



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2748

Admission authority: Hampshire County Council

School: Hatch Warren Infant School

Date of decision: 14 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 Hampshire County Council for Hatch Warren Infant School in 2026/27.

I determine that the published admission number for the school in 2026/27 will be 60.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Local Authority (LA or HCC)) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements of Hatch Warren Infant School (HWIS or the School) in 2026/27 (the Arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged 4 to 7 in Basingstoke, Hampshire. It is a co-educational and non-selective infant school with no designated religious character.
3. HWIS was judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted in all inspected areas at its last inspection in June 2022.
4. The proposed variation is for the published admission number (PAN) of the School to be reduced from 90 to 60 in 2026/27.

Jurisdiction and procedure

5. The referral was made to me in accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) which deals with variations to determined

arrangements. Paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the School Admissions Code (the Code) say (as far as 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 arrangements were determined by the LA’s Executive Member for Education on 12 February 2025. The LA has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified, and I have seen confirmation that the School’s Governing Body has been consulted on the proposed variation. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am also satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.

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

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

- a. the referral from the LA dated 2 June 2026 and supporting documents;
- b. the determined arrangements for 2026/27 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c. responses received from the School and the LA in response to requests for further information; and
- d. information available on the websites of the LA, the School, the Department for Education (DfE) (including ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS) and ‘Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool’ (FBIT)) and Ofsted.

9. 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.

10. I note here that the arrangements for 2027/28 have already been determined. This means that the request to amend the arrangements for 2026/27 will be for that year only and will not have the effect of forming the 'baseline' PAN for following years.

11. I have been asked to consider this request late in the academic year. I felt it important that the decision on the PAN reduction be made swiftly, such that it can be implemented in good time. I have not, therefore, undertaken an assessment of the Arrangements as a whole under section 88I of the Act. The Admission Authority should not take the fact that I have not raised any other matters about the Arrangements as an endorsement of their compliance with the Code.

12. I wish to convey my thanks to the LA for its response to my request for further information.

Consideration of proposed variation

13. 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 variation requested is justified by the change in circumstances.

14. The LA told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the School is:

"The Published Admission Number (PAN) for Hatch Warren Infant School for 2026/27 is 90. However, for the 2026 admissions round, the school received only 51 offers. As a result, and with the support of the Local Authority, the school is seeking to reduce its PAN to 60 for Year R admissions in September 2026. This low number of offers for September 2026 is expected to exacerbate the school's worsening financial position following a year of operating below capacity with currently only 77 pupils on roll in year R against a PAN of 90."

15. The LA has a duty to make sure 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 geographical area covered by the LA is divided up into 'planning areas' for this purpose. Each planning area is made up of a small group of schools.

16. The School is one of nine schools for primary aged children in the LA's 'Basingstoke Area E' planning area (BAE or the planning area). There are five other schools in the planning area that admit children to Reception (YR) are (in order of straight line distance (in miles) from the postcode of the HWIS site taken from the DfE's GIAS website): Manor Field Infant School (0.41); St Mark's Church of England Primary School (0.46); Kempshott Infant School (0.77); Chalk Ridge Primary School (0.91); and Hounsme Fields Primary School (1.27). The remaining schools in the planning area are: Hatch Warren Junior School (0.04);

Manor Field Junior School (0.41); and Kempshott Junior School (0.75). As these three schools admit to Year 3 and not YR, I will not consider them any further.

17. HWIS was graded 'Good' in all inspected areas in June 2022. Putting aside Hounsme Fields Primary School (which has not yet been inspected as it only opened in 2025). none of the other schools admitting to YR in the BAE have been judged by Ofsted to be below the 'Expected Standard' (if inspected post-November 2025) or 'Good' (in individual inspection areas if inspected after September and before November 2025 or overall if inspected prior to September 2025) either as an overall judgement or in individual categories (depending on when it was inspected). has not been inspected by Ofsted. This means that all places available in the BAE are in schools judged to be providing at least the expected standard of education.

18. About this planning area, the LA told me that:

"Regarding the wider planning area, within Basingstoke - Area E, there are a total of 325 offers for September 2026 for Year R against a combined capacity of 390, leaving a surplus of 65 places, equivalent to over 2 forms of entry. Across the planning area, Chalk Ridge Primary School have received 27 offers against a PAN of 30, Hounsme Fields Primary School have received 30 offers against a PAN of 30, Kempshott Infant School have received 77 offers against a PAN of 90, Manor Field Infant School have received 50 offers against a PAN of 60 and St Mark's C Of E Primary School have received 90 offers against a PAN of 90. This demonstrates that there is capacity within the planning area should the PAN reduction be approved."

19. If I do not approve the reduction in the PAN in 2026/27, that would leave a surplus of 65 places (16.6 per cent of the total PAN). If I approve the PAN at HWIS being reduced to 60 in 2026/27, this will have the effect of reducing the number of YR places for children in the BAE to 360 for that academic year. This would leave a surplus of 35 places (9.7 per cent of places).

