



Office of  
the Schools  
Adjudicator

## Determination

<b>Case reference:</b>	<b>VAR2719 and VAR2726</b>
<b>Admission Authority:</b>	<b>The Governing Body for Ravenswood Primary School</b>
<b>Local Authority:</b>	<b>Newcastle City Council</b>
<b>Date of decision:</b>	<b>19 May 2026</b>

### Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by the Governing Body of Ravenswood Primary School for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 and 2027/28 the Published Admission Number shall be 60.

### The referral

1. The Governing Body for Ravenswood Primary School (the Admission Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for variations to the admission arrangements for Ravenswood Primary School (the School) for 2026/27 and 2027/28 (the Arrangements). There are effectively two separate proposals – one for each year – but, since the facts and reasons are identical, I have dealt with them together.
2. The School is a foundation school for children aged 3 to 11 in Newcastle upon Tyne. It is a co-educational, non-selective school with no designated religious character. The School is located in the Newcastle City Council area.
3. The Admission Authority for the School is the Governing Body of the School.
4. Parties to the request are the Admission Authority and the Local Authority (LA).
5. The proposed variations are that the Published Admission Number (PAN) for 2026/27 and 2027/28 be reduced from 90 to 60.

## 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 3 February 2026 for 2027/28. For 2026/27, I have been provided with minutes from a governing body document dated 10 November 2025 stating that “Governors Agreed that the Admissions policy for 2026-2027 to remain unchanged”. Assuming this is the date the arrangements for 2026/27 were determined, it was after the deadline for determining arrangements which was 28 February 2025. This does not affect the standing of the 2026/27 Arrangements or my power to consider them or the proposed variation.

8. The Admission Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variations in line with the Code.

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

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

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

- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 1 April 2026 and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 and 2027/28 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 gov.uk websites (including the 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS) and 'Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool' (FBIT) websites), and the websites of the LA and the School.

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

13. 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.

14. I note here that the Arrangements for 2028/29 have not yet been determined. This means that if I decide to approve the proposed variation to the Arrangements for 2027/28 by reducing the PAN from 90 to 60 as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for the determination of PAN for subsequent years.

## 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 variations are justified by the change in circumstances.

16. The Admission Authority has proposed that the PAN for 2026/27 and 2027/28 be reduced from 90 to 60.

17. The Admission Authority told me that the reason for seeking variations for the School is a decline in pupil numbers coupled with unpredictability for the future of their building. The School is affected by the provisions of the School Admissions (Infant Class Size) (England) Regulations 2012 which 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. The Admission Authority said that:

"In September 2026, the Reception intake will fall to 60 pupils (2FE) for the first time, and local authority data shows that neighbouring schools are also likely to have unfilled reception places. We are therefore requesting a variation to temporarily reduce our PAN from 90 to 60 from September 2026. If the PAN remains at 90 for 2026/27, with only 60 place offers, a small number of additional late or in-year applications (e.g., one or two pupils) would require us—under infant class size legislation—to open an additional class. This would place an unsustainable financial burden on the school."

18. The LA also told me that their forecasts show a continued decrease in birth rates and anticipated reduced demand for primary places in the area, albeit with some year-on-year fluctuations in specific localities, and that reducing the PAN would help the School operate sustainably and support a more efficient distribution of pupils across other local schools.

19. In addition, both the School and the LA have raised the issue of the condition of the school building. The LA has submitted a bid to the Department for Education (DfE) for the School to be considered for the School Rebuilding Programme. Depending on the progress of the rebuilding proposal, temporary accommodation arrangements for some or all pupils may be required in the interim. I am told that when a confirmed plan for rebuilding is in place, full consideration will be given to the appropriate size of the school needed to meet future local demand.

Availability of school places

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. For the School, the planning area is identified as ‘Inner East’ and comprises nine schools that admit children to Reception.

21. I have been provided with data by the School and the LA for the period 2023/24 to 2026/27 and projected data for the 2027/28 admissions year for all primary schools in the Inner East planning area. Table 1 below shows, for each year, the sums of the PANs for the planning area, the number of children admitted (or projected) and calculations on surplus places. This includes estimates if the PAN at the School is 60 or 90.

