



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: ADA4621

Objector: A parent

Admission Authority: The White Hills Park Trust Ltd for Alderman White School

Date of advice: 9 September 2026

Determination

In accordance with section 88H(4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I partially uphold the objection to the admission arrangements determined by The White Hills Park Trust Ltd for Alderman White School for 2027.

By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the admission authority. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of this determination.

The referral

1. Under section 88H(2) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act), an objection has been referred to the adjudicator by a parent (the Objector), about the admission arrangements for September 2027 (the Arrangements) for Alderman White School (the School or AWS). The School is located in Nottinghamshire and is a secondary, academy school for children aged eleven to sixteen years.
2. The Local Authority (LA) for the area in which the School is located is Nottinghamshire County Council.
3. The LA is a party to this objection, as is the Objector. Other parties to the objection are the School and The White Hills Park Trust Ltd, which is the admission authority for the School (the Trust, the Admission Authority).

4. The objection is in respect of three matters: the prioritisation for entry which is afforded to applicants from feeder schools; the “distance tiebreaker”; and the definition of the catchment area of the School.

Jurisdiction

5. The terms of the academy agreement between the Admission Authority and the Secretary of State for Education require that the admissions policy and arrangements for the School are in accordance with admissions law as it applies to maintained schools.

6. The Arrangements were determined under section 88C of the Act, by the Trust, on 12 November 2025.

7. The Objector submitted his objection to the determined arrangements on 26 April 2026. I am satisfied the objection has been properly referred to me in accordance with section 88H of the Act and it is within my jurisdiction.

8. I have not considered the Arrangements as a whole under section 88I of the Act. The Admission Authority should not take the fact that I have not used this power as an endorsement of the compliance of the Arrangements with the Code.

9. The Objector made reference to previous adjudicators’ findings in respect of other, unrelated schools. These included Lawrence Sheriff School (case reference ADA4479); and Langley Park School for Boys and Langley Park School for Girls (case references ADA3958-3959, ADA3983-4066 and REF4078-4083). Previous determinations by other schools adjudicators may be relevant and informative. However, they do not set precedents and I have, therefore, considered the Arrangements in accordance with the requirements set out in legislation and the Code and in the light of the facts and circumstances as they are now.

10. My jurisdiction is for the 2027 admission arrangements only. I do not consider the following matters, included in the objection, to be within my jurisdiction:

- a. Whether or not allocation data has been published, by the Trust, in a timely manner.
- b. Whether or not the LA has published its annual reports to the OSA in a timely manner.
- c. Financial information regarding local housing developments, the use of funds received by the LA in respect of those developments, or any planning or funding decisions taken by the LA or any other body in respect of such developments.
- d. Any matters relating to the Arrangements for 2026, including whether or not the Trust should have chosen to consult on and revise those arrangements.

- e. Assertions of failures by the LA to revisit secondary school place planning, or whether or not the LA is fulfilling its duty to provide sufficient school places for the children in its area.
- f. Whether or not the LA has published its school allocation data in a timely manner.
- g. Any matters relating to the design or functionality of the LA website.
- h. Paragraph 3.3b of the Code states that “objections about own authority admission’s decision to increase or keep the same PAN” cannot be brought. As the PAN has remained unchanged since at least 2026 I am unable to consider any concerns relating to it.

Procedure

- 11. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
- 12. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
 - the objection dated 23 April 2026 and supporting documents, plus further correspondence from the Objector;
 - the determined Arrangements for 2027;
 - a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Admission Authority at which the Arrangements were determined;
 - responses from the LA and the Trust to the objection and to my requests for further information;
 - an adjudicator determination for Lawrence Sheriff School (case reference ADA4479) (the Lawrence Sheriff determination);
 - an adjudicator determination for Langley Park School for Boys and Langley Park School for Girls (case references ADA3958-3959, ADA3983-4066 and REF4078-4083) (the Langley determination);
 - Google Maps; and
 - information available on the websites of gov.uk (including the ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS) website), the LA, the School and Ofsted.

13. I have been provided with a substantial amount of information, including by the Objector. I have referred only to that which has a bearing on my determination. I am grateful to all parties for the information provided in response to my requests.

Background

14. According to GIAS, the School is an academy converter, secondary school for children aged 11 to 16 years in Bramcote, Nottingham. It is part of The White Hills Park Trust Ltd, which comprises nine schools. The School does not have a religious character, and was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2022 when it was judged to be Good.

15. The published admission number (PAN) of the School, which applies to Year 7, is 145. After the admission of any child with an Education, Health and Care plan (EHC plan) which names the School, the criteria used to prioritise applicants in the event of oversubscription are set out under the heading “Oversubscription Criteria”. These are, in summary:

1. Looked after children and previously looked after children.
2. Children living within the catchment area of AWS, who will have a sibling attending the School at the time of admission.
3. Other children living within the catchment area.
4. Children living outside the catchment area who attend a “linked primary phase school” at the time of application and who will have a sibling attending the School at the time of admission.
5. Children living outside the catchment area who, at the time of admission, will have a sibling attending the School.
6. Children living outside the catchment area who attend a “linked primary phase school”.
7. Other children.

16. Although the Arrangements do not assign numbers to the oversubscription criteria, for the purposes of this determination I use the numbering I have set out above; this has also been used by the Objector.

