



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2727

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Netley Abbey Infant School

Date of decision: 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 Netley Abbey Infant School, for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the Published Admission Number will be 70.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Admission Authority, the Local Authority (LA)) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Netley Abbey Infant School (the School) for 2026/27.
2. The School is a community school for children aged 5 to 7 years old in Southampton, Hampshire. It is a co-educational school with no designated religious character. The School is part of the Federation of Netley Abbey Infant and Junior Schools.
3. The School was judged to be good by Ofsted at its last inspection in January 2023.
4. Parties to the request are the Local Authority and the Governing Body of the School.
5. The proposed variation is to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) for the School from 90 to 70 for admissions to reception (Year R, YR) for the academic year 2026/27.

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 12 February 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 provided me with confirmation that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variation and that there is agreement with the proposed variation. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.

9. In considering the variation request I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:

- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 13 May 2026 and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- maps, including Google Maps and those showing the location of the School; and
- information available on the websites of the Department for Education (DfE), ‘Get Information About Schools’ website (GIAS), the LA, and the School.

10. I have not needed to seek any information from the LA or School further to that already provided to me.

11. I have been provided with a substantial amount of information / data by the LA. I have referred only to that which has a bearing on my determination.

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 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 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.

Other Matters

14. In the interests of dealing speedily with this request 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 for 2026/27

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 variation is justified by the change in circumstances.

16. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School is reduced from 90 to 70 for entry to YR in 2026/27.

17. The Local Authority told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the School is that in July 2026 the school had made 73 offers for September 2026 compared to a PAN of 90, significantly lower than had been predicted. They said that:

“The school, with the support of the Local Authority, is seeking to reduce its PAN to 70 for admissions into Year R in September 2026. All 73 current offers will be honoured, with pupil numbers managed down in preparation for September 2027, when the cohort will be combined with the cohort in the year above.”

18. In September 2025, following a previous variation to PAN, the School combined YR with the year above creating a mixed age class and the opportunity for the School to potentially reduce the overall number of classes thus increasing efficiency and reducing financial challenges. The School and LA are seeking to secure the long term sustainable model of eight classes rather than nine, stating that there is a need to reduce the cohort size from potentially requiring three larger classes because:

“The school will not be able to afford to run three discrete classes for the cohort's duration of time in the school.”

19. The smaller number of pupils currently in YR in 2025/26 means that in September the School can move to mixed age classes across Y1 and Y2 as shown in table 2 below. The proposed reduction in PAN from 90 to 70 will enable the school to run eight classes overall moving to three classes in YR and five mixed age classes in Y1 and Y2. The intention is to maintain five mixed age classes in Y1 and Y2 in 2027/28 when the YR PAN

has been determined to return to 90, which will require three classes at that time, but providing the School .

20. I have considered the data available to me to form a view about the sufficiency of school places in the local planning area if the PAN of the school is reduced from 90 to 70 for 2026/27. I have also considered the level of demand for places in other years and whether the proposed PAN reduction is justified considering all the relevant circumstances.

21. The LA has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty, the LA assess the likely future number of places to be needed and plans to meet that need. The LA uses planning areas, which are geographical areas each containing several schools, for this purpose. The School is in the Hamble Primary planning area which includes one other infant school, a primary school and two junior schools. Details of the schools which admit children to YR are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of places in Year R in schools in the planning area for Sept 2026.

School	Published admission number (YR)	Offers for Sept 2026	Surplus
Netley Abbey Infant School	90	73	17
Bursledon CofE E Infant School	90	73	17
Hamble Primary School	45	46	-1
Total	225	192	33

22. The LA, as the admission authority, has also said that it is requesting the reduction in PAN because:

“The total offers for Year R for the planning area are 192, against a combined planning area capacity of 225, leaving over a form of entry surplus within the planning area at 33 places.”

23. The LA is confident that a reduction in PAN for the School will not impact on its ability to provide sufficient school places to meet demand within the planning area. As shown in table 1, on national offer day in April 2026, 192 offers were made, 33 fewer than the 225 places available in YR in the planning area. That is, 85 per cent of places were allocated, which compares to 93 per cent in 2025. If the variation is approved, there would still be 13 available places in the planning area, or 6 per cent of capacity.

