



Office of  
the Schools  
Adjudicator

## Determination

**Case references:** VAR2711 and VAR2712

**Admission Authority:** Hampshire County Council for Petersfield Infant School

**Date of decision:** 25 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 Hampshire County Council for Petersfield Infant School for 2025/26.

I determine that for admission in 2025/26 the published admission number will be 75.

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Petersfield Infant School for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number will be 75.

### The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the local authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for variations to the admission arrangements for Petersfield Infant School (the School) for 2025/26 (the 2025 arrangements) and 2026/27 (the 2026 arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged four to seven in the town of Petersfield. The local authority is the admission authority for the School. The local authority and the governing body for the School are the parties to the proposed variations.
3. The proposed variations are that the published admission number (PAN) for the admission year 2025/26 is reduced from 90 to 75 and the PAN for admission year 2026/27 is reduced from 90 to 75.

## 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 2025 arrangements were determined by the local authority on 20 February 2024 and the 2026 arrangements were determined by the local authority on 12 February 2025. The local authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variations in line with the Code and that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variations and supports them.

6. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variations are within my jurisdiction. In considering the variation requests, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.

7. The information I have considered in reaching my decisions includes:

- a) the referral from the local authority dated 20 March 2026 and supporting documents;
- b) the determined arrangements for 2025/26 and 2026/27 and the proposed variations to those arrangements;
- c) a map showing the location of the School and other relevant schools;
- d) the determination for a previous request for a variation to the 2025 arrangements (case reference VAR2540);
- e) the website for the local authority including the determined arrangements for admissions in 2027/28; and
- f) information available on government websites including:
  - a. ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS);
  - b. ‘Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool’ (FBIT); and

c. 'Compare school and college performance in England' (the DfE website).

8. 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.

9. The 2025 arrangements were previously varied following a request to the adjudicator. The request was that the PAN be reduced from 120 to 90. I considered that request and agreed that the PAN could be reduced in a determination published on 25 March 2025. This is therefore the second variation request for the 2025 arrangements.

10. The arrangements for 2027/28 have been determined for the School with a PAN of 90. This means that if I agree to the request to vary the 2026 arrangements so the PAN is reduced to 75, it will be for 2026/27 only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.

11. In the interests of dealing speedily with this and other requests for variations, particularly from Hampshire County Council, I have not considered other aspects of the admission 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 variations**

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 variations are justified by the change in circumstances.

13. I am conscious that parents have applied for places in reception year for 2026/27 in the expectation that the PAN for the School would be 90. In these circumstances, if parental preferences were to be frustrated by the reduction in PAN, there would need to be strong justification.

14. I will first consider if there would be sufficient school places in the area if I were to agree the variations, then the demand for places at the School and then the reasons for the variations.

15. 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 geographical areas and the schools within those areas, for this purpose. The School is in a planning area with eight schools that admit children to reception year; there is also a junior school which admits children to year 3. Table 1 below provides information on demand for the state funded schools in the planning area which admit children to reception year.

**Table 1: data on admissions to schools in the planning area to reception year as at 15 January 2026**

|   | <b>2023</b> | <b>2024</b> | <b>2025</b> | <b>2026</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Sum of PANs</b>  | 236         | 236         | 206         | 206         |
| <b>Number of first preferences</b>  | 204         | 221         | 185         | 176         |
| <b>Number of children admitted (2023, 2024 and 2025) or forecast (2026)</b> | 208         | 213         | 182         | 176         |
| <b>Vacant places (actual or forecast as above)</b>                          | 28          | 23          | 24          | 30          |

16. There are 24 vacant places for reception year at this late stage in the academic year for 2025/26. The proposed variation would reduce that by 15 places, if agreed, to nine places. I believe there is very little risk that any child seeking a place in the area would be without a place if the variation for 2025/26 were to be agreed.

17. If the PAN for the School for 2026/27 were to be reduced by 15 as requested, then the number of vacant places in the planning area is forecast to be 15. Fifteen vacant places would be nearly eight per cent of the whole, a generous proportion. I am assured that if the PAN for the School were reduced to 75 for admissions in 2026/27 there would still be sufficient places in the planning area to meet demand.

18. I will now consider demand for the School and the reasons for requesting the variations. The School is one subject to the School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 (the Infant Class Size Regulations). These 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. It is more economical to provide classes that have 30 or close to 30 pupils. If the class size is significantly smaller, then the costs of providing the class can be higher than the income derived from the pupils. In other words, if a class has around 23 pupils, for example, then the costs of providing the class are likely to be higher than the income derived from the pupils within it. This can lead to financial deficit over time if not addressed. As an infant school, all classes at the School are subject to the Infant Class Size Regulations. Table 2 provides data on admissions to the School.

**Table 2: data on admissions to the School provided 20 March 2026**

|   | <b>2023</b> | <b>2024</b> | <b>2025</b> | <b>2026</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>PAN</b>  | 120         | 120         | 90          | 90          |
| <b>Number of first preferences</b>  | 102         | 97          | 71          | 56          |
| <b>Number of children admitted (2023, 2024 and 2025) or forecast (2026)</b> | 111         | 105         | 70          | 56          |
| <b>Vacant places or shortfall: actual or forecast as above</b>              | 9           | 15          | 20          | 34          |

19. The local authority explained that following the previous variation that agreed the PAN for the School could be reduced from 120 to 90, the number of admissions to the current reception year was 70 in September 2025 and the number of pupils in reception year is now 68.

20. A first preference is made for the school that a parent most wants their child to attend. The number of first preferences gives an indication of demand for places, although there can be many changes between January, by when applications are made, and September, when the children are admitted. The number of first preferences for 2026/27 is 56 and the local authority, seeing the number of potential vacant places in the planning area, does not expect the number of admissions to be above 75 in September 2026. Given the lower number of first preferences for 2026/27 for the planning area (176) compared to the number of first preferences for 2025/26 (185), it is highly unlikely that more children will be admitted to the School in 2026/27 than occurred in 2025/26 where the highest number has been 70.

21. The School originally had four classes for each year group with a PAN of 120 for the year of entry. As numbers have reduced, this has become financially unsustainable. Reducing the PAN to 90 for 2025/26 allowed three classes for reception year but the low numbers still make this financially challenging. Reception year has 68 pupils in three classes which vary from 21 to 24 pupils. Year 1 and Year 2 classes are larger classes due to the higher number of pupils and vary between 25 and 29 pupils. Given 56 first preferences for admission in September 2026, the School plans to combine reception year and year one in five mixed age classes. This would allow the School to reduce the number of classes to nine.

22. The local authority explained:

“Operating 9 classes instead of 10 significantly improves the school’s financial position. Under the 10 class model, the cumulative deficit is projected to reach £627,343 by 2027–28, whereas with 9 classes this reduces to £272,614, a difference of more than £350,000. This demonstrates that avoiding the need for a tenth class is essential to limiting further deficit growth and maintaining financial viability.”

23. A financial deficit creates significant problems for a school and the children which it educates and should be avoided if at all possible. There are 68 pupils in reception year and there is no risk of unduly frustrating parental preference by setting the PAN for 2025/26 at 75. There are 56 first preferences for admissions for 2026/27 and again, there appears to be minimal risk of frustrating parental preference if the PAN were to be set at 75.

24. There are high risks to the School, its finances and the children which it educates if the School cannot plan on the basis of five classes for reception year and year 1. If the PANs were to remain at 90 for either year, there is a small risk that up to that number could be admitted and thus preventing the planned class structure. There are therefore good reasons that the PAN for admissions in 2025/26 and the PAN for admissions in 2026/27 should be reduced to 75 and I agree the proposed variations.

## Determination

25. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Petersfield Infant School for 2025/26.
26. I determine that for admission in 2025/26 the published admission number will be 75.
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 Hampshire County Council for Petersfield Infant School for 2026/27.
28. I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number will be 75.

Dated: 25 March 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard