



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2683

Admission Authority: Governing board for Cheadle Catholic Infant School

Local Authority: Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

Date of decision: 17 March 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 the governing board for Cheadle Catholic Infant School, for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number (PAN) will be 60.

The referral

1. The governing board (the Admission Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for Cheadle Catholic Infant School (the School) for 2026/27 (the Arrangements).
2. The School is a voluntary aided school for children aged three to seven in Cheadle Hume, Stockport. It is located in the local authority area of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (the LA)
3. The religious character of the School is Catholic. The religious authority for the School is the Diocese of Shrewsbury (the Diocese).
4. Parties to the request are the Admission Authority, the LA, and the Diocese.
5. The proposed variation is reducing the PAN for Reception Year (YR) from 90 to 60 for the academic year 2026/27.

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 24 November 2024.

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. In considering the variation request I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.

10. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:

- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 28 January 2026 and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- responses from the School and Diocese 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 Get Information about Schools (GIAS) and Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool (FBIT)).

I would like to extend my thanks to the School and Diocese for the responses to my requests for further information. I have received no response from the LA despite numerous requests.

11. 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.

12. I note here that the Arrangements for 2027/28 have been determined. This means that if I agree to the Admission Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the PAN from 90 to 60 in YR as proposed, it will be for that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.

13. In the interests of dealing as quickly as possible 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 confirm with the requirements relating to admissions.

Consideration of proposed variation

14. 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.

15. The Admission Authority told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the School is for the last four years, the number of children seeking places to YR in the School has dropped and remained below the PAN of 90. In 2026 the number of applications received for the School is 51, significantly below the proposed new PAN of 60. Reducing the PAN from 90 to 60 will enable the School to confidently move to two classes in YR from three, therefore reducing the number of staff and consequently the costs in that year group.

16. The School have proposed a variation for one year currently and has determined arrangements for 2027/28 with a PAN of 90 because the number of projected applications for 2027/28 is uncertain at this time.

17. The Diocese "fully support" the variation request. Following communications with the Admission Authority they believe the requested variation will see the School's current provision for its Catholic life and mission retained, with no detriment to pupils already on roll. The Diocese is also satisfied that there will be no detriment to other local Catholic schools.

18. The LA has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for the children 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 and the schools within those areas, for this purpose. The LA has not raised any concerns about the proposed variation.

19. Data provided highlights the number of school places in the planning area and the number who have applied (first preferences) and have been admitted to each school for YR in the last two years and expected for 2026/27, as illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1: The number of school places in the planning area, the number of children who have applied (first preferences) and have been admitted for each school in YR for the last two years and expected in 2026/27.

School	PAN	2024/25 First preferences	2024/25 Admissions	2025/26 First preferences	2025/26 Admissions	2026/27 First preferences
Bradshaw Hall Primary	60	66	60	74	59	72
Cheadle Catholic Infant	90	67	72	67	76	51
Cheadle Hulme Primary	60	86	60	87	60	72
Hursthead Infant	90	75	77	70	72	60
Lane End Primary	30	33	30	27	28	21
Nevill road Infant	90	62	65	63	60	43
Oak Tree Primary	90	74	81	52	59	71
Thorn Grove Primary	30	20	20	20	19	24
Total	540 *	483	465	460	433	414

* Proposed PAN variation would reduce the total capacity by 30 places to 510.

20. Table 1 illustrates that the demand for places in the planning area has been significantly below the number of places available for the last two years and is projected to be even lower in 2026/27. I am, therefore, satisfied that if the proposed PAN variation is agreed, it will not prevent the LA from fulfilling their statutory duty to ensure enough places are available.

21. Parents are entitled to express a preference as to where their children go to school. However, admission authorities cannot give any guarantee that preferences will be met. I am satisfied that the number of places available compared to the number of children being admitted means that parental preference is unlikely to be frustrated in 2026/27. There are sufficient places in the planning area. I am also satisfied that any in-year applicants for places in 2026/27 will be able to secure places at schools within the planning area.

22. Infant class sizes are limited to 30 (as set out in The School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 and in paragraph 2.16 of the Code). In classes of less than 30, the cost of a teacher and the resources necessary for an infant class has to be borne by a proportionally smaller income from the children admitted to the infant classes.

23. I have considered the impact on reducing the PAN on admission numbers. In 2024/25 FBIT indicates that the School had an in-year balance of -£45,443 with revenue reserve of -£25,628. Both figures illustrate that the School necessarily needs to make financial savings in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of provision for children currently in the School. Reduced numbers of applications in 2026/27 contribute further to reductions in income and generate a worsening financial position. The proposed variation will enable the School to reduce the number of taught classes and therefore reduce costs.

24. Having considered the matters above, I have concluded that the proposed variation will improve the financial viability of the School whilst not giving rise to any concerns about the sufficiency of YR places in the planning area for 2026/7.

25. I therefore agree that the proposed variation is justified by the change in circumstances and I approve it. The PAN for YR in 2026/27 will be reduced from 90 to 60.

26. Reducing the PAN does not reduce the overall capacity of the School unless accommodation is being removed from the premises. It is not being suggested that accommodation is being removed and so the physical capacity of the School remains the same.

Determination

27. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by the governing board for Cheadle Catholic Infant School, for 2026/27.

28. I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number (PAN) will be 60.

Dated: 17 March 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Mr Philip Lloyd