



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	VAR 2742
Admission Authority:	Hampshire County Council for Liss Infant School, Liss, Hampshire
Date of decision:	25 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 Liss Infant School, Liss for September 2026.

I determine that, for admission in September 2026, the published admission number will be 30.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Admission Authority or the Local Authority) has referred a proposal to the adjudicator for a variation to the admission arrangements for September 2026 (the Arrangements) for Liss Infant School (the School).
2. The School is a community school for children aged four to seven. It is a co-educational, non-selective school with no designated religious character. The School is located in the Hampshire local authority area.
3. The School was judged as “Good” by Ofsted at its last inspection in July 2025.
4. The parties to this request are the Admission Authority and the School.

5. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) is reduced from 60 to 30.

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 2026 Arrangements were determined by the Admission Authority on the 12 February 2025.

8. The Admission Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies were notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code. The Admission Authority has also confirmed that the Governing Body of the School was consulted and supports 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 27 May 2026 and the supporting documents provided;
- the determined Arrangements for 2026 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;

- maps showing the location of the School and other relevant schools in the planning area; and
- information available on the websites of central government, in particular the Department for Education (DfE) (including the 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS), the School Capacity (SCAP) survey, and the 'Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool' (FBIT) websites), the Local Authority, the School, and Ofsted.

12. I have been provided with and reviewed comprehensive information and data by the Admission Authority. I have referred only to information relevant to my determination.

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 September 2027 have been determined by the Admission Authority with a PAN of 45.

15. Any determination to reduce the PAN to 30, or to leave it at 60, affects only the Reception cohort. The allocation of places in other year groups depends on the number of pupils in each cohort and the organisation of classes, and the degree to which admitting an additional pupil would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources or breach the School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 (the Infant Class Sizes Regulations).

16. In the interests of dealing speedily with this and the many other requests for variations at this time, I have not considered other aspects of the 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

17. 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 in certain other limited and specified circumstances.

18. The PAN for the School is set at 60 for September 2026. The Admission Authority has reported that only 29 offers have been made for September 2026. It went on to say that for September 2025, undersubscription resulted in the School operating with only 12 pupils in its Reception Year against a PAN of 60. There are falling numbers at the School overall and this

undersubscription is creating substantial challenges for the School and placing severe financial pressure on its budget.

19. Schools are largely funded on the number of pupils on roll and the highest cost to a school's budget is its staff. Most infant and primary schools aim to have around 30 pupils to a class. If a school has classes that are many pupils fewer than 30, this can mean that the income from the number of pupils is less than the costs of providing the class. If this happens over several classes, a school can face financial challenges.

20. As the School is an infant school, it will be affected by the provisions of the Infant Class Sizes Regulations and paragraph 2.16 of the Code 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 school teacher except in specific exceptional circumstances. The Infant Class Sizes Regulations apply to Reception, Year 1, and Year 2.

21. The variation is therefore proposed to reduce the PAN for the School in September 2026 from 60 to 30 to enable the School to operate a single Reception Year class of 30 pupils, thereby complying with the Infant Class Sizes Regulations, whilst also improving its financial sustainability.

22. I have considered the data provided by the Admission Authority in support of the request. Table 1 below shows the current class structure at the School. It is apparent from this, that there is significant surplus capacity at the School with 108 (60%) surplus places.

Table 1: Current class structure with actual numbers on roll as at May 2026

Class	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Total
1	12	10		22
2		26		26
3			24	24
Total	12	36	24	72
PAN*	60	60	60	180
Surplus (+/-)	+48	+24	+36	+108

* admission number set for the relevant age group

23. With declining numbers at the School, it has become increasingly unviable for the School to continue organising classes by year group. As can be seen above, the School has therefore implemented mixed aged teaching with pupils in the Reception Year and some pupils in Year 1 being taught together.

24. The School wishes to continue with mixed age teaching at Key Stage 1 (Year 1 and Year 2) from September 2026 whilst retaining one Reception Year class. If I approve the proposal, the School will combine one of the Key Stage 1 classes into one class of no more than 30 pupils. In addition, there will be one Reception Year class of 30 pupils.

25. The proposed class structure, should the PAN reduction be approved, is set out below in Table 2.

Class	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Total
1	30			30
2		12	10	22
3			26	26
Total	30	12	36	78
PAN*	30	60	60	

* admission number set for the relevant age group

26. This class structure will reduce the financial impact of declining pupil numbers in the School whilst continuing to comply with the Infant Class Sizes Regulations. If I do not approve the variation, and numbers in Reception were to grow above 30 due to in-year admissions, then the School would have to revert to providing two classes at Reception with the consequent additional staffing costs due to the need to employ a further teacher at the School.

27. The Admission Authority believes that enabling the School to organise its classes in this way will also “ensure that teaching and provision are fully aligned with the two distinct curriculums taught in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 classes.” While a mixed Reception Year and Year 1 class has been used this academic year out of necessity, this has presented challenges to the School in delivering both curriculums effectively within a single

environment. The Admission Authority believes that organising in the way proposed would “enable more targeted teaching, appropriate use of resources and space, and allows staff to focus on age-relevant learning, assessment and progression.”

