



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2759

Admission Authority: Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council for Rose Hill Primary School

Date of decision: 3 July 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 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council for Rose Hill Primary School for 2027/28.

I determine that for admission in 2027/28 the published admission number will be 60.

The referral

1. Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council is the local authority (the local authority) and the admission authority for Rose Hill Primary School. The local authority has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for Rose Hill Primary School (the School) for 2027/28 (the arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged three to eleven years in Marple, Stockport. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) for the School is reduced from 75 to 60.

Jurisdiction and procedure

3. 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”.

4. The arrangements were determined by the local authority on 10 February 2026. 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 the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variation. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.

5. In the interest of dealing speedily with this and other cases, 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.

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

- a) the referral from the local authority dated 16 June 2026 and supporting documents;
- b) the determined arrangements for 2027/28 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c) responses from the local authority and the School to my requests for further information; and
- d) information available on government websites including:
 - ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS);
 - Ofsted;
 - ‘Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool’ (FBIT); and
 - ‘Find and compare schools and colleges in England’ (the DfE website).

7. 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.

8. The arrangements for 2028/29 have not yet been determined. If I decide to approve the proposed variation to the arrangements for 2027/28 by agreeing the reduction to the PAN as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years. The local authority has said that it intends to consult on setting the PAN at 60 for admissions in 2028/29.

Consideration of proposed variation

9. 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.

10. The local authority told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the School is that the number of children needing a place in reception year is falling across the area and at the School. Schools are funded largely by the number of pupils on roll and the greatest cost is staffing. This means that if a school has a number of small classes it is unlikely to receive sufficient funding to meet its costs. Most primary schools seek to have close to 30 pupils in a class in order to be financially efficient.

11. The School is subject to the School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 (the Infant Class Sizes Regulations) 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, year 1 and year 2.

12. The local authority and the School are concerned that the combination of falling demand for the School and the requirements of the Infant Class Sizes Regulations means that the School will accrue a financial deficit if the PAN is not reduced. I will first consider the applications and admissions overall, including whether there would be sufficient school places in the area if I were to agree the variation. I will then consider demand for places at the School and the reasons for the variation request.

13. GIAS records that there are 35 primary schools within three miles of the School (in a straight line) and one other within one mile. The local authority has a duty to ensure 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 to be needed and plans to meet that need. The local authority uses planning areas, which are geographical areas and the schools within those areas, for this purpose. The School is in a planning area of six schools, including the School, which admit children to reception year.

14. Parents can apply for admission for their children wherever they wish and will make their decisions based on their circumstances, considering factors such as convenience, family connections and reputation. Parents will take no account of planning areas when

applying for a school place. Table 1 shows the demand in recent years and forecast demand for school places in the planning area for admission to reception year.

Table 1: numbers of school places, and the number of children offered places in YR in the planning area or forecast to be offered places, and the number of pupils in reception at the time of the October census

	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Sum of PANs of schools for YR (assuming no changes for 2028)	285	285	285	285	285
Number of first preferences	251	250	254	N/A	N/A
Number of children offered places or forecast to be offered a place	244	259	260	215	219
Pupils on roll at time of relevant October census	248	259	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vacant places based on admissions or forecast demand	37	26	25	70	66

15. When applying for a school place, parents in the local authority area are able to express up to six preferences. A first preference is the school to which a parent would most like their child to be admitted. Table 1 shows that the number of first preferences between 2024 and 2026 remained stable and the number of offers increased. The forecast for 2027 is, however, a significant reduction in demand compared to previous years.

16. The local authority referred to the overall reduction in demand, which I am seeing in many areas, but this was not reflected in the number of children being offered places in the planning area between 2024 and 2026. I, therefore, asked the local authority for its confidence in its forecasts. The local authority responded:

“Stockport’s forecasts were produced by [...], a specialist consultancy that produces demographic forecasts to support local authorities in planning services, such as school places. The modelling draws on a range of data sources, including GP registration, historical school census data and birth estimates and tracks how cohorts of children will progress through the school system over time.

Whilst all forecasts carry some degree of uncertainty, the local authority has confidence in these forecasts. They are based on established methodology and draw on multiple robust data sources. The consistency of the projected reduction in demand provides a clear and reliable base for school place planning and supporting this proposed variation.”

