Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: **VAR2724**

Admission authority: **Hampshire County Council for Ringwood Church of England Infant School, Ringwood, Hampshire**

Local Authority: **Hampshire County Council**

Date: **10 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 Ringwood Church of England Infant School for 2026/27.

I determine that the published admission number for admission in 2026/27 will be 80.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Admission Authority, the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Ringwood Church of England Primary School (the School) for 2026/27.

2. The School is a voluntary controlled Church of England infant school for children aged five to seven in the Diocese of Portsmouth, which is the religious authority for the School. The Local Authority is the admission authority for the School.

3. Parties to the request are the School, the Local Authority and the Diocese of Portsmouth. As the Local Authority is the Admission Authority, both terms are used throughout this determination.

4. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (the PAN) for admission to Reception Year (Year R) in 2026/27 is reduced from 90 to 80.

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 Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code. The proposed variation has the support of the Governing Body of the School and the Diocese of Portsmouth.

7. The School's PAN for 2025/26 was varied from 90 to 70, determined and implemented during the last academic year following a request from the LA and School to lower the PAN following applications and admissions to Reception (YR), enabling the School to plan for eight classes with certainty. This reduced PAN had effect for the year 2025/26 only. Although the Local Authority determined the PAN at 90 for 2026/27 based on a degree of uncertainty about projected numbers and subsequent offers. The number of places offered at the School for September 2026 is 71. Therefore to enable the School to plan with certainty for a stable class structure, a variation has been sought for 2026/27.

8. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation for 2026/27 is within my jurisdiction.

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

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

- the referral from the Local Authority dated 11 May 2026, supporting documents and further information provided by the School at my request;
- the determined arrangements for 2026/27 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;

- maps showing the location of the School and other relevant schools;
- information available on the websites of the Department for Education, the Local Authority and the School; and
- the response from the Diocese of Portsmouth to the proposed variation.

11. In the interests of dealing speedily with this request, I have not exercised my powers to consider other aspects of the admission arrangements under section 88I(5) of the Act. 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

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 if I decide to vary the arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the PAN from 90 to 80 as proposed, it will not have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years, because the 2027/28 arrangements have already been determined with a PAN of 75. Any determination to reduce the PAN for 2026/27 will be valid for that year only and will not change the PAN for September 2027.

14. 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.

15. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Admission Authority is set out in the referral, which states:

> "The PAN for September 2026 was determined at 90 in February 2025 as the forecast was not supportive of a reduction at the time. Based on the 71 offers made for September 2026, the school wishes to apply to reduce its PAN to 80 and continue to operate the eight-class structure established last year, while safeguarding the school against the need to open additional classes should further applications be received, which would cause the school significant financial detriment."

16. The LA confirmed that as of 29 April 2026, 72 offers have been made to pupils for entry to the School in September 2026 (one more than initially on national offer day).

Overall demand for Year R places in the School

17. I have considered the data provided by the LA in order to form a view about 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 reduction and whether the proposed reduction is justified considering all relevant circumstances.

18. 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 several schools, for this purpose.

19. The Local Authority has confirmed that there have been 190 offers of Year R places made for September 2026 in the planning area, within a capacity of 235 places. Approximately 80% of places have been filled.

20. The Local Authority as the Admission Authority has provided assurance that a reduced PAN of 80, with 72 predicated admissions to Year R at the School in September 2026, provides sufficient capacity in the School for parents moving to the area or expressing an interest mid-year to have an opportunity to gain a place at the School for their child. Table 1 illustrates the number of places offered in different schools in the planning area and their PAN.

Table 1: Number of children with offers for Year R for September 2026 compared to total PAN for schools in the planning area.

School	PAN	YR Offers	Surplus	Surplus %
Ringwood CE Infant School	90	72	18	20
Bransgore CE Primary School	60	34	26	43
Burley Primary School	15	13	2	13
Poulner Infant School	60	60	0	0
Sopley Primary School	10	12	-2	n/a
Total	235	191	44	19

21. Table 1 illustrates that if the PAN variation is agreed, there will remain significant capacity of 44 places within the planning area, including 8 places in the School, which means that should additional children apply for places in the area during next academic year, they

can be reasonably accommodated. Parental preference for the School and planning area is unlikely to be impacted by the proposed PAN reduction. All first choice preferences were met on National Offer Day.

22. The DFE Guidance on "Basic need allocations 2026-27 and 2027-28, Explanatory note on methodology" recommends that local authorities have an operating margin of 2% in pupil forecasts to support parental choice, pupil movement and manageability of the system. If the variation is approved, surplus places in the planning area would reduce from 19% to 11% (24 of 215), well within recommended margin.

23. The School currently has 64 pupils in Year R who will move to Year 1 in September 2026. The School is also undersubscribed in other year groups. The School proposes to maintain an eight-class structure that was implemented in September 2025 as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Indicative class structure for Sept 2026

Class	YR	Y1	Y2	Total
1	30			30
2	30			30
3	12	18		30
4		23		23
5		23		23
6			20	20
7			30	30
8			30	30
Total	**72**	**64**	**80**	**215**
PAN	**80**	**70**	**90**	

24. The class structure set out in Table 2 is the same as in 2025/26 with one mixed age Year R/Year1 class, providing continuity to School planning and organisation. The proposed structure enables the School to meet the requirements of The School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 and paragraph 2.15 of the Code.

25. The School provided information from the Governing Body meeting where the variation request was approved in principle that illustrates careful consideration given by the headteacher and Governing Body of the impact of changing the PAN. They note the School's experience of working with mixed age classes alongside the need for effective communication with parents.

26. The Local Authority provided information to illustrate that maintaining the current eight-class structure in the School significantly improves the financial forecasts compared with the alternative of returning to the historic model of nine classes. While the School continues to face financial challenges through the medium term with a projected financial deficit of

£476,484, this is around £201,000 lower than if the School were required to reintroduce an additional class. The Local Authority states that:

> "Although the eight-class option does not fully eliminate longer-term financial pressures, it clearly mitigates risk, slows the depletion or reserves , and offers a far more sustainable platform from which to implement further recovery or efficiency measures."

27. The difference is because the cost of a teacher and the resources necessary for an infant class, when compared to, say, a junior or secondary school (where numbers are not limited), has to be borne by proportionately smaller income from the children admitted to infant classes. Therefore, the justification of the Local Authority and the School is clear.

28. I have been provided with information from the Diocese of Portsmouth that confirms they have been informed and fully support the proposed PAN reduction for 2026/27.

Summary of findings

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

a. The proposed variation does not give rise to any concerns about the sufficiency of Year R places in the School or planning area for 2026/27.

b. There is no indication of any potential for the frustration of parental preference because there will remain places available for in-year applicants in the Year R / Year 1 mixed age class.

c. The proposed variation will allow the School to plan with certainty for its long-term plans for curriculum delivery and mixed age classes. This will help stabilise the School's financial position, and hence its ability to meet the needs of the existing children on roll. If the proposed variation is not approved, there remains a risk of a negative financial and organisational impact on the School, with detriment to those children already at the School.

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

Determination

31. 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 Ringwood Church of England Infant School for 2026/27.

32. I determine that the published admission number for admission in 2026/27 will be 80.

Dated: 10 June 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Philip Lloyd