



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	VAR2663
Admission Authority:	West Northamptonshire Council for Boothville Primary School, Northampton
Local Authority:	West Northamptonshire Council
Date of decision:	13 January 2026

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 West Northamptonshire Council for Boothville Primary School, Northampton for September 2026.

I determine that for admission in September 2026, the published admission number will be 60.

The referral

1. West Northamptonshire Council (the Admission Authority or Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Boothville Primary School, Booth Lane North, Northampton (the School) for September 2026.
2. The School is a community school for children aged 3-11 in Northampton. It is a co-educational, non-selective school with no designated religious character. The School is located in the West Northamptonshire local authority area.
3. The School's overall effectiveness was judged to be Good by Ofsted at its last inspection on the 21 February 2023.
4. The parties to the request are the Admission Authority and the School.
5. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (the PAN) for admission to Reception Year in September 2026 is reduced from 90 to 60.

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 11 February 2025.
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. The governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variation.
9. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
10. In considering the variation request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
11. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 24 November 2025 and supporting documents;
 - the determined Arrangements for September 2026 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
 - responses from the Admission Authority and the School to my requests for further information; and
 - information available on gov.uk websites (including the ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS) and ‘Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool’ (FBIT) websites), and on the websites of the Local Authority, the School and Ofsted.

12. I have been provided with and reviewed comprehensive information and data by the Admission Authority and the School and would like to extend my thanks for their responses to my requests for further information. I have referred only to that which has a bearing on my determination.
13. There is no formal consultation required for a variation, meaning 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 September 2027 have not yet been determined. This means that if I decide to vary the Arrangements for September 2026 by reducing the PAN from 90 to 60 as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years.
15. Any determination to reduce the PAN to 60, or to leave it at 90, has no effect on any cohort of pupils other than those in Reception. The allocation of places in other year groups depends on the number of pupils in each cohort and the organisation of classes and the degree to which admitting an additional pupil would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources or breach the School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 (the Infant Class Sizes Regulations).
16. In the interests of dealing speedily with this and the many other requests for variations at this time, 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 variation

17. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code (as mentioned 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.
18. The Admission Authority told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the School is that, since the Arrangements were determined, the School "has seen a significant drop in demand for primary school places in the area, arising from a drop in the birth rate circa 5 years ago and the location of the school. It has now led to the level of surplus capacity at the school exceeding DfE [Department for Education] recommended limits of between 5 and 10%."
19. The Admission Authority went on to tell me that "[c]onsecutive low intakes in the recent academic years, combined with larger cohorts leaving the school at the end of

Year 6 have resulted in a significant decrease in the number of pupils on roll at the school and this is now impacting on the school's budget."

20. The variation is, therefore, proposed to reduce the PAN for the School in September 2026 from 90 to 60 to support the School. The reduction in PAN is intended to reduce the costs for the School and help with the projected budget deficit. The Admission Authority states that this would lead to "greater certainty when planning the numbers of staff required and allow for more robust financial planning." It will also "improve the long-term financial viability of the school, inevitably benefit all pupils that attend the school and help to stabilise surplus capacity within the wider planning area."
21. The proposed variation has the support of the School's Governing Body.
22. I have considered the data provided by the Admission Authority. Table 1 below shows that the School is currently undersubscribed in all year groups with projected numbers on roll declining year on year from September 2026. Spare capacity at the School, without the PAN reduction, is predicted to be around 10%.

Table 1: Actual and projected numbers on roll - September 2025 to 2029

Academic Year	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
2025/26 (actual)	64	66	77	88	88	89	88	560
2026/27	75	78	71	77	89	93	91	575
2027/28	74	77	80	70	79	90	93	563
2028/29	70	76	79	79	71	80	90	546
2029/30	74	72	78	78	81	72	80	534

23. Although there are declining numbers and surplus capacity at the School, the proposed PAN reduction to 60 places is below the actual intake of 64 pupils in September 2025, and below the projection for admission to the School in September 2026, which is 75. I was concerned that agreeing the PAN reduction may therefore frustrate parental preference and I asked the Admission Authority to provide details relating to historical preferences and this is set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Parental preferences for admission to the School - September 2021 to 2025

Academic Year	1st Preference	2nd Preference	3rd Preference	Admitted
2021/22 (actual)	73	42	36	74
2022/23	72	48	33	75
2023/24	63	49	31	68
2024/25	57	33	37	59
2025/26	64	42	32	64

24. In addition, the Admission Authority responded as follows:

“While a reduction to a PAN of 60 will have some impact on parental preference, the Local Authority has a statutory duty to operate the system at a sustainable level across the wider planning area. Our forward-view modelling demonstrates that maintaining the higher PAN would create surplus capacity above recommended levels, which in turn destabilises both the School and neighbouring schools.

The proposed reduction therefore functions as a strategic recalibration to rebalance provision, support viability, and avoid disproportionate under-subscription across the local network. Any shortfall in places arising from the reduced PAN can be absorbed by neighbouring schools within a reasonable walking distance, all of which collectively retain sufficient capacity to meet projected demand.

While we remain mindful of parental preference, place planning cannot be driven by preference trends alone. The revised PAN provides the most sustainable configuration for the School and the surrounding planning areas, ensuring long-term resilience and an efficient distribution of pupil places in the area.”

25. As is noted above, 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 a geographical grouping of schools, for this purpose.
26. The School is located in the NN3 West Planning Area which comprises ten schools, including the School. The Admission Authority provided data relating to the actual and projected Reception intake for Planning Area NN3 West which I have analysed and summarised in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Actual and projected Reception intake for Planning Area NN3 West

Year of Intake	NOR	Places*	+/-	% surplus
2025 (actual)	474	630	+156	25
2026	542	600	+58	10
2027	535	600	+65	11
2028	508	600	+92	15
2029	540	600	+60	10

* with proposed PAN reduction of 30 applied as from September 2026

27. The data provided show that there are currently significant surplus places across the planning area. Some level of overcapacity in the planning areas is prudent but too much may lead to financial difficulties for schools, and a balance, therefore, needs to be struck by local authorities to ensure they have enough capacity to satisfy their statutory duties but not too much as to lead to budget deficits in schools.
28. 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. This helps to support parental choice, pupil population movement, and general manageability of the system.” It is clear from the data in Table 3 above that the proportion of vacant places across the planning area is and would remain well above two per cent if I approve the proposed variation.
29. Although it is a common methodology for a local authority to use planning areas to help determine whether it would be able to meet its statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places in its area, parents are unlikely to take account of planning areas when applying for a school place. As part of my review, I therefore also looked at all primary schools in close proximity to the School, some of which are not included in the NN3 West Planning Area. The Local Authority helpfully provided further data in relation to all primary schools within a one mile radius of the School. All of these schools are predicted to have spare capacity in September 2026 and for future years.
30. I, therefore, conclude that should the variation be approved, there is sufficient spare capacity at schools in close proximity and/or within the planning area to cater for the demand for places in September 2026 and in future years.
31. It was clear from the data provided that the Local Authority has a picture of up to date projected demand in schools in its planning areas. It appeared to me that the matter raised in respect of the PAN at the School and the number of surplus places in the planning area projected would have been obvious in enough time for what has been requested to have been dealt with through the consultation process prior to the determination of the Arrangements.
32. As noted above, in paragraph 13, an application for a variation does not have any formal consultation process so parents are unable to express their views. In this situation, the application to vary the PAN has been made close to the closing date for primary applications, being the 15 January 2026. Parents may have already made

their choices on the basis of the currently published PAN expecting that a place at the School would not be in doubt. Agreeing the reduction in PAN so late may, therefore, mean that some parents will be disappointed and they may have made their choices differently if the PAN had been reduced earlier.

33. I will now consider the reason for the proposed variations and why the governing body supports the reduction in the PAN from 90 to 60 in September 2026.
34. The School is a Primary school and this means that it will be affected by the provisions of the Infant Class Sizes Regulations and paragraph 2.16 of the Code 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 Sizes Regulations apply to Reception, year 1 (Y1) and year 2 (Y2).
35. Schools are largely funded on the number of pupils and the highest cost to a school budget is its staff. Most infant and primary schools aim to have around 30 pupils to a class. If a school has classes that are less than 30, this can mean that the income from the number of pupils is less than the costs of providing a class. If this happens over several classes, a school can face financial challenges.
36. I asked the School for details of the impact of the current surplus in places and they told me that, for this academic year, they have 207 pupils at Key Stage 1 (Reception, Y1 & Y2). I am told that this equates to a loss of £243,190.08 in their budget for this year. In September 2026, if the PAN were to remain at 90, it will equate to a loss of £267,197.00 in its budget due to the decreasing pupil numbers and the impact of lagged funding. This is the equivalent of the loss of three teachers and three teaching assistants. The School view this not to be a viable option long term and are seeking to mitigate the financial impact on the School of an increasing surplus of places. Limiting the PAN to 60 in September 2026 will allow the School to plan with certainty for two Reception classes.
37. I have considered the impact of decreasing admission numbers on the School's finances balanced against the impact that reducing the School's PAN will have on meeting parental preference. As noted above, parents have a right to express a preference as to where their children go to school and it is unfortunate that the reduction in PAN was not dealt with sooner as there will potentially be some parents who were expecting their child to be admitted to the School in September 2026 who will be disappointed. However, I agree with the Local Authority and the School in that admission authorities cannot give a guarantee that all preferences will be met and that the long-term adverse financial consequences for the School threaten its sustainability. Parents will also be able to find suitable alternative places at numerous schools within a mile of the School.
38. 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. The Admission Authority has presented a compelling argument for the

variation it proposes and has provided clear evidence that it will still be able to manage school places in the planning area whilst reducing the PAN at the School and providing choice to parents.

39. I, therefore, find that the variation is justified by the circumstances and approve the proposed variation to reduce the PAN in September 2026 from 90 to 60.

Determination

40. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by West Northamptonshire Council for Boothville Primary School, Northampton for September 2026.
41. I determine that for admission in September 2026, the published admission number will be 60.

Dated: 13 January 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: David Holland