



Case reference: **VAR2675**

Admission Authority: **Wakefield Council for Kettlethorpe High School**

Date of decision: **28 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 Wakefield Council for Kettlethorpe High School for 2026/27.

I determine that the published admission number, for admissions to Year 7 in 2026/27, shall be 330.

The referral

1. Wakefield Council (the Admission Authority; the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Kettlethorpe High School (the School) for the school year 2026/27.
2. The School is a community school for children aged 11 to 16 at Wakefield, West Yorkshire. It is a co-educational school with no designated religious character.
3. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) of the School, which applies to admissions to Year 7, be reduced from 350, as determined, to 330 for 2026/27.

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 26 February 2025.
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 15 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 and those showing the location of the School; and
 - information available on gov.uk websites (including the 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS) and 'Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool' (FBIT) websites); and that on the websites of the Local Authority and the School.
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 of the School for 2027/28 have not yet been determined. This means that if I decide to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by

reducing the School's PAN from 350 to 330 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.

Consideration of proposed variation

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 variation is justified by the change in circumstances.
13. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School be reduced from 350 to 330 in 2026/27.
14. Having regard to the declining birth rates and Year 7 admissions in recent years, the Local Authority told me the following reason for it seeking a variation to the PAN for the School:

"The school feel they are constrained by a PAN they feel no longer reflects current demographic realities. Despite a PAN of 350 for Year 7, their current intake stands at 299, and other year groups are similarly underfilled. This mismatch has created significant operational challenges, leaving the school with substantial vacancies across multiple cohorts."

15. I understand from the request that the School had originally asked the Local Authority to consider making the case for the reduction of the School's PAN from 350 to 330. The Local Authority told me that:

"[The School] has requested approval to reduce its PAN from 350 to 300 from September 2026 to accurately reflect current and projected demand. The school believes this adjustment will enable proactive planning, protect educational standards, and ensure the school remains a strong and sustainable part of the Wakefield community. However, as the admission authority for [the School], the [Local Authority] is proposing a reduction in their PAN from 350 to 330 from the September 2026 intake year to ensure the Local Authority protects an acceptable level of surplus to support this area and the neighbouring planning areas."

16. I have considered the latest available data to form a view about the sufficiency of school places in the local area if the PAN of the School is reduced from 350 to 330 in 2026. I have also considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the change in demand, the potential effect of the proposed PAN reduction on

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

17. The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient school 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 geographical areas and the schools within those areas, for this purpose. The School is based in 'Wakefield Rural Secondary Planning Area' (the planning area), and I have considered the data that the Local Authority has provided for that area.
18. In the planning area there are three schools, including the School, for which the usual year of entry is Year 7. When the Local Authority determined the admission arrangements of the School for 2025/26, the PAN was reduced by 10 places, from 360 to 350. With reference to the latest information provided by the Local Authority in its response dated 19 January 2026, the data set out in Table 1 show the number of Year 7 places and the number of children admitted to, or forecast to require a place at, those schools within the planning area. Table 1 also demonstrates the effect of the proposed PAN reduction for the School on surplus places in the planning area.

Table 1: Year 7 places available at schools within the planning area, and the number of children admitted to, or forecast to require a place at, those schools

	2024	2025	2026	2027
Number of places in Year 7 at the schools in the planning area (with a PAN of 360 at the School in 2024, and 350 in 2025)	720	710	710	710
Number of children admitted (2024 and 2025), and forecast to require Year 7 places (2026 and 2027)	715	665	696	696
Vacant places	5	45	14	14
Vacant places as a percentage	0.7	6.3	2.0	2.0
Forecast number of places in Year 7 if variation approved (with a PAN of 330 at the School in 2026 and onwards)	NA	NA	690	690
Forecast vacant places if variation approved	NA	NA	-6	-6

19. The Department for Education's 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.” From the data above I note that the proportion of vacant places in the planning area would, according to the forecast numbers for 2026 and 2027, be just at the suggested two per cent before the proposed variation. In other words, if I agree to this variation, this may be read as taking away that ‘operating margin’ for the Local Authority in the allocation of Year 7 places within the planning area.

20. This notwithstanding, I note that when the Local Authority notified the appropriate bodies, it said:

“The [Local Authority] does not consider that any child or school will be disadvantaged as the [Local Authority] forecasts there will still be sufficient school places available in the Wakefield Rural Secondary Planning Area.”

