Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Determination

Case references: **VAR2736 and VAR2737**

Admission Authority: **Hampshire County Council for Romsey Primary School and Nursery**

Local Authority: **Hampshire County Council**

Date of decision: **10 July 2026**

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Romsey Primary School and Nursery, for 2025/26 and for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2025 the published admission number shall be 40.

I determine that for admission in 2026 the published admission number shall be 20.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Local Authority, the LA, and the Admission Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for variations to the admission arrangements for Romsey Primary School and Nursery (the School) for both 2025/26 and 2026/27 (the Arrangements).

2. The School is a community school for children aged three to eleven in Romsey. It is a co-educational school. The school is located in the town of Romsey north of Southampton.

3. The Admission Authority for the School is the local authority (LA). As the LA is the Admission Authority, both terms are used throughout this determination.

4. Parties to the request are the LA and the School.

5. The proposed variations are that the published admission number (PAN) for the School should be as follows:

- 40 children for 2025/26.
- 20 children for 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 20 February 2024 (for 2025) and 14 February 2025 (for 2026).

8. The Admission Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variations in line with the Code. An initial error stating the proposed PAN was for 36 children for 2025/26 was amended later to the current proposal of 40 children, and the appropriate bodies were informed of this. The LA has provided me with confirmation that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variations.

9. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variations are 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 22 May 2026 and supporting documents;

- the determined Arrangements for 2025/26 and 2026/27 and the proposed variations to those Arrangements;
- responses from the LA, and the School to my requests for further information;
- maps, including Google Maps and those showing the location of the School; and
- information available on the websites of .gov.uk. (including the 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS) and 'Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool' (FBIT) websites), the LA, and the School (including its Arrangements for 2025/26 and 2026/27) and Ofsted.

12. I would like to extend my thanks to the LA and the School for their responses to my requests for further information.

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

14. 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.

15. 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 as proposed, it will be for that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.

Consideration of proposed variations

16. 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 variations are justified by the change in circumstances.

17. For both 2025/26 and 2026/27, the PAN in the determined arrangements is 60 children. The Admission Authority has proposed that the PAN for children currently in Reception Classes, admitted in 2025/26, be reduced to 40. There are currently 36 children in that cohort. For clarity, the PAN applies to the maximum number of children the School can be required to admit in the September of the admission year, and in-year while the children are in the year of admission. The Admission Authority has further proposed that the PAN for children about to be admitted to Reception Classes in 2026/27 be reduced to 20. This reflects a low number of places allocated for September, 17 children.

18. The maximum number of places which could be admitted to Reception by the School in 2025/26 was set by the PAN of 60. However, the effect of the PAN expires at the end of that academic year. From that point onwards, the capacity of classes in the cohort in Year

1, is set by the class organisation of the School. The major factors on that assignment are the class size limit of thirty children, due to infant class sizes legislation (as set out in The School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 and in paragraph 2.16 of the Code), and the willingness of the School to create viable mixed aged classes. The School has already created mixed aged classes for children in Years 1 and 2, which gives it considerable flexibility.

19. Regarding the requested variation of the PAN for 2025/26 to 40 places, in my judgement it is hard to find this to be necessary nor significant. The determinant of availability of places in that cohort, which will be Year 1 in 2026/27, is not its PAN on admission, but the number of classes and the number of children in those classes. The School could not legitimately deny places into Year 1 next academic year on the basis of the PAN used for that cohort of students when admitted in 2025/26. However, there is no reason not to agree this variation at this stage in the school year and I agree that the PAN for 2025/26 can be 40.

20. I will now consider the variation for 2026/27. The School is one of four schools admitting children to Reception in Romsey, which is a sub-area of the admissions planning area. The other schools are Cupernham Infants School, Halterworth Primary School and Romsey Abbey Church of England Primary School. These schools are less than one mile in distance from the School, which is situated in the centre of the triangle which they form. A further school, North Baddesley Infant School, is too far distant from the School to be relevant to this adjudication.

21. Of the four schools in consideration, only Romsey Abbey is generally oversubscribed and admits up to its PAN of 30. For the other schools for admission in 2026/27, the places allocated are the School (17 places offered, PAN of 60), Cupernham (66 offers for a PAN of 90), and Halterworth (56 offers for a PAN of 60). For transparency North Baddesley is also under-subscribed for September 2026 entry to Reception.

22. The LA has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty the LA assesses the likely future number of places to be needed and plans to meet that need. The LA uses planning areas, which are geographical areas and the schools within those areas, for this purpose. In the planning area for the School there are 330 places available on determined arrangements for September 2026, but only 250 offers have been made. The LA has stated, “Offers for this school are currently low, and overall demand within the school place planning area remains below capacity. It is therefore not expected that any applications will be frustrated. In the unlikely event that this does occur, there is adequate capacity elsewhere within the local planning area. The Local Authority would not support this application if this were not the case.”

23. The effect of granting the variation for 2026/27 would be to reduce the number of places available in the admissions planning area in September 2026 to 290. No child would lose their allocated place at the School. Three other schools in Romsey would still be able to admit additional children to Reception in-year in 2026/27. The location of the School is such that no significant additional journey would be likely to be necessary.

24. The LA has stated that its reason for seeking the variation is that the School is operating well below capacity which is creating significant operational and financial pressure. Aligning the PAN more closely with the school's realistic intake is therefore necessary to ensure efficient class organisation and to avoid the financial pressures associated with maintaining capacity significantly above expected numbers.

The LA has provided the following projected School organisation for September 2026/27:

Table 1: projected School organisation for 2026/27.