17. The Arrangements make provision for children to be admitted after “Special Consideration”, stating: “Admission under special circumstances will have priority over all but the first numbered criterion”. Although not presented under the heading of Oversubscription Criteria, and putting aside the fact that the criteria are not numbered, this is an oversubscription criterion which affords priority on the basis of social and medical needs.

18. The Arrangements refer to 'linked primary schools'; I will use the term 'feeder schools', as in the Code. The feeder schools are:

- Beeston Fields Flying High Academy.
- Bramcote CofE Primary School.
- Eskdale Junior School.
- Round Hill Primary School.
- Sunnyside Spencer Academy.

19. In the event of oversubscription within any one criterion, applicants are prioritised on the basis of distance with those living closest to the School afforded greatest priority.

20. Although I have not used my powers under section 88I of the Act to consider the Arrangements as a whole, I suggest that the Trust revise the Arrangements (as permitted under paragraph 3.6 of the Code) to make it clear that 'special circumstances' is the second oversubscription criterion. The Trust may also wish to review the statement in the Arrangements that the oversubscription criteria will be applied: "once places have been allocated to pupils who have an Education, Health and Care Plan which names the school provided that the school can meet their needs". As a child with an EHC plan which names a school must, by law, be given a place at that school, the reference to whether needs can be met seems unclear and may be unlawful.

Consideration of Case

21. I set out below a summary of the objection, which the Objector has confirmed to be accurate.

22. Firstly, the Objector asserts that as criterion 3 does not recognise attendance at the feeder schools, the Arrangements are unreasonable and unfair, and therefore contrary to paragraph 1.18 of the Code.

23. Secondly, the Objector alleges that the "distance tiebreaker" in the Arrangements is unreasonable in its use of straight-line distances rather than safe walking routes.

24. Thirdly, the Objector alleges that the Arrangements are contrary to paragraph 1.14 of the Code as the catchment area is not clearly defined.

25. The Objector has described the position of his own daughter, who attended Round Hill Primary School and has been refused a place at AWS for 2026. Although I may refer to this insofar as it serves to demonstrate the objection raised, I make it clear that it is not the role of the adjudicator to consider the position of individual children in objection cases. Further, my

jurisdiction is for the 2027 admission arrangements and no finding I make in respect of those arrangements would have any effect on admissions in 2026.

26. I have identified the following paragraphs of the Code as relevant:

14: "In drawing up their admission arrangements, admission authorities **must** ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear, and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated."

1.8: "Oversubscription criteria **must** be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation. Admission authorities **must** ensure that their arrangements will not disadvantage unfairly, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with a disability or special educational needs, and that other policies around school uniform or school trips do not discourage parents from applying for a place for their child. Admission arrangements **must** include an effective, clear, and fair tie-breaker to decide between two applications that cannot otherwise be separated."

1.13 "Admission authorities **must** clearly set out how distance from home to the school and/or any nodal points used in the arrangements will be measured. This **must** include making clear how the 'home' address will be determined and the point(s) in the school or nodal points from which all distances will be measured. This should include provision for cases where parents have shared responsibility for a child following the breakdown of their relationship and the child lives for part of the week with each parent. The selection of a nodal point **must** be clearly explained and made on reasonable grounds."

1.14 "Catchment areas **must** be designed so that they are reasonable and clearly defined. Catchment areas do not prevent parents who live outside the catchment of a particular school from expressing a preference for the school."

27. I will now set out my consideration of each part of the objection, under three headings corresponding to the different parts of the objection. I will conclude each section with a statement as to whether or not I uphold that particular aspect of the objection, preceded by my reasons for that conclusion. Where I state that I uphold an aspect of the objection, that does not necessarily imply that I fully endorse the reasoning expressed by the Objector, nor that the Objector has necessarily correctly interpreted which Code provision applies. Rather, it means that I have found that the particular aspect of the Arrangements drawn to my attention by the Objector does not conform with a requirement of the Code identified by me and is in breach of the Code for the reasons I have given.

As criterion 3 does not recognise attendance at the feeder schools, the Arrangements are unreasonable and unfair.

28. The first oversubscription criterion prioritises looked after and previously looked after children as required by paragraph 1.7 of the Code. The second criterion prioritises siblings of children attending the School, at the time of admission, who live within the catchment area. Aside from any applicants admitted under 'special consideration', those prioritised under criterion 2 are afforded the greatest priority possible under the Code and I need give no consideration to their position.

29. The matter for consideration is the third criterion, which affords equal priority to all in-catchment children without a sibling at the School. The Objector asserts that this equal prioritisation is unfair, and that such children who attend one of the feeder schools should be afforded greater priority for entry than those who do not. The reasons the Objector gives for this assertion are as follows:

- a. The Arrangements prioritise applicants from feeder schools under some of the other oversubscription criteria; this is an inconsistency.
- b. As a result of this inconsistency, the Arrangements cause indirect disadvantage to a particular social group, namely those who attend the feeder schools.
- c. For offers made for 2026, children living in Beeston (NG9 postcode) have been displaced "to schools far outside their communities".
- d. The Arrangements are inconsistent with the Trust's own view of fairness, as stated in its consultation in respect of the arrangements for 2021.

30. The objection stated:

"The oversubscription criteria recognise attendance at named feeder primary schools as a priority factor, but exclude it entirely from criterion 3 - the criterion that determines the outcome for the largest group of applicants (in-catchment children without siblings).

In-catchment children attending named feeder primary schools receive no recognition of feeder status. Out-of-catchment children attending the same feeder schools do receive priority. Applicants who satisfy more of the school's stated priorities (catchment + feeder) receive less benefit than those who satisfy fewer. . .

Paragraph 1.8 of the School Admissions Code requires oversubscription criteria to be procedurally fair. The arrangements recognise feeder school relationships as relevant but apply them selectively. This creates an internal inconsistency and results in unequal treatment of a clearly identifiable group (feeder pupils)."

31. I will refer to the children alleged to be disadvantaged (that is, those within the catchment area, without a sibling at AWS, who attend a feeder school), as 'the identified group'.

32. Parents may apply for a place for their child at any school of their choice; this does not have to be one for which they are in catchment, if such areas are in use, or even one in the local authority area in which they live. Some schools will inevitably attract more applications than others; there are many reasons why a school may be popular and no child (except one with an EHC plan which names a school) can be guaranteed a place at the school which their parents most want them to attend.

33. All admission arrangements advantage some applicants over others. This is because all arrangements must contain oversubscription criteria which prioritise certain applicants in the event of oversubscription. Paragraph 1.8 of the Code requires that oversubscription criteria are reasonable and fair. I will first consider whether the Arrangements are reasonable. I will then consider whether, as a result of the choice to afford equal prioritisation to all in-catchment children without a sibling at the School, those from the identified group will be unfairly disadvantaged.

34. The Code uses the term 'reasonable' but does not define it. An everyday definition is of having sound judgement; being sensible and rational. It is the requirement of public bodies, including admission authorities, that they must act reasonably in adopting any policy or making any decision. I will apply what I will refer to as the 'reasonableness test'. This is a two stage objective test in which the first stage is the consideration of the rationale for adopting that which is the focus of the objection. The second is the effect of its practical operation.

35. I asked the Trust for its rationale for naming feeder schools in the arrangements. It stated:

"The schools are geographically close, and within the catchment area for Alderman White and this was originally a determination of the Local Authority to secure place planning obligations. These are a family of schools that work collaboratively and as a cluster. This then reflects Alderman White's commitment to their local community."

36. The Trust also provided its rationale in respect of why children from the identified group are not afforded greater priority for entry than other children prioritised under Criterion 3:

"The school are [sic] obliged to provide a framework that balances children's needs and individual circumstances. The school has used criteria that give a priority to families who already have a sibling and who live in catchment."

This reflects the needs of families in respect of not only child care, but also the opportunity to share the same teaching, learning and extra curricula options.

Families may live in the catchment area but opt for their child to attend a primary school that is not a linked school e.g. as they feel this school best meets their child's SEND needs, or due to a breakdown in relationship with the local primary school. Using link primary school as an in-catchment criteria could unfairly disadvantage these families.

Attendance at a feeder school does not necessarily prioritise those who live close to the school. Families can move out of the area, but keep children at their current primary setting. That could give rise to children outside of area being prioritised over local children. The school does not think this is fair.

Giving priority to feeder school children would not necessarily be fair."

37. I asked the Trust for an explanation as to why applicants who attend the feeder schools are prioritised under the fourth and sixth criteria but not the third criterion. The Trust responded:

"This is to cover children who live outside the catchment area but have a pre-existing link to the school, either due to having siblings attending, attending a link primary school, or both. However, this doesn't give children at a linked primary school priority over children who live in the catchment area."

38. The Trust has provided a clear rationale for affording equal priority to all children who fall under the third oversubscription criterion, and for not affording greater priority to the identified group. I find nothing unreasonable in the Trust's rationale and nothing that might otherwise make it unreasonable.

39. The Objector alleged that the Arrangements are inconsistent with the Trust's own view of fairness. I have accordingly considered, within the first part of the reasonableness test, whether any inconsistency exists which would render the Arrangements unreasonable. The Objector stated:

"7.1.1 In December 2019 the White Hills Park Trust conducted a formal public consultation on proposed changes to Alderman White's admissions arrangements for entry from September 2021. Four changes were proposed. Three were implemented. One was not.

7.1.2 The fourth proposal was to remove Sunnyside Spencer Academy from the list of named feeder primary schools for Alderman White. The stated reason, in the Trust's own consultation document, was: "Sunnyside Spencer Academy is a linked school to George Spencer Academy under number 4 of their oversubscription criteria. This

change ensures that all primary schools in the local area have only one linked secondary school and is fairer.”

7.1.3 That sentence establishes three things: the Trust correctly identified that a primary having two linked secondaries creates unfairness; it stated explicitly that a one-primary-to-one-secondary mapping “is fairer”; and it proposed to act on that principle. This is the Trust’s own published articulation of the fairness standard it considered appropriate. . .

7.2.1 Sunnyside Spencer was not removed. It remains on the feeder list today. The Trust consulted on removing the dual-link as a fairness measure and then retained it. No public record of a formal response summary or determined arrangements notice explaining the decision has been identified.