28. The Governing Body supports having a PAN of 30 in September 2026 so that it can combine the current Reception cohort with some of the Year 1 pupils into a mixed age class at Key Stage 1 in the academic year beginning in September 2026.

29. The Admission Authority provided minutes of the extraordinary governing body meeting held on the 29 April 2026 which discussed the proposal to reduce the PAN for September 2026. The Governing Body considered, and were supportive of, the need to continue with mixed aged classes at Key Stage 1.

30. Tables 3 and 4 below compare the original budget forecast based on a PAN of 60 with the proposed model of reducing the PAN to 30 and operating with a single form of entry.

Table 3: Forecast for the original budget setting for 2026/27 (based on a PAN of 60 with two Reception classes):

	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
In Year Surplus / (Deficit)	(141,343)	(187,136)	(270,931)
Surplus/(Deficit) Brought Fwd.	(26,501)	(167,844)	(356,980)
Cumulative Surplus/(Deficit) C/Fwd.	(167,844)	(356,980)	(627,911)

Table 4: Forecast with PAN change (based on a PAN of 30 with one Reception class):

	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
In Year Surplus / (Deficit)	(94,980)	(115,637)	(190,116)
Surplus/(Deficit) Brought Fwd.	(26,501)	(121,481)	(237,118)
Cumulative Surplus/(Deficit) C/Fwd.	(121,481)	(237,118)	(427,234)

31. This shows that, if the variation is not approved, the cumulative deficit of the School is expected to worsen from £167,844 in 2026/27 to £627,911 by 2028/29, driven by increasing in-year losses. By contrast, the class structure with the reduced PAN of 30 lowers the cumulative deficit to £427,234 over the same period, representing an improvement of around £200,000.

32. In-year deficits will also be consistently lower under the reduced PAN. The Admission Authority has indicated that operating one Reception class instead of potentially two classes reduces costs around staffing and resourcing, including savings from not needing to employ a second Reception Year teacher and teaching assistant, as well as associated classroom resources.

33. There is clear evidence of the financial impact on the School if the PAN were to remain at 60. Limiting the PAN to 30 in September 2026 will allow the School to plan mixed aged teaching at Key Stage 1 with certainty, whilst also being confident that, as a consequence of the Infant Class Sizes Regulations, they will not need to provide more than one class at Reception.

34. The Local Authority has a duty to make sure 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 needed and then plans to meet that need. The Local Authority uses planning areas, which are geographical groups of schools, for this purpose. The planning area for the School is the Liss/Liphook Primary Planning Area which has five schools. Only three of these schools, Greatham Primary School, Liphook Infant School, and the School admit children to Reception. Table 5 summarises the PANs of the schools admitting to Reception in the planning area.

Table 5: PANs of schools admitting to Reception in the planning area

SCHOOL	2023	2024	2025	2026
Reception Intake				
Greatham Primary School	30	30	30	30
Liphook Infant School	90	90	90	90
Liss Infant School	60	60	60	60
Total PAN (Reception)	180	180	180	180

35. If the proposed variation were approved, there would be a reduction of 30 places in the combined PAN for the planning area giving a total number of Reception places in September 2026 of 150.

36. Current offers to date in the planning area for admission to Reception in September 2026 are 149. This would mean that there would be only one spare place in the Liss/Liphook Primary Planning Area for any late or in-year admissions. I was concerned that this might mean the Local Authority is unable to satisfy its statutory duty and I therefore requested clarification. The Local Authority responded as follows:

“We can confirm that the Local Authority is satisfied it has met its statutory duty to secure sufficient school places for the normal point of entry (Year R) for the 2026/27 academic year.

All on-time applicants processed through the coordinated admissions scheme have been offered a school place. Whilst all places, except 1, within the Liss/Liphook planning area are forecast to be fully allocated at the start of the academic year if the PAN reduction is approved, this reflects efficient use of available capacity rather than a shortfall in provision.

The Local Authority has planned provision strategically across a wider geographical area. There remains available capacity in neighbouring planning areas which enables the Authority to accommodate late and in-year applications and ensure continued access to a school place for any child requiring one.

We therefore consider that sufficient places are available to meet demand, including for families applying after the normal admissions round. The Local Authority will continue to monitor demand closely and work with schools to ensure that sufficient and appropriate provision is maintained.”

37. In addition, the Local Authority provided data showing spare capacity at three schools in adjacent planning areas. On this basis, I conclude that should the variation be approved, the Local Authority being conscious of its statutory duty, has sufficient spare capacity to satisfy parental demand and to cater for any in-year admissions.

38. I have considered the impact of decreasing admission numbers on the School's finances balanced against the effect that reducing the School's PAN will have on any potential in-year applications at the School. I am satisfied that there are sufficient places at local schools within the planning area to accommodate any potential in-year admissions. I am also satisfied that approving the variation request for September 2026 will significantly mitigate the adverse financial risk of declining rolls for the School and enable them to plan with certainty for the academic year 2026/27.

39. I, therefore, find that the variation to reduce the PAN in September 2026 from 60 to 30 is justified by the circumstances and approve the proposed variation.

Determination

40. 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 Liss Infant School for September 2026.

41. I determine that the published admission number shall be 30.

Dated: 25 June 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: David Holland