Class	Foundation	KS1	KS1	KS2	KS2	KS2	KS2
-	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
1	20	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	-	12	11	-	-	-	-
3	-	12	11	-	-	-	-
4	-	12	10	-	-	-	-
5	-	-	-	10	16	-	-
6	-	-	-	10	16	-	-
7	-	-	-	11	15	-	-
8	-	-	-	-	-	13	14
9	-	-	-	-	-	14	13
10	-	-	-	-	-	13	14
total	20	36	32	31	47	40	41
PAN	20	~~40~~	~~60~~	~~60~~	~~60~~	~~60~~	~~60~~

*The PAN data has been excised to denote that the PAN only has value in the year of admission.

Table 2: projected School organisation for 2027/28.

Class	Foundation	KS1	KS1	KS2	KS2	KS2	KS2
-	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
1	30	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	30	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	-	10	20	-	-	-	-
4	-	10	20	-	-	-	-
5	-	-	-	32	-	-	-
6	-	-	-	-	31	-	-
7	-	-	-	-	-	16	14
8	-	-	-	-	-	16	13
9	-	-	-	-	-	16	13
total	60	20	40	32	31	48	40
PAN	60*	~~20~~	~~40~~	~~60~~	~~60~~	~~60~~	~~60~~

*in error the LA gave the figure of 30.

The LA sees the following financial implications of this organisation:

Table 3: Cost Implication of PAN reduction to 20 for 2026/27 on three academic years.

-	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
In Year Surplus/(Deficit) PAN at 60	£22,101	(£220,09)	(£414,013)
In Year Surplus/(Deficit) PAN at 20	£22,101	(£179,234)	(£215,908)
Surplus/(Deficit) Brought Forward PAN at 60	£14,435	£36,536	(£183,483)
Surplus/(Deficit) Brought Forward PAN at 20	£14,435	£36,536	(£142,698)
Cumulative Surplus/(Deficit) Carried forward PAN at 60	£36,336	(£183,483)	(£597,497)
Cumulative Surplus/(Deficit) Carried forward PAN at 20	£36,536	(£142,698)	(£358,605)

25. At first review, these figures look plausible for 2026/27. They could be achieved by a PAN variation to 20. However, that variation would bind the School to offer up to 20 Reception places either for September or for in-year entry in 2026/27 although the Admission Authority can admit over PAN as provided in paragraph 1.4 of the Code.

26. That would then have consequences for the age profile of the two mixed aged KS1 classes in 2027/28. If 20 Reception aged children progress into Year 1, this limits the school's ability to recruit Year 2 aged children into those mixed aged classes – and this age group is where the local need may be.

27. I note the LA assumes two classes of 30 at the School in Reception in 2027/28. This is not a plausible assumption. It is challenging to see why the LA would make this assumption given historic and projection data. The School has not exceeded an intake of 37 in terms of children admitted to Reception in the last three years. The LA projection for 2026 Reception need at the School was 33 places, but only 17 places have been allocated. The LA projection for need for 2027 Reception entry is only 36 places, with a determined PAN is 60.

28. The implication is that I cannot judge the savings suggested for 2027/28 as well-founded. What appears to be a valuable saving of £250,000 may not be plausible, and in any event, still leaves the School with a large budget deficit.

29. I offered the LA the chance to provide alternative figures for the future using a more plausible and lower PAN in 2027/28. Such a PAN would only operate if the authority chose to submit a further request for revision for the 2027/28 arrangements. The LA has not done so. As adjudicator I therefore have uncompelling information of the likely real-world financial outcome of the variation requested for 2026/27.

30. This creates an unusual decision problem for the adjudication. On one hand I need to judge the adverse effect of the change requested compared to benefits of agreements.

31. I have considered the impact of decreasing admission numbers on school finances balanced against the impact reducing the School's PAN will have on meeting parental preference. Parents have a right to express a preference as to where their children go to school. However, admission authorities cannot give any guarantee that preferences will be met. Additionally, infant class sizes are limited to 30 (as set out in The School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 and in paragraph 2.16 of the Code). The cost of a teacher and the resources necessary for an infant class, when compared to, say, a junior or secondary school teacher / class (where numbers are not limited), has to be borne by proportionately smaller income from the children admitted to infant classes.

32. I have tried to ensure that I have considered the competing needs of providing the school places that parents want for their children and the financial viability of the School.

33. In this request I can see no adverse effects from the changes requested.

34. The LA is satisfied that it will have adequate capacity for Reception entry in the rest of the decade, even using figures for the need for places which are unrealistically high for 2026/27.

35. No first preference applicants for the School will lose allocated places if the variation for 2026/27 is agreed. Alternative schools admitting to Reception are in any event nearby.

36. The School already has expertise in running a mixed-age curriculum. In some cases, allowing the variation for 2026/27 will allow some use of single age classes, an equally successful form.

37. In contrast there will be a limited financial benefit to the LA and the School. Money will be saved, albeit to a limited and in some ways inadequately identified degree. Granting the variation for 2026/27 would however eliminate a long-standing mismatch between places available in Reception in the admissions planning area and the need for those places, which I believe to aid future planning. The LA specified this as an objective.

38. On balance I therefore agree to the requested variations for both 2025 and 2026.

39. It will be for the LA and School to work together to determine future arrangements in the way expected by the Code. The LA advised the School to agree to go to consultation on its arrangements in both 2024 and 2025, and the School declined. In the short run the LA may seek a further request for variation of PAN for 2027/28. I cannot pre-judge how the OSA would determine such a request.

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 Romsey Primary School and Nursery, for 2025/26 and for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2025 the published admission number shall be 40.

I determine that for admission in 2026 the published admission number shall be 20.

Dated: 10 July 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Patrick Storrie