



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case references: VAR2770, VAR2771 and VAR2772

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Hook Infant School

Date of decision: 16 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 Hampshire County Council for Hook Infant School, for each of 2026/27 and 2027/28.

I am unable to reach a determination for the admission arrangements for 2025/26 because the request was made and materials submitted too late for a determination to be reached before the end of that admission year.

I determine that for admission in September 2026 the Published Admission Number shall be 105.

I determine that for admission in September 2027 the Published Admission Number shall be 105.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the Admission Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for variations to the admission arrangements for Hook Infant School (the School) for three intake years (the Arrangements). The years concerned are 2025/26, 2026/27, and 2027/28.
2. The School is a community school for children aged five to seven in Hook, Hampshire. It is a co-educational school with no designated 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.

5. The proposed variations are that for each of three admission years, the published admission number (PAN) of the School be reduced to 105 children from the determined figure of 120 children.

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 were determined by the LA as follows:

- 20 February 2024 for the 2025/26 arrangements.
- 12 February 2025 for the 2026/27 arrangements.
- 24 February 2026 for the 2027/28 arrangements.

8. The LA 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 29 June 2026 and supporting documents;

- the determined Arrangements for 2025/26, 2026/27, and 2027/28 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- responses from the LA 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) websites), the LA, and the School (including its Arrangements for 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28), 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. I have been provided with a substantial amount of information by the LA and the School. I have referred only to that which has a bearing on my determination.

13. There is no formal consultation required for this 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 yet to be determined. This means that if I agree to the LA's request to vary the Arrangements for 2027/28 by reducing the PAN as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years. Should I determine to reduce the PAN for 2027/28, then there will be no need to consult on the same PAN in 2028/29 as this would be carried forward from the amended 2027/28 arrangements. However, for the avoidance of doubt, there is nothing in the statutory scheme that would prevent the LA from consulting if it wished to do so; it is simply that it would not be required to.

15. The LA has informed me that in the autumn of 2026 it will be consulting on the Arrangements which will apply to the School for entry in 2028/29. Should the requested variations be approved, this would be a voluntary choice of the LA. The LA has stated that it will be consulting on the PAN for the School remaining at 105 for 2028/29.

16. I have read a sample of determinations from previous cases relating to variation requests made by the LA for its schools as part of my consideration of this request. However, I stress here that adjudicator determinations do not set precedents and each case is considered on its merits.

Consideration of proposed variations

17. 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 variations are justified by the change in circumstances.

18. The Arrangements set out the following oversubscription criteria:
- a) Looked after children and children previously looked after.
 - b) Children with an exceptional medical or social need to attend the school
 - c) Children of staff.
 - d) Children living in the school catchment area who have a sibling attending the school.
 - e) Other children living in the school catchment area.
 - f) Children living outside of the school catchment area who have a sibling attending the school.
 - g) Other children.
19. The Admission Authority has proposed that the PAN for the School should be reduced to 105 children for each of the years 2025/26, 2026/27, and 2027/28. I will review each request separately, considering such evidence as is available to make my judgement.
20. I am regrettably unable to provide a determination for the request to vary the determined Arrangements for 2025/26. This is because the request was made too late in that admission year for a well-founded determination to be reached. The request was made on 29 June 2026, and the LA was not able to provide necessary information about the effect of revision on School finances until 10 September 2026. This is after the completion of that admission year.
21. I can identify no practical effect from my inability to reach a determination on that year. The children admitted to Reception in September 2025 have now progressed to Year 1. The ability of the School to admit more children to that year will be affected now by the number of children in Year 1 and features such as Infant Class Sizes regulations, not the PAN in the previous or current year of admission to Reception.
22. In the case of Arrangements for 2026/27 and 2027/28 I am in a position to reach a determination.
23. The LA has told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the School is to better balance the availability of places in Reception classes in the area with a declining local demand for such places.
24. The Governors of the School discussed the proposed variations at their meeting in May 2026. The minutes confirm that they support all three proposals. The LA has stated that the Governors had previously rejected suggestions that they agree to reduce the School's PAN.
25. The requests for variation have been made in the context of an over-provision of Reception places in the area around the School. Local authorities have an obligation to

ensure there is sufficient capacity in schools in their area to meet the need. They divide schools into groups called planning areas, which indicate local groups of schools where a failure to secure a first preference may lead to the allocation at a second or third preference, often within that group. Being in the same planning area may indicate that a school is close enough to be a realistic alternative allocation in travel terms.

