



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	VAR2732
Admission Authority:	Hampshire County Council for Elson Junior School in Gosport, Hampshire
Local Authority:	Hampshire County Council
Date of decision:	3 June 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 Elson Junior School for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27, the published admission number for entry to Year 3 will be 70.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Local Authority) for Elson Junior School (the School) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for 2026/27 (the Arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged seven to eleven in Gosport, Hampshire. The Local Authority is the admission authority for the School.
3. The parties to the request are the School and the Local Authority.
4. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (the PAN) for 2026/27 is reduced from 90 to 70.

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):

“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”.

6. The Arrangements were determined by the Local Authority on 12 February 2025. 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 it has the support of the governing body of the School.

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

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

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

- the referral from the Local Authority dated 21 May 2026 and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- maps, including Google Maps, showing the location of the School and other schools; and
- information available on government websites, including ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS).

10. 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.

11. I note here that the Arrangements for 2027/28 have already been determined. This means that if I agree to the Local Authority’s request to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the PAN from 90 to 70 as proposed, it will be for that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.

12. In the interests of dealing speedily with this and other requests for variations, particularly from Hampshire County Council, 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.

Consideration of proposed variation

13. 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.

14. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Local Authority is set out in the referral as follows:

“This reduction is necessary to align the PAN with actual and projected pupil numbers and to secure the school’s ongoing financial and organisational viability.

For September 2026, Elson Junior School received just 67 offers against a PAN of 90. Across the planning area for the year 3 intake there were only 220 offers made against a total PAN of 270 places, resulting in 50 unfilled places overall across the Gosport Central primary planning area.

[...]

... this data demonstrates clear unused capacity within the planning area and indicates that there is sufficient flexibility within the system to accommodate additional pupils should the proposed PAN reduction be approved.

Due to offers being below the PAN, the school is no longer able to viably operate 12 classes, and maintaining the current PAN would place significant and ongoing financial pressure on the school. Implementing the proposed PAN reduction would enable the school to move to 10 classes, creating a financially sustainable and educationally coherent structure that more accurately reflects the demand for places.

For September 2025, the school was undersubscribed, with only 81 pupils on roll in Year 3 against a PAN of 90. This trend of undersubscription extends across all four year groups, placing increasing financial pressure on the school. As a consequence, the current organisational structure requires the operation of 12 classes, many of which have relatively small class sizes.

[...]

This has resulted in inefficient class sizes, with the school currently required to staff and resource 12 classes despite declining pupil numbers. Reducing the PAN to 70 from September 2026 would enable the school to align its class structure more

closely with current and projected demand, supporting a more sustainable and efficient use of staffing and resources. Under this proposed change, the school would operate 10 classes of a more appropriate size, helping to improve overall efficiency while maintaining a high standard of educational provision.”

15. 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 is reduced as proposed. I have also considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the changes in demand, the potential effect on parental preference of the proposed PAN reductions and whether the proposed reductions are justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.

Overall demand for Year 3 places in the area and parental preference

16. The Local Authority has a duty to make sure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty, it 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 one of three schools in the “Gosport Primary Planning Area” for which Year 3 is the normal point of admission.

17. There are currently 270 places available for admission to Year 3 in these schools in September 2026, but only 220 offers have been made, as follows:

Table 1: expected admissions to Gosport Primary junior schools in September 2026

School	PAN for Year 3	Places offered for 2026
Elson Junior School	90	67
Alver Valley Junior School	60	48
Grange Junior School	60	58
King’s Academy Rowner	60	47
TOTAL	270	220

18. This table shows that there are currently 50 surplus places in the planning area, which would be reduced to 30 if the proposed variation were approved.

19. I am satisfied that the proposed variation would not frustrate existing parental preference for places in Year 3 in September 2026 at the School. All 67 of the children seeking a place at the School in September 2026 would still be able to be admitted. I am also satisfied that there would not be a shortage of places in the planning area for children who may seek a place in Year 3 in 2026/27, but whose parents have not yet applied.

Places at the School

20. The Local Authority has helpfully provided me with a detailed breakdown of how the School will organise its classes in 2026/27 if the proposed variation is approved. With a PAN of 70 it will be able to operate two Year 3 classes and hence it can plan with certainty for a 10 class model from September 2026 (two classes in each of Year 3 and Year 5, and three classes in each of Year 4 and Year 6). However, with the PAN of 90 currently in place for Year 3 for 2026, any in-year applications to Year 3 during 2026/27 would have to be admitted, and it is possible that this might require the provision of an extra Year 3 class in order to manage the number of pupils. The effect of the proposed variation for 2026/27 would be to remove the risk of this scenario and to enable the School to plan with certainty for 10 classes overall throughout 2026/27. In the event that any in-year applications were made, the school would be better placed to refuse such applications because they would be able to show that the admission of additional children could be prejudicial to the efficient provision of education and the efficient use of resources, given the organisational structure which would be in place.

21. The Local Authority has also provided me with a summary of the School's financial position to support the variation request. This summary shows that the School is currently in a stable financial position. However, the projected position for the end of the 2027-28 financial year is a cumulative deficit of £185,438 if the current 12 class model is retained. If the proposed variation is approved, and a 10 class model is implemented, the projected cumulative deficit reduces to only £5,957. The School, therefore, requires the approval of the proposed variation for 2026/27 if it is to minimise the impact on its financial position of any unplanned staffing costs.

Summary of findings

22. Having considered all the matters above, my reasoning can be summarised as follows:

- a. The proposed variation does not give rise to concerns about the sufficiency of Year 3 places in the planning area for 2026/27.
- b. There is no indication that the proposed variation leads to any degree of frustration of parental preference.
- c. By enabling the School to plan with certainty for ten classes in 2026/27, the proposed variation removes the financial and organisational risk of having to plan for three Year 3 classes. If funding has to be diverted to pay for the provision of an extra class for 2026/27, there will be a significantly negative financial and organisational impact on the School, with detriment to those children already at the School and to other necessary areas of expenditure.

23. After carefully weighing the above factors, I conclude that the proposed variation is justified by the change in circumstances, and I approve it.

Determination

24. 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 Elson Junior School for 2026/27.
25. I determine that for admission in 2026/27, the published admission number for entry to Year 3 will be 70.

Dated: 3 June 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Clive Sentance