



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2610

Admission Authority: The Governing Body for Ireland Wood Primary School, Leeds

Local Authority: Leeds City Council

Date of decision: 11 December 2025

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I do not approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by the Governing Body for Ireland Wood Primary School, Leeds for 2026/27.

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, unless an alternative timescale is specified by the schools adjudicator. In this case, I determine that the arrangements must be revised no later than Friday 9 January 2026.

The referral

1. The governing body (the admission authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for Ireland Wood Primary School (the school, IWPS) for September 2026 (the arrangements).
2. The school is a foundation school for children aged between the ages of 5 and 11 in the northwestern suburbs of the city of Leeds, about 5 miles from the city centre. It is a co-educational school. It is part of the Leeds North West Education Partnership Foundation which is an educational trust which includes two local primary schools and one local secondary school according to the GOV.UK website, but more schools according to a website hosted by the school.

3. The school was judged to be “Good” by Ofsted at its last inspection in 2022.
4. Parties to the request are the school’s governing body and Leeds City Council (the local authority, the LA).
5. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) which has been determined as part of the school’s admission arrangements for 2026 be 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 arrangements were determined by the admission authority on 12 March 2025. This is after the deadline for determining arrangements which was 28 February 2025. This does not affect the standing of the arrangements or my power to consider them or the proposed variation.
8. The admission authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code.
9. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
10. I have also used my power under section 88I of the Act to consider the arrangements as a whole and to determine whether or not they conform with the requirements relating to admissions and, if not, in what ways they do not so conform. I will refer to these as ‘other matters’ and they are covered in the section of the determination under that name.

11. In considering the variation request and the matters considered under section 88I, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
12. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
 - the referral from the admission authority dated 10 July 2025 and supporting documents;
 - the determined arrangements for 2026/27 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
 - responses from the LA, and the school to my requests for further information;
 - maps, including Google Maps and those showing the location of the school; and
 - information available on the websites of the DfE (including the ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS) and the school.
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 here that the arrangements for 2027 have not yet been determined. This means that if I decide to vary the arrangements for 2026 by agreeing the PAN reduction as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the ‘baseline’ for subsequent years, and this will then have taken place without any local consultation.

Consideration of proposed variation

15. 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.
16. The arrangements set out the following oversubscription criteria:
 - a. Children “in public care” the definition of which does not comply with that provided in the Code at paragraph 1.7.
 - b. Children whose special educational needs or exceptional medical or mobility needs can only be met at the school.
 - c. Children with a brother or sister (as defined) at the school. The footnote refers to “siblings”, which are not mentioned in the oversubscription criterion.

- d. Under the heading “Priority 3a” there is a statement that says that all children will be admitted to the school if there are enough places, which seems out of place.
 - e. Under the heading Priority 3b and the heading 3c are statements about admitting children in order of the distance of their home from the school but giving first priority to those for whom the school is the nearest school to their home. I have found it difficult to understand the effect of these criteria, which I consider unclear.
17. The arrangements say that “there will be 60 reception places available in September 2026” and the admission authority has proposed that this figure be varied to 30 places. It has told me that the reason for it seeking a variation is that “the birthrate has fallen over the last three years and looks set to continue.” It told me that the school had the following out of 60 start:
 - September 2023- 52
 - September 2024- 43
 - September 2025- 39 (expected number when the request was made, now confirmed as 41).
 18. The admission authority also told me that “the school is in a deficit position due in part to the falling numbers and this deficit will increase further over the next three years”. I assume this is intended to mean that this will happen if the school’s PAN remains at 60.
 19. The form requesting the variation said that it was being asked for “for September 2026 onwards”. This appears to misunderstand both the effect of a school’s PAN on the PAN for the subsequent year, and the nature of the variation request. As I have said above, if the school’s PAN for 2026 is varied to become 30, this forms the baseline for the 2027 PAN, and in any case it is not possible for me to consider a variation to a PAN which has not yet been determined.
 20. The LA uses planning areas to carry out its pupil place planning function. The Cookridge/Adel Primary Planning Area consists of the school and six other primary schools. The tables below show information about recent admissions to these schools, preferences expressed by parents, and projections of future need for the schools in the planning area.