17. The local authority also brought my attention to the DfE's published School Places Scorecards and said, "These show that Stockport's primary pupil forecasts for 2024/25 were within approximately 1% of actual pupil numbers for both one-year and three-year forecasts." I am, therefore, assured that it is rational to accept the data provided by the local authority.

18. As table 1 shows, if the PAN for the School had been 60 for 2026/27, there would, based on offers made, be 3.7 per cent of places vacant. This is a reasonable proportion. Based on the local authority's forecast for 2027, there would be nearly 25 per cent, or a quarter of all places, vacant if the PAN were to remain at 75. If the PAN were to be 60 in 2027/28, then, based on the local authority's forecast, there would be over 20 per cent vacant places. These are very high proportions, and I am assured that there would be sufficient places in the planning area if I agreed the reduction in PAN for 2027/28.

19. The number of vacancies forecast for the number of first preferences in 2028/29 is similar to 2027/28 so I am not concerned that setting the baseline would lead to a lack of places for 2028/29.

20. I will now consider demand for the School, parental preference and the reasons for requesting the reduction in PAN in more detail. Table 2 shows demand for the School and forecast demand.

Table 2: the number of first preferences and the number of children offered places at the School or forecast demand

	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
The PAN for the School	75	75	75	75	75
The number of first preferences	62	67	55	N/A	N/A
Number of children offered a place or forecast to be offered a place	61	67	61	52	54
Number of children in reception year at the time of the relevant October census	62	65	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of vacant places (forecast for 2026)	13	10	14	N/A	N/A

21. The School provided a comprehensive summary of the challenges of managing intakes to reception of just over 60 children. The information provided on the number of pupils and class structures illustrates that the School has routinely used mixed age classes. However, intakes of just over 60 children, as has occurred in recent years, makes this increasingly difficult. For example, the 64 pupils anticipated in reception in September 2026 (changes have occurred since national offer day) are to be in three classes of just over 20 children. This is a hard model to sustain financially. As the School explained:

“Each year, the school must determine staffing levels before final pupil numbers are confirmed, creating considerable uncertainty and often having to acquire temporary teachers last minute. With Reception cohorts frequently around 64-67 pupils, the school faces a difficult dilemma. If 64 pupils are admitted, the school must organise three Reception classes to comply with infant class size regulations, despite only receiving funding for 64 pupils. While the funding reflects the number of children on roll, it does not fully recognise the additional staffing costs created by the statutory class size limit. This means the school is required to fund the salary and associated employment costs of a third Reception teacher from an already constrained budget.

Conversely, planning for only two Reception classes in anticipation of lower numbers carries significant risk. Should admissions exceed 60 pupils or exceed it later in the year via in-year transfers, the school would be required to recruit or redeploy additional staff at short notice to remain compliant with legislation. This uncertainty makes workforce planning exceptionally difficult and often results in conservative staffing decisions that place additional pressure on the budget.”

22. One year group of such low numbers can be managed but as the School explained:

“The school cannot simply reduce staffing in line with falling pupil numbers without significantly increasing class sizes or creating even more complex mixed-age classes. This creates a structural imbalance whereby income decreases more quickly than expenditure can realistically be reduced.

The combined effect is that the school has less funding available for teaching assistants, intervention programmes, curriculum resources, staff professional development, enrichment opportunities, and investment in school improvement. Staff are required to undertake wider responsibilities, increasing workload and reducing capacity to provide targeted support for pupils. Financial flexibility is significantly reduced, limiting the school's ability to respond to emerging needs or invest in initiatives that would further improve outcomes.”

23. The School's current financial situation shows no immediate risk of financial deficit but sustaining small classes could lead to problems as the School illustrated above. Against the educational arguments made, I have considered the children for whom the School is the highest preference that could be achieved, who may be denied a place at the School if the PAN is reduced. However, there are sufficient places at nearby schools to meet demand so no child need be without a place at a local school. The School has provided strong educational arguments for setting the PAN at 60. Additionally, parents will know in good time, before they apply for a place in reception year, the PAN for 2027 if the PAN is reduced now. Taking all the evidence into consideration, I believe the variation is justified by the circumstances and I agree the variation.

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 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council for Rose Hill Primary School for 2027/28.
25. I determine that for admission in 2027/28 the published admission number will be 60.

Dated: 3 July 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard