



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: ADA4614

Objector: A parent

Admission Authority: Buckinghamshire Council for Buckingham School

Date of advice: 08 June 2026

Determination

In accordance with section 88H(4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I uphold the objection to the admission arrangements determined by Buckinghamshire Council for Buckingham School, for 2027/28.

I have also considered the arrangements under section 88I(5) and find that they do not comply with requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

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. Under section 88H(2) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act), an objection has been referred to the adjudicator by a parent (the Objector), about the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for September 2027 for Buckingham School (the School). The School is a non-selective, community school for children aged 11 to 18 years. It is located in Buckingham.
2. The Local Authority (LA) for the area in which the School is located is Buckinghamshire Council. The LA is also the Admission Authority for the School.
3. The LA is a party to this objection. Other parties to the objection are the School and the Objector.

4. The objection is that the Arrangements make no reference to the admission of children outside their normal age group.

5. As well as objecting to the Arrangements of the School, the Objector has objected to the arrangements of three other Buckinghamshire schools. As each of the schools involved has a different admission authority, I am considering each case independently and on its own merits. Each objection is, therefore, being dealt with as a separate determination case.

6. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the LA for its timely response to my requests for further information.

Jurisdiction

7. The Arrangements were determined under section 88C of the Act by Buckinghamshire Council. The Arrangements were determined on 16 March 2026. This is after the deadline for determining arrangements which was 28 February 2026. The LA told me that there had been a delay “corporately in getting the signoff required”. This does not, however, affect the standing of the Arrangements or my power to consider them or the objection.

8. The Objector submitted their objection to the determined arrangements on 13 April 2026. The Objector has asked to have their identity kept from the other parties and has met the requirement of Regulation 24 of the School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 by providing details of their name and address to me.

9. I am satisfied the objection has been properly referred to me in accordance with section 88H of the Act and it is within my jurisdiction.

10. I have also used my power under section 88I of the Act to consider the Arrangements as a whole and to determine whether or not they conform with the requirements relating to admissions and, if not, in what ways they do not so conform. I will refer to these as ‘other matters’ and they are covered in the section of the determination under the title of that name.

Procedure

11. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the School Admissions Code 2021 (the Code).

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

- the objection dated 13 April 2026;
- a copy of the ‘Leader decision notice’, dated 16 March 2026, in which the Leader of

Buckinghamshire Council agreed the determined admission arrangements for admission to Voluntary Controlled and Community Schools in September 2027;

- the determined Arrangements for 2027/28;
- a response from the LA to the objection and to my requests for further information;
- the LA's online school admissions pages;
- Department for Education (DfE) guidance 'Guidance on handling admission requests for summer-born children¹ (November 2024)';
- maps, including those showing the location of the School; and
- information available on the websites of gov.uk (including the 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS) and Ofsted websites), the LA and the School.

13. I have been provided with a substantial amount of information. I have referred only to that which has a bearing on my determination.

Background

14. According to GIAS, the School is a community secondary school. It is the only LA-maintained secondary school in Buckinghamshire. It does not have a designated religious character.

15. The School was last inspected by Ofsted in April 2023. Ofsted judgements for the School were good in all areas, including sixth form, with the exception of behaviour and attitudes which requires improvement.

16. The published admission number (PAN) of the School for entry to Year 7 in 2027/28 is 210.

17. The Arrangements set out that children with Education, Health and Care Plans will be admitted first. Then, in times when oversubscribed, children will be prioritised according to the oversubscription criteria. These can be summarised as follows:

- a. Looked after and previously looked after children.

¹ The term summer born children relates to all children born from 1 April to 31 August. These children reach compulsory school age on 31 August following their fifth birthday (or on their fifth birthday if it falls on 31 August).

- b. Children who have exceptional medical or social needs.
- c. Children living within the catchment area of the school.
- d. Siblings of children in Years 7 to 10 who are on the roll of the school at the time allocations are made and are expected to be on the school roll at the time of the proposed admission.
- e. Children of staff where the member of staff has been employed at the school for two or more years and/or the member of staff is recruited to fill a vacant post for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage.

Once the above criteria have been applied then any further places will be offered in distance order, offering places to those who live closest first (using straight-line distance). If it is still not possible to decide between two applicants who are equidistant then a random allocation will be made to allocate the final place.

Consideration of Case

18. I will now set out my consideration of the matters raised by the Objector. I will conclude each section with a statement as to whether or not I uphold that particular aspect of the objection, preceded by my reasons for that conclusion. Where I state that I uphold an aspect of the objection, that does not necessarily imply that I fully endorse the reasoning expressed by the Objector, nor that the Objector has necessarily correctly interpreted which Code provision applies. Rather, it means that I have found that the particular aspect of the Arrangements drawn to my attention by the Objector does not conform with a requirement of the Code identified by me and is in breach of the Code for the reasons I have given.

19. The objection is in relation to the fact that the Arrangements make no reference to the admission of children outside their normal age group. The Objector states:

“Omission of Mandatory Process: Paragraph 2.18 of the Code explicitly requires admission authorities to "make clear in their admission arrangements the process for requesting admission out of the normal age group." The published policy for secondary community schools (including The Buckingham School) contains no such process.

Failure to Define Decision-Making Criteria: Because the policy contains no section on out-of-year admissions, it fails to specify that decisions will be made on the basis of the individual circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child. It also fails to list the mandatory factors the authority must consider, such as the parent's views and the child's prior educational history.

Lack of Clarity for Secondary Transition: For children who are already educated out of year group (e.g., summer-born children who started Reception a year late), the policy provides no guidance on how to ensure "continuity of education" during the secondary transfer process. This lack of clarity is a breach of the requirement for admission arrangements to be "clear".

20. I have determined that the following paragraphs of the Code, are relevant to this objection.

14. In drawing up their admission arrangements, admission authorities **must** ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear, and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated.

2.18 Parents may seek a place for their child outside of their normal age group, for example, if the child is gifted and talented or has experienced problems such as ill health. In addition, the parents of a summer born child may choose not to send that child to school until the September following their fifth birthday and may request that they are admitted out of their normal age group – to reception rather than year 1. Admission authorities **must** make clear in their admission arrangements the process for requesting admission out of the normal age group.

2.19 Admission authorities **must** make decisions on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child concerned. This will include taking account of the parent's views; information about the child's academic, social, and emotional development; where relevant, their medical history and the views of a medical professional; whether they have previously been educated out of their normal age group; and whether they may naturally have fallen into a lower age group if it were not for being born prematurely. They **must** also take into account the views of the head teacher of the school concerned. When informing a parent of their decision on the year group the child should be admitted to, the admission authority **must** set out clearly the reasons for their decision.

2.20 Where an admission authority agrees to a parent's request for their child to be admitted out of their normal age group and, as a consequence of that decision, the child will be admitted to a relevant age group (i.e. the age group to which pupils are normally admitted to the school) the local authority and admission authority **must** process the application as part of the main admissions round, unless the parental request is made too late for this to be possible, and on the basis of their determined admission arrangements only, including the application of oversubscription criteria where applicable. They **must** not give the application lower priority on the basis that the child is being admitted out of their normal age group. Parents have a statutory right to appeal

against the refusal of a place at a school for which they have applied. This right does not apply if they are offered a place at the school, but it is not in their preferred age group.

21. The Arrangements make no reference to the admission of children outside their normal age group. This is clearly in breach of paragraph 2.18 of the Code which states that admission authorities must make clear in their admission arrangements the process for requesting admission out of the normal age group. The omission also means that the Arrangements do not set out the factors that the Admission Authority will take into account when deciding on the year group a child should be admitted to. Furthermore, there is no information about how an application for a school place will be processed once the Admission Authority has agreed to a parent's request for their child to be admitted out of their normal age group.

22. Overall, the Admission Authority has not ensured that parents can look at the Arrangements and understand easily how places for the School will be allocated. As a result, the Arrangements are not clear and are in breach of paragraph 14 of the Code. I uphold the objection.

23. The LA accept that the School's Arrangements make no reference to the admission of children outside their normal age group. In its response to me, the LA stated:

"The offset process² explanation is set out in the primary appendix (Appendix 2)³ as it pertains to reception applications, but we accept there is no reference to the offset process in Appendix 3⁴, so we are happy to rectify this omission.

Our normal process is to automatically agree applications for summer born children where the application is made in a timely way by parents for schools where we are the admission authority and we also manage a communal offset application process. Once a child is agreed as offset then we will support the continued education offset throughout the child's education as there is rarely a circumstance in which it is in the child's best interest to rejoin their original cohort."

24. Although not part of the Arrangements, the LA referred me to pages on its website which support parents who are considering making a request for their child to be admitted outside their normal age group. For example, there are pages titled 'Delay your child's school start date'; 'Guide to delaying a school start date' and 'Beyond the Reception Year'. In addition to this information, the LA said:

² This is the term used by the LA to refer to the admission of children outside their normal age group.

³ This is the document called "Primary community and voluntary controlled schools admission policy September 2027" on the LA's website.

⁴ This is the document called "Secondary community schools admission policy 2027" on the LA's website.

“We support all Buckinghamshire schools on request where they are dealing with applications outside of their normal year group. Our normal process is to allow a child that has been offset to a lower year group to progress with their new cohort throughout their education and would not require them to re-apply specifically. We would agree that they can transfer normally to secondary school in the year group they are being educated in. We accept that this is not immediately clear in the Appendix 3 when read in isolation.”