Table 1. Year R admissions 2023-2025 Cookridge/Adel Planning Area (summer term 2025 data)

Schools (primary schools)	Distance from IWPS (miles)	PAN for 2026	Admissions to Year R 2023 (October census)	Admissions to year R 2024 (October census)	Admissions to year R 2025 (October census)

Ireland Wood	n/a	60	51	44	41
Holy Name RC	0.4	30	30	26	26
Cookridge	0.5	45	45	45	45
Iveson	0.7	60	48	43	39
Cookridge Holy Trinity CE	0.8	60	57	43	47
Adel St John the Baptist	1.0	30	30	30	30
Adel	1.2	30	30	30	30
TOTALS	n/a	315	291	261	258

Table 2. Numbers of first preferences and total preferences expressed by parents for places in 2023-2025 (at national offer day)

School	PAN for 2026	2023/24 first (and total) preferences	2024/25 first (and total) preferences	2025/26 first (and total) preferences
Ireland Wood	60	40 (153)	38 (135)	38 (135)
Holy Name RC	30	24 (97)	20 (96)	19 (99)
Cookridge	45	76 (211)	41 (189)	59 (190)
Iveson	60	29 (110)	41 (118)	33 (110)
Cookridge Holy Trinity CE	60	39 (148)	41 (130)	40 (135)
Adel St John	30	32 (123)	30 (125)	24 (117)
Adel	30	31 (179)	39(168)	31 (162)

Table 3. Projected number of pupils in Reception classes 2026-2028

School	PAN for 2026	Projected YR 2026	Projected YR 2027	Projected YR 2028
Ireland Wood	60/30	47	41	42

Holy Name RC	30	28	23	24
Cookridge	45	45	44	44
Iveson	60	52	45	48
Cookridge Holy Trinity CE	60	42	43	44
Adel St John	30	27	28	28
Adel	30	28	32	31
TOTALS	315/285	269	255	260

21. Taking the information shown in these tables in turn, I have noted particularly that:

- (i) All the other schools in the planning area are within a short distance of the school, although the two Adel schools are on the other side of a main road from it.
- (ii) Numbers of Year R admissions have been falling since 2023. Some schools have remained at capacity, but this has not been the case for the school or for Holy Name RC Primary School (marginally), Iveson Primary School and Cookridge Holy Trinity C of E School.
- (iii) In the last three years, there have been fewer than 60 first preferences expressed for a Year R place at the school, but in each year the number of first preferences and the number of Year R admissions was greater than the proposed PAN of 30. Only one of the other schools in the planning area has had more first preferences than the PAN in each of the last three years (Adel Primary School). Two others have had more expressed first preferences than their PAN in two of these years (Cookridge Primary and Adel St John the Baptist C of E Primary).
- (iv) Projected Year R admissions (made assuming the PAN for the school remained at 60) would exceed or equal the PAN for one other school in the planning area for two of the next three years (Adel Primary School), and for one other school in one of those years (Cookridge Primary School). If the school's PAN were reduced to 30, the projected admissions would exceed the PAN in each of the next three years.

22. The LA has told me that it has no objection to the school's request for a PAN of 30 because it "would not create a sufficiency issue". That is to say, if the total of Year R places in the area were to be 285 instead of the current figure of 315, the projected need for Year R places would be satisfied in 2026 and beyond. This would be so, with a margin of 16 places in 2026 (or just over 5 percent of the total). Local authorities frequently plan to have a margin of between 3 and 5 percent surplus in localities, and recent DfE guidance suggests that a 2 percent margin is appropriate for planning purposes.