7.2.2 As a result, Sunnyside Spencer children benefit from feeder priority at two secondary schools - Alderman White (criterion 6) and George Spencer Academy. Round Hill children have no such fallback. Alderman White is the only school to which Round Hill’s primary designation links. A child from the dual-linked primary has twice the feeder-school protection of a child from the single-linked primary. The Trust identified this asymmetry as unfair in 2019. It persists, unresolved, in 2026. . .

The Trust articulated the correct fairness principle in 2019: deliberate, intentional mapping of primaries to secondaries requires consistency. That principle, applied to criterion 3, supports the proposition that the feeder relationship should operate more meaningfully within the criterion, not less. The Trust has never applied its own fairness standard within criterion 3. The Adjudicator is invited to consider whether the arrangements, as they stand, are consistent with the Trust’s own published standard.”

40. Consultation is a process which seeks comments from interested parties on proposed arrangements. It goes without saying that admission authorities are not required to adopt every aspect of proposed arrangements; such a requirement would render consultation meaningless. Following consultation, it is for the admission authority to decide whether to determine arrangements which are the same as, or different from those proposed. I note here that no objection has been raised in respect of Sunnyside Primary School or its inclusion as a feeder school for AWS; consequently, that is not a matter for my consideration.

41. The Objector has asserted that the Trust’s “fairness principle”, expressed in 2019, “supports the proposition that the feeder relationship should operate more meaningfully” within the third oversubscription criterion. In my view that conclusion does not necessarily follow from the principle set out. In any case, there is no requirement under the Code for an admission authority to maintain a principle previously expressed. Consequently, I do not find that an inconsistency exists, as the Objector has described, which renders the Arrangements unreasonable.

42. For the reasons set out above, I find that oversubscription criterion 3 is reasonable in seeking to achieve the Trust's intention to prioritise children who live close to the School. I will now consider the potential effect of the practical operation of this criterion, and whether this supports the Trust's rationale.

43. AWS is a popular, oversubscribed school. Although the Trust has made offers above the level of the School's PAN in recent years, it cannot accommodate all children who wish to attend. In 2026, 43 children for whom AWS was the first preference were not offered a place at the School. The LA provided the data below: table 1 sets out the total number of applicants and offers made for places at the School on National Offer Day in recent years, plus the number of applicants and offers organised by preference. Table 2 shows the number of children with EHC plans offered a place at the School in each of 2024, 2025 and 2026, and the numbers of children who were offered a place under each oversubscription criterion; no places were offered to applicants prioritised under a criterion lower than criterion 3.

Table 1: Applications for places at the School and offers made on National Offer Day.

	2024 entry		2025 entry		2026 entry	
	Applied	Offers	Applied	Offers	Applied	Offers
Total applications and offers	579	158	556	150	588	155
First preference applicants	198	150	205	144	185	142
Second preference applicants	228	5	208	2	234	6
Third preference applicants	116	1	114	0	127	1
Other preference applicants	37	0	29	0	42	0
EHC plan	N/A	2	N/A	4	N/A	6

Table 2: Numbers of children with EHC plans offered a place at the School, and offers made under each oversubscription criterion.

Numbers offered into Year 7	2024	2025	2026
EHCP	2	4	6
Special circumstances	2	6	1
Oversubscription Criterion 1	7	8	5
Oversubscription Criterion 2	49	45	47
Oversubscription Criterion 3	98	87	96
Total offers	158	150	155
PAN	145	145	145

44. The data show that the large majority of places at the School have, in recent years, been allocated to applicants prioritised under the second and third oversubscription criteria; that is, to children living within the catchment area of the School. In the three years shown, children prioritised under those combined criteria comprised between 88 and 93 per cent of all offers.

45. Feeder school attendance is of relevance in criteria 4 and 6; no applicants were afforded entry under those criteria in either 2024, 2025 or 2026. This perhaps calls into question the reasonableness of naming feeder schools in the Arrangements. In other words, it is not clear why the Trust has chosen to use feeder schools given that the practical operation of the Arrangements is such that this has, in recent years, afforded no priority to any applicant. However, whether or not there should be feeder schools is not the objection that has been raised.

46. The data support the Trust's rationale of affording priority to children from the catchment area of the School. Consequently, I find that this particular likely effect of the oversubscription criteria is reasonable.

47. I turn now to the wider effects of the practical application of the Arrangements and the matter of fairness. Fairness is a concept which, like that of reasonableness, is used in the Code but is not defined. Fairness can be described as a 'protean concept' in that it cannot be defined in universal terms; its requirements will depend on the circumstances. Fairness is focussed on the effect of the Arrangements on any relevant group. I stress here that oversubscription criteria create advantage for some applicants and disadvantage to others; indeed, that is their purpose.

48. Simply not being able to obtain a place at your school of choice is not of itself unfair. Data on the Explore Education Statistics website show that for entry to secondary school in England in 2026, 16.4 per cent of applicants were refused an offer at their first preference school.

49. In respect of demand for places in the area, data show that the LA made 9201 offers for Year 7 places, to Nottinghamshire residents, on National Offer Day in 2026. Of these:

- a. 691 children were refused a place at their first preference school, equivalent to 7.5 per cent of all offers.
- b. Of the children who were refused entry to their first preference school, most were offered a place at the school which was their second preference (449 children, equivalent to 65.0 per cent).
- c. In total, 8,959 applicants were offered either their first or second preference school, equivalent to 97.4 per cent of all applicants.
- d. There were 137 children for whom no preference could be met; this is equivalent to 1.5 per cent of all offers made.

50. In respect of demand for places at the School, LA data show that:

- a. In 2025, 60 children for whom the School was the first preference were refused a place. In 2026, 43 such applicants were refused entry.
- b. Of the 43 children refused entry to the School in 2026, three were offered a place at a school over two miles from their home address (but less than three miles), and seven were offered a place at a school over three miles distant. The furthest distance offered was 7.72 miles.
- c. In 2026, 28 first preference applicants from the feeder schools were refused a place at the School. 18 of these were offered their second preference school.
- d. In 2026, ten first preference applicants living within the catchment area of the School were refused a place. Four of these were offered their second preference school, and two their third preference.
- e. In 2026, of the children living in the NG9 post code area identified by the objector, 40 first preference applicants were refused a place at AWS; 26 of these attended a feeder school.

51. I stress here that all oversubscription criteria create advantage for some applicants and disadvantage to others; indeed, that is their purpose. I accept that Criterion 3 may result in children from the feeder schools being refused a place in favour of other children living within the catchment area of the School. This approach is part of a deliberate decision to prioritise children who live locally. It is a reasonable decision and compliant with the Code. The Objector is concerned that because oversubscription criterion 3 does not afford greater priority to children from the identified group, those children will be unfairly disadvantaged.

52. The Objector has linked the alleged unfairness to a lack of surplus school places in the area. The objection stated:

“An admission arrangement that may appear neutral or proportionate in conditions of surplus capacity can become procedurally unfair or unreasonable when demographic conditions change in ways that were known, reported and sustained.”

53. The Objector asserts that children have been displaced “to schools far outside their communities” and stated:

“[On National Offer day] Families living in Beeston (NG9) - within the Broxtowe South planning area - received offers at secondary schools in Gedling and Hucknall: schools located in entirely different parts of Nottinghamshire with no connection whatsoever to the Beeston communities from which these children come. . . Gedling and Hucknall are not neighbouring communities to Beeston. They are geographically, socially and educationally disconnected from NG9. A secondary school placement in Hucknall imposes a daily journey of well over 10 miles on a child living in Beeston - a journey by public transport that can exceed 45 minutes each way.”

54. The Objector also described the position of his own child:

“ [My child] has herself been offered a place at Chilwell [Chilwell School] - and it might superficially appear that the system has “worked”: a place has been provided, albeit at a different school. . .

An offer at Chilwell does not represent the provision of a place at [my child]’s local school within her catchment area. It represents displacement - a child being sent to a school with which she has no feeder connection, where her primary school peer group is absent and where she falls into the lowest priority criterion.

Displacement is a real-world consequence of operating admission arrangements that take no account of feeder-school relationships within catchment at the very point where those relationships matter most. It is those arrangements, rather than the displacement alone, that fall to be assessed against paragraph 1.8 of the Code.”

55. The Objector believes that children should be able to progress from primary school to secondary school alongside their classmates. I understand that families may prefer this, but the law does not require it. The Objector has described the effect on his child, and on other children in the identified group, who have been or may be denied a place at the School. This does not show that the effect on such children will be disproportionate, or that children who attend the feeder schools will be more affected by being refused a place than other children may be. In other words, all the negative outcomes which the Objector describes seem as equally likely to impact other in-catchment children without a sibling at the School.

56. According to GIAS, there are 33 primary schools which provide education up to the age of eleven within three miles of AWS, and 17 within two miles. If an in-catchment child does not secure a place at the School because of oversubscription criteria which give higher priority than currently to children from the identified group, then they could be in the position

of the Objector. That is, the child would have to be admitted to a school for which they were out-of-catchment, and all the issues which concern the Objector may apply to that family. As an illustration, I note that The Lanes Primary School is just outside the catchment area of AWS and is not a named feeder school. Google Maps shows that the walking distance from The Lanes Primary School to AWS is 0.9 miles, and it seems perfectly possible that some children attending that school will live within the AWS catchment area and wish to progress to the School alongside classmates. The Objector's address is, by way of comparison, 1.6 miles walking distance from AWS according to Google Maps.

57. A change in the Arrangements as the Objector wishes, to afford greater priority to children from the identified group, could not guarantee admission for all of those children who wished to be admitted. Data from the LA show that the sum of the PANs of the feeder schools is 255 and there are currently 234 children on roll at those schools who will be due to progress to secondary school in 2027. The PAN of AWS is 145. In other words, even if children from the identified group were afforded higher priority for entry to the School this would not, and could not, guarantee admittance for those children. It would, however, increase the likelihood that they would be admitted.

58. The Objector made allegations of "indirect disadvantage" to the identified group which I have summarised into three points; I consider each of these below:

- a. Children from the feeder schools are, and have been, encouraged to expect that they will transition to AWS.
- b. The disadvantaged experienced by the identified group is equivalent to that found in the Langley case.
- c. Admission into the School is correlated with property values, which is "a compounding feature of the unfairness".

59. In respect of expectation, the Objector said that parents of children from the identified group are "encouraged, through published materials and historic practice, to expect continuity of peer transition from those primaries to Alderman White", and stated:

"Reading the published criteria, a parent would reasonably conclude two things: that being in-catchment gives a good chance of a place and that attending a feeder school may help if needed. Neither assumption is correct. Whilst a parent would reasonably think that in catchment and at-feeder status matter more than they do, in reality distance is decisive."

60. The Objector referred to this matter as "Ground 1" and stated, with reference to the Lawrence Sheriff determination:

“The objector asserted that “parents... cannot make informed decisions about the probable allocation of seats by reading the published admission policy” and that “without this capability, informed decision making is impossible for parents.” The Adjudicator confirmed the operative test as whether arrangements are “sufficiently clear to enable parents to understand easily how places for that school will be allocated.”

Relevance: The Adjudicator’s confirmation that clarity requires more than formal publication - it requires that the published arrangements enable accurate understanding of how allocation will operate in practice - is the foundation for Ground 1. Where the structure of the criteria leads parents to an incorrect conclusion about the operative mechanism, the standard is not met.”

61. The purpose of admission arrangements is to set out how places will be allocated. Paragraph 14 of the Code requires that this is clear. It is not the purpose of admission arrangements to give parents confidence as to whether they will be allocated places at a particular school, or to provide any guarantee of admission. Indeed, the Lawrence Sheriff determination states:

“There is no obligation upon admission authorities to set out in their arrangements how likely it is that any applicant will be offered a place. The obligation is to explain clearly to parents the steps that they need to take to make an application and how the outcome of that application will be determined.”

62. Notwithstanding the matter of applicants admitted under ‘special circumstances’, the Arrangements are clear in their presentation of the oversubscription criteria. There is nothing to suggest in the Arrangements that children from the feeder schools are afforded higher priority for entry than is in fact the case. I have consulted the website of the School and have found nothing which contradicts the Arrangements. Consequently, I do not find that parents of children from the feeder schools are or have been encouraged to expect that those children will transition to AWS.

63. The Objector alleged that the disadvantaged experienced by the identified group is equivalent to that found in the Langley case, stating:

“6.4.2 This is consistent with the finding in *Sharp v Office of the Schools Adjudicator* [2023] EWHC 1242, in which the High Court upheld an OSA determination that children from a named feeder primary school constituted a group who had been unfairly disadvantaged within the meaning of paragraph 1.8 because the admission arrangements formally acknowledged a relationship with that school but then gave it no weight at the criterion that mattered. The adjudicator found that the appropriate remedy was to name the primary school as a feeder in the oversubscription criteria. That is

precisely the structural remedy this referral invites the Adjudicator to require at criterion 3 of Alderman White's arrangements.”

64. As I have said, previous determinations do not set a precedent. Nevertheless, I have considered whether, as the Objector asserts, the case under my consideration is similar to the Langley case and find that it is not. The determination for the Langley case set out the following:

“The objections and referrals are concerned solely with the absence in the admission arrangements of any priority given to a particular group of pupils who are among those who will be in Y5 and Y6 at the primary school from September 2022. This group of children live further away from the secondary schools than the forecasted distance from the school which will allow a child to gain admission in September 2023 on the basis of distance. These families applied for places at the primary school in its first two years of operation having taken into account reassurances that pupils would be able to gain places at the secondary schools because they would be given priority on the basis of attending the primary school.”

65. I can see no meaningful parallel between the children in the Langley case and those in the identified group. The adjudicator in the Langley case determined that parents at the primary school in question had been “misled”; I have found no evidence of this in respect of AWS. Consequently, I do not find that the disadvantaged experienced by the identified group is equivalent to that found in the Langley case.

66. In respect of property values the objection stated:

“A secondary dimension of the paragraph 1.8 concern is socioeconomic. Because the tiebreaker cut-off now falls well inside the catchment boundary, which side of the line a family falls on is correlated with property values - proximity to the school gate commands a premium. The Adjudicator is invited to note this as a compounding feature of the unfairness, while the primary ground under paragraph 1.8 remains the disadvantage to feeder school children as a defined group.

Round Hill Primary School's catchment straddles the tiebreaker cut-off. Families in the Round Hill community - the Trust's own designated feeder community for Alderman White - fall on both sides of the line. The sorting of that community into those who gain places and those who do not is substantially predicted by house value.”

67. The rights of children to a school place apply to all children regardless of their financial circumstances. That is, a child who is from a wealthy family needs a school place and has as much right to secure one as a child from a less affluent family. I have seen no suggestion or evidence that the Trust has sought to discourage or exclude applications for children from

less affluent families. Consequently, I do not find that any matter in respect of property values renders the Arrangements unfair.

68. There might be unfairness if it was demonstrated that there were no reasonable alternatives for children. GIAS records the location of AWS as “Urban: Nearer to a major town or city” and shows that there are ten other secondary schools within three miles of the School and 14 within three miles of the Objector’s NG9 address. The LA told me:

“NG9 encompasses parts of the City Council area as well as parts of NCC’s area. Within Nottinghamshire, the NG9 postcodes are served by 3 secondary schools catchment areas, Alderman White School, Bramcote College and George Spencer Academy. There is a further school within the NG9 postcode area, but this school does not have a catchment area as priority within its admission arrangements. . .

