



## Determination

**Case reference:** VAR2716

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

**Date of decision:** 29 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 Northern Infant School, for 2025/26.

I determine that for admission in 2025/26 the published admission number will be changed to 40 thereby limiting additional admissions to Reception prior to September 2026.

### The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Admission Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Northern Infant School (the School) for 2025/26.
2. The School is a community school for children age five to seven in Portchester, Hampshire. It is a co-educational, non-selective school with no designated religious character. It is federated with Northern Junior School.
3. The Admission Authority for the School is the local authority (LA). As the LA is the Admission Authority, both terms are used throughout this determination.
4. Parties to the request are the LA and the School.
5. The proposed variation is to reduce the current published admission number (PAN) for Reception (YR) from 45 to 40 for the remainder of the 2025/26 academic year.

## 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 20 February 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 and confirmation that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variation.

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

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

- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 26 March 2026;
- the determined Arrangements for 2025/26 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- responses from the LA, and the School to my requests for further information;
- maps, including Google Maps and those showing the location of the School; and
- information available on the websites of gov.uk including ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS).

11. I would like to extend my thanks to the LA and the School for their prompt responses to my requests for further information.

12. 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.

13. I note here that the Arrangements for 2026/27 and 2027/28 have been determined. This means that if I agree to the Admission Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2025/26 by reducing the PAN from 45 to 40 as proposed, it will be for the remainder of that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.

14. In the interest of dealing speedily with this request, 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

15. 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.

16. The Admission Authority has proposed that the PAN for admission to YR in 2025/26 be reduced from 45 to 40 for the remainder of the 2025/26 academic year.

17. The Admission Authority told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the School is because since the Arrangements were determined, the number of children joining YR has fallen to 40, which is below the current PAN of 45. This represents a significant reduction from the previous year's intake of 53 and is inconsistent with the wider planning area, where overall YR demand has remained broadly stable. The unexpected fall in admissions at the School means that, without the proposed variation, the school may be required to run an additional class across years 1 and 2 which would be "educationally and financially unsustainable" because it would be for one year and would be financially inefficient due to consequential small classes for that year.

18. The Governing Body of the School support the variation request and outlined the following reasons:

- The School is currently managing falling rolls across the federation. While the PAN for the infant's school is now fixed at 45 for future years, there is a specific issue related to the current Y1 cohort. There are 50 pupils on roll in Y1 which is a "bulge year".
- With 50 pupils in Y1 moving to Y2, the variation request would lead to 40 pupils moving from YR to Y1 and therefore 90 pupils in Y1 and Y2 in September 2026. This would enable the School to run three mixed-age classes of 30 pupils across the two year groups.

- The Governing Body is conscious that with a PAN of 45, the School could be required to admit additional pupils into YR (above the current 40) if applications are received before 31 August 2026.
- The HT noted that service families often move into the area during the summer term, making it likely that more pupils will apply to the school in the summer term.
- If the total number of pupils in Y1 and Y2 exceeds 90 pupils, there is concern that a requirement to run four mixed-age classes instead of three will have a significant financial impact on the School.

19. Local authorities have a duty to ensure there are sufficient school places for children in their area. Normally they assess need based on geographical areas known as planning areas. In this case, the planning area has four other schools including three primary schools that admit children to YR and Northern Junior School that admits children in Y3.

**Table 1: Schools in planning area with entry to YR and PAN between 2023 and 2027.**

School	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Castle Primary School	60	60	60	60	60
Northern Infant School	45	60	45*	45	45
Red Barn Community Primary School	30	30	30	30	30
Wicor Primary School	60	60	60	60	60
Total YR PAN	195	210	195	195	195

\* The proposed variation would reduce the PAN for the School to 40 and the planning area PAN to 190 for the remainder 2025/26 academic year.

20. The LA has provided information to indicate the number of children admitted to YR between 2023/24 and 2025/26 as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Number of children admitted to YR in the planning area for three years.**

School	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Castle Primary School	43	55	51
Northern Infant School	41	53	40
Red Barn Community Primary School	30	30	30
Wicor Primary School	61	45	58
Total YR admissions in planning area	175	183	179

21. Data in Tables 1 and 2 illustrate that there is sufficient capacity in the planning area to ensure that the LA meets its statutory obligation to ensure there are enough places in the relevant year groups to satisfy demand. I am satisfied that the proposed variation will not have a significant impact on parental preference.

22. The School is subject to the provisions of the School Admissions (Infant Class Size) (England) Regulations 2012 (the infant class size regulations) which require that infant classes (those where the majority of children will reach age of five, six or seven during the school year) must not contain more than 30 pupils with a single qualified school teacher except in specific exceptional circumstances. The infant class size regulations apply to YR, Y1 and Y2.

23. The School has a structure of five classes, including three mixed-age classes in Y1 and Y2 as illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3: School five class structure in 2025/26**

Class	YR	Y1	Y2	Total
1	20	-	-	20
2	20	-	-	20
3	-	17	13	30
4	-	15	15	30
5	-	18	12	30
Total	40	50*	40	129

\* Table 3 illustrates the larger year group in Y1.

24. Maintaining a total of 90 pupils or less across Y1 and Y2 in September 2026 will enable the School to plan for the proposed class structure illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4: Proposed class structure for 2026/27.**

Class	YR	Y1	Y2	Total
1	23	-	-	23
2	22	-	-	22
3	-	14	16	30
4	-	13	17	30
5	-	13	17	30

Class	YR	Y1	Y2	Total
Total	45	40	50	129

25. Table 4 illustrates that Y1 and Y2 classes are likely to be full in 2026/27. It also indicates that should demand arise, there is capacity to admit additional pupils into YR. I am satisfied that, based on information in Tables 1 and 2, there remain enough places in the planning area in Y1 and Y2 to meet demand. Currently, there would be 11 vacant places available for any children requiring a YR place if the variation is approved.

26. The School has a planned curriculum structure based on mixed-age classes in Y1 and Y2. They seek to maintain single-age classes in YR.

27. Schools are funded largely based on the number of pupils. Staff costs are normally the most significant financial commitment in any school. To remain financially sustainable, most schools seek to have as close to 30 pupils as possible in classes but due to the infant class size regulations they cannot normally exceed that number.

28. The Local Authority have stated that:

“The School’s budget remains broadly manageable under the planned five class structure, with the cumulative position projected to stay positive through 2026/27 (£2,573 surplus) before moving to a modest deficit of £19,980 in 2027/28. This is a level the school can address through normal financial planning.

However, if the School is required to run six classes, the financial position deteriorates rapidly due to the extra staffing costs.”

The LA project that if the variation is not approved the School would face an in-year deficit of £56,862 in 2026/27 leading to a cumulative deficit of £67,859 by the end of 2027/28.

29. I have considered the competing needs of providing the school places that parents want for their children and the financial viability of the School. 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. I am satisfied that there are sufficient suitable places in the planning area.

30. The Admission Authority has presented a compelling argument for the unusual and short-term variation it proposes. Enabling the School to plan effectively for the new academic year in the knowledge that it will not be obliged to create an additional class at short notice to comply with class size regulations will ensure the financial sustainability of the School. I accept that the LA has provided evidence that it will be able to manage school places in the planning area if the PAN at Northern Infant School is reduced for the remainder of 2025/26 academic year.

31. I, therefore, agree that the PAN for Northern Infant School for 2025/26 will be reduced from 45 to 40 for the remainder of the 2025/26 academic year.

## **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 Northern Infant School, for 2025/26.**

**I determine that for admission in 2025/26 the published admission number will be changed to 40 thereby limiting additional admissions to Reception prior to September 2026.**

Dated: 29 April 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Mr Philip Lloyd