



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	VAR2695
Admission Authority:	Hampshire County Council for Hart Plain Junior School in Waterloooville, Hampshire
Local Authority:	Hampshire County Council
Date of decision:	7 April 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 Hart Plain Junior School for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27, the published admission number for entry to Year 3 will be 31.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Local Authority) for Hart Plain Junior School (the School) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for 2026/27 (the Arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged seven to eleven in Waterloooville, Hampshire. The Local Authority is the admission authority for the School.
3. The parties to the request are the School and the Local Authority.
4. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (the PAN) for 2026/27 is reduced from 60 to 31.

Jurisdiction and procedure

5. 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”.

6. The 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 variation in line with the Code, and that it has the support of the governing body of the School.

7. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.

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

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

- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 9 March 2026 and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- responses from the Local Authority and the School to my requests for further information;
- maps, including Google Maps showing the location of the School and other schools; and
- information available on government websites, including ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS).

10. 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.

11. I note here that the Arrangements for 2027/28 were determined on Tuesday 24 February 2026 with a PAN of 60. This means that if I agree to the Local Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the PAN from 60 to 31 as proposed, it will be for that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.

12. 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 variation

13. 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.

14. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Local Authority is set out in the referral as follows:

"The Published Admission Number (PAN) at Hart Plain Junior School for the 2026/27 academic year is currently 60. The school has received 31 on-time first-preference applications for September 2026. When the LA determined the arrangements in spring 2025 however, there was 40 children on roll in the relevant year group in the infant school, with the forecast suggesting a significantly higher number of children would materialise. So the LA could not make a reduction to 31 at that time through the consultation and determination process. This reduction in demand became clear during the autumn term and was confirmed after the January application process.

Across the Cowplain Primary planning-area, there were 197 first-preferences for 225 available Year 3 places, which suggests local capacity. Year 3 intake across the planning area has fallen consistently over the past three years, reducing from 232 pupils to 195. This represents a sustained fall in overall demand and increasing surplus places across the area, demonstrating that parental preferences can be met without all schools admitting at full capacity. The continued decline at Hart Plain Junior supports the need for a PAN reduction as a proportionate response to lower cohort sizes.

[...]

The PAN for September 2025 was reduced to 33 via an OSA application (VAR2572) following a request from the Local Authority, prompted by emerging financial pressures and a decline in demand. Since then, projections for September 2026 show only 31 first-preferences against a PAN of 60. This ongoing decline could not have been fully anticipated at the time of the determination of the 2026 arrangements in February 2025. Without a further reduction for 2026, the school

could be required to organise more classes than numbers justify, placing avoidable financial strain on the budget and disrupting educational planning. A second, timely PAN reduction is therefore necessary to provide stability and ensure the school can implement a sustainable class structure for the cohort.

[...]

A reduction to 31 would enable the school to maintain a single class in year 3.

[...]

With only 31 1st-preferences against a PAN of 60 and following an already reduced Year 3 cohort for 2025, maintaining the current PAN could require the school to organise additional classes that are not financially sustainable.

[...]

While mixed-age teaching was considered, the school does not currently deliver a mixed-age curriculum and temporary changes would disrupt established sequencing. The variation therefore prevents the school from having to open an extra class and ensures a sustainable structure for the cohort.”

15. I have given careful consideration to the latest available data in order to form a view about the sufficiency of school places in the local area if the PAN is reduced as proposed. I have also considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the changes in demand, the potential effect on parental preference of the proposed PAN reductions and whether the proposed reductions are justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.

Overall demand for Year 3 places in the area and parental preference

16. The Local Authority has a duty to make sure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty, it 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 each containing a number of schools, for this purpose. The school is one of three schools in the “Cowplain Planning Area” for which Year 3 is the normal point of admission.

17. There are currently 225 places available for admission to Year 3 in these schools in September 2026, with 197 first preferences for these places, as follows:

Table 1: expected admissions to Cowplain junior schools in September 2026

School	PAN for Year 3	Demand originally forecast for 2026	Actual first preferences for 2026
Hart Plain Junior School	60	39	31
Denmead Junior School	90 ¹	78	76
Padnell Junior School	90	89	90
TOTAL	240	206	197
Surplus places currently	N/A	34	43
Surplus places if proposed variation is approved	N/A	5	14

18. I note here that all three of these schools have infant schools which feed to them, and, therefore, that this accounts for most of the preferences for Year 3 entry to those schools. In almost all cases, children will be simply moving up to Year 3 from Year 2 in the associated infant school. Furthermore, the Local Authority has assured me that all 31 children on roll in Year 2 at Hart Plain Infant School for whom the School is their highest available preference will be able to join the School in September 2026.

19. Moreover, I note that any appeals for places at the above named junior schools would not be subject to the restrictions of the provisions of the School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012. This means that whilst schools may be technically “full” (for example, with 90 offers for 90 places), there is no legal reason why the Local Authority, as the admission authority, could not offer a number of extra places if they were needed. Indeed, at Padnell Junior School, with three classes of 30, up to six extra places could be offered before all three class sizes reached 32.

20. In the light of the above, I am satisfied that the proposed variation would not frustrate existing parental preference for places in Year 3 in September 2026 at the School, nor would it lead to a shortage of places in the planning area for children who may seek a place in Year 3 in 2026/27 but whose parents have not yet applied.

¹ The determined PAN for this school is 75, but I am told that the governing body have asked the Local Authority to continue to make offers above 75 places and up to 90 places if there is demand. Hence I have used a figure of 90 places to calculate sufficiency.

Places at the School

21. The Local Authority has helpfully provided me with a detailed breakdown of how the School will organise its classes in 2026/27 if the proposed variation is approved. With a PAN of 31, it will be able to operate a single Year 3 class and hence it can plan with certainty for a six class model from September 2026 (one class in each of Year 3 and Year 4, and two classes in each of Year 5 and Year 6). However, with the PAN of 60 currently in place for Year 3 for 2026, any in-year applications to Year 3 during 2026/27 would have to be admitted, and it is possible that this might require the provision of an extra Year 3 class in order to manage the number of pupils. The effect of the proposed variation for 2026/27 would be to remove the risk of this scenario and to enable the School to plan with certainty for six classes overall throughout 2026/27. In the event of any in-year applications being made, the school would be better placed to refuse such applications because they would be able to show that the admission of additional children could be prejudicial to the efficient provision of education and the efficient use of resources, given the six-class structure which would be in place.

22. The Local Authority has also provided me with a summary of the School's financial position to support the variation request. This summary shows that if the proposed variation is not approved, the School is predicted to have a cumulative deficit of £14,881 at the end of the 2026-27 financial year, rising to £394,313 at the end of the 2027-28 financial year. However, if the proposed variation is approved, these figures improve significantly to a cumulative surplus of £16,153 at the end of 2026-27 and a cumulative deficit of £309,133 at the end of 2027-28. The School, therefore, requires the approval of the proposed variation for 2026/27 if it is to minimise the impact on its financial position of unplanned staffing costs.

Summary of findings

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

- a. The proposed variation does not give rise to concerns about the sufficiency of Year 3 places in the planning area for 2025/26.
- b. There is no indication of any degree of frustration of parental preference. All of the children currently at the associated infant school who want their child to be admitted to the School will be able to be admitted.
- c. By enabling the School to plan with certainty for six classes in 2026/27, the proposed variation removes the financial and organisational risk of having to plan for two Year 3 classes. If funding has to be diverted to pay for the provision of an extra class for 2026/27, there will be a significantly negative financial and organisational impact on the School, with detriment to those children already at the School and to other necessary areas of expenditure.

24. After carefully weighing the above factors, I conclude that the proposed variation is justified by the change in circumstances, and I approve it.

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 Hart Plain Junior School for 2026/27.

26. I determine that for admission in 2026/27, the published admission number for entry to Year 3 will be 31.

Dated: 2 April 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Clive Sentance