20. The DfE document, "Basic need allocations 2025-26: Explanatory note on methodology", refers to the need for two per cent surplus capacity "to provide an operating margin for local authorities ... to support parental choice, pupil population movement, and general manageability of the system". I note that the proportion of vacant places in the planning area will be considerably higher than two per cent and would continue to be if I approve the proposed reduction in PAN.

21. Turning now to the School, I note the LA's description of the class structure:

"The current class structure at Hatch Warren Infant School comprises three Year R classes, three Year 1 classes, and three Year 2 classes, all operating below capacity. This level of undersubscription is creating substantial challenges for the school and placing severe financial pressure on its budget."

22. I looked at the School's financial position. This is because schools are funded, in large part, on a per child basis. A reduction in the number of children admitted, therefore, results in a reduction in income. Additionally, the provisions of the School Admissions (Infant Class Size) (England) Regulations 2012 (the infant class size regulations) apply to the School, and they 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 children with a single qualified teacher, except in specific exceptional circumstances.

23. I noted from the FBIT website that in the financial year 2024-25 (up to March 2025), the School had an in-year deficit of -£112,144 and a revenue reserve deficit of -£125,295.

24. As the School is currently running a budget deficit, the Governing Body are expected to work with the LA to work towards a balanced budget. The School's financial projections are such that a reduction in the PAN for YR in 2026/27 will significantly help the financial pressure the School is under. Hence the Governing Body requested that the LA make this variation request to the adjudicator. The Governing Body and the LA are concerned that continuing to staff and resource the School for a higher number of children (three classes of 30) than is currently projected to be admitted (less than two classes of 30) would cause further financial difficulty at a time when the School is required to address its budget issues. A PAN of 60 would allow for two classes of 30; this removes the cost of staffing and resourcing a third class.

25. I note from the minutes of the Governing Body meeting on 5 May 2026 that there was unanimous support for the PAN reduction as a means by which the school can continue to address its financial issues.

26. In my view, the Governing Body at the School and the LA are working to address the financial shortfall in the School's budget. Reducing the PAN for the School for 2026/27 will have no effect on parental preference in the normal admission round as offers have been made and there are less admissions than there are places. The number of offers made will remain fewer than the number of places with a reduced PAN. There will be nine places available at the School for any in-year applicants and, as set out earlier, there are places available in other schools admitting children into YR in the BAE. Aside from Hounsome Fields Primary School, Ofsted have judged the education at all of those schools to be at the same level or better than at HWIS; parents will, therefore, have a good choice of schools in the local area.

27. The data provided by the LA demonstrated that it has a clear picture of recent / projected demand in schools in the BAE. It appeared to me that the matter raised in respect of the PAN at HWIS and the surplus places in the BAE in 2026/27 would have been obvious in enough time for what has been requested to have been dealt with through the consultation process prior to the determination of the Arrangements. I raised this concern with the LA and its response was:

“There was no clear basis for a reduction in the school's PAN in Autumn 2024 when any reduction to [the YR] intake [was] consulted upon. At the point when admission arrangements for September 2026 were being considered, forecasts indicated that there would be 74 [YR] pupils in 2026, rising to 79 [YR] pupils in 2027 (please see the forecast below). Whilst these figures were below the school's PAN of 90, they did not suggest a sustained reduction in demand that would justify reducing the PAN to 75 or 60. In particular, a reduction to 60 would only typically be considered where forecasts indicated [YR] pupil numbers consistently at, or below that level, enabling the school to maintain discrete year groups while operating sustainably.

In addition, when the 2026 admission arrangements were being consulted on in autumn 2024, the school had exceeded its own [YR] forecast, with 90 pupils taking up places against a forecast of 80. This demonstrated that actual pupil numbers could vary and indicated that pupil numbers might continue to fluctuate. It should also be noted that the impact of the new Hounsme Fields school, which opened in September 2025, could not be fully assessed when admission arrangements for September 2026 were being determined.

Although demand was forecast to be below the school's PAN of 90, the reductions projected at that time were not sufficiently significant or sustained to justify consultation on a lower PAN. Furthermore, the available evidence did not indicate that the school would be able to reduce the number of classes.”

28. I consider the LA's reasons for not consulting for a reduction in PAN, prior to the determination of the Arrangements, to be understandable. Should any future reductions in PAN be required, it is preferable that they are undertaken through the consultation process wherever possible.

29. Taking all of the above into account, I agree to the proposed reduction in the PAN from 90 to 60 in 2026/27.

30. 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 PAN of the School to be increased and / or for more children to be admitted from 2026/27 than is currently expected, there remains the capacity in the building for the LA to do so.

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 Hatch Warren Infant School in 2026/27.

32. I determine that the published admission number for the school in 2026/27 will be 60.

Dated: 14 July 2026

Signed:

Schools adjudicator: Dr Robert Cawley