clear. He has also pointed out that there have been significant numbers of children admitted to the school in 2025 because they held an EHCP naming the school or because of their looked after or previously looked after status, and surmises that many are likely to live outside the school's catchment area, which I think is a fair assumption. The prospect therefore is that this will continue in future years.

37. Given what the LA has said about the school having agreed to admit 330 children to Year 7 until the "spike" in pupil numbers has abated, and the fact that the objector has told me that the LA has confirmed to him that this figure will apply again in 2028, I think it fair to assume that this will be the number of available Year 7 places each year until that time. I note here also that I have been told that the school has admitted 330 children to Year 7 in every year since 2022, and so if 330 are admitted again in 2026 this will make a total of 1650 on roll. The GIAS website (May 2025) gives the school capacity as 1553, making it extremely unlikely that the school could take more than 330 in 2026 or subsequent years.

38. The following table shows the figures the objector has asked me to consider concerning 2026 admissions.

Admission Year	2025 (known figures)	2026
Number of children living in catchment area and at	300	328

primary school there		
July 31 waiting list for places at the school (actual for 2025 and as projected by objector for 2026)	14	42 (14 +28)

39. The objector has used the known information about admissions in 2025 to make a straightforward comparative assessment of how demand for places at the school will grow because there will be a greater numbers of in-catchment children coming through the catchment area primary schools than was the case in 2025. However, it is the number of children who live in the catchment area that is the relevant figure (since this is the basis on which the arrangements give priority to applications for places), not the number both living and at school there. There is no fixed relationship between the number of children who live in the catchment area and the number who are at a primary school there, not least because these are different year groups and therefore mostly different parents, for example. In a given year more (or fewer) children may live in the catchment area but attend a school outside it. So the number of children who both live in and who go to school in the catchment area cannot be used to project the number of children who are likely to be still on the school's waiting list in a given year from the known figures for 2025, as the objector has asked me to accept.

40. The information which I have that I believe I can rely on is that for 2025 there were 386 Year 7 children living in the catchment area (of whom the objector says 300 were also at school there) and that 367 of their parents applied for a place at the school. The LA is clearly aware of these figures and has produced the above forecasts of the future need for places. I must note that it has also had every opportunity to comment on what the objector has said but has not done so.

41. Although I am left with contrasting views of the numbers involved, it is clear to me that, given the (completely appropriate) take-up of places for children with EHCPs or who are LAC/PLAC that is likely combined with the LA's (lower) projections, it can be assumed that there will be some children who live in the catchment area of the school who will not secure a place there in 2026 (and in some of the years following).

Reasonableness

42. I need at this point to discuss the question of reasonableness, since that is the wording of the Code's requirement concerning catchment areas, and since the basis of the challenge

made by the objector is that the catchment area is unreasonable. The LA has reminded me that:

“The Code uses the term ‘reasonable’ but does not define it. We understand that it is the requirement of public bodies, including admission authorities, that they must act reasonably in adopting any policy or making any decision. The common law test for ‘unreasonableness’ in this context is that, for a decision to be considered unreasonable it would have to be a decision that no rational admission authority would have made having taken into account all relevant factors, placing sufficient weight upon each of those factors and disregarding any irrelevant factors.”

43. This is a fair representation of the effect of the case which provides the bedrock of the legal understanding of unreasonableness. This is Associated Provincial Picture Houses Ltd v Wednesbury Corporation (1948) 1 KB 223. The test of “Wednesbury unreasonableness”, as it has become known, is whether a policy or decision is “so unreasonable that no reasonable authority acting reasonably could ever have come to it.” It is only this sense of “reasonable/ reasonably” that adjudicators are concerned with. So, everyday uses of the term such as in “it was a reasonably priced car” are not involved. The import of this is that the question of whether a provision is or is not reasonable necessitates a “high bar” to be reached if unreasonableness is to be found.

44. The objector has also asked me to consider his view that information which the LA has provided to me about the broader picture of secondary school admissions across Stockport should not be part of my consideration of the reasonableness of the school’s catchment area. Essentially, what the LA has said to me is that it is content with the use of secondary school catchment areas as a means for providing assurance to parents, and for enabling pupil place planning to be more accurate than that provided by “preference trends”. It points out that “Every Stockport resident regardless of their other circumstances is prioritised to attend one local Stockport school by way of a catchment area. This is particularly important for residents who live in rural locations and may not be able to secure a school place otherwise and this is a particular factor for Marple Hall School. The catchment model has served the Borough well and provided a stable model that has provided assurances to families for many years, informed infrastructure development and community ties.”

45. The objector says: “I note that Stockport Council in its response states that the broader ‘catchment model’ for Stockport is working well. On the contrary, the significant imbalance that currently exists between the deficit of places at MHS [the school] versus the material surplus of places at its neighbour Werneth School demonstrates that this existing Stockport ‘catchment model’ is not fit for purpose. Finally, I would note that the response from Stockport Council attempts to justify the existing MHS [the school] catchment area in the context of the wider borough. Notwithstanding my point directly above, my understanding is that this is not relevant to my objection - MHS catchment area needs to be shown to be reasonable in its own right.”

46. While it is true that the adjudicator considers a school's admission arrangements as such, a determination of matters such as the fairness or reasonableness of admission arrangements must take account of the of context in which they operate. An obvious example of this is that the LA meets its statutory duty to ensure a sufficiency of schooling by planning provision across a number of schools, in this case what it calls its East Secondary planning area, which consists of Marple Hall School and Stockport School. An individual catchment area could however be unreasonable because of its effect, and what that effect is will depend on the local context, such as the closeness of other schools and the provision of places there.

47. In order for a school's catchment area to be unreasonable, the admission authority would, for example, have had to fail to take into account relevant factors and not to have taken account irrelevant factors when setting it. The objector has stated his view that what he believes to be his establishment from the data to which I have referred above of "the material forecast shortfall in places at [the school] until at least 2029 implies that the existing catchment area isn't reasonable". While it is the case that one of the purposes of a school having a catchment area, particularly when it is in a rural location where children living furthest away from it may have no reasonable alternative school to go to, is to ensure that such children will have (as the objector himself puts it) "a reasonable expectation of gaining a place", the fact that that was not the case would be insufficient in my view to find the catchment area unreasonable. To put it another way, a reasonable catchment area does not have to guarantee every child living within it a place, or even a reasonable expectation of a place, at the school.

48. A catchment area could be unreasonable if a child is without a school place which is within a reasonable travel distance from their home as a result of the catchment area which has been set (as part of the admission arrangements for the school), and if that effect was both a predictable and unfair one. This would be the case irrespective of whether the admission authority has an overall rationale for the use of catchment areas, such as the rationale which the LA has presented to me. An admission authority which was aware that a catchment area would be likely to have an unfair effect would be remiss and potentially acting unreasonably if it did not take into account matters such as the location of the school and alternative schools, the size and shape of the catchment area, and so on, when determining the school's arrangements. The LA has accepted this in its correspondence with me.

49. Since I have already said that there are likely to be children living in the catchment area who will not be admitted to the school in 2026, the question which I must consider is whether it can be concluded that the arrangements (and the designated catchment area they include) have resulted in any unfairness in 2024 or 2025 which might then be expected to be repeated.

50. The numbers of children living in the school's catchment area in both 2024 and 2025 who were not offered a place there on national offer day, and the number of children

in each of these years who were offered a place at their nearest available school (and the number of these for whom that was beyond the statutory walking distance) are given above.

51. There could be an unfair effect if a child had to travel further than the statutory walking distance to school, particularly if no alternatives were available to the child's parents and if this situation could have been avoided by catchment areas being drawn differently, for example. I have been conscious in this case that the local geography presents some challenges which do indeed have the potential to render alternative schools in practice unavailable to parents. The school's catchment area reaches up to the Derbyshire border and the edge of the High Peak district where there are very poor or no road or rail links to the east in some places, making alternative schools located there effectively inaccessible. Some of the children living in the school's catchment area but furthest away from it (and so not allocated a place there because of this distance) may well live near that border, at least in some years.

52. When the LA responded to my request to be given information about the children whose parents had expressed a preference for a place at the school in 2024 and 2025 but who had not been allocated place although living in the catchment area, it gave me the alternative school at which each child was offered a place and its distance from the child's home. This showed that as well as Werneth School, where many children were allocated a place (in almost all cases, but not exclusively, because it was the nearest available school with a place since some parent preferred the school), two other Stockport schools and one located in Derbyshire and one in Cheshire East, were also accessed by these parents.