23. However, in this case, there are other matters to take into account, as I have mentioned above. The LA has also told me that:
“We recently updated local schools of our recommendation to reduce the number of reception places by 30 in Cookridge/Adel PPA from 2027 to support long-term sustainability. This reduction could be brought forward to 2026 in line with the current variation request”.
24. The question for me to consider is not simply whether a reduction in provision is appropriate, but also whether a variation request is an appropriate means to bring this about, in spite of what the LA now says. My clear understanding of the data I have presented above, when taken together, is that it shows that pupil numbers at the school have fallen, but not to the point where it would satisfy the projected demand for places there (in terms of the forecast of parental preferences) if it became a one form of entry school (i.e. with a PAN of 30). That is to say, a PAN of 30 would frustrate between 10 and 20 parents who could have expected a place at the school if the PAN were higher, for the foreseeable future. The use of a variation to a determined PAN, as I have pointed out, means that this change would be brought in without any local consultation. The notification of other bodies which is required in the case of a variation request is not a substitute for local consultation.
25. It has been a cornerstone of educational policy for some time that parental preferences for a place at a good school should be met wherever possible. If parents wishing to have a place at the school were displaced to other schools in the planning area, then the data above shows that the available places are likely to be at one of three schools: Iveson Primary School, Cookridge Holy Trinity C of E Primary School or Holy Name Catholic Primary School. While each was rated “Good” by Ofsted when most recently inspected (as was the school), two of the three are schools with a Christian religious character, which may not accord with the wishes of the parents concerned, leaving only one alternative school available to them.
26. The data shown above indicated clearly to me that there is every expectation of a continuing demand from parents for more than 30 places at the school. It is not material to this point that the LA has told me that there has historically been a high degree of inward and outward movement from other parts of Leeds in terms of parental preferences for Reception places. The net effect, and as projected, is shown above, as is the continuing popularity of the school which contributes to it.
27. At the same time, it appears evident from the above that continuing parental demand for places at the school could be met were the PAN to be reduced from 60 to 45 instead of 30. I have therefore consulted the school’s admission authority about the possibility that I might modify its requested variation accordingly, as I am permitted to do under section 88E(6)(b) of the Act. In doing so, I was mindful of the pattern of recent admissions to the school and its existing class organisation which it has provided for me (at my request).

28. In spite of falling admissions in the last two years, the school has retained 14 classes, two for each year group. Given the number of Year R admissions in 2025 (41), classes have been organised for this year group for the current school year containing 20 and 21 children. Year 1 is taught in classes of 21 and 22 children. Unsurprisingly, this is leading to financial difficulty for the school, since per pupil funding in the early years will not sustain a teacher being employed for this number of children. Given the probable level of continuing demand for places at the school, it seems to me to be an obvious suggestion that a PAN might be set below 60, but high enough to meet this demand, with the organisation of the school responding accordingly. I have therefore sought the views of the school's admission authority, saying that in the light of all the available evidence I was minded to modify their requested variation to provide for a PAN of 45 in 2026. The school had earlier told me that the governing body had already considered mixed-age teaching but that "this would mean 2 curriculums until the sixth year which would be detrimental to the education of pupils" and that it would also "mean that 4/5 teachers would be made redundant together causing lots of unrest for staff." I have to say that I do not find either of these points telling.

29. When the admission authority replied to my proposed modification of its request, it said that:

- (i) "45 does not help us financially. We are already £104490 in deficit despite an in-year surplus and could cut this deficit to £32,490 if we reduce to 30 in September 2026."

I recognise the first figure, as that given to me by the school in a letter dated 1 September 2025 as a "forecast" which gave even larger figure "going forward", I assume on the basis of a retained PAN of 60, which is of course not inevitable from the school's point of view, as I shall discuss below. I am also clear that the saving referred to does not depend on a PAN of 30 being set. It could equally be achieved by reorganisation of the teaching arrangements involving the employment of fewer teachers.

- (ii) "We would be changing [the curriculum] to a mixed year curriculum across school over 7 years which is an organisational issue but creates a massive range within classes and creates instability."

