



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2799

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Wallop Primary School

Date of decision: 19 August 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 Wallop Primary School for 2026/27.

I determine that the published admission number for admissions to the Reception Year in 2026/27 shall be 15.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Admission Authority; the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Wallop Primary School (the School) for 2026/27.
2. The School is a community school for children aged four to eleven years in the town of Stockbridge, which is at the heart of the Test Valley in Hampshire. It is a co-educational school with no designated religious character.
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 30, as determined, to 15 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 Local Authority on 12 February 2025.

6. 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.

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 Local Authority dated 10 August 2026, and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- maps, including Google Maps and those showing the location of the School; and
- information available on gov.uk websites (including the ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS) and ‘Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool’ (FBIT) websites); and on the websites of 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 view. 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 view. 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 15. 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, particularly those from Hampshire County Council, 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.

13. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School be reduced from 30 to 15 in 2026/27. The proposed variation has the support of the School's governing body.

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

"The proposed reduction is necessary to better align the PAN with current and projected pupil numbers and to support the school's ongoing financial sustainability and effective organisation. For September 2026, Wallop Primary School [made] just 11 offers against a PAN of 30."

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 30 to 15 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. 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 located in 'Stockbridge Primary planning area' (the planning area), and I have considered the data that the Local Authority has provided for that area.

17. Along with the School there are six other schools in the planning area for which the usual year of entry is Year R. Before the proposed PAN reduction is

approved, the combined Year R PAN of the planning area is 125 for September 2026, and the latest number of children offered a place is 109. It is worthy to note that, due to the rurality of the areas, three of such primary schools intend to admit over and above their PAN by a total of additional ten pupils for September 2026.

18. The DfE document, “Basic need allocations 2026-27 and 2027-28: Explanatory note on methodology”, refers to the need for two per cent surplus capacity “to provide an operating margin for local authorities. This helps to support parental choice, pupil population movement, and general manageability of the system”. From the data above, there would be a surplus of Year R places for September 2026 (about 14 places, representing 12.7 per cent of the reduced combined PAN of 110 places), which is well above the suggested two per cent, if I agreed the proposed variation to reduce the School’s PAN by 15 places.

19. I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 15 for 2026/27, there would be sufficient places in the planning area for any parents seeking a Year R place for their child both for September 2026 and in-year admissions.

20. I turn now to the demand for places at the School. The Local Authority advised me that it made 11 offers on National Offer Day in response to applications for Year R places at the School. As September 2026 is approaching, the School still has four Year R places to accommodate any in-year or late applications, even if the proposed PAN reduction is approved. Otherwise the nearest primary school with vacant Year R places will be West Tytherley Church of England Primary School, but it is almost seven miles away from the School by car.

21. On the understanding that the School still has a few vacant Year R places to accommodate any late or in-year applications, I am satisfied, on balance, that there is unlikely to be any substantial frustration of parental preference if the variation were to be agreed for September 2026.

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

23. 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 school 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.

24. For September 2026, the School plans to offer one Year R class to accommodate all 11 pupils admitted. It will adopt mixed-age teaching and run three other classes each for Years 1/2, Years 3/4, and Years 5/6.

25. The Local Authority added in the referral form:

“The offers for September 2026 will see only 11 pupils admitted into Year R; a similar number to last year. As a response to these falling pupil numbers, the proposal is to reduce the school’s PAN from 30 to 15 for September in order to maintain the 4-class structure established in previous years. This will provide greater certainty around staffing and class organisation and will help maintain the school's financial viability under the per-pupil funding model.

From September 2027, the school has permanently reduced its PAN to 15 through the statutory Admissions Arrangements consultation process, as this was supported by forecasts, enabling it to continue operating a four-class structure. The proposed permanent reduction in PAN will enable the school to operate as a 0.5 [form of entry] provision, bringing the number of places more closely into line with forecast demand and helping to ensure the school's long-term financial sustainability.”

26. The Local Authority has shown me a proposed class structure scenario in 2027/28, such that one mixed-age class will accommodate all Year R and Year 1 pupils if the numbers of Year R pupils in 2026/27 transiting to Year 1 in 2027/28 are kept at 15 or below (if this variation request is approved), and if the School is to admit up to the established PAN of 15 for 2027/28.

27. The FBIT website shows that for the financial year ending March 2025, the School had an in-year surplus of about £16,000, and a revenue reserve of £50,000. The Local Authority has shown me budgetary information to demonstrate that maintaining more than four classes is financially unsustainable for the School as the in-year deficit may grow as high as over £300,000 in 2026/27. According to the Local Authority, the four-class structure would enable the School to reduce staff cost and improve its long-term financial viability.

28. 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 have four vacant places to accommodate any late or in-year applications for admissions to Year R in 2026/27. I must note that since the School is to offer one Year R class and to have one qualified teacher for that class anyway for all 11 pupils offered admissions in September 2026, the Admission Authority has the capacity to admit over and above the reduced PAN of 15 to the School in the very unlikely situation of a sudden surge of late or in-year applicants in the locality for Year R places (instead of allocating or otherwise steering those applicants to another school which has vacant places but is miles away). The advantage of granting a reduction in the PAN to 15 here now is to allow the School to

plan with more certainty knowing the number of classes and staff members that will be required for 2026/27 and beyond. 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 30 for any applicant in 2026/27. There is a risk, however remote, that up to that number could be admitted, thus preventing the continuation of the four-class structure through 2027/28.

29. Taking everything into consideration, I find that the variation is, on balance, justified by the circumstances and I approve it.

Determination

30. 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 Wallop Primary School for 2026/27.

31. I determine that the published admission number for admissions to the Reception Year in 2026/27 shall be 15.

Dated: 19 August 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Jackie Liu