



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case references: VAR2655 and VAR2656

Admission Authority: Reading Borough Council for Moorlands Primary School

Date of decision: 27 November 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 Reading Borough Council for Moorlands 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 Reading Borough Council for Moorlands Primary School for 2026/27. The published admission number for 2026/27 shall be 30.

The referral

1. Reading Borough Council (the Admission Authority, the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator proposals for variations to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Moorlands Primary School (the School) for 2025/26 and 2026/27.
2. The School is a community school for children aged four to eleven years in Tilehurst, Reading. It is a co-educational, non-selective school with no designated religious character. The School is part of the Federation of Park Lane and Moorlands Primary Schools.
3. The School was judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted in March 2020. It was deemed to be maintaining this standard at its last inspection in June 2025.
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 that began in September 2025 (VAR2655); and
- the PAN be reduced from 60 to 30 for admissions to Year R in the academic year beginning in September 2026 (VAR2656).

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 Local Authority on 17 January 2024. The 2026/27 Arrangements were determined on 15 January 2025.

8. The Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variations in line with the Code.

9. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variations are within my jurisdiction.

10. In considering the variation requests, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.

11. The information I have considered in reaching my decisions include:

- the referral forms from the Local Authority dated 14 November 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 other schools in the planning area; 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.

12. I would like to extend my thanks to the LA and the School for their timely responses to my requests for further information.

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. In the interests of dealing speedily with this and other requests for variations for schools, I have not considered other aspects of the 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 variations

17. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School is reduced from 60 to 30 for entry to Year R in 2025/26. It has also proposed that the PAN of the School is reduced from 60 to 30 for entry to Year R in 2026/27. 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 variations are justified by the change in circumstances.

19. The Local Authority provided the same reasons for seeking a variation to the Arrangements for both 2025/26 and 2026/27. It said:

“Over the last 6 years the school has seen a falling number of children on roll. This has resulted in budget pressures for Moorlands school and a reduction on the school staff. The school are in a deficit budget for financial year 2025-26.

Moorlands Primary School been working closely with the Local Authority to ensure future sustainability of the school.

There is currently a falling roll across a number of planning areas in Reading in primary and therefore we are seeing a surplus of places across the borough. This applies to Moorlands school.

The reduction of the PAN will help to reduce the surplus of places in the West of Reading. The school currently only have 28 children on roll in their reception class.”

20. The School currently has 269 pupils across 11 classes. These are organised as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Class organisation and number of pupils at the School (data provided by the School on 24 November 2025)

Year group	No of pupils
Reception (1 class)	28
Year 1 (1 class)	28
Year 2 (2 classes)	37
Year 3 (1x Y3/1x Y3/4)	36
Year 4 (1xY4)	32
Year 5 (2 classes)	59
Year 6 (2 classes)	49

21. 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.

22. 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 West Reading planning area of the Local Authority. There are eight schools in the planning area, including the School, that admit children into Year R.

23. Table 2 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 and 2027 .

Table 2: School places in the planning area and allocation to Year R

	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
The sum of the PANs across the area	435	435	435	435	435*
The number of children admitted to Year R or forecast to be admitted	328	319	291	345	340
The number of vacant places	107	116	144	90	95
The number of vacant places as a percentage of the total number of places	24.6	26.7	33.1	20.7	21.8

* The PANs for schools in the area are yet to be determined for 2027. This figure is an estimate based on 2026 data.

VAR2655 – PAN reduction for 2025/26

24. Table 2 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 2026-27 and 2027/28: 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.

25. At this point in the school year, the great majority of children who will require a place in Reception during the current academic year have already been allocated a place. From the data in Table 2, I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 30 for 2025/26, there would be sufficient places available in the planning area for any parents seeking a Year R place for their child.

26. I will now consider the demand for places at the School. Table 3 summarises recent admissions to the School.

Table 3: 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	30	28	28
The number of children admitted to Year R	31	28	28
The number of vacant places	29	32	32
The number of vacant places as a percentage	48.3	53.3	53.3

27. As already stated, most families seeking a Year R place for their child in 2025/26 will have already secured one and Table 3 shows that all the children whose parents applied for a Year R place at the School were admitted. Table 3 also shows that if the proposed reduction in the PAN is agreed, there will still be two places available in Year R. I am, therefore, assured that a reduction in PAN would result in minimal frustration of parental preference.

28. 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.

29. As noted above, the School currently has 28 children in Year R. If more than two additional Year R children were to be admitted in year, which would bring the Year R total to above 30, then the School would either have to reorganise its classes and staffing or create an extra class to accommodate them to avoid breaching the infant class size regulations. As well as being potentially disruptive and unsettling for both children and staff, it could 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.

30. 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.

VAR2656 – PAN reduction for 2026/27

31. As set out in Table 2, the Local Authority is forecasting that it will require 345 Year R places in 2026/27. This is higher than in each of the previous three years. In relation to this point, the Local Authority said:

“Our [forecast] predicts that we will require 345 places in the West in 26/27 and 340 in 27/28.

Our [predictions] for 24/25, 23/24 & 22/23 were in broadly line with forecasts.

[We] predicted that we would require 365 places for this September [2025]. Only 291 were admitted to schools in the West, therefore lower than the prediction. The local Authority are still reviewing this to understand why there was a difference ...

For school level forecast we have analysed the number of children admitted in the September for the 4 last years and then gained an average. This shows us on average we are admitting 31 children to Moorlands, but for the last 2 years we have admitted less than 30 children.

The average for the planning area is 324 children.”

32. If the proposed reduction in PAN for 2026/27 is agreed, the sum of the PANs in the planning area will be 405. Even if the Local Authority admits 345 children, as forecast, there will continue to be 60 vacant places, which is equivalent to having 14.8 per cent surplus capacity. I am, therefore, 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.

33. As set out in Table 3, the number of parents selecting the School as their first preference for a Year R place for their child has been 30 or fewer for the last three years. 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. The School is situated in an urban area and the LA has confirmed that there are 22 other schools admitting children to Year R within two miles of the School, I am, therefore, assured that a reduction in PAN would result in minimal frustration of parental preference.

34. At the end of March 2025, the School’s in-year balance was -£114 thousand and its revenue reserve was -£19 thousand. With regard to the School’s financial situation and the proposed reduction in PAN, the School said:

“For 2026/2027 if approved we would have one class in Reception which would help stabilise the structure and budget. If not approved the PAN would remain at 60 and with potential low pupil numbers we would need to run two classes which would have a significant impact on the budget.

The school is currently running a deficit budget. To continue a PAN of 60 with pupil numbers potentially being in the low 30s two classes would be needed therefore 2 class teachers and 4 support staff. This would have considerable impact on the budget and would take us further into deficit.”

35. 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.

36. 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.

37. 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

38. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Reading Borough Council for Moorlands Primary School for 2025/26. I determine that for admission to Reception Year in 2025/26, the published admission number shall be 30.

39. I also approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Reading Borough Council for Moorlands Primary School for 2026/27. The published admission number for 2026/27 shall be 30.

Dated: 27 November 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Catherine Crooks