



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	VAR2652
Admission Authority:	The Governing Body for Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School in Richmond, Surrey
Local Authority:	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Date of decision:	2 December 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 Governing Body for Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission to Reception Year in 2026/27, the published admission number will be 30.

I have also considered the arrangements under section 88I(5) and find that they do not comply with 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 admission authority. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of this determination.

The referral

1. The Governing Body (the Admission Authority) for Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School (the School) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for the School for 2026/27.
2. The School is a voluntary aided co-educational school for children aged three to eleven in Richmond, Surrey. It is located in the local authority area of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (the Local Authority).

3. The School has a Church of England religious character, and the religious authority for the school is the Diocese of Southwark (the Diocese).
4. The parties to the request are the Admission Authority, the Local Authority and the Diocese.
5. The proposed variation, which has the support of the Diocese and to which the Local Authority is not opposed, is that the published admission number (the PAN) for 2026/27 is reduced from 60 to 30.

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 Admission Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code.
8. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
9. In considering the variation request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
10. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
 - the referral from the Admission Authority received on 13 November 2025;
 - the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;

- a map showing the location of the School and other schools that are nearby, and the various planning areas within the area of the Local Authority.
- responses from the Local Authority, the School and the Diocese to my requests for further information; and
- information available on gov.uk websites, including 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS), and on the websites of the School and the Local Authority.

Consideration of proposed variation

11. There is no formal consultation required for a variation and so parents and others do not have the opportunity to express their views. Clearly it is desirable that changes to arrangements are made via the process of determination following consultation as the consultation process allows those with an interest to express their views. It also allows for objections to the adjudicator. None of this is afforded by the variation process.

12. I note here that if I decide to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the PAN from 60 to 30 as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years, so that the PAN could be set at 30 for 2027/28 and beyond without any need for consultation.

13. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code (as above) requires that admission arrangements, once determined, may only be revised, that is changed or varied, if there is a major change of circumstance or certain other limited and specified circumstances. I will consider below whether the proposed variation is justified by the change in circumstances.

14. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Admission Authority is set out in the referral as follows:

"The major change of circumstance that has occurred since the original arrangements were determined is a significant financial challenge driven by external factors and internal conditions, specifically:

A reduction in the number of pupils (a drop in the school's income source).

An increase in staffing and other operational costs (e.g., utility bills, supplies, statutory pay rises). In Richmond, Reception applications have been falling since 2015, and the forecast is that the drop in the size of Reception cohorts will continue to fluctuate between September 2025 and September 2031/32 with an increase in surplus places expected.

This combination of decreased income and increased expenditure has resulted in the school facing a deficit budget due to overstaffing relative to the current pupil numbers and funding levels.

The requested variation is a necessary and appropriate response to this change in circumstances because the existing staffing arrangements are financially unsustainable. The school must address the structural deficit to ensure its long-term viability and ability to provide a high standard of education. The variation will likely involve adjustments to staffing levels or structure to align expenditure with current and projected income, thereby balancing the budget and fulfilling the school's statutory financial obligations.

The following problems have arisen or are foreseen as a result of the reduction in pupil numbers, increased costs, and the resulting deficit budget due to overstaffing:

1. Imminent Financial Insolvency: The most immediate problem is the projected deficit budget. If unchecked, the school will run out of reserves and face severe cash flow problems, potentially breaching financial regulations and requiring intervention from the Local Authority.

2. Erosion of Educational Quality: To manage the deficit, the school may be forced to make indiscriminate cuts. This could lead to:

Reduced Curriculum Offer: Cutting subjects, particularly non-core or specialist options, due to insufficient teacher numbers.

Increased Class Sizes: Fewer staff supporting the same, or slightly smaller, number of classes, negatively impacting individual pupil attention and teacher workload.

Reduced Pastoral/Support Services: Cuts to mental health resources, harming vulnerable pupils.

Lack of Investment: Inability to fund essential building maintenance, updated technology, or new resources.

3. Difficulty in Strategic Planning: The constant state of financial firefighting makes it impossible for the leadership team to focus on long-term educational strategy, curriculum development, or school improvement plans. All focus is diverted to managing the budget crisis.

The proposed variation [...] will allow the school to reduce the number of teachers by 1.0, thus saving this salary and other associated costs, as part of other cost-saving measures within the school's financial plan."

15. 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 were to be reduced as proposed. I have also considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the changes in demand, the potential effect on parental preference of the proposed PAN

reduction and whether the proposed reduction is justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.

Overall demand for Reception Year (YR) places in the area

16. The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty, it assesses the likely future number of places to be needed and plans to meet that need. The Local Authority uses planning areas, which are geographical areas and the schools within those areas, for this purpose. The School is located in the North Richmond/South Richmond Planning Area. The Local Authority tells me that:

“[We are] confident that the proposed reduction in the Published Admission Number (PAN) for September 2026 entry will not undermine the statutory duty to ensure sufficiency of places. Children living in the North Richmond/South Richmond planning area will have access to alternative 'Good' or 'Outstanding' OFSTED-rated schools, both within and near the area. The parents or carers with a preference for a Church of England school are prioritised within the school's existing arrangements, and the number of Foundation places offered has remained low over the last three years of entry (2023 - 0, 2024 - 0, 2025 - 4)”

17. To support this statement, the Local Authority has supplied me with data for the North Richmond/South Richmond planning area, as follows:

Table 1: Reception intake for the North Richmond/South Richmond Planning Area

Reception Intake	Number of children	Current Sum of PANs	Current surplus places	Sum of PANs if proposed variation is approved	Surplus places if proposed variation is approved
2025/26	182 (actual at October census)	240	58 (24%)	N/A	N/A
2026/27	152 (current forecast)	240	88 (37%)	210	58 (28%)
2027/28	170 (current forecast)	240	70 (29%)	210	40 (19%)

18. The School has helpfully drawn my attention to 10 other schools within a two mile travelling distance of the School. I asked the Local Authority for planning and forecast data for the five different planning areas in which these other schools are located. This

information shows that all of those additional five planning areas have ample surplus for admissions in 2026/27 and beyond.

