



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2701

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Liss Junior School

Date of decision: 14 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 Liss Junior School for 2026/27.

I determine that the published admission number, for admissions to Year 3 in 2026/27, shall be 32.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Admission Authority; the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Liss Junior School (the School) for the school year 2026/27.
2. The School is a community school for children aged seven to eleven years in the village of Liss, Hampshire. It is a co-educational junior 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 3, be reduced from 60, as determined, to 32 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 12 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 9 March 2026, and supporting documents;
 - the determined Arrangements and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
 - responses from the Local Authority to my requests for further information;
 - maps, including Google Maps and those showing the location of the School;
 - [VAR2616](#), in which another Schools Adjudicator approved, in September 2025, a variation to the determined admission arrangements for the School for 2025/26 by reducing the PAN which applied to admissions to Year 3 from 60 (as previously determined) to 34; 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 for 2027/28 have been determined, and that the PAN is set at 45. This means that if I decide to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the School's PAN from 60 to 32 as proposed, it will be for that school year only and it will not have a bearing on subsequent years.
11. In the interest of dealing speedily with this and other requests for variations for schools, particularly those from Hampshire County Council, 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 60 to 32 in 2026/27. The minutes of the School's governing body meeting held on 23 February 2026 showed its support for the proposal.
14. Having regard to the declining birth rates in recent years, the Admission Authority told me the following reason for it seeking a variation to the PAN for the School:

"The PAN at Liss Junior School for the 2026/27 academic year is currently 60. For the 2026 admissions round, the school received 25 1st preferences... [The] total Year 3 1st preferences for 2026 stand at 114, against a combined planning-area capacity of 150, leaving 36 surplus places...

Admissions data shows a clear reduction in Year 3 demand across the Liss/Liphook planning area since the arrangements were determined. The total number of Year 3 pupils has fallen from 140 in 2024/25 to 121 in 2025/26, a decrease of 19 pupils (14%). This fall is concentrated at Liss Junior School, where numbers have reduced from 49 to 33 (-16, 33%). This represents a significant change in the size and distribution of the Year 3 cohort, creating substantial surplus places in the planning area and leaving Liss Junior with far fewer pupils than the current PAN anticipates... With existing PANs across the planning area already providing more than sufficient capacity to meet parental preference, maintaining a PAN of 60 at Liss Junior would result in substantial surplus places and inefficient class organisation."

15. 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 60 to 32 in 2026/27. 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.
16. 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 one of two schools in the 'Liss Liphook Planning Area' (the planning area) for which the usual year of entry is Year 3. There are currently 150 places available for admission to Year 3 in these schools in September 2026, with 114 first preferences for these places, as follows:

Table 1: Expected admissions to junior schools in the planning area for September 2026.

School	PAN for Year 3	Actual First Preferences for 2026
Liphook Church of England Controlled Junior School	90	89
Liss Junior School	60	25
Total	150	114
Surplus places currently	NA	36
Surplus places if proposed variation is approved	NA	8

17. 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 there will still be a surplus of Year 3 places for September 2026 (8 places, representing 6.6 per cent of the reduced combined PAN of 122 places), which is well above the suggested two per cent, if I agreed the proposed variation to reduce the School's PAN by 28 places.
18. I note here that both junior schools have infant schools which feed to them, and 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. The Local Authority has assured me that all applicants who have expressed first preferences for the School would be offered a place on national offer day (16 April 2026).

19. I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 32 for 2026/27, there would be sufficient places for children living in the planning area and seeking a Year 3 place, and that there is unlikely to be any substantial frustration of parental preference.
20. I will now consider the impact on the School of my approving, or not approving, the proposed variation.
21. The Local Authority told me that the School is currently running seven classes, including one single Year 3 class, two Year 4 classes, two Year 5 classes, and two Year 6 classes.
22. As schools are largely funded on the number of pupils on roll and the highest costs to a school budget are staff, it is generally considered financially efficient to have classes that have around 30 pupils. If a school has classes that have many fewer than 30 pupils, then this can mean that the income from the number of pupils is less than the costs of providing a class. If this happens over several classes, a school can have severe financial challenges.
23. The Local Authority indicated that, should the variation be approved, the School would plan to restructure from seven classes to five classes in 2026/27 (including one single Year 3 class, one Year 4 class, and three mixed-aged classes for Year 5 and Year 6), ideally with about 30 pupils in each class. Although there is no maximum class size for children at a junior school, classes of many more than 30 pupils may result in challenges in relation to teaching effectiveness and the space available in classrooms.
24. The FBIT website shows that for financial year ending March 2025, the School had an in-year deficit of about £68,000, and a negative balance of about £21,000 in its revenue reserve. The Local Authority has shown me budgetary information to demonstrate that maintaining seven classes is financially unsustainable for the School, and that a move to a five-class structure will enable the School to reduce staff cost and improve its long-term financial viability.
25. Having considered all the matters above, my reasoning can be summarised as follows:
 - If the proposed variation is approved, this does not give rise to concerns about the sufficiency of Year 3 places in the planning area for 2026/27. The reduction in the School's PAN will be unlikely to result in a substantial frustration of parental preference given the number of first preference applications for the School under the normal admission round. Indeed, all of the children currently at the associated infant school who want to be admitted to the School will be offered admission. There is compelling evidence that a reduction in the PAN to 32 will allow the School to move to a five-class structure and plan some mixed-age teaching accordingly for September 2026. This will enable the School 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 3 place up to the existing PAN of 60 for any applicant in 2026/27. If over 32 children were to be admitted to the School, this would affect the School's plan for operating its intended class structure. This might consequentially require a substantial cost to employ an additional teacher and to reorganise these classes for optimal teaching outcomes and effectiveness.

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

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 Hampshire County Council for Liss Junior School for 2026/27.

28. I determine that the published admission number, for admissions to Year 3 in 2026/27, shall be 32.

Dated: 14 April 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Jackie Liu