



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2760

Admission Authority: Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council for Broadstone Hall Primary 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 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council for Broadstone Hall 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 admission authority for Broadstone Hall Primary School (the School) and has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for the School for 2027/28 (the arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged three to eleven years. Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council is also the local authority for the area in which the School is located and I shall refer to it as the local authority. The School is in an urban area with eight other schools which admit children to reception year within one mile and around 90 within three miles.
3. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) for the School is reduced from 75 to 60 for admissions in 2027/28; a reduction of 15 places. The year of entry is reception year and this is the year group to which the PAN applies.

Jurisdiction and procedure

4. 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”.

5. 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 confirmation that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variation and supports it.

6. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.

7. 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.

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

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

- a) the referral from the local authority dated 16 June 2026;
- b) the determined arrangements for 2027/28 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c) responses from the School to my requests for further information;
- d) maps showing the location of the School; and
- e) 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);
- f) the websites for the local authority and the School.

10. 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.

11. The arrangements for 2028/29 have not yet been determined. This means that if I decide to approve the proposed variation to the arrangements for 2027/28 as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years. I note that the local authority intends to consult on setting the PAN at 60 for 2028/29.

Consideration of proposed variation

12. 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.

13. 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 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 the costs. Most primary schools seek to have close to 30 pupils to a class in order to be financially efficient.

14. The School is one subject to the School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 (the Infant Class Size 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 Size Regulations apply to reception year, year 1 and year 2.

15. The local authority and the School are concerned that the combination of falling demand for the School and the requirements of the Infant Class Size 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.

16. The local authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient school 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 eight schools, including the School, which admit children to reception year.

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

Table 1: number of school places, and the number of children offered places in reception year in the planning area or forecast to be offered places

-	2024	2025	2026	2027
Sum of PANs of schools for YR (assuming no changes for 2028)	435	435	435	435
Number of first preferences	423	375	359	N/A
Number of children offered places or forecast to be offered a place	400	393	347	338
Vacant places based on offers or forecast demand	35	42	88	97

18. When applying for a school place, parents in the local authority's 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 demand has reduced in the planning area from 400 children offered places for 2024/25 to 347 offered places for 2026/27. The number of vacant places based on offers in 2026 is 88, which is over 20 per cent or one fifth of the total number of places available. This is a very high proportion. There is a higher number of vacant places forecast for 2027 and I am assured that if the PAN were reduced to 60 that there would be sufficient places to meet demand for 2027/28. The number of vacancies forecast for 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.

19. 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 to require a place

-	2024	2025	2026	2027
The PAN for the School	75	75	75	75
The number of first preferences	83	69	65	N/A
Number of children offered a place or forecast to be offered a place	75	70	62	68

-	2024	2025	2026	2027
Number of children in reception year at the time of the relevant October census	76	70	N/A	N/A
Number of vacant places or forecast to be vacant	Plus 1	5	13	7

20. I note that the local authority said,

“it is important to consider the nuances of parental preference and the actual number of children offered places in previous years. For the September 2026 intake, the forecast was 65, yet only 63 pupils were offered places on National Offer Day and this has since dropped to 62 pupils. Similarly, for the 2025 intake, the forecast was 73, and 70 pupils started on the first day of the academic year.”

21. FBIT recorded that at the end of the financial year April 2024 to March 2025, the in-year balance was £64,247 and the reserves were £97,325. I asked the School to provide further information about its finances and the planned class organisation taking into account whether I agreed the variation or not.

22. The School told me that for the end of the 2025 – 2026 financial year, the in-year balance was £56,453 and the revenue reserve was £153,778. Therefore the financial situation for the School improved in the last financial year. However, the School forecasts for 2027 – 2028, the School would have a revenue reserve deficit of £139,466 if the variation is not agreed. Clearly all forecast figures are subject to a variety of factors but give an indication of possible outcomes. I note that once a school is in a financial deficit, it is hard to address without implications for teaching and learning at a school as every budget line must be affected, particularly staffing and resources.

23. In terms of class organisation, the School currently provides 19 classes, with three for the current reception year of around 22 and 23 pupils each. Other year groups have some mixed aged classes, as one would expect from a school with a PAN of 75, and some single year group classes. I note that year 6 has three single year group classes with 20, 22 and 23 pupils. A similar pattern is planned for the 2026/27 academic year for year 6.

24. The School plans 16 classes for the 2026/27 academic year with two classes of 30 for reception year, even though 63 children have accepted places. Sixteen classes are partly achieved by classes of over 30 pupils in years 3 and 4, which are not infant classes, and 60 children or fewer in reception year. The School wishes to work towards two classes to each year group.

25. I note that the local authority forecasts that 68 parents will put the School as their first preference for 2027/28. Forecasts of the number of children for reception year are challenging as the children concerned are not in school and forecasts of parental preference will be largely based on the number of births, the number of children in pre-

school provision and previous patterns. It is particularly difficult to forecast demand for specific primary schools.

26. In considering this matter I have balanced the possible frustration of parental preference against the likely impact on the School's financial and educational health of the PAN remaining at 75. It is probable that if the PAN is 60 in 2027, then a number of parents may not be able to achieve their first preference. It is clear, however, that there are a high number of schools within a short distance of the School and so a high chance of admission to a local school. I note that if the variation is made now, parents will be able to apply in the knowledge of the PAN set.

27. The number of children seeking a place at the School has fallen, in line with demographic trends, and the School seeks a pragmatic approach to responding to this with a PAN which allows it to remain a financially healthy educational establishment. Taking these matters into account, I approve the reduction in PAN from 75 to 60 for admissions in 2027/28.

28. I also ask the local authority to note that it could request a reduction to the PAN for 2026/27. I cannot say what the outcome of such a request would be and note that any child for whom a place has been offered would have to be admitted. However, if the PAN were to be set at 60 and pupil numbers were to reduce to that level, the local authority would not have to admit over 60 in 2026/27, although it would remain open to any parent refused a place to appeal.

Determination

29. 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 Broadstone Hall Primary School for 2027/28.

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

Dated: 14 July 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard