



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	VAR2773
Admission Authority:	The governing body of St Mary's Church of England Primary School
Local Authority:	The London Borough of Haringey
Date of decision:	27 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 the governing body of St Mary's Church of England Primary School for 2026/27.

I determine that the published admission number for admissions to the Reception Year in 2026/27 shall be 30.

The referral

1. The governing body of St Mary's Church of England Primary School (the Admission Authority; the School) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for the School for 2026/27.
2. The School is a voluntary aided school for children aged two to eleven years in the London Borough of Haringey. It is a co-educational school with a Church of England religious character. The Diocese of London (the Diocese) is the religious authority for the School.
3. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) of the School, which applies to admissions to the Reception Year (Year R), be reduced from 60, as determined, to 30 for 2026/27.

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 Admission Authority on 23 October 2024.

6. The Admission Authority and the Local Authority have provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am 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:

- the referral from the Admission Authority (submitted by the Local Authority on the Admission Authority's behalf) dated 13 July 2026 and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- responses from the Admission Authority, the Local Authority, and the Diocese 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 Local Authority, and the School.

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 been determined, and the PAN is set at 60. This means that if I agree to the Admission Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the PAN as proposed, it will be for that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.

11. In the interest of dealing speedily with this and other requests for variations for schools, 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

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 Admission Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School be reduced from 60 to 30 in 2026/27. The Local Authority and the Diocese have supported the proposal.

14. Having regard to the declining birth rate and Year R admissions in recent years, the Admission Authority told me the following reason for it seeking a variation to the PAN for the School:

"We are aware of the continued decline in pupil numbers across the borough and the reductions in PAN that have already been approved for a number of schools in response to falling demand and the need to ensure that the supply of places more closely aligns with projected need.

We understand that St Mary's CE Primary School has been allocated only 30 Reception offers for September 2026. This level of demand is a significant concern and will have a substantial impact on the School's financial position if the current PAN remains unchanged."

15. I have considered the latest available data to form a view about the sufficiency of school places in the local area if the PAN of the School is reduced from 60 to 30 in 2026/27. I have also considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the change in demand, the potential effect of the proposed PAN reduction on parental preference, and whether the proposed reduction is justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.

16. The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. The Local Authority has assured me that within a distance of two miles

from the School, there are now at least 12 primary schools with a total number of 98 Year R vacancies for entry in September 2026. The Local Authority stated:

“From an admissions and school place planning perspective, there remains significant surplus Reception capacity across the local area, and the Local Authority is satisfied that a reduction in PAN would not adversely affect its statutory duty to secure a sufficient supply of school places. Should the variation be approved, there would continue to be adequate Reception capacity available to meet anticipated demand. The Local Authority therefore considers that the proposed PAN reduction can be accommodated without impacting parental preference or access to school places within the local area and supports the variation request.”

17. Given the transport infrastructure and connectivity within London, I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 30 for 2026/27, there would be sufficient places in the borough for any parents seeking a Year R place for their child both for September 2026 and in-year admissions.

18. I turn now to the demand for places at the School. The Local Authority stated on 15 July 2026:

“The school now has 28 confirmed Reception offers against its PAN of 60, leaving 32 vacant places. Since the submission of the variation request, two applicants have been offered places at higher preference schools and have consequently withdrawn from St Mary's CofE, resulting in the release of those places. The school currently has no children on its Reception waiting list and there remains significant surplus capacity across the wider local authority area for September 2026 admissions.”

19. I am satisfied that there is unlikely to be any frustration of parental preference if the variation were to be agreed for September 2026.

20. I will now consider the impact on the School of my approving, or not approving, the proposed variation.

21. The School is one affected by the provisions of 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 teacher except in specific exceptional circumstances (paragraph 2.16 of the Code). The Infant Class Sizes Regulations apply to Year R, Year 1, and Year 2.

22. The School is planning to organise the 28 pupils in one Year R class in September 2026. Together with classes in other year groups, it will likely have 11 classes in total for the school year.

23. As schools are largely funded on the number of pupils on roll and the most expensive element of a school budget is staff, it is generally considered financially efficient to have infant classes that have 30 pupils or close to, but below, 30 pupils. If a school has classes

that are many fewer than 30, then this can mean that the income from the number of pupils is less than the costs of providing a class. If this happens over several classes, a school can have severe financial challenges.

24. The FBIT website shows that for the financial year ending March 2025, the School had an in-year deficit of about £194,000, and a revenue reserve of £46,000.

25. In response to my request for further information, the Admission Authority stated:

“Given the school's current budget deficit, if the reduction in the PAN is not implemented, the school faces a serious financial risk. This assessment is supported by the Local Authority's finance team, who have advised that the current level of provision is not financially sustainable.

Reducing the school to a one-form entry (1FE) model will help secure its long-term financial viability, ensuring that it can continue to provide high-quality education for its pupils. It will also preserve the local community's access to a Church of England school, which is the last remaining Church of England primary school within the community.”

26. Having considered all the matters above, my reasoning can be summarised as follows:

- If the proposed variation is approved, the reduction in the School's PAN will be unlikely to result in a frustration of parental preference. The School will still have two vacant Year R places to cope with any demand in relation to late or in-year applications. There is compelling evidence that a reduction in the PAN to 30 will allow the School to plan with more certainty knowing the number of classes and staff members that will be required for 2026/27. This will enable the School to make the best use of its resources, thereby benefitting the School financially in the longer term.
- If the proposed variation is not approved, the School would be obliged to offer a Year R place up to the existing PAN of 60 for any applicant in 2026/27. If just over 30 children were to be admitted to the School, then the School could have to re-arrange its classes to meet the requirements of the Infant Class Sizes Regulations, and this might require a substantial cost to employ an additional teacher and any necessary support staff.

27. Taking everything into consideration, I find that the proposed variation is justified by the circumstances and I approve it.

Determination

28. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by the governing body of St Mary's Church of England Primary School for 2026/27.

29. I determine that the published admission number for admissions to the Reception Year in 2026/27 shall be 30.

Dated: 27 July 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Jackie Liu