26. The LA has stated:

“A reduction in the birth rate nationally in recent years together with the slowing down of house building has led to falling school rolls in some parts of the county. This is reflected more significantly in some localised areas of Hampshire and some individual schools who will need to manage surplus places over the coming years. In September 2025 there were 15,322 Reception places available, and only 13,740 offers made. There is approximately 10% surplus county wide, though certain pockets of the county have a significantly higher % surplus..... (in spite of) recent reductions in PAN at Oakwood Infant School and Buryfields Infant School where 40 places have been taken out in recent years and in October 2025, there was still 9.6% of surplus places in the school place planning area.”

27. The LA does not contend that the area around the School is one of particular over-provision, but that the planning area and the School share the same trait as seen in the county in general. That planning area contains the following schools which admit children to Reception.

Table 1: recent applications for places in Reception classes in schools in the planning area, LA figures, June 2026

School	PAN	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Hook Infant School	120	110	113	109
Buryfields Infant School	60	59	53	56
Long Sutton CE Primary School	20	15	14	16
Oakwood Infant School	60	59	61	61
Whitewater CE Primary School	20	19	21	11
Surplus places in the planning area with Hook Infant PAN set at 120	n/a	18	19	27
Surplus places in the planning area if Hook Infant PAN set at 105	n/a	3	4	12

25. In my judgement the data suggest that the PAN of 120 may no longer be an appropriate allocation for the School. It has been substantially short of that figure for the last three years. There has been capacity at three other schools in the planning area to take additional children into Reception classes.

26. The LA has submitted the following data on patterns of preference in applications in recent years:

Table 2: patterns of parental preference for schools in the planning area, LA figures June 2026.

SCHOOL	2026/2027*			2025/2026			2024/2025		
	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
Yr R Intake									
Hook Infant School (Bracketed figure shows number of children admitted on each intake)	101 (107)	31	18	105 (109)	40	20	111 (113)	30	28
Buryfields Infant School	45	18	7	57	22	14	54	25	17
Long Sutton CE Primary School	16	10	2	18	14	5	14	9	5
Oakwood Infant School	69	21	13	67	32	16	77	28	15
Whitewater CE Primary School	18	21	10	13	25	20	17	37	15
Total Yr R	249	101	50	260	133	75	273	129	80
	*data from 15th January 2026								

27. Table 2 therefore suggests that first preferences have continued to be below the current determined PAN for the School of 120.

28. In the last two years, first preferences have been below the requested PAN of 105, albeit only narrowly so.

29. The bracketed figure shows that with a PAN on 120; the School may end up with a number in Reception year of more than 105 on the basis of late or re-allocations. This is potentially problematic for school organisation. 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 schoolteacher 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.

30. An additional fifteen children can be accommodated in a mixed age class of 15 children from two consecutive year groups, but this is not possible if the number admitted to

a year group is 106 children or more. Data supplied by the LA however suggest a rapid and considerable reduction in demand for Reception places in the planning area.

Table 3: forecast demand for places in the planning area of the School up to 2028/29, LA figures, July 2026

School	PAN	2026/7 intake	2027/28 forecast	2028/29 forecast
Hook Infant School	120 or 105	107	87	99
Buryfields Infant School	60	54	51	55
Long Sutton CE Primary School	20	17	11	12
Oakwood Infant School	60	63	60	54
Whitewater CE Primary School	20	16	15	18
Total assuming PAN of 120 at Hook Infant School	280	257	224	238
Combined PAN	n/a	280	280	280
Surplus places	n/a	23	56	42
Surplus places if Hook Infant PAN set at 105	n/a	8	41	27

28. These tables together support the contention that a PAN of 120 is not likely to be required in the foreseeable future. Even with a PAN reduced to 105 there would be capacity for all children in the planning area at all schools which admit to Reception in 2026/27 and 2027/28. I note that the School is close to some infant schools in the planning area to its west, and the LA has communicated that there is, and is expected to be, four unfilled Reception places in that area. The LA has noted that there are expected to be 15 Reception places available in the planning area to the east.

29. Taking the data as a whole, I note that the variation proposal was formulated at a point when the School was admitting more than the 105 children proposed for the revised PAN. This might lead me to query whether the effect of the proposals will be reasonable and fair in effect.

30. However, there has been a tendency to over-estimate forecast demand for places. The LA also understands it must ensure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area.

31. I see the likely effect of the requested variations in the two years where I can determine to be reasonable and fair. The likely number of parents who select the School as their first preference would still have that preference met in each of the two years under review. There would continue to be an adequacy of places both in the planning area and

the LA's area of responsibility. Applicants would continue to have a number of appropriate alternative schools. The balance between available places and demand would be closer.

32. In terms of the pattern of change expected in 2027/28 compared to 2026/27, the surplus between supply of Reception places and demand for them is expected to be high. Therefore, the arguments in favour of the request which apply in 2026/27 also apply in the following year.

33. The LA and school have made a case for the advantage that would arise at the School if the request for each of the three years is met. This is based around one class in the School becoming a mixed age class of 30 in 2027/28. The PAN of 105 for Reception in 2026/27 would mean the School could avoid taking more than that number of children, although the LA and School rightly inform me that the 106 places offered would be delivered to all allocated a place. However, any departures from that year group would not be replaced. The variation for 2026/27, if approved, would make possible a mixed age class of Year 1 and Year 2 children in 2027/28.

34. This means that in 2027/28, the School would have eleven classes, one mixed age. This compares to twelve single age classes in 2025/26 and 2026/27.

35. However, there is an argument that there are management challenges to achieve that outcome. The PAN for a school is the minimum number of children the school can be required to admit at the normal point of entry and for the remainder of that entry year. Once children progress into Year 1, the PAN in the previous year has no bearing. The capacity to admit children to year groups other than the Reception is determined by the point at which admitting an additional child would have excessive adverse impact on the education of those already on roll. That capacity will be determined by the school organisation adopted by the school.

36. The School's expectation for its organisation in 2026/27 is as follows:

Table 4: Intended school organisation for 2026/27 submitted by the LA

	Reception	Year 1	Year 2
PAN	105	No longer applies	No longer applies
	Number in class	Number in class	Number in class
Class 1	26		
Class 2	27		
Class 3	27		
Class 4	27		
Class 5		27	
Class 6		27	

	Reception	Year 1	Year 2
Class 7		25	
Class 8		27	
Class 9			27
Class 10			29
Class 11			28
Class 12			26
“Available places”	0	14	12

37. I indicate “available places” as any parent of a child seeking admission to Year 1 or Year 2 during the academic year 2026/27 could legitimately expect a place to be allocated at the School. The PAN of the School which applies to Reception (as the ‘relevant age group’ referred to in paragraph 1.2 of the Code) has no bearing. If the School declined to offer a place, an Individual Admission Appeal might be expected to uphold a parent’s appeal, given each class in Year 1 and Year 2 is below thirty students. This may make a mixed aged Year 1 and Year 2 class impossible in 2027/28.

38. There are other projections which might enable a shared class in another combination of year groups in 2027/28. For instance, if Reception numbers in 2026/27 reduce to 105 the departing children would not need to be replaced. If 105 children are then admitted to Reception in 2027/28, there could then be a mixed age class of Reception and Year 1 students.