**Table 1: Data relating to the total PAN and numbers on roll for the planning area**

Year	Total PAN (with a PAN of 90 at the School)	Total PAN (with a PAN of 60 at the School)	On roll at census date	Vacant places after census date
2023/24	472	-	427	45
2024/25	472	-	452	20
2025/26	472	-	429	43
2026/27	472	442	383 offered	89 (PAN of 90) 59 (PAN of 60)
2027/28	465	435	424 forecast	41 (PAN of 90) 11 (PAN of 60)

22. On the face of the data, if the current trend continues, there would be around 2.5 per cent surplus places available in 2027/28 should I agree to reduce the PAN of the School for that year. I raised with the LA the fact that for each of the previous years a number of children have been admitted to schools in the planning area during the academic year and that if this trend were to continue, and I were to agree to the reduction in PAN, the number of surplus places would be low. The LA has told me that this is a result of a number of

factors, including late Reception applications for families already living in the local area as well as in-year admissions after the start of the school term. These applicants do not necessarily live within the planning area, although some will do so. The LA has stated that there is currently a two-year trend showing a reduction of net migration in Newcastle after a number of years of increased inward migration. There is not enough evidence as yet to conclude whether this is temporary or part of a longer-term change.

23. I am told that the forecasts reflect previous patterns of admissions into schools in the planning area. Across Inner East primary schools, around a third of their current population live outside this planning area. On the projected data, with a PAN reduction, the surplus of 2.5 per cent of Reception places across the planning area is a small operating margin, but the LA believes it should be sufficient, especially given that there has been a reduction in net migration in the last two years and there are places available in adjacent school planning areas. The LA has stated it can support the School’s proposed reduction in PAN for 2026/27 and 2027/28 while it monitors net migration rates.

24. Additionally, the DfE 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 ... to support parental choice, pupil population movement, and general manageability of the system”. Based on the projected data, the proportion of vacant places in the planning area would remain higher than two per cent if I were to agree to the proposed variations.

25. The LA has also told me that if, in 2027/28, all schools in the Inner East planning area were full on National Offer Day, fewer pupils from outside of the planning area would be offered a school place. There are expected to be places available for all pupils who live in the Outer East planning area and falling pupil numbers in the neighbouring North Tyneside planning area.

Parental preference

26. I have been provided with data showing parental preferences for the School for the years 2023/24 to 2026/27. Table 2 shows that the number of first preferences for the School has been below the current PAN of 90 for each of those years and in 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27 has been below the proposed reduced PAN of 60.

**Table 2: Data showing first preferences for the School**

Year	First preference for the School
2023/24	69
2024/25	54
2025/26	58
2026/27	59

27. Table 3 provides preference data for the Inner East planning area for the year 2026/27. There are two primary schools, Chillingham Road Primary School and Cragside

Primary School, which are both less than 1 kilometre from the School and which each offered eight places fewer than their PAN on National Offer Day. Based on this data, if the proposed variation for 2026/27 is agreed, there would be 59 surplus YR places in the area, spread across five schools.

**Table 3: PAN, preference and offer data for schools in the Inner East planning area for 2026/27**

<b>School</b>	<b>2026/27 PAN</b>	<b>Number of first preferences</b>	<b>Number of offers made</b>
Benton Park Primary School	60	63	60
Chillingham Road Primary School	30	22	22
Christ Church CE Primary	22	16	16
Cragside Primary School	60	40	52
Hotspur Primary School	60	41	42
Ravenswood Primary School	90	59	60
St Catherine's Catholic Primary School	30	11	11
St Teresa's Catholic Primary School	30	34	30
West Jesmond Primary School	90	115	90
<b>Total</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>383</b>

#### Financial position

28. The School has provided information on its budget for 2026/27 and its projected budget for 2027/28 on the basis of a PAN of 90 and a PAN of 60. The budgeting information shows that on current pupil number projections, reducing the PAN to 60 would mean a saving of £55,983 for 2026/27 and a saving of £174,225 for 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. There is no basis to suggest that amending the PAN to 60 would adversely impact parents who choose the School as their first preference.

#### Summary of findings

30. Having considered the matters above, I summarise my findings as follows: reducing the PAN to 60 for the next two years reflects the recent trend in applications and first preferences. It will allow the School to manage its finances and provides some certainty until the School's accommodation issues can be progressed. I accept that the LA has provided compelling evidence that it will be able to manage school places in the planning area if the PAN at the School is reduced to 60 for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

31. I, therefore, agree that the PAN for Ravenswood Primary School should be reduced from 90 to 60 for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

## Determination

32. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by the Governing Body for Ravenswood Primary School for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

33. I determine that for admission in 2026/27 and 2027/28 the Published Admission Number shall be 60.

Dated: 19 May 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Miranda Barnett