



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2692 and VAR2693

Admission Authority: HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL FOR FAIRFIELD INFANT SCHOOL

Local Authority: HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Date of decision: 15 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 Fairfield Infant School, for 2025 and 2026.

I determine that for admission in 2025/26 the Published Admissions Number (PAN) will be 70.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the Published Admissions Number (PAN) will be 80.

By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the Admission Authority. The School Admissions Code requires the Admission Authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of this determination.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Admission Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for Fairfield Infant School (the School) for both 2025 and 2026 (the Arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged four to seven years old in Havant. It is a co-educational school with no designated religious character.
3. The proposed variation is that for 2025 entry the PAN (Published Admission Number) for the school should be 70 children. A second proposal is that for 2026 entry the PAN should be 80 children.

4. This is an adjustment to an initial submission that the PANs should be changed to 75 in 2025 and 75 in 2026.

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):

6. “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.

7. 3.7 Admission authorities **must** notify the appropriate bodies of all variations.”

8. The Arrangements for 2025 were determined by the Admission Authority on 20 February 2024.

9. The Arrangements for 2026 were determined by the Admission Authority on 12 February 2025.

10. The Admission Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code, including the revision of the figure proposed. The Admission Authority has provided me with confirmation that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variation and supports it. The Admission Authority has confirmed that the revised submission has also been notified to relevant bodies.

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

12. In the interests of dealing speedily with this and the many other requests for variations at this time, 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.

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

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

- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 3 March 2026 and supporting documents; and
- the determined Arrangements for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements; and
- responses from the LA and the School to my requests for further information, which included a request to amend the variation requested; and
- maps, including Google Maps and those showing the location of the School; and
- information available on the websites of the DfE (including the 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS) [and 'Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool' (FBIT)] website[s]), the LA, and the School (including its Arrangements for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027), and Ofsted.

15. I would like to extend my thanks to the Admission Authority and the School for their responses to my requests for further information.

16. I have been provided with a substantial amount of information / data by the Admission Authority and the School. I have referred only to that which has a bearing on my determination.

17. 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.

18. I note here that the Arrangements for 2027/2028 have been determined, and the PAN for admission to Reception for September 2027 is 90 children

Consideration of proposed variation

19. 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.

20. 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 School is in the Havant planning area.

21. The School Arrangements set out the following oversubscription criteria for both 2025 and 2026 entry:

“When Fairfield Infant School is oversubscribed, after the admission of pupils with an Education, Health and Care plan naming the school, priority for admission will be given to children in the following order:

1. Looked after children or children who were previously looked after.
2. Children or families with an exceptional medical and/or social need.
3. Children of staff who have, (1) been employed at Fairfield Infant School for two or more years at the time at which the application for admission to the school is made, or (2) have been recruited to fill a vacant post for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage.
4. Children living in the catchment area of Fairfield Infant School who at the time of application have a sibling on the roll of Fairfield Infant School or linked junior school, Bosmere Junior School, who will still be on roll at the time of admission.
5. Other children living in the catchment area of Fairfield Infant School.
6. Children living out of the catchment area of Fairfield Infant School who at the time of application have a sibling on the roll of Fairfield Infant School or the linked junior school, Bosmere Junior School, who will still be on roll at the time of admission.
7. Other children.”

22. The Authority initially proposed that the Published Admissions Number for the admission of children into Reception class should be reduced from 90 to 75. The reason for it seeking a variation is to better match the demand for places at the School to the declining need in the area for such places. Limited deployment of some mixed age teaching would, in the view of the Authority, still enable parental preferences for the school of their choice to be met. The financial savings of this step would be substantial and would ensure the on-going viability of the school.

23. A first preference is made for the school that a parent most wants their child to attend. The number of first preferences across a planning area gives an indication of demand for places at the time of application. In this planning area, there are fewer places taken up than first preferences made. The evidence provided by the Authority initially suggested that if the PAN were reduced by thirty places to 70 and 75 for admissions in 2025 and 2026, there could still be around 90 vacant places in the planning area. The percentage of vacant places in the planning area for 2026/27, if the PAN for the School remains at 90, is forecast at around 22 per cent which is a high proportion. I was assured that if the PAN for the School were reduced to 80 for admissions in 2026/27 that there would be sufficient places in the planning area to meet demand.

24. The Authority communicated its intent to seek a variation to the PAN for the School to necessary stakeholders as required. The same communication indicated that two other schools are seeking PAN reductions totalling 19 children in 2025/26. Those two schools and

one other are seeking reductions of an additional 61 children in 2026/27. None of these schools are within 3 miles of the school. There would have remained a surplus of places in the area for Reception entry, with high likelihood of all on-time first-preferences being met.