39. However, there is a possibility that the Reception class may not lose students in 2026/27. In such a case, admission of 105 children to Reception in 2027/28 would not enable such a mixed aged class. There would be 212 children in the two year groups combined, requiring 8 classes to stay within infant class sizes restrictions.

40. The School and the LA are aware of these possible outcomes. It appears that a lawful mixed aged class would be achievable by 2029/30 through two years of operation of the requested PAN of 105. That would mean that the 2027/28 Reception year and the Reception year of 2028/29 would both be 105 children or fewer, with no more than 210 children in Years 1 and 2 combined when they reach September 2029.

41. I have explicitly confirmed with the LA and the School that they understand that their planned organisation in future years can only be provisional. They have confirmed that understanding and have re-stated the variation requests.

42. I have assessed the implications of the requested change for the School’s finances with this outcome in mind.

43. The LA reports that the School is currently in deficit. Planning for future school organisation is aimed at limiting the growth of that deficit and securing recovery from it. There has been some disagreement as to the scale of the deficit due to varied views on the year to which recent redundancy costs should be allocated.

44. The LA is, however, clear, that at 2026 prices the saving including on costs of having one fewer teacher employed is £60,000. The LA and the School have provided the following figures for the end of year balance in each of the years to which this request applies:

Table 5: Projected budget outcomes for the School depending on the PAN in effect

Original Budget Setting based on a PAN 120:

	2025 - 26	2026 - 27	2027 - 28
In Year Surplus / (Deficit)	(78,199)	166,297	83,607
Surplus / (Deficit) Brought Forward	(147,862)	(226,061)	(59,764)
Cumulative Surplus / (Deficit) Carried Forward	(226,061)	(59,764)	23,844

Approximate figures based on a PAN 105:

	2025-26	2026 - 27	2027 - 28
In Year Surplus / (Deficit)	(78,199)	166,297	123,198
Surplus / (Deficit) Brought Forward	(147,862)	(226,061)	(59,764)
Cumulative Surplus / (Deficit) Carried Forward	(226,061)	(59,764)	63,435

45. It is clear that under either the current determined PAN or the requested PAN of 105 in each year, the School is expected to be in financial surplus to a greater or lesser degree by 2027/28.

Overall view

46. I have tried to ensure that I have considered the competing needs of providing the school places that parents want for their children, and the financial viability of the School.

47. The Local Authority has presented a compelling argument for the two variations it proposes for 2026/27 and 2027/28. I accept that the LA has provided compelling evidence

that it will be able to manage Reception places in the planning area by reducing the PAN at the School to 105. The LA is taking pro-active steps to balance supply of places with demand for places in infant schools in the planning area. The admissions to the School have not been close to its historic PAN of 120 for some years. The trend in required Reception places is downwards. Even with the reduced PAN of 105, all parents who express a first preference for the School are likely to have that preference met in each of the affected years. There would still be expected to be sufficient appropriate alternative places available in other infant schools in the planning area, and also in the neighbouring planning areas to the west and the east.

48. The point at which the School will be able to achieve financial savings is hard to fix. However, as a four form of entry infant school with an annual budget out-turn close to break even, this is not the main driver of the request. The School and LA are acting in time to ensure the viability of the setting for the moment, with clear undertakings to consult according to the Code at the point of determination for future years. Should that consultation favour a PAN of 105 in future years, the reductions made according to this referral would enable a speedier transition to some mixed aged teaching.

49. While the financial benefit to the School may be slow to emerge, I can see no unreasonable or unfair element to the referred change for any of the two years where I can reach a determination.

50. Taking everything into consideration, I, therefore, agree that the PAN for the School should be 105 children in each of the years 2026/27 and 2027/28.

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 Hook Infant School, for each of 2026/27 and 2027/28.

I am unable to reach a determination for the admission arrangements for 2025/26 because the request was made and materials submitted too late for a determination to be reached before the end of that admission year.

I determine that for admission in September 2026 the Published Admission Number shall be 105.

I determine that for admission in September 2027 the Published Admission Number shall be 105.

Dated: 16 September 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Patrick Storrie