24. This falls in line with DfE guidance on “Basic need allocations 2026-27 and 2027-28: Explanatory note on methodology” which recommends that local authorities have an operating margin of 2% in pupil forecasts to help support parental choice, pupil movement and manageability of the system.

25. At this point in the school year, the great majority of children who will require a YR place during the 2026/27 academic year have already been allocated a place. From the above data, I am, therefore, satisfied that a reduction in the School's PAN to 70 for 2026/27 is likely to leave sufficient surplus capacity in the planning area for any in-year admissions during 2025/26. The LA has not advised that there are any housing developments likely to be completed in 2025/26 or that there are any other reasons to suggest that more than 13 applications will be made for places at schools within the planning area for places if the variation is agreed.

26. I note that, despite capacity in the planning area, the School will not have any available places in YR, which has the potential to frustrate parental choice. However, the other two schools within the planning area are within 2 miles of the School and have vacant places, which means parents will be able to access an appropriate school place. Therefore, the LA can meet its statutory duty to ensure enough places are available.

27. I now turn to the number of children at the School and the reasons given by the School in support of the variation approval request.

28. During the academic year 2025/26, the School ran five classes, in total, for Year R and Year 1 including one mixed age class, and three classes in Year 2. In 2026/27, the School intends to run three reception classes, with five mixed age classes for Year 1 and Year 2 combined. By limiting the PAN in Year R in 2026/27 to 70, the School will be able to plan with certainty to continue with 8 classes in 2027/28 when the determined arrangements confirm a return to the original PAN of 90 pupils that will potentially require three dedicated Year R classes to meet the requirements of School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012. The class organisation proposed by the School is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Class organisation , if variation is agreed.

Class	YR 25/26 Actual	Y1 25/26 Actual	Y2 25/26 Actual	YR 26/27	Y1 26/27	Y2 26/27	YR 27/28	Y1 27/28	Y2 27/28
1	27			25			30		
2	27			24			30		
3	20	10		24			30		
4		30			15	14		15	15
5		30			15	14		15	15
6			30		15	14		15	15
7			30		15	14		14	15
8			28		14	14		14	14

29. If the variation is approved, the School can plan with certainty for eight classes over the next two years. Depending on the number of applications the School receives in 2027/28 and 2028/29 the School can then either maintain an eight-class structure or return to nine classes if demand necessitates an increase in places.

30. The LA have presented financial information that illustrates if the current PAN is maintained and an additional class is required, the School will have a cumulative deficit of circa £181 thousand by the end of the 2027/28 academic year. It is anticipated that maintaining an eight-class structure, that the variation will facilitate, will almost halve the expected deficit to £94 thousand, placing the School in a challenging, but more manageable financial position.

31. Governors are seeking this prudent solution to maintain the financial stability of the School in year, maintaining the ability to respond to demand while securing the sustainability of the School. The School provided evidence that it has carefully considered several relevant factors, including: any potential educational impact on the children; how the School will manage a mixed age class; communication with parents, and how children are identified for the mixed age class.

32. 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 places in YR in the planning area for 2026/27.
- b. There is indication that parental preference may possibly be frustrated to a limited extent as there will be no places in YR at the School. However, there is sufficient capacity within 2 miles in other schools in the planning area. This impact is not likely to be significant as the great majority of children requiring a YR place during 2026/27 have already been allocated a place.
- c. If the variation is not approved, there is a risk of significant negative financial impact on the school, with potential detriment to those children already at the School if funding must be diverted to pay for the provision of an extra infant class during 2026/27.

33. After considering all the above factors, I conclude that the proposed variation is justified by the circumstances and I approve it.

34. 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 admit more children, there is the potential to do so.

Determination

35. 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 Netley Abbey Infant School for 2026/27.

36. I determine that the published admission number, for admissions to the Reception Year in 2026/27 shall be 70.

Dated: 10 June 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Mr Philip Lloyd