



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2669

Admission Authority: Cornwall Council for Burraton Community Primary School

Date of decision: 4 February 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 Cornwall Council for Burraton Community Primary School for September 2026.

I determine that for September 2026 the published admission number will be 30.

The referral

1. Cornwall Council (the local authority, the LA) has referred a proposal to the adjudicator for a variation to the admission arrangements for September 2026 (the arrangements) for Burraton Community Primary School (Burraton, the school). The school is a community school for children aged four to eleven in Saltash Town. In January 2026 the school has a capacity of 420 and a number on roll of 348.
2. The proposed variation is to reduce the published admission number (PAN) for September 2026 to 30
3. The school is also the site of a base for specialist provision for students needing additional support to cater for their severe learning difficulties

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 for 2025/2026 entry set a reduced PAN of 45 students. This was determined on 12 December 2023. However, it rapidly became clear that this reduction from a PAN of 60 still provided a number of places in excess of local need. Therefore, in December 2025, a further variation was proposed to reduce the PAN to 30 for 2026/2027.

6. The case made by the LA is that the speed of the decline in need for primary places has been rapid and substantial, running at a pace which the process of determination cannot match. It became apparent in that process that the new proposed figures still over-estimated the likely required need for places for Reception age entries in 2025, 2026, and 2027. The final year of those three years was sufficiently distant for an appropriately reduced number to be included in the draft arrangements for 2027 entry, and the LA is currently seeking comments on that proposal.

7. The net effect of these changes if agreed stands to be that instead of a PAN in Saltash Town of 210 in Reception classes, the PAN will be 150 in 2026. This number is still more than 20 places above the anticipated need for Year R places in the planning area in September 2026.

8. The LA has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies were notified of the proposed variation in line with paragraph 3.6 of the Code. The LA has also provided me with confirmation that the governing body of the school was consulted on the proposed variation and is in support of it.

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 LA dated 8 December 2025 and supporting documents;
- the determined arrangements for 2026/7 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;

- maps, including Google Maps and those submitted by the LA showing the location of the school and other relevant schools; and;
- information available on the websites of the Department for Education (DfE) (including the 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS) and Ofsted

12. I would like to extend my thanks to the LA and the school for their responses to my requests for further information. I have referred only to that which has a bearing on my determination of the PAN which should apply. Due to the and imminence of September 2026 entry, I am not in this case considering other aspects of the admissions arrangements determined by the LA for the school.

13. Because one outcome of the decision could be a different PAN for Burraton for 2026, it is important to note that this figure would become a new substantive PAN for the school, if it is set in place ahead of the 2027/2028 PAN being determined.

Consideration of proposed variation

14. The referral makes clear that the PAN at Burraton Community Primary School for the 2026/2027 academic year is currently 45. On the deadline day for on-time receipt of applications for 2026 entry, 32 first-preference applications had been received.

15. The LA has a duty to make sure that there are sufficient places to meet the school place needs of pupils in its area. To fulfil this duty, the LA assesses the likely future number of places to be needed and plans to meet that need. The LA uses planning areas, which are geographical areas each containing a number of schools, for this purpose. The school is one of 4 schools providing primary education in the Saltash Town Area. Of the schools in the planning area all admit to Year R.

16. The LA has explained that its motivation for making this proposal is to efficiently balance the needs of local families to express preferences about their child's schooling, and the need for local school planning to be efficient and effective.

17. The school has provided information on likely organisation of classes if the proposed variation for 2026 is approved. It would become a school with a single form of entry for 30 Reception children. Year 1 and 2 children would be taught in mixed aged classes with just below thirty pupils in each class. This is a common staffing model.

18. This plan shows no detriment to the LA's ability to meet the needs of children in the area. The overall trend in application and provision of places since 2023 is one of decline. Only 119 applications were received on time that year, 134 in 2024, and 128 in 2025.

19. The request for a variation relates to the risk of the school having to operate more than one teaching group for Reception-aged children in 2026/2027. The school is regulated by the provisions of the School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 (the infant class sizes regulations). The infant class size regulations 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 schoolteacher, except in specific exceptional circumstances.

Table 1: The number of school places in the planning area and the number of children who have applied for each school into YR. [pref = preference]

School	PAN 2025	1 st Prefs 2025	Admitted to Reception September 2025	PAN proposed 2026	1 st Prefs 2026
Bishop Cuthbert	30	31	30	30	15
Brunel	60	21	24	60	37
St. Stephens	45	45	45	30	32
Burraton	45	37	37	30	32
Total capacity with current PAN	180	134			
Total capacity with PAN change	150	134			

20. In addition to Burraton Community Nursery and Primary school, the LA is applying for a variation to PAN from 60 to 45 at St. Stephens (Saltash) Community Primary School and Nursery for 2025/2026, and to 30 places for 2026/2027. This school is in the same Saltash Town planning area. The LA has informed me that on the final day for making applications on time for 2026/2027 Reception entry, 33 children had made a first preference application for St Stephens school.

21. If both requests for 2026 were approved, there would still be sufficient Year R places in the Saltash area in that year. A student unsuccessful in being allocated their first preference would expect a high chance of their second preference.

22. In all other regards, the variation request affects only the PAN for the school: otherwise Burraton will continue to use Cornwall's standard admissions criteria for primary schools admitting to Reception.

23. Table 1 suggests that in 2026/2027, and thereafter, fewer places will be needed than current demand in all four schools. In the two schools for which the LA is the admission authority, 64 first requests have been received for 60 places. The LA has pointed out that the other two schools, which are academies, have received first preference applications such that even with both of the LA variations approved there would still be well over a dozen vacancies for starting Reception in September 2026 at the Brunel School, and at Bishop Cornish. By 2028, only just over half the number of places in Reception will be needed in Saltash Town than were available 5 years before. The highest forecast reception intake expected up to 2028 is 138; the lowest PAN if the proposals are approved will be 150. There will continue to be sufficient school places available in this area.

24. 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 PAN reductions 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. However, I consider the variation requested is justified by the change in circumstances, especially given the high cost of requiring a PAN which will ensure every last child gets their first preference. It is also relevant that the schools which might be allocated to a disappointed child are nearby and have both been recently assessed as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. While one of the alternative schools has a faith link, which some parents might not support, the other has no faith connection. No negative comments have been made about the proposed variation.

25. If the PAN for Burraton were to remain at 45, then the school would be required to offer a place to any child who applied until the point where the PAN is reached. The infant class sizes regulations apply to Year R and so in the event of any further admissions that take YR above 30 children, the school would have to either create an extra class or reorganise their infant children into mixed age classes. This would present a significant logistical and financial challenge. In this case a continued reduction in the demand for places at the school means that there is no “unmet need” for any child.

26. It is notable that should further demand for places emerge between now and September, priority for such places would go to applicants from addresses within the Saltash Town admissions planning area. This is a consequence of the adopted admissions criteria, which give such children greater priority in the allocation of places than those who live closer to the school but from another planning area, such as Plymouth. Access around the area is not straightforward, and the planning area is bordered by the River Tamar to the east, the Lynher River to the south, and further watercourses to the west. Only in the north-west are there three road crossings, as well as the Tamar Bridge to the east. While the LA has not been able to provide individual details of children who might have lost out on places at the school had the PAN been lower in 2023 and 2024, I am satisfied by the argument made that children living in the planning area in the near future will have adequate priority for a school place in that area should they apply for one.

27. I note that in previous years the number of applicants admitted in September to Reception in addition to on-time applicants has been generally in the low single figures. There is no evidenced basis to expect demand to be materially higher by September 2026.

28. I find the case made by the LA is persuasive. There is projected to be very little reduction in the ability of families to secure their first preference for their child. The LA have attempted to respond swiftly to demographic change by varying the PAN in the determined arrangements, keeping a careful eye on the balance of needs of local families and schools. When it was clear that a determined change to the PAN was too little and too late, the school and authority moved speedily to make further change quickly. They are emphatic in stressing the very limited impact of the variation on local families. I note that in their consultation for 2027/28, the LA has suggested a PAN for Burraton and St Stephens at 30 students. The change provides a substantial cost saving albeit with effect on parental

preferences. After consideration of all the factors above, I find that the variation request is justified by the circumstances, and I approve it. The PAN for the academic year 2026/27 will be 30.

29. My decision affects only admissions to Reception at the school for September 2026 and in-year admissions to Reception in 2026/27. It does, however, set a new start level for the PAN of Burraton, should it come into effect before the PAN for 2027/2028 is determined.

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 Cornwall Council for Burraton Community Primary School, Saltash Town for September 2026.

31. I determine that for September 2026 the published admission number will be 30.

Dated: 4 February 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Patrick Storrie