25. The Authority originally stated:

“The Published Admission Number (PAN) at Fairfield Infant School for the 2025/26 academic year is 90; however, the school currently has only 68 children on roll in Year R. This is consistent with the wider picture across the Havant Primary planning area, where there are 348 children in the current Year R cohort despite 525 places being available.

First preference data reinforces this pattern of sustained surplus capacity. For the 2026/27 academic year, there are 409 first preference applications for 525 Reception places, leaving a surplus of 116 places (22%). Fairfield Infant School has received 67 first preferences against a PAN of 90. Several schools in the planning area remain undersubscribed—such as Riders Infant School (20 first preferences against a PAN of 60), St Alban’s CE Primary (19 against 30), and Sharps Copse Primary (31 against 45)—with only one school marginally oversubscribed. This demonstrates that sufficient capacity exists across the planning area to meet parental demand if the proposed PAN reduction is approved.

The lower demand at Fairfield Infant School, alongside similar trends in neighbouring schools, reflects an area wide demographic decline rather than a school specific issue. Reducing the PAN is therefore a proportionate and reasonable response that will not restrict parental choice or displace children from the local area. The proposal is aligned with the local authority’s broader school place planning strategy, which seeks to balance surplus capacity with falling demand across the Havant admissions planning area.”

Table 1: School organisation as of March 2026, School submission

	Foundation	Key Stage 1		
Class	Reception	Y1	Y2	Total
1	24			
2	24			
3	20			
4		29		
5		30		
6		30		
7			21	
8			23	
9			23	
Total	68	80	67	224

26. The Chair of Governors of the School has stated:

“If the variation is not agreed, the school would likely become virtually unsustainable as the financial impact of running and staffing 9 classes would inevitably lead to further substantial cuts to all leadership roles and most support roles. Currently the school is already undergoing a restructure and further significant cuts to key roles would compromise the quality of education and provision for the children attending the school.

If the variation were agreed this would enable the school to significantly reduce a currently growing in-year deficit and hence secure the financial stability to maintain the staffing and resources to deliver a high quality of education for the community it services.”

27. The Authority originally stated:

“Reducing the PAN is essential to enable the school to move to an 8-class structure which is required to address the projected deficit. This model involves mixed-age teaching and a reduction in staffing, but it is only viable if the intake is limited. A PAN of 75 allows the school to operate eight classes sustainably, avoids triggering an additional class, and still exceeds the 67 first-preferences received for the coming year, providing the minimum adjustment needed to ensure financial viability.”

28. The Authority provided further data on the situation in Reception admissions in the Havant planning area overall. This shows that the number of first-preference choices made in that area between 2022 and 2026 has been 384 at its lowest and 420 at its highest. Through this period the number of available places in the planning area has been 525.

29. Over the same period, the School has never come close to admitting near to its PAN of 90. In only one year, 2024/2025, did the School attract more first preferences than the originally proposed new PAN of 75, with 78 children applying in that year.

30. It was clear from the data provided by the Admission Authority, that the LA has a picture of recent / projected demand in schools in its planning areas.

31. The number of surplus places in the planning area projected for 2026 entry to Reception might have been obvious in enough time for PAN reduction to have been dealt with through the consultation process prior to the determination of the Arrangements. This might lead to a view that applying now for PAN reduction is not appropriate.

32. To balance this, there is limited accuracy of the data on the number of places needed. In 2024, the School had a one-off large intake of 85 students into Reception, which may have made the authority hesitant to reduce the PAN in the normal way, through consultation on revised arrangements. This will be heightened by the Local Authority's obligation to ensure sufficiency of Reception places. A variation in data on the number of places needed at the School between the beginning and end of March is also troubling.

These traits lead me to see the steps taken by the authority to only now seek to reduce the planned supply of Reception places as reasonable. It might also suggest that long term consultation and modelling is all the more necessary.

33. The Authority was clear in its original submission that the school will tend to admit some children to Reception on second and third preference. The Authority contacted the Adjudicator in mid-March 2026 to flag that a dry run of the process revealed a need for 79 places, four children more than the proposed PAN of 75. The Authority stated that it wished to amend its proposal so that the PAN for 2025 entrants be set at 70, and that for 2026 entrants by 80.

34. Three of the unallocated children selected the School as their first and only preference. This may be a consequence of the submission for a reduction in PAN for the School for 2026/2027 being unknown to the community at large. Applicants may have assumed that with a historic PAN of 90 children, and with all first preference applicants being successful in recent years, there was no need to do other than to select the School as a first and only preference.

35. This raises considerable issues of fairness. Not only would these families not qualify for their first preference. They will also be allocated a place at a school which is unpreferred, the applicants not realising that there was any likelihood of needing a “second choice”. Meeting the preference expressed by these families led the Authority to revise its proposal to a PAN of 70 in 2025/2026 and 80 in 2026/2027.

36. This would allow school re-organisation as follows, with one mixed age class which would roll up through the school.

Table 2: Projected school organisation for September 2026, Adjudicator figures

	Foundation		Key Stage 1		
Class	Reception		Y1	Y2	Total
1	29				
2	30				
3	20		8		
4			30		
5			30		
6				30	
7				30	
8				29	
Total	79		68	89	236

37. I have considered the impact of decreasing admission numbers on school finances balanced against the impact that reducing the School’s PAN could have on meeting parental preferences.

38. Parents have a right to express a preference as to where their children go to school. However, admission authorities cannot give any guarantee that preferences will be met. Additionally, 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). The cost of a teacher and the resources necessary for an infant class, when compared to, say, a junior or secondary school teacher / class (where numbers are not limited), has to be borne by proportionately smaller income from the children admitted to infant classes.

39. The proposed changes to the PAN for 2025 can have only a marginal budget effect in 2025-2026. It essentially fixes the current roll. If fixed at 70 places, there stand to be two available places for children to be admitted to Reception mid-year. Fixing at 70 does however, provide the downstream benefit that if the PAN is fixed at 80 for 2026 entry, the school's capacity in 2026/2027 is for 150 children in Reception and Year 1. This makes possible a meeting of needs through five classes, one of which must be mixed age.

40. The Authority has stated that the cost effect of the originally suggested PAN reduction to 75 would be that by 2027/28 the school would be running a budget surplus in-year of £2,520, with an accumulated deficit of £78,142. If the change is not made and the PAN remains 90, the in-year deficit would be £191,511, and the cumulative deficit £429,208. This is a substantial saving.

41. Were the PAN revision to be from 90 to 80 children rather than 75, the saving might be expected to be greater still. Only eight classes would be needed, but the school would receive increased income from higher student numbers, each class almost full to its maximum 30 children.

42. Were the original proposal of a reduction to 75 places to stand, it would clearly run against the parental preference of identifiable children. These families may or may not seek redress through the Admissions Appeals process, and the School could not defend itself through high class size: it would be the PAN which prevented allocation of places. Both the School and allocated schools would be in limbo awaiting the appeal process decision.

43. If both that and the revised proposal were to be rejected, the PAN of 90 for 2026/2027 would remain in place. The school could proceed with its planned organisation but may be reluctant to do so. In year admission to either Reception or Year 1 classes in 2026/2027 could continue until the PAN of 90 is reached. The school may find it has to revise or reverse its re-organisation.

44. If the revised proposal of a PAN of 80 for 2026/2027 is agreed, all parental preferences are met; the re-organisation can proceed; cost savings will follow. The planning area would in future years have to manage one of its schools being close to the class size limit in all cohorts.

45. I note that the submission made by the School incorporates projected need for the planning area for 2026/2027 and 2027/2028. This shows an expected need of 474 places for 2026/2027 and 424 places for 2027/2028. These figures are high compared to recent declining norms, but the Authority has determined a PAN of 90 children from 2027/2028 which will meet that need.

46. The Admission Authority initially presented a secure argument for the variation it proposed. The originally requested change to the PAN of the School for 2025/26 and 2026/27 was well founded in the historic data for the School, and broader demographic change in the local area.

47. The 2026/27 figures are now securely based on applications made. There is no shortfall in places needed at the school in 2027/2028.

48. At the same time, the evidence presented regarding school re-organisation and finance is detailed and compelling. I accept that the Admission Authority has provided compelling evidence that it will be able to manage school places in the planning area by reducing the PAN at the School for both 2025/26 and 2026/27.

Determination

49. 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 Fairfield Infant School, for 2025 and 2026.

50. I determine that for admission in 2025/26 the Published Admissions Number (PAN) will be 70.

52. I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the Published Admissions Number (PAN) will be 80.

53. By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the Admission Authority. The School Admissions Code requires the Admission Authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of this determination.

Dated: 15 April 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Paddy Storrie