19. I am, therefore, satisfied that a reduction of the School's PAN to 30 for 2026/27 would leave sufficient surplus capacity in the planning area, and surrounding planning areas, for admissions in 2026/27. I am also satisfied that, if the PAN for 2027/28 were also to be set at 30, there would be sufficient surplus capacity for admissions in 2027/28.

Places at the School

20. I now turn to the number of children at the School and the reasons given by the School in support of the variation approval request. The request for approval of the proposed variation refers to the Governing Body's wish to align its staffing and budget to the reducing number of children. The provisions of the School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 (the Infant Class Sizes Regulations) apply to the School, and they 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.

21. The School has provided me with a breakdown of the number of children in each year group in the School and how they are organised into classes. This shows that, leaving out the nursery provision, there are 328 children organised into 13 single age classes (two classes per year group, with the exception of Year 1, which has one class).

22. The school's modelling shows that if it admits more than 30 children to Reception Year in 2026, it is likely to require two Reception classes and 12 classes overall. This is one fewer than now since current Year 2, which numbers 32 children taught in two classes to comply with the Infant Class Sizes Regulations, will be able to be taught in a single class when it becomes Year 3. However, if no more than 30 children are admitted to Reception Year in 2026, the School will only require one Reception class and hence it predicts that it will only need 11 classes overall. This will provide a considerable staffing saving, although that will be offset to an as yet unknown degree by the loss of per-pupil funding that arises from capping the number of children admitted.

23. I have considered patterns of previous preferences, offers and actual numbers admitted, and I conclude that a PAN of 30 in 2026/27 is likely to lead to a degree of frustration of parental preference. Some parents for whom the School would otherwise be their highest available preference are likely to be unsuccessful in securing a place for their child at the School if only 30 places are available. However, they would have been able to express their preferences in full knowledge of the reduced number of places at the School and the potential consequences of this. As I have explained above, there is no shortage of space at suitable alternative schools within a relatively short distance from the School.

24. To support the variation request, the School has provided me with an insight into its financial position. Whilst it had a cumulative surplus of £286,209 at the end of the 2024-25

financial year, there is a projected in-year deficit of £269,810 for the end of the 2025-26 financial year and a projected in-year deficit of £264,589 for the following year. I consider that this is compelling evidence of the financial challenges facing the School. By enabling the School to plan with certainty for only one Reception class in 2026/27, which would reduce the staffing costs by significantly more than any loss in per-pupil funding, the proposal removes any financial and organisational risks of having to plan for two Reception classes rather than one. Were two Reception classes to be required, it is likely that the net cost of staffing the extra class would add to the challenges of the School's financial position, and hence to its ability to meet the needs of the existing children on roll.

25. Having considered all the matters above, my reasoning can be summarised as follows:

- a. The proposed variation does not give rise to any concerns about the sufficiency of YR places in the planning area for 2026/27 or 2027/28.
- b. The proposed variation may give rise to a limited degree of frustration of parental preference for the School in 2026/27 (and similarly in 2027/28).
- c. If the proposed variation is not approved, there remains the risk of a significantly negative financial and organisational impact on the School, with detriment to those children already at the School, and to other necessary areas of expenditure which may be adversely affected should funding have to be diverted to pay for the provision of an extra class for 2026/27.

26. After carefully weighing the above factors, I conclude that the proposed variation is justified by the change in circumstances, and I approve it.

Other matters

27. Having considered the Arrangements as a whole it appeared to me that there was a matter which may not conform with the requirements of the Code and so I brought it to the attention of the Admission Authority.

28. In the section titled "Education out of Normal (Chronological) Age Group", the Arrangements do not comply with the requirements of paragraph 14 of the Code, which requires that admission arrangements must be clear and that "Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated."

29. This is because:

- a. there is no clear reference to explain that this section applies to summer born children, for whom there exist statutory entitlements and non-statutory guidance; and

- b. whilst the Arrangements state that “Further details... are available from the local authority”, they do not link to, nor state easily, how the Local Authority’s processes (which the School appears to have adopted as its own) can be found.

30. The Admission Authority has told me that it will address these matters, as permitted by paragraph 3.6 of the Code, which is welcomed. As the Admission Authority has accepted that changes are required, I will not discuss them further other than to make clear that the Code requires that the Arrangements be amended to address the points set out here.

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 the Governing Body for Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School for 2026/27.

32. I determine that for admission to Reception Year in 2026/27, the published admission number will be 30.

33. I have also considered the arrangements under section 88I(5) and find that they do not comply with requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

34. By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator’s decision is binding on the admission authority. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of this determination.

Dated: 2 December 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Clive Sentence