



Office of  
the Schools  
Adjudicator

## Determination

**Case references:** VAR2658 and VAR2659

**Admission Authority:** Hampshire County Council for Northern Junior School

**Date of decision:** 28 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 Hampshire County Council for Northern Junior School for 2025/26.

I determine that for admission in 2025/26 the published admission number shall be 45.

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Northern Junior School for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number shall be 40.

### The referral

1. Hampshire County Council, which is the admission authority for Northern Junior School (the School), has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for variations to the admission arrangements for the School for admissions in 2025/26 and 2026/27 (the 2025 arrangements and the 2026 arrangements respectively).
2. The School is a community school for children aged seven to eleven years in Portchester. It is federated with the Northern Infant School (the infant school) and the two schools have the same governing body. The School admits children to year 3, as it is a junior school, and the pupils leave at the end of year 6.
3. Hampshire County Council is the local authority area for which the School is located and I will refer to it as the local authority.

4. The proposed variations are that:
  - a. the published admission number (PAN) for 2025/26, which was set at 60, be reduced to 45; and
  - b. the PAN for 2026/27, which was set at 60, be reduced to 40.

## Jurisdiction and procedure

5. Section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) makes provision for variations to determined arrangements. Paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the School Admissions Code (the Code) say (insofar as is relevant here):

“3.6 Once admission arrangements have been determined for a particular school year, they cannot be revised by the admission authority unless such revision is necessary to give effect to a mandatory requirement of this Code, admissions law, a determination of the Adjudicator or any misprint in the admission arrangements. Admission authorities may propose other variations where they consider such changes to be necessary in view of a major change in circumstances. Such proposals **must** be referred to the Schools Adjudicator for approval, and the appropriate bodies notified. Where the local authority is the admission authority for a community or voluntary controlled school, it **must** consult the governing body of the school before making any reference.

3.7 Admission authorities **must** notify the appropriate bodies of all variations”.

6. The 2025/26 arrangements were determined by the local authority on 20 February 2024. The 2026/27 arrangements were determined by the local authority on 12 February 2025.
7. The local authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variations in line with the Code and that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variations. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variations are within my jurisdiction.
8. In considering the variations request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
  - a) the referral from the local authority dated ‘November 2025’ and received 18 November 2025 and further information provided at my request;
  - b) the determined 2025 arrangements and the determined 2026 arrangements;
  - c) a map showing the location of the School and other relevant schools; and
  - d) information available on the government websites ‘Get information about schools’ (GIAS); ‘Find and compare schools and colleges in England’ (the DfE website),

and the 'Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool' (FBIT).

9. 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.
10. I note here that the admission arrangements for 2027/28 have not yet been determined. This means that if I decide to vary the arrangements for 2026/27, as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years. The local authority has expressed its intention to consult on setting the PAN for the School at 50 for 2027/28.
11. In the interest 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**

12. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code (as above) requires that admission arrangements, once determined, may only be revised, that is changed or varied, if there is a major change of circumstance or certain other limited and specified circumstances. I will consider below whether the proposed variations are justified by the change in circumstances.
13. The context is significant in this matter and I will provide that context before considering the detail of the proposed variations. The map provided by the local authority shows that Portchester is located by the coast and so there is only sea to the south (Portsmouth Harbour). The map shows largely rural areas to the north, with other towns to the west and east of Portchester. While the DfE website shows 21 primary schools within three miles of the School, these distances are measured in a straight line and, in reality, the journey would be considerably further unless undertaken by sea or air. It is, therefore, the schools in Portchester which are most relevant.
14. Local authorities have a duty to make sure that there are sufficient school places for the children in their area. Normally they assess need and provision on the basis of geographical areas known as planning areas. In this case the planning area has five primary schools but only one admits children to year 3, the School. The other schools are the infant school and three primary schools which admit children to reception year and typically the children stay at the primary schools until the end of year 6. This combination means that normally it is only pupils in year 2 at the infant school, or children moving into the area, who will require a place in year 3 at the School.
15. The local authority said that, "typically 100% of the Year 3 admissions [to the School]

are from the infant school”. It is common for infant schools to be linked to a junior school and, in this instance, the infant school and the School are federated as well. The number of pupils in the infant school is, therefore, an accurate indicator of the number of children likely to require a place at the School in year 3 for both 2025/26 and 2026/27.

16. The School is not subject to 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 reception year, year 1 and year 2 and the School is for pupils in years 3, 4, 5 and 6. However, all classes in the infant school are subject to the infant class size regulations and this informs the infant school’s admissions and class organisation.
17. The PAN for the infant school has been reduced in recognition of reducing demand. A PAN is the minimum number of children to be admitted to the year of entry (reception year for the infant school) if there is sufficient demand. In other year groups, and in the normal year of entry once PAN is reached, the admission authority can refuse admission if admission would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources. When a child is refused admission there is always the right of appeal.
18. Schools are largely funded on the basis of the number of pupils and staff are normally the highest cost to any school. For financial efficiency, most primary schools seek to have close to 30 children in a class, but, as set out above, they cannot have over 30 children in infant classes except excepted pupils. Classes of junior aged children can be over 30 but few schools would wish to have many pupils over 30 for reasons of educational effectiveness. If a class is many pupils fewer than 30, the costs of providing the class will be higher than the income derived from its pupils. This can lead to financial problems for a school. The number of pupils at the infant school currently are shown in table 1 below.

**Table 1: PAN and admissions to the infant school dated 24 November 2025**

	<b>PAN</b>	<b>Number in year group</b>
<b>Reception year</b>	45	40
<b>Year 1</b>	60	52
<b>Year 2</b>	45	40

19. The infant school has arranged its classes as cost effectively as possible by moving from having a single year group in a class to mixed year groups. In other words, the number of pupils in years 1 and 2 combine to total 92 children which are taught in

three classes: one of 30 and two of 31. I must assume, as it is not part of my jurisdiction, that two of the classes must be the result of “excepted” pupils as permitted by the infant class size regulations, otherwise the School would be breaching those regulations.

20. This is a very efficient model financially. It means, however, that no more children could be admitted to years 1 and 2 without making it necessary to take measures to meet the infant class size regulations (unless they were also excepted pupils). If more children were to be admitted to those year groups, one obvious option would be to provide another class at the infant school by reorganising years 1 and 2 into four classes. This would be a very expensive option and disruptive; it is likely to prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources. Given the children being admitted to the School are almost entirely from the infant school, the local authority can be confident of the number of children likely to require a place at the School in 2026 and 2027. Clearly admissions to the infant school have already occurred for 2025/26, although the PAN remains in place for the whole of the admission year, that is until July 2026.

21. The number of pupils in the School by year group are as in table 2 below.

**Table 2: number of pupils at the School and class organisation November 2025**

	Number in year group	Two classes to a year group: class numbers
<b>Year 3</b>	41	20 21
<b>Year 4</b>	50	25 25
<b>Year 5</b>	62	32 30
<b>Year 6</b>	57	27 30

22. Taking these factors into consideration, the School and the local authority are attempting to make sure that there are sufficient places at the School for each year group in an educationally sound way, while preventing the financial situation from deteriorating. The reasoning is:

- 2025/26: Admissions in 2025 have already occurred and there are 41 pupils in year 3. A PAN of 45 would mean that there is space if children move into the area during this academic year and need a school place. The local authority, therefore, requests that the PAN is reduced from 60 to 45.
- 2026/27: As there are 40 children in year 2 at the infant school and no more will be admitted for the reasons given above, the local authority anticipates admitting 40 children to the School for 2026. The combination of years 3 and 4 in 2026/27 would make 81 pupils. The School plans to arrange them in three classes of 27 pupils each. The local authority, therefore, requests a PAN of 40.
- 2027/28: There are 52 children in year 1 at the infant school at the moment.

This is the year group which would be admitted to the School in September 2027 as year 3. This year group of 52 would combine with the 40 admitted in 2026 to create a group of 92 children which could be arranged in three classes of 30 or 31 pupils each. Of course, the numbers could change in the meantime. The local authority is consulting on setting the PAN for the School at 50, although I note that this is two fewer than the 52 currently in year 1 at the infant school.

23. I will now consider the request for a variation so that the PAN for 2025/26 is reduced from 60 to 45. There are currently 41 pupils in year 3 and so little risk of parental preference being frustrated if the PAN is reduced to 45. A PAN of 45 would leave spaces if other children were to require a school place and there are at least five year 3 places at other schools in close proximity to the School. If the PAN were not reduced as requested, there is a slight risk that up to 60 children could be admitted to the year group and this would affect the plans for class organisation in 2026 (as described above). I note that as a junior school, there can lawfully be more than 30 pupils to a class.
24. I also note that the local authority could only refuse a place on the grounds that the admission of a child or children would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources and a parent could always appeal for a place even if the PAN has been reached.
25. FBIT provides a summary of the School's budgetary figures for the financial year ending in April 2025. These support figures provided to me by the local authority which show that the School will have a financial deficit if the classes are not organised in a financially efficient manner in the future. I am assured that the reasons given by the local authority and the School justify the variation so that the PAN for 2025/26 is reduced from 60 to 45.
26. I will now consider the request that the PAN for 2026/27 is reduced from 60 to 40. The local authority has explained how the number of children likely to seek a place at the School is 40 and the class structure which would be put in place. This class structure of three classes of around 30 is dependent on no more than 40 children being admitted. I did consider that the PAN could be 45 as the School is not subject to the infant class size regulations and could have more than 30 pupils to a class. However, generally schools do not want to have more than 30 pupils to a class for educational reasons.
27. I considered what could occur if a child required a school place in the area. Firstly, the local authority can admit over the PAN as the infant class size regulations do not apply. In addition, the local authority said,  
  
"the planning area includes three other primary schools—Castle Primary, Red Barn Community Primary, and Wicor Primary—which collectively offer sufficient capacity to meet Year 3 demand. Based on current numbers on roll these are approximately 14 spaces across the three primary schools in current Year 2."

28. I am assured that parental preference is unlikely to be frustrated if the PAN for 2026/27 were to be reduced to 40. There are also sound financial and educational reasons for doing so and the variation to reduce the PAN from 60 to 40 for admissions in 2026/27 is justified.

## Determination

29. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Northern Junior School for 2025/26.
30. I determine that for admission in 2025/26 the published admission number shall be 45.
31. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Northern Junior School for 2026/27.
32. I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number shall be 40.

Dated: 28 November 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard