



## Determination

<b>Case reference:</b>	<b>VAR2720</b>
<b>Admission Authority:</b>	<b>Surrey County Council for The Grange Community Infant School</b>
<b>Date of decision:</b>	<b>20 May 2026</b>

### 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 Surrey County Council for The Grange Community Infant School, for 2026/27.**

**I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number will be 60.**

### The referral

1. Surrey County Council (the Admission Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for The Grange Community Infant School (the School) for 2026/27 (the Arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged four to seven in Addlestone, Surrey. It is a co-educational, non-selective school with no designated religious character.
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 Local Authority and the Governing Body of the School.
5. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) be reduced from 90 to 60 for admission to Reception (YR) in the academic year that begins in September 2026.

### 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 28 January 2025.

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. The LA has also provided me with 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. In considering the variation 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 15 April 2026 and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- responses from the LA and the School to my requests for further information;
- a previous OSA determination in relation to the School (case reference VAR2625-2626);
- a map showing the location of the School and other schools within the planning area; and
- information available on gov.uk websites (including ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS) and ‘Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool’ (FBIT)) and the websites of the School and the Local Authority.

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 2027/28 have been determined. This means that if I agree to the Admission Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 as proposed, it will be for that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years. I also note that the PAN for 2027/28 has been determined to be 60.

## Consideration of proposed variation

15. The Admissions Authority has proposed that the PAN for the School is reduced from 90 to 60 for entry to YR during 2026/27.

16. 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.

17. The Admission Authority told me that the reasons for it seeking a variation for the School are:

Background and necessity: This application follows the previous determination by the OSA, where a reduction of PAN to 60 was granted for the 2025 cohort only. At that time, the Adjudicator indicated that a decision for the 2026 cohort should be deferred until concrete preference and allocation data were available.

This variation for 2026/27 is now necessary because:

Current allocation data: The school has 59 preference offers for the September 2026 intake. Maintaining a PAN of 90 in this context would result in 31 vacancies, creating a significant and unsustainable funding gap.

Operational stability: A PAN of 60 aligns the school's capacity with actual demand, allowing for two stable classes of 30. This avoids the pedagogical and financial inefficiency of running three under-capacity classes.

Strategic alignment: The local authority has already formally consulted on a reduction to 60 from September 2027. This variation provides the necessary bridge to ensure the 2026 intake is consistent with both the 2025 approved reduction and the 2027 arrangements.

While the planning area forecasts suggest a potential deficit of places for 2026/27 and in future years, our analysis indicates that these figures do not accurately reflect the immediate and emerging reality of the number of pupils actually on roll at schools. These forecasts rely on historical trends that have now been superseded by a

significant shift in parental preference and pupil movement, meaning that there is a growing divergence between projections and actual numbers on roll. This will be adjusted in future iterations of our projections as new pupil movement trends become clearer and can be quantified.

As a result, maintaining a higher PAN based solely on forecasts creates an artificial oversupply of places. This leads to significant volatility in terms of sustainability, making it increasingly difficult for the school to set a reliable budget or organise staffing structures with any degree of certainty.

By adjusting the PAN now, the school can establish a more sustainable baseline that aligns with current demand. Should local demand genuinely surge in the future and is evidenced through the level of applications for schools in the area, the local authority remains committed to reviewing the number of places available in the area and commissioning bulge provision or increasing PANs to ensure statutory duties are met.”

18. 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 of the School is reduced from 90 to 60 for 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 meeting parental preference, and whether the proposed reduction is justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.

19. The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient 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 each containing a number of schools, for this purpose. The School is based in the Addlestone and Ottershaw primary planning area of the Local Authority. There are nine schools in the planning area including five primary schools, two infant schools (including the School) and two junior schools. The primary and infant schools admit children into YR.

20. Table 1 summarises data about school places for the seven schools in the planning area that admit children to YR. The table includes the number of children admitted to YR in each of the previous three years; and forecast data for 2026/27.

**Table 1: School places in the planning area and admissions to YR**

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
<b>The sum of the PANs across the planning area for schools admitting children to YR</b>	330	330	300	330
<b>The number of children admitted to YR or forecast to be admitted</b>	330	293	294*	299**
<b>The number of vacant places</b>	0	37	6	31

\* On 5 May 2026, the LA confirmed that for 2025/26 316 offers were made for schools in the planning area. However, due to “a consistent drop-out between offer day and the start of term; by the October census, the overall number on roll across the planning area had dropped to 294.”

\*\* Total number of places offered as of 5 May 2026.

21. In addition to confirming that 299 places have been offered for September 2026, the LA also said:

“... all existing vacancies are concentrated at The Grange Infant School, with all other schools within the planning area at capacity. Consequently, The Grange is effectively carrying the total surplus for the area, resulting in a significantly under-subscribed intake.

Current allocation data shows that there is additional capacity in the adjacent planning area Byfleet & West Byfleet. These vacancies provide a secondary safety net for the small number of pupils that the forecast suggests may require a place. Should demand increase beyond current forecasts and necessitate additional provision in the future, the school and the local authority remain committed to a collaborative response. However, maintaining notional capacity in the interim poses a greater risk to the school's viability than a managed reduction.

There are 9 vacancies at St Mary’s CE (Controlled) Primary School which is 1.7 miles by straight line distance [from the School].”

22. If the proposed variation were agreed, there would be one vacant place in the planning area. This place would be at the School.

23. I will now consider the demand for places at the School. Table 2 summarises recent admissions to the School and includes the number of places allocated, as of 5 May 2026, for admission in September 2026.

**Table 2: The number of children admitted to YR at the School or forecast to be admitted in 2026**

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
<b>The PAN for the School</b>	90	90	60	90
<b>The number of first preferences</b>	77	47	60	49
<b>The number of children admitted or forecast to be admitted to YR</b>	90	56	61	59
<b>The number of vacant places</b>	0	34	-1	31*

\* If the proposed variation is agreed, there would be one vacant place.

24. Table 2 shows that the number of parents selecting the School as their first preference for a YR place for their child has fluctuated in recent years. However, the number of children admitted to the School has been around 60 since September 2024.

25. 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 infant class size regulations apply to Year R, Year 1 and Year 2.

26. Schools are largely funded based on the number of pupils on their rolls, and the highest cost to a school budget is its staff. Most infant and primary schools aim to have close to 30 pupils in a class. If a school has class sizes that are many fewer than 30, this can mean that the income from the number of pupils is less than the costs of providing a class. When this happens over several classes, a school can face significant financial challenges.

27. If the PAN remains at 90, the Admission Authority would be required to admit to the School any child during the 2026/27 academic year whose parents request a Reception place at the School until 90 children have been admitted. By reducing the PAN to 60, the School will be able to plan with certainty knowing that two YR classes will be required across the year.

28. In support of the proposed variation, the Governing Body said:

“The school faces a number of challenges including a looming financial deficit for the current financial year (26/27). Approval of the variation is vital to ensure the risks associated with the need for an increased number of classes (3 not 2 should PAN be 61+ for September 2026 intake) and for those classes not being at capacity, and therefore, incurring increased costs (e.g. An additional teacher and classroom) do not come to fruition. It is vital the school is as resource efficient as possible in light of the challenging financial situation. The variation will assist the school and governing body in planning and implementing efficiency measures going forward.”

29. The Local Authority said:

“Given that a PAN of 60 has already been formally determined for 2027, this variation simply ensures that the school is not forced to sustain an avoidable financial loss in the final year of its transition to being a 2FE [form of entry] primary school.”

30. In September 2026, based on current pupil numbers, the School will have 60 children in Year 1 and 53 children in Year 2. The School intends to provide two classes per year group. As the School is subject to the Infant Class Size Regulations, there is little scope for the School to consider organising classes any differently, for example in mixed-age classes. Therefore, reducing the PAN to 60 is an appropriate action to take in the School's circumstances.

31. Having considered the matters above, I summarise my findings as follows:
- all parents who expressed a first preference for a YR place at the School in September 2026 have been offered a place, this includes late applicants;
  - reducing the PAN to 60 for 2026/27 will allow the School to manage its finances and provides certainty on the number of classes and associated staffing required; and
  - the reduction in PAN will leave very few YR places available in the planning area. However, I accept the LA's assertion that it will be able to manage school places in the area if the PAN at the School is reduced to 60 for 2026/27. Specifically, I note the LA's statements that pupil numbers in the area generally fall between offer day in April and the start of September and that there are YR places available in neighbouring planning areas.

32. I, therefore, agree that the PAN for the School should be reduced from 90 to 60 for 2026/27.

33. I note here that reducing the PAN does not reduce the overall capacity of the School unless accommodation is being removed from the premises. It is not being suggested that accommodation is being removed and so the physical capacity of the School remains the same. Reducing the PAN will not change that. What this means is that should there be a need for the School to increase its PAN and / or admit more children in 2026/27 than it currently expects to, there remains the capacity in the building for it to do so.

## **Determination**

34. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Surrey County Council for The Grange Community Infant School, for 2026/27.

35. I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number will be 60.

Dated: 20 May 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Catherine Crooks