



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2668

Admission Authority: Nottingham City Council for Hempshill Hall Primary School

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 Nottingham City Council for Hempshill Hall Primary School, for 2026/27.

I determine that, for admissions to the Reception Year in 2026/27, the catchment area will be as described in this determination.

The referral

1. Nottingham City Council (the Admission Authority; the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Hempshill Hall Primary School (the School; Hempshill Hall) for the school year 2026/27.
2. The School is a community school for children aged three to eleven. It is a co-educational school with no designated religious character. The School was judged to be 'Good' (in relation to the quality of education), and 'Good' (in relation to its early year provision), among other judgments, by Ofsted at its last inspection in January 2025.
3. The proposed variation is for an extension and enlargement of the 'catchment area' for the School in relation to the application of the published oversubscription criteria under the Arrangements, given the planned closure of another community school, namely Snape Wood Primary and Nursery School (Snape Wood), on 31 August 2026. Snape Wood is situated approximately one mile to the north of Hempshill Hall.

Jurisdiction and procedure

4. 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”.

5. The Arrangements were determined by the Local Authority on 17 December 2024.
6. The Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code, and that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variation. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
7. In considering the variation request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
8. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
 - the referral from the Local Authority dated 4 December 2025 and supporting documents;
 - the determined Arrangements and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
 - responses from the Local Authority and the governing body of the School to my requests for further information;
 - maps, including Google Maps, such as those showing the respective location of Hempshill Hall and Snape Wood, as well as the established catchment area and its proposed extension being considered; and
 - information available on gov.uk websites (including the ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS) website); and that on the websites of the Local Authority, the School and Ofsted.

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 Arrangements for 2027 have not yet been determined. This means that if I decide to vary the Arrangements for 2026 by extending and enlarging the School's catchment area as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years.
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.

Background

12. The Local Authority told me the following reason for it seeking the proposed variation to the catchment area of the School:

"The neighbouring school of Snape Wood Primary has formally had agreement to close from September 2026 at a meeting of the Council's Executive Board on 18 November 2025. As a result, the families living in that school's catchment area will no longer have a catchment school, which puts them at a disadvantage in the 2026/27 co-ordinated round and in-year processes. If we followed the normal procedure and changed the catchment areas in 2027/28, then these families will remain at a disadvantage until then. By seeking a variation we can implement the catchment as part of our arrangements with immediate effect."
13. In response to my request for further information, the Local Authority showed me an official paper requesting a decision to be made by its Executive Board at a meeting on 18 November 2025 in relation to the closure of Snape Wood. The paper stated the following reason for the closure:

"Snape Wood Primary and Nursery School has been significantly affected by falling rolls and it has by far the highest surplus of places of all the schools in the Bulwell area, which is affecting the financial stability and sustainability of the school. There are not enough children in the local area seeking places in this school."
14. I have not studied the decision-making process which led to the closure of Snape Wood, as the Local Authority is the decision-maker assigned by statute to decide whether a community school should close.

15. As set out in the Arrangements, the oversubscription criteria for the School, which apply to admissions to reception (Year R), are as follows (**my emphasis** added):

“Pupils who have an Education, Health and Care Plan, where that school is named in the child’s statement or plan will be admitted. In this event, the number of places that remain available for allocation will be reduced.

In the event of oversubscription within any of the criteria listed below, preference will be given to applicants who live closest to the school, as measured in a straight line (i.e. as the crow flies) from a point at the school campus to a point at the pupil’s home, both identified by the Local Land and Property Gazetteer...

- (i) Looked after children and previously looked after children [as defined].
- (ii) pupils who live **within the catchment area**, whose parents have requested a place at the school and who have a sibling already attending the school [as defined].
- (iii) other pupils who live **within the catchment area** and whose parents have requested a place at the school.
- (iv) pupils who live **outside the catchment area**, whose parents have requested a place at the school and who have a sibling already attending the school [as defined].
- (v) other pupils who live **outside the catchment area** whose parents have requested a place at the school.

Note: The above criteria (ii to iv) may be overridden and priority given to an applicant who can establish any of the following:

- pupils with special educational needs that can only be met at a specific school (e.g. where the school has specialist provision) [as defined];
- children of travellers, pupils with exceptional medical, mobility, or social grounds that can only be met at a specific school [as defined].”

16. Paragraph 1.8 of the Code, insofar as is relevant here, reads:

“Oversubscription criteria **must** be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation.”

17. Paragraph 1.14 of the Code reads:

“Catchment areas **must** be designed so that they are reasonable and clearly defined. Catchment areas do not prevent parents who live outside the catchment of a particular school from expressing a preference for the school.”

18. Paragraph 2.33 of the Code reads:

“Where a maintained school or Academy is to be closed, the local authority **must** collaborate with all schools in their area to consider the best way to secure provision for children in other local schools.”

Consideration of proposed variation

19. 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.
20. The Local Authority’s variation proposal is that the existing Snape Wood’s catchment area be absorbed into the Hempshill Hall’s catchment area.
21. If the proposed variation is approved, the revised boundaries of the catchment area for Hempshill Hall will be defined as shown in the second map at the Appendix to this determination.
22. The Local Authority showed me its consultation paper issued in August 2025 for the affected schools. That paper sets out a summary of the rationale for this proposed change as follows:
 - “The current catchment area for Hempshill Hall Primary currently has a significantly lower number of children living in the area than the other two local schools (Crabtree Primary & Nursery School and Rufford Primary & Nursery School). This is an ongoing issue evidenced by both historical and forecasting data.
 - All three schools have the same capacity of 420 pupils and a [Published Admission] Number (PAN) of 60 pupils, therefore the numbers living in each catchment area should be as balanced as possible. The current ratio of Hempshill Hall Primary’s ‘Number In Catchment’ compared to PAN is much lower than that of the other two local city schools (Crabtree Farm and Rufford).
 - Merging the two catchment areas will provide a much more even balance of the number of pupils living in each catchment area.
 - For existing and future pupils living in the current Snape Wood catchment area, travel implications have been considered to ensure that closure would not unnecessarily or significantly extend journey times or cost for families.
 - The aim is also to meet parental reference wherever possible and for children to be able to attend their local school.

- To inform this proposal, consideration has also been given to the new Peveril Homes housing development being constructed close to Hempshill Hall Primary School. Due to its close proximity, there is a possibility that the school could draw some pupils from this new development. However, as the development is located within the County Council area and not the City, it cannot currently be included in the catchment area for Hempshill Hall Primary School. Therefore, pupils living in the new housing development would have a lower priority in the admissions criteria to accessing a place in Hempshill Hall Primary.
- If Local Government Reorganisation is implemented from 2028, this will change the local authority boundaries and a further review of schools and catchment areas would be required at that time.”

23. The oversubscription criteria include the use of ‘catchment area’, which plays a significant role in the allocation of places at Hempshill Hall if the School were to be oversubscribed.
24. The PAN of the School stands at 60, and was not oversubscribed in recent years. According to the Local Authority, the School admitted 49 and 40 children to Year R respectively in September 2024 and September 2025, leaving 11 and 20 vacant Year R places for each school year.
25. I asked the Local Authority to assess whether the proposed extension of the catchment area would affect the sufficiency of Year R places at Hempshill Hall to meet any increase in the demand for places from children living in the extended catchment area.
26. The Local Authority’s response dated 19 December 2025 is as follows:

“For the 2024 Year R intake, 68 pupils were allocated places at Hempshill Hall and Snape Wood combined. Of these, 28 lived in the combined catchment areas of the two schools. 12 pupils across the two schools had siblings already on roll but lived outside their catchment areas.

For the 2025 intake, the combined number of reception-aged pupils living in the catchment area of both Hempshill Hall and Snape Wood combined was 40, and this is projected to be 40 again for 2026. With a PAN of 60 there will clearly be sufficient Year R places at Hempshill Hall following the proposed increase to the catchment area, including those that previously lived in the catchment area for Snape Wood.

The number of pupils living in Hempshill Hall’s catchment is currently much too low for a 420 school (60 PAN). The numbers in catchment to PAN ratio is much lower than any other local school – see catchment numbers September 2025 and historical catchment loyalty:

School	Intake from Own Catchment	Intake from Own Planning Area	From County [Area served by Nottinghamshire County Council]
Snape Wood	20%	60%	0%
Hempshill Hall	35%	53%	5%
Rufford	48%	43%	0%
Crabtree	73%	22%	2%

For existing Snape Wood Primary & Nursery pupils, travel implications have also been considered to ensure that the new proposed catchment area would not unreasonably or significantly extend journey times or increase transport costs for families. The furthest walking distances from Snape Wood's previous catchment to the closest alternative schools (mapped from the furthest catchment area point which is Howick Drive) can be seen below:

-	Maximum Walking Distance	Approximate Maximum Walking Time
To Rufford Primary	0.7 miles	15 minutes
To Hempshill Hall Primary	0.9 miles	18 minutes
To Crabtree Farm Primary	1.1 miles	24 minutes
Snape Wood	0.6 miles	12 minutes"

27. I will now consider any potential frustration of parental preference, should the variation be approved:

- The PAN of the School was, on its own, more than enough to cover the preferences expressed by parents within the respective catchment area of Hempshill Hall and Snape Wood for Year R places at either school in the last two years. Both schools were under-subscribed, and the oversubscription criteria were not applied at all. It is unlikely that some children within the current catchment area of Hempshill Hall who would otherwise gain a Year R place at the School might be displaced due to the additional demand from a larger catchment area.
- Even with the enlarged catchment area, the Local Authority forecasts that the School will admit around 40-43 Year R pupils in each of the next two school years. The possibility for any frustration of parental preference (particularly in relation to those parents who live within the existing catchment area and have expressed a preference for the School for September 2026) will likely be small.

- The revisions to the boundaries of Hempshill Hall's catchment area are likely to lead to fairer outcomes for children living in proximity to the School, particularly given that the locality to the north of Hempshill Hall (served by Snape Wood before its closure) will not be covered by the current catchment of any primary school within the Local Authority's area but for the variation sought.

28. I also asked the Local Authority to address the potential new demand for Year R places from Peveril Homes housing development (mentioned in paragraph 21 above). The Local Authority's response is as follows:

"Peveril Homes has not publicly given an exact date when the first completions will start on the Hempshill Croft development of approximately 116 houses, however some are likely to be completed by mid-2026. The land where these houses are being built falls outside the Nottingham City Council Local Authority boundary, and is already included in the catchment area for Horsendale Primary School in the Broxtowe Borough of Nottinghamshire, ensuring that any children living there will have priority at that school.

Using our pupil yield formula the estimated number of pupils could be up to 25 in total or 3.5 averaged per year group. Although this could draw some additional applications for places at Hempshill Hall Primary, the statutory responsibility for providing a school place for children living within the Nottinghamshire Local Authority area does not rest with Nottingham City. City resident pupils who live in Hempshill Hall's catchment, would have priority over places at the school."

29. The governing body of Hempshill Hall has confirmed that the School is supportive of the proposed variation as it stated in its response dated 17 December 2025:

"The School Governing Body met on Tuesday 2nd December and we discussed and agreed the catchment change as proposed by Nottingham City Admissions. Hempshill Hall Primary School currently has a falling roll and we would hope that by making our catchment bigger this will help in the future and secure the viability of the school long term."

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

- If the variation is approved, the revised boundaries of the catchment area will enable children living in the area to the north of the School, i.e. the locality surrounding Snape Wood before its closure, to have the same advantage as being enjoyed by their counterparts living in the catchment area set currently for Hempshill Hall under the Arrangements. Within the expanded catchment area being proposed for Hempshill Hall, the straight-line distance between the home of a child and the School continues to be critical in the allocation of Year R places as and when the oversubscription criteria are to be applied (see paragraph 15 above).
- If the variation is not approved, some children who live in the local area around

Snape Wood might be left without a primary school with a catchment area covering their home address. Consequently, they might be ranked in a lower priority, for admissions to Hempshill Hall, than other applicants living within the current catchment area of the School, even though Hempshill Hall may become their nearest local school in 2026/27 following the closure of Snape Wood.

31. This being the case, I concur that the expanded catchment area for Hempshill Hall under the Arrangements, in light of the planned closure of Snape Wood, is clear, reasonable, and objective. The revisions to the boundaries of the catchment area for Hempshill Hall, as clearly defined, do not prevent parents who live outside of the catchment area of the School from expressing a preference for the School. I am satisfied that the proposed variation is consistent with the requirements under paragraphs 1.8 and 1.14 of the Code (as set out above).
32. I find that the variation is justified by the circumstances, and approve the proposed variation to the Arrangements.

Determination

33. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Nottingham City Council for Hempshill Hall Primary School, for 2026/27.
34. I determine that, for admissions to the Reception Year in 2026/27, the catchment area will be as described in this determination.

Dated: 13 January 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Jackie Liu