As I have said, I do not take the view that mixed-age teaching in primary schools is of its nature detrimental to children's education, since it is employed by very large numbers of schools nationally without that being the case.

- (iii) Further comments were made concerning the number of available places in other local schools (which is not directly relevant to the question I had posed), concerning the fact that there having been fewer than 45 admissions to the school in the two most recent years (which fact argues in favour of a revised PAN of 45, not the reverse), and telling me that the school is now consulting on a PAN of 30 for admissions in 2027.

30. As I referred to above, this last point makes it plain that the school, as an own admission authority school, may determine a lower PAN if it chooses to do so for 2027 (although this could be the subject of an objection), and so does not need to contemplate ongoing financial burdens of the sort it has suggested are forecast for it.

31. The question I must answer is whether the school, having itself determined a PAN of 60 for admissions in 2026 (in a late determination), should now have a PAN of 30 instead. I have outlined above what I consider the consequences of that change are likely to be. In coming to a decision, I have tried to ensure that I have considered the competing needs of providing the school places that parents want for their children and the financial viability of the school. As I have said, while a move to a PAN of 30 would enable the school to save money in 2026/27, this is not the only means for doing so which is at its disposal even if a PAN of 45 were not introduced, given the level of recent admissions and those likely for 2026. A PAN of 30 for 2026 would on the other hand have a detrimental effect on the provision of school places at a school where the evidence says parents want them.
32. It is also the case that if I agree a PAN of 30 for 2026, the school will not need to have regard to the feedback from its consultation about the PAN it intends to set for 2027. My view is that it is appropriate that the school should hear from local parents before a PAN of 30 is introduced, and therefore that this should take place only after it has consulted meaningfully on such a change. I do not approve the proposed variation to the school's admission arrangements for 2026.
33. Given the school's clear unwillingness to embrace mixed-age teaching, which would have been supported by a PAN of 45 (which would itself have ensured parental preference could be met), I do not propose to pursue a modification of the requested variation.

Other matters

34. Having considered the arrangements as a whole it appeared to me that there are matters which may not conform with the requirements of the Code and so I brought them to the attention of the admission authority. These matters are (paragraphs of the Code are indicated where relevant):
 - (i) The definition of looked after and previously looked after children does not comply with that provided in the Code (paragraph 1.7).
 - (ii) The statement concerning the admission of all children being admitted if there are enough places is not an oversubscription criterion, and its inclusion as such makes the arrangements unclear, in contravention of paragraph 14 of the Code.
 - (iii) Under the heading Priority 3b and the heading 3c are statements about admitting children in order of the distance of their home from the school but giving first priority to those for whom the school is the nearest school to their home. I have found it difficult to understand the effect of these criteria, which I consider unclear in contravention of paragraph 1.8 of the Code.

- (iv) The statement concerning deferred entry to school does not conform with the requirements of paragraph 2.17 of the Code (which makes part-time schooling a right, not something which can only be requested).
 - (v) The arrangements fail to contain the statements mandated by paragraph 2.15 of the Code concerning waiting lists and paragraph 2.18 concerning admission outside the normal age group.
35. When the school replied to these concerns, it said that it was grateful to have each of these matters brought to its attention and suggested in most cases how it might revise its arrangements. This is of course helpful, but my remit concerns only admission arrangements which have been determined and does not extend to commenting on or to the provision of advice about any proposed admission arrangements.
36. As determined, the arrangements fail to comply with the Code in the ways I have stated. The arrangements must now be amended accordingly. The Code provides that this must take place within 2 months of this determination unless the adjudicator specifies a different timescale. Since the closing date for the primary school applications is 15 January annually, I determine that the arrangements must be amended no later than Friday 9 January 2026.

Determination

35. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I do not approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by the Governing Body for Ireland Wood Primary School, Leeds for 2026/27.
36. 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.
37. 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, unless an alternative timescale is specified by the schools adjudicator. In this case, I determine that the arrangements must be revised no later than Friday 9 January 2026.

Dated: 11 December 2025

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Bryan Slater