



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case references: VAR2745 and VAR2746

Admission Authority: Buckinghamshire County Council for
Stokenchurch Primary School, Stokenchurch, High
Wycombe

Date of decision: 11 September 2026

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by Buckinghamshire County Council Stokenchurch Primary School in Stokenchurch, High Wycombe for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 and 2027/28 the published admission number will be 45.

The referral

1. Buckinghamshire County Council (the Admission Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for variations to the admission arrangements for Stokenchurch Primary School (the School) for 2026/27 and 2027/28 (the Arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged 3 to 11 in Stokenchurch, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. The School is a mixed school and has no religious character.
3. The Admission Authority for the School is the local authority (LA). As the LA is the Admission Authority, both terms are used throughout this determination.
4. Parties to the request are the LA and the School's governing body.
5. The proposed variations are reducing the published admission number (PAN) for Reception (YR) from 60 to 45 in both 2026/27 and 2027/28.

Jurisdiction and procedure

6. 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”.

7. The Arrangements for 2026/27 were determined by the Admission Authority on 24 February 2025. The Arrangements for 2027/28 were determined on 16 March 2026, and this is after the deadline for determining arrangements which was 28 February 2026. This does not affect the standing of the Arrangements or my power to consider them or the proposed variation.

8. The Admission Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variations in line with the Code. The LA has provided me with confirmation that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variations.

9. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variations are within my jurisdiction.

10. In considering the variation requests I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.

11. The information I have considered in reaching my decisions includes:

- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 2 June 2026 and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 and 2027/28 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- responses from the LA, and the School 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), the LA, the School, and Ofsted;

12. I would like to extend my thanks to the LA and the School for their responses to my requests for further information.

13. 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.

14. I note here that 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 by reducing the PAN for YR from 60 to 45 as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years.

Consideration of proposed variations

15. 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 in circumstances or certain other limited and specified circumstances. I will consider below whether the proposed variations are justified by the change in circumstances.

16. The Admission Authority has proposed that for 2026/27 and 2027/28 the PAN be reduced from 60 to 45. For each of 2026/27 and 2027/28 the PAN in the determined arrangements is 60 children. For clarity, the PAN applies to the expected number of children the School is required to admit in September of the admission year, and in-year while the children are in the year of admission.

17. The Admission Authority told me that the reasons for it seeking variations for the School are:

- a. Declining pupil numbers and reception surplus places: With a PAN of 60, the School is currently running two reception classes. Recent recruitment means that there are a significant number of vacancies in each class.
- b. Significant deficit position: The School is facing substantial and ongoing financial challenges.
- c. DFE and finance directives: The School has recently received support from a Department for Education (DfE) School Resource Management Advisor alongside a LA financial audit. Both have identified that PAN reduction is a necessary step to stabilize its budget and ensure long-term structural viability.

18. The LA highlights that the area local to the School has seen a sustained fall in population leading to a reduction in demand for places. It says that:

“The low number of pupils in the area mean that maintaining a PAN of 60 is no longer financially sustainable for Stokenchurch Primary School. They have surplus places in every year group, only have 46 pupils in Reception currently and have only been allocated 46 pupils for reception in September 2026.”

19. The LA has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty the LA assesses the likely future number of places to be needed and plans to meet that need. The LA uses planning areas, which are geographical areas and the schools within those areas, for this purpose.

20. The School is in the Wycombe West Planning Area with eight other schools that admit children to YR. I note here that seven of the eight other schools in the planning area are more than two miles from the School.

Table1: School places in the planning area, and the number of children admitted.

	2023	2024	2025	2026
Number of places in YR in schools in the planning area with the School PAN of 60.	243	243	228	228
Number of children on roll (2023-25) or allocated places on national offer day (2026)	212	203	209	181
Vacant places	31	40	19	47
Vacant places as a percentage of total	13	16	8	21

21. Table 1 illustrates that there are sufficient places in the planning area to meet demand for places in YR. If the variation was approved for 2026/27, the number of places would reduce from 228 to 213, leaving 32 vacant places in the planning area in 2026/27, that is 15 per cent of the total available places would be vacant.

22. The DfE document “Basic need allocations for 2026-27 and 2027-28, Explanatory note on methodology” refers to the assumption of a two percent surplus capacity “to provide an operating margin for local authorities. This supports parental choice, pupil population movement, and general manageability of the system.” Data in Table 1 illustrate that, should the requested PAN variations be approved, the projected capacity provides more than sufficient school places in the area for any parent seeking a place for their children in YR.

23. I note that from information provided by the LA, a primary school in the planning area closed in 2023 because of a lack of demand. In 2025, a different school in the planning area reduced PAN from 45 to 30 because of low pupil numbers.

24. The LA projected numbers for the planning area in 2027 and 2028 are 186 and 185 respectively. This means that if the variation is approved for 2027/28 there would still be sufficient places available in the planning area for the near future. It is unlikely that parental preference will be frustrated by a reduction in PAN.

Table 2: The number of first preference applications for the School between 2024 and 2026; and the number of children admitted or offered a place.

	2024	2025	2026
The PAN for the School	60	60	45 (proposed)
Number of first preferences	48	44	43
Number of children admitted or offered a place in YR	50	46	46

25. Table 2 illustrates that for the last three years, applications and admissions have been significantly below the PAN of 60. The number of applications received suggests that with a PAN of 45 the LA will still be able to meet parental first preferences for the School. The LA expects the School to be allocated between 40 and 45 pupils in each year up until 2028.

26. I note that the number of offers in 2026 is 46, one above the proposed PAN of 45. The LA addressed this issue in the information it provided stating:

“We recognise that places that have already been offered must be honoured, but we expect that if the reduction in PAN is permitted, numbers will fall through natural pupil movement over the next 12 months so that classes can be combined in September 2027.”

27. Based on the LA’s knowledge of pupil movements in the local area and the availability of places in other schools locally, I am satisfied that should a child leave the School, they will not be replaced. In such case, the overall numbers will likely be reduced by one in due course, and this ensures that the class size remains at 30 or below across the infant year groups in 2026/27 and beyond.

28. The School and LA identified that financial sustainability of the School is a major priority underpinned by recent assessments through a LA financial audit and report from a DfE School Resource Management Advisor who both identified the reduction of PAN as an essential step in securing the School’s future.

29. The LA provided data to illustrate the financial impact of the PAN remaining at 60 and being reduced to 45 as shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Financial impact of proposed reduction of PAN from 60 to 45.

Academic Year	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2029/30
Carry forward at year end if PAN remains at 60	- £497,82 7	- £395,44 5	- £334,52 0	- £332,54 5	- £381,90 7
Carry forward at year end if PAN is reduced to 45	- £459,17 3	- £277,40 3	- £106,59 7	-£8,793	£89,011

30. Table 3 illustrates that the proposed reduction in PAN improves the financial position of the School substantially. A potential deficit recovery plan within five years will provide a more secure future for the School and all of those currently served by the School.

31. Infant class sizes are limited to 30 (as set out in The School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes (England) Regulations 2012 and paragraph 2.16 of the Code). The cost of a teacher and resources necessary for an infant class, when compared to, say, a junior or secondary school (where numbers are not limited), has to be borne by the proportionately smaller income from the children admitted to infant classes. It is clear from the information provided by the LA that continuing to provide two infant classes in each year group for 45 pupils is unsustainable.

32. Mixed age teaching is a common model in primary schools nationally. The School is planning to run three classes across YR and Y1 in 2027/28 which will deliver significant savings whilst maintaining the quality of education for children in the School.

33. I have considered the impact of decreasing admission numbers on school finances balanced against the impact reducing the School's PAN will have on meeting parental preference. Parents have a right to express a preference as to where their children go to school. However, admission authorities cannot give any guarantee that preferences will be met. The LA has illustrated that there are sufficient appropriate places in the planning area and that based on recent admissions and projected demand it is unlikely that parental preference will be frustrated. It is clear that the financial challenges faced by the School need to be addressed to secure its future.

34. The Admission Authority has presented a compelling argument for the variations it proposes. External evaluation of the financial position of the School means that maintaining the current position is not appropriate. The LA has provided compelling evidence that it will be able to manage school places in the planning area by reducing the PAN at the School from 60 to 45 for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

35. I therefore agree that the PAN for the School in each of 2026/27 and 2027/28 will be 45.

36. I note here that reducing the PAN does not reduce the overall capacity of the School unless accommodation is being removed from the premises. It is not being suggested that accommodation is being removed and so the physical capacity of the School remains the same. Reducing the PAN will not change that. What this means is that should there be a need for the School to increase its PAN and / or admit more children in future years than it currently expects to, there remains the capacity in the building for it to do so.

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by Buckinghamshire County Council Stokenchurch Primary School in Stokenchurch, High Wycombe for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 and 2027/28 the published admission number will be 45.

Dated: 11 September 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Mr Philip Lloyd