NCC’s Transport and Travel Services have confirmed that there are very few requests for travel in that area as children living in NG9 area would all be in walking distance of another secondary school, for example Chilwell School, Bramcote College and George Spencer Academy. Not all NG9 post codes in this area (catchment and/or closest) would be under 3 miles to all of these schools (or 2 miles in the case of low-income families). . .

There are currently 19 places available at Chilwell School for year 7 in September 2026.”

69. I asked the LA whether, if there are not safe walking routes from the NG9 postcode area to other alternative schools, transport would be provided and what the nature of that transport would be. The LA responded:

“Travel assistance is assessed at the point an application for transport is submitted. Travel assistance will be agreed if the pupil is attending the nearest available school over 3 miles or for low-income families to one of three nearest schools between 2 and 6 miles. The travel assistance offered would be appropriate to the journey, e.g. parent mileage, public bus pass or where this is not appropriate, arranged transport.

In summary most addresses in the NG9 postcode are on an available walking route to schools in the NG9 postcode area as this is an urban area with good roads and footpaths. Some children may be placed over the statutory walking distance and so will be eligible for travel assistance where this is the nearest available school, this is regardless of whether the route is available or not.”

70. The objection raises a particular point regarding the operation of the Arrangements compared to those of other schools in the local area, stating:

“Alderman White’s criterion 3 is, on the evidence available, the sole criterion across a significant number of local secondary schools that does not differentiate between in-catchment applicants on the basis of feeder school attendance. Every other oversubscribed school in the local admissions ecosystem operates feeder school criteria. Chilwell School - to which [my daughter] has been allocated - prioritises children from The Lanes, John Clifford and Rylands primary schools. Round Hill is not among them. At Chilwell, [my daughter] falls into criterion 5 at best.”

71. The Objector also set out a table showing the position of his daughter in respect of priority for admittance to eight other schools in the area, stating:

“The table below sets out the secondary schools geographically most accessible from [my daughter]’s home address, showing the oversubscription criterion under which she falls at each school (given that she is in-catchment only for Alderman White, attends Round Hill Primary and has no sibling at any school). It demonstrates that [she] is treated as a near-lowest-priority applicant at every school in the local area - the sole exception being Alderman White, where she qualifies for criterion 3 as an in catchment child. The cascade is not merely that she was refused her preferred school: it is that the local admissions ecosystem, taken as a whole, provides her with almost no protection anywhere.”

72. Likelihood of admission cannot always be easily assessed by considering priority of admission. It may be that an applicant is afforded relatively low priority for entry at a particular school but still gains a place, as has happened in the Objector’s case. Although I have some sympathy with the Objector’s position, the Code does not require that, say, all children are afforded high priority for entry to a local school. There are schools other than AWS, in the area, to which children can apply and be admitted.

73. As I have said above, all schools must have oversubscription criteria which, by their very nature, disadvantage some applicants compared to others. In order for the Arrangements to be unfair the disadvantage must also be unfair. I have weighed this case very carefully and find that the disadvantage which the Arrangements cause to the identified group is no greater than that which would be caused to other in-catchment children without siblings at the School in the event that those children were given lower priority for admission. I find that the practical effects of the oversubscription criteria are neither unreasonable nor unfair.

74. For the reasons given above, I do not uphold this part of the objection.

The “distance tiebreaker” in the Arrangements is unreasonable in its use of straight-line distances, rather than safe walking routes.

75. The Objector asserted that “The distance tiebreaker in criterion 3 is internally contradicted by NCC's own home-to-school transport policy, which uses safe walking routes” and stated:

“We do not contend that the use of straight-line distance is impermissible per se. The concern raised is one of reasonableness in application. Where a straight-line tiebreaker produces outcomes that diverge from real-world proximity because of known, fixed physical barriers, it ceases to function as a reliable proxy for a distance it purports to measure.

There are two parallel statutory distance frameworks in English education law, both operated by Nottinghamshire County Council in relation to the same children travelling to the same school. Admissions policy uses crow-flies distance. Home-to school transport policy uses the shortest safe walking route, as defined in the Education Act 1996. NCC’s published transport policy uses walking routes for every distance assessment it makes in determining transport entitlement.”

76. The matter of the distance differentiator is for the Admission Authority to determine. Home to school transport is a matter for the Local Authority. Consequently, whether or not any contradiction exists between the two is not relevant to my consideration, which is focused on the reasonableness of the Arrangements.

77. The Arrangements state:

“In the event of oversubscription, within any criterion, preference will be given to children who live nearest to the main administrative point at the school campus from their address point (using eastings and northings as defined by Ordnance Survey) to the child’s home using the local authority’s computerised distance measuring software.”

78. As set out above, paragraph 1.13 of the Code requires that, where distance measurements are used, admission arrangements set out clearly the point(s) in the school from which distances will be measured. The Arrangements do not do so. Consequently, I find that the Arrangements are contrary to that paragraph and must be revised.

79. I asked the Trust to explain why it has chosen to use straight-line rather than walking distance to prioritise applicants to AWS. It told me:

“This provides clarity in respect of measurement of distance that is objective. Safe walking routes are subjective. In this case there are children and families who may live on the opposite side of the A52 which is a very busy dual carriageway that may have

safer crossing routes but that would be subjective. Also, at the rear of the school there is a footpath and golf course that can give access to the rear entrance of the school. There are two potential entrances that students can access which would complicate the safe walking route option even further.

The straight-line distance is fair and transparent.”

80. I find nothing irrational or unreasonable in the Trust’s rationale for using straight line distance rather than safe walking routes to prioritise applicants to the School.

81. The Objector provided an illustration of the operation of the straight line distance measurement, asserting that, due to geographical factors, this may result in a child with a longer walking route to the School being admitted ahead of a child with a shorter journey. This may well be true but is not necessarily unreasonable.

82. If the rationale of the Trust was to prioritise children with the shortest journeys, by foot, to AWS, then it is certainly possible that an alternative method of measuring distance might have been considered to be more reasonable. However, the Trust’s rationale is to prioritise “local children”, and use of straight line distance is, in my view, within the range of reasonable methods compatible with that rationale.

83. For the reasons given above, I do not uphold the objection that the use of straight-line distances in the Arrangements is contrary to the Code.

The Arrangements are contrary to paragraph 1.14 of the Code as the catchment area is not clearly defined.

84. The Objector stated:

“We also note that the school website [link provided] explicitly states "the catchment area for Alderman White School is shown in the shaded area to the south of the A52 in the map below" but no map is present.

The school provides instead a link to Nottinghamshire County Council's interactive catchment tool at [link provided]. The Chief Schools Adjudicator addressed precisely this practice in the OSA Annual Report 2023 (paragraph 18, March 2024): interactive catchment maps on local authority websites "are not on their own enough to satisfy the requirement in paragraph 1.14 of the Code that catchment areas be 'clearly defined'." The Adjudicator further stated that where a catchment area is part of a school's admission arrangements, it "must be defined clearly - by means of a map which shows its boundaries clearly or by some other means such as a definitive list of road names or post codes."

Alderman White provides neither. A parent cannot determine the boundaries of the catchment from the school's own published arrangements, and must rely entirely on a third-party tool that does not constitute a defined boundary under the Code. We argue that is a breach of paragraph 1.14 in its own right, and further supports our question over the clarity of the admissions arrangements.”

85. The Arrangements state:

“The catchment area for Alderman White School is shown in the shaded area to the south of the A52 in the map below. . .

If you would like to learn more about our catchment area, see a detailed map and see which schools serve your home address, you can do so on the Nottinghamshire County Council website here [hyperlink provided].”

86. The map which appears in the Arrangements shows the overall shape of the catchment area and includes the locations of the five feeder schools plus two other primary schools. It does not show which addresses are and are not within the catchment area and therefore does not define that area.

87. I asked the Trust about this matter. It stated:

“The link for the Nottinghamshire Count [sic] Council linked map is available. This is being reviewed and greater clarity will be provided.”

88. The hyperlink provided in the Arrangements takes users to a page on the LA website headed “School search”. That page states:

“Find local schools in and around Nottinghamshire below.

'Filter schools' enables you to search all schools in Nottinghamshire by name, district or phase. When you select a school, you can see how places have been allocated on National Offer Day over the past 3 years. This can help you better understand your chances of a securing a place at that school.

'Catchment areas' enables you to add your postcode and search for your catchment school.”

89. These instructions are followed by a choice of two search boxes: “Filter schools” and “Catchment Areas”. I have used both, as follows:

- a. The “Catchment areas” facility cannot be used to find the catchment area of AWS, or indeed of any other school. Rather, it is a tool to check which school, or schools, a specific address is in the catchment area of. Although doubtless of

use to parents, this tool has no function in respect of defining the catchment area.

- b. I used the “filter schools” facility to search for AWS. This results in the name of the School and its contact details. Clicking on the School name brings up a new webpage with more details about the School plus a map. I assume that map is of the catchment area, and it does clearly show which properties are and are not within a large, shaded area around the location of the School. However, the map does not have a title and there is nothing on the webpage to say whether or not this is a map of the catchment area.

90. As I have set out above, paragraph 1.14 of the Code requires that catchment areas are clearly defined. The map accessed via the “Filter Schools” facility may fulfil that requirement but this is not clear; nor is that map easily accessible from the Arrangements.

91. For the reasons given above, I find that the Arrangements are contrary to paragraph 1.14 of the Code and I uphold this part of the objection.

92. The Trust has recognised the requirement for greater clarity, stating:

“We also recognise that a more detailed catchment map would be helpful. While a comprehensive catchment map is available on Nottinghamshire County Council’s website, as the admission authority we acknowledge the importance of providing clarity within our own framework. A review of our catchment mapping will take place over the summer to support parental applications for the 2027–2028 academic year, making boundaries more easily identifiable.”

93. For the avoidance of doubt, I make it clear that it is acceptable for a catchment area to be defined on the website of a local authority, whether or not that local authority is the admission authority for the school concerned. However, this should be accessible via a single link directly from the admission arrangements.

Determination

94. In accordance with section 88H(4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I partially uphold the objection to the admission arrangements determined by The White Hills Park Trust Ltd for Alderman White School for 2027.

95. By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the admission authority. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of this determination.

Dated: 9 September 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Jennifer Gamble