25. It is not clear whether the approach set out by the LA in the previous paragraph applies to all schools in the LA or only to the schools for which it is the Admission Authority, including the School. In either case, I have been unable to find anything which indicates that parents applying for a Y7 place at the School for a child being educated outside their normal age group could know this information from either the School’s statutory Arrangements or the LA’s non-statutory website. Indeed, the LA’s document ‘Beyond the Reception Year’ suggests this may not be the case in reality as the document states:

“When your child transfers to junior or secondary school, the admission authority for that school will make the decision on whether or not to allow them to continue out of their chronological year group – you should carefully consider how to have this conversation with them before making your decision.”

26. Information not provided in the Arrangements is not in my jurisdiction but in this case the Local Authority has relied on information in other documents to fulfil the requirements of the Code. It is, therefore, concerning that the information thus relied on is also unclear. I also wish to emphasise that a parent may ask that their child is admitted to a year other than their normal age group at any point in their compulsory education. As paragraph 2.18 of the Code says, repeated here for ease of access:

“Parents may seek a place for their child outside of their normal age group, for example, if the child is gifted and talented or has experienced problems such as ill health.”

27. In other words, this is not only a matter where a child is summer born and their parents wish to delay their education until the child reaches compulsory school age. Parents can apply at any age both to delay or accelerate admission and the arrangements must make the process to apply clear in order to meet the requirements of the Code.

Other matters

28. Having considered the Arrangements as a whole it appeared to me that there are other matters which do not conform with requirements of the Code and so I brought them to

the attention of the Admission Authority. These matters are (paragraphs of the Code are indicated where relevant):

29. In the objection form, the Objector stated: “I am objecting to the determined admission arrangements for secondary community schools for September 2025”. The objection was submitted on 13 April 2026. When I checked the School’s website on 29 April 2026, the link provided went to a Buckinghamshire Council Webpage titled ‘Secondary community schools admissions policy for September 2025’. Therefore, the 2025 arrangements were the most recent arrangements readily accessible to parents. This is in breach of paragraph 1.50 of the Code as admission authorities must publish a copy of the determined arrangements on the school’s website or their own website (in the case of a local authority) by 15 March in the determination year and continue displaying them for the whole offer year. As of 21 May 2026, this issue had been rectified on the School’s website.

30. Information provided by the Admissions Authority shows that the Admission Arrangements for 2027/28 were determined on 16 March 2026 which is after the deadline for determining arrangements. This is in breach of paragraph 1.49 of the Code which requires an admission authority to determine their admission arrangements every year by 28 February. It is also a breach of paragraph 1.50 of the Code.

31. In the Section titled ‘Note 4: Definition of sibling’, the text refers to March and September 2016. These dates also appear in the same section of the Secondary community schools admissions policy for September 2025. This is potentially confusing for parents and is, therefore, in breach of paragraph 14 of the Code.

32. One part of the Arrangements is titled ‘Note 7: Definition of normal home address (more detail can be found in the guide)’. The guide referred to in the title of this section is not referenced elsewhere in the Arrangements. This may, therefore, be unclear for parents and is in breach of paragraph 14 of the Code.

33. The Arrangements refer to the catchment area for the School in ‘Note 3: Secondary School Catchment Areas’. This section states: “The Council’s agreed catchment map for each school can be viewed on the school directory”. The Arrangements then contain a hyperlink to a website. This link did not work when checked on 29 April and 21 May 2026. I accept that a schools’ directory and catchment area maps are available on the LA’s website but these are not accessible via the link in the Arrangements. This is in breach of paragraph 14 of the Code.

34. Paragraph 2.15 of the Code requires an admission authority to “maintain a clear, fair, and objective waiting list until at least 31 December of each school year of admission, stating in their arrangements that each added child will require the list to be ranked again in line with the published oversubscription criteria...” This information is not included in the

Arrangements for the School and the Arrangements are, therefore, in breach of paragraph 2.15 of the Code. Information about waiting lists is included in the LA's document 'Coordinated admissions scheme September 2027'. However, as this document states "Two weeks after the beginning of term, phased entry waiting lists will be formally dissolved unless a reaffirmation is received in which case the application is included in the in-year process", the requirement to maintain a clear, fair, and objective waiting list until at least 31 December is not met.

35. The Admission Authority has indicated a willingness to address these matters, as permitted by paragraph 3.6 of the Code, which is welcomed. As the Admission Authority has accepted that changes are required, I will not discuss them further other than to make clear that the Code requires that the Arrangements be amended to address the points set out here.

Determination

36. In accordance with section 88H(4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I uphold the objection to the admission arrangements determined by Buckinghamshire Council for Buckingham School, for 2027/28.

37. I have also considered the arrangements under section 88I(5) and find that they do not comply with requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

38. 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: 08 June 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Catherine Crooks