Schools (other than Werneth School) accessed by parents living in catchment not offered a place at the school as a preference	2024 Number of children (and furthest distance)	2025 (number of children and furthest distance)
New Mills School (Derbyshire)	5 (2.2 miles)	8 (3.1 miles)
Harrytown Catholic High	4 (3.1 miles)	4 (3.3 miles)
Bramhall High School	3 (5.2 miles)	2 (6.2 miles)
Poynton High School (Cheshire East)	nil	2 (5.9 miles)

53. New Mills is a small town in Derbyshire, and the school there (New Mills School) is about 2.5 miles from the settlement of Mellor in the Marple Hall catchment area. There appear to be reasonably good road connections between this part of the school's catchment area and New Mills. New Mills School is rated as "good" by Ofsted in all

categories. It was accessed by five unsuccessful Marple Hall parents in 2024 and by seven in 2025 who all lived less than three miles away from it. Harrytown Catholic High School is located in Werneth, close to Werneth School, and is currently rated as “requires improvement” in three Ofsted judgements and as “good” in the fourth. This may have been chosen on denominational grounds by some parents but was also under three miles from their home for three families in each of the above years.

54. So, in both years, all unsuccessful children were all either allocated a place at their nearest alternative school (Werneth School, in all cases) or at an alternative school preferred by their parent, very many of which were within two miles of their home. The LA’s home to school transport policy, which I have seen, guarantees free transport for those living more than three miles from a school which is the “nearest available school with availability.” Taking all this together, I am of the view that it cannot be concluded that there has been any unfair outcome of the sort I have described above in the last two years for any of the children living in the school’s catchment area whose parents unsuccessfully sought a place there.

55. The LA determined the arrangements on 4 February 2025, and the admissions timetable is such that the LA would probably have not been aware of the effect of the arrangements for 2025, since offers would not by then yet have been made, but I cannot be sure on this point. However, the effect of the catchment area being drawn as it is in the 2024 arrangements had had on admissions for that year was certainly known, and as I have said it is not evident that there was any unfair effect. Neither did the 2025 arrangements cause an unfairness, as I have said.

56. My view is therefore that the LA did not act unreasonably when determining the arrangements for 2026, since although it will have been aware that it is likely that a number of children living in the catchment area will again not be admitted to the school in 2026, it did not have any evidence that would have led it to believe that an unfair effect would result for the children concerned if the catchment area was not amended. The catchment area determined as part of the school’s arrangements is therefore not unreasonable in nature, and I do not uphold the objection.

Other Matters

57. When the LA provided its comments on the objection it made no comment on the matters of concern which I had raised. The trust also made no comment, but said that these were a matter for the LA. To the extent that these relate to the arrangements determined by the LA for the schools for which it remains the admission authority, that is correct. However, they are also relevant to the school’s arrangements, and the trust is the admission authority and so responsible for what those arrangements contain. I set out earlier in this determination what the matters of concern were. My view concerning each is as follows:

- (i) Paragraph 5.1 refers to “voluntary controlled schools”, but this is inappropriate with respect to the arrangements for the schools for which the LA is the admission authority and so confusing to parents and therefore in contravention of

paragraph 14 of the Code. The trust will also need to amend its arrangements to remove any reference to any other schools since mention of community or voluntary controlled schools is equally confusing to parents and in breach of the requirements of paragraph 14 of the Code.

- (ii) The arrangements, both those of the school and those for the schools for which the LA is the admission authority, fail to comply with both paragraphs 1.40 and 2.15 of the Code for the reasons which I have set out above.

Summary of Findings

58. I have set out in detail above the reasons for my conclusion that the LA did not fail to act reasonably when it determined the school's catchment area. The catchment area therefore is also not unreasonable, and neither are the oversubscription criteria employed in the arrangements which include it.

59. I have also said why the arrangements as they apply to the school and to the schools for which the LA is the admission authority do not meet the requirements of the Code concerning:

- (i) the nomenclature which they contain;
- (ii) the lack of specification regarding the priority given to members of staff at the school, and
- (iii) the clarity of the operation of waiting lists.

Determination

60. In accordance with section 88H(4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I do not uphold the objection to the admission arrangements determined by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council for the predecessor school to Marple Hall School as these now apply to it.

61. I have also considered the arrangements, and those for the schools for which the LA remains the admission authority, in accordance with section 88I(5) and find there are other matters which do not conform with the requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

62. By virtue of section 88K(2), the adjudicator's decision is binding on the respective admission authorities. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authorities to revise their admission arrangements within two months of the date of the determination.

Dated: 23 October 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Dr Bryan Slater