21. The Local Authority told me that the forecast numbers for 2026 and 2027 were taken from its responses to the School Capacity survey in July 2025. I appreciate that it is difficult for local authorities to forecast precisely the number of school places required for a particular planning area. This also explains partly why the Local Authority is taking a restrained approach in not proposing the reduction of the School’s PAN by 50 places (as initially suggested by the School), but 20 places only, for 2026/27. As the Local Authority is the Admission Authority of the School, it may, when circumstances warrant, always enable the School to admit slightly more pupils than the reduced PAN (if approved). Having regard to the Local Authority’s assurance, as well as to the downward trends of birth rates and actual admissions in recent years, I am satisfied that the reduced PAN of 330 would be sufficient to accommodate children living in the planning area and seeking a Year 7 place for September 2026.

22. I turn now to the demand for places at the School. Table 2 shows the number of children admitted to the School in 2024 and 2025, and the forecast numbers for the next two years. The Table uses the proposed PAN of 330 for 2026 onwards.

Table 2: The number of children admitted to the School in 2024 and 2025, and the forecast number of places required in 2026 and 2027

	2024	2025	2026	2027
The PAN for the School	360	350	330	330
Number of first preferences	305	254	224	NA
Number of children admitted to Year 7 (2024 and 2025), and forecast to require places (2026, 2027)	345	299	332	332
Vacant places	15	51	NA	NA

23. Table 2 shows that in recent years the number of first preference applications for the School has been below the proposed PAN of 330. First preference applications are only one indicator of demand; applications are made months in advance of admission and people's lives can change considerably in that time. I note that the number of children admitted to Year 7 at the School in September 2025 was down to 299, and that the School received 224 first preference applications for the current normal admission around for entry in September 2026.
24. I note that parents were not able to consider preferences and make their applications for 2026 in the knowledge that the PAN of the School would be reduced to 330 (if approved). However, it is likely that all parents who had made first preference applications for the School would be offered a Year 7 place for their children on national offer day (2 March 2026). I am satisfied that there is unlikely to be any substantial frustration of parental preference if the proposed variation is agreed, at this point in time, for September 2026.
25. I will now consider the impact on the School of my approving, or not approving, the proposed variation.
26. The FBIT website shows that for financial year ending March 2025, the School had an in-year balance of about £68,000, and a revenue reserve of over £1.3 million. In response to my request for further information, the School told me, in its letter dated 19 January 2026, that:

"Kettlethorpe High School has historically had a healthy financial reserve, which has resulted in the school being able to invest in the school estate and its resources to ensure the highest level of education for its pupils. However, because of falling pupil numbers and increasing numbers of Pupil Premium and SEND pupils, the school will now need to identify significant savings to ensure financial viability.

Early financial projections indicate that the school is expected to feel the financial impact of falling pupil numbers starting in the 2026/27 financial year. As the number of Year 6 pupils in the catchment area continues to decline, fewer students will transition into Year 7, leading to reduced enrolment figures.

Early financial projections indicate that Kettlethorpe's reserves would be fully depleted by the end of 2027/28. Kettlethorpe has already taken a proactive approach to address the forecasted decline in funding but without support for the reduction in PAN, this will put further financial strain on the school's budget."

27. In addition, the School outlined several advantages of the reduced PAN in relation to timetabling, staffing, resourcing, and support for students with special education needs and disability.

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

- If the proposed variation is approved, parents were not able to consider preferences and make their applications for 2026 in the knowledge that the PAN of the School would be reduced to 330. Nonetheless, the reduction in the School's PAN will be unlikely to result in a substantial frustration of parental preference given the falling numbers of first preference applications for the School in recent years. In any case, the Admission Authority may admit over the PAN, if circumstances warrant, in accordance with paragraph 1.4 of the Code. There is compelling evidence that a reduction in the PAN to 330 would allow the School to plan with more certainty knowing the number of classes and staff members that will be required for 2026/27, and to make the best use of its resources, thereby benefitting the School financially in the longer term.
- If the proposed variation is not approved, the School would be obliged to offer a Year 7 place up to the existing PAN of 350 for any applicant at any time in 2026/27. This may disrupt carefully balanced timetables, student groups across subjects, and pastoral support structures, making it more challenging for the School to maintain consistent provision and outcomes for its pupils.

29. Taking everything into consideration, I find that the variation is justified by the circumstances and approve it.

Determination

30. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Wakefield Council for Kettlethorpe High School for 2026/27.

31. I determine that the published admission number, for admissions to Year 7 in 2026/27, shall be 330.

Dated: 28 January 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Jackie Liu