



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2814

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Petersfield Infant School

Date of decision: 6 October 2026

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Petersfield Infant School for 2027/28.

I determine that for admission in 2027/28 the published admission number shall be 75.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council, which is the admission authority for Petersfield Infant School has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for Petersfield Infant School (the School) for 2027/28 (the 2027 arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged between four and seven years and is thus known as an infant school. It is in Petersfield, which is in the local authority area of Hampshire County Council (the local authority).
3. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) for the School is reduced from 90 to 75. There have been previous variations agreed for the School. These are as follows:
 - a. The PAN was reduced from 120 to 90 for 2025/26 (case reference VAR2540).
 - b. The PAN for 2025/26 was further reduced from 90 to 75 (case reference VAR2711)
 - c. The PAN for September 2026/27 was reduced 90 to 75 (case reference VAR2712).

4. I was the adjudicator for these cases. No case sets a precedent for future cases.

Jurisdiction and procedure

5. 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”.

6. The 2027 arrangements were determined by the local authority on 24 February 2026. The local authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code and confirmation that the governing body of the School has been consulted on the proposed variation and supports it.

7. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.

8. In considering the variation request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.

9. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:

- a) the referral from the local authority dated 22 September 2026 (the request form) and supporting documents;
- b) the determined 2027 arrangements and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c) previous determinations following requests for variations to the admission arrangements for the School (case references VAR2540, VAR2711 and VAR2712); and
- d) A map of the location of the schools in the planning area for the School.

10. 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.

11. The arrangements for 2028/29 have not yet been determined. This means that if I agree to the local authority's request to vary the 2027 arrangements as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years. The local authority has expressed the intention of consulting on setting the PAN at 75 for admissions in 2028/29, which is welcomed.

12. In the interests of dealing speedily with this and other requests for variations, I have not considered other aspects of the admission arrangements. Therefore, nothing in this determination should be taken as indicating that other aspects of the arrangements do or do not conform with the requirements relating to admissions.

Consideration of proposed variation

13. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code (as above) requires that admission arrangements, once determined, may only be revised, that is changed or varied, if there is a major change of circumstance or certain other limited and specified circumstances. I will consider below whether the proposed variation is justified by the change in circumstances.

14. The local authority explained that the PAN for the School for admissions in 2026/27 is 75 and it intends to consult on setting the PAN at 75 for admissions in 2028/29. This could mean that the PAN for 2027/28, if it remains at 90, could create challenges for the School both in terms of class organisation and financially.

15. The previous changes to the PAN allowed the School to reduce its class organisation from eleven to nine classes. The request form helpfully provided the current class structure and the proposed class structures from September 2027 and September 2028 if the variation were to be agreed. There would be eight classes from September 2027 which would continue to be the arrangement from September 2028. If the PAN remains at 90 for 2027/28, then the School may have to provide nine classes for that year which will have financial implications and I will consider these further below.

16. First of all I will consider the demand for school places in the area and then for the School. I will then consider in greater detail the reasons for the proposed variation.

17. The local authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty the local authority assesses the likely future number of places to be needed and plans to meet that need. The local authority uses planning areas, which are geographical areas and the schools within those areas, for this purpose. The School is in a planning area with seven other schools which admit children to reception year. Information on recent admissions to the schools in the planning area is provided in table 1. The School is in the centre of the planning area and the town of Petersfield.

Table 1: admissions to schools in the planning area that admit children to reception year

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Sum of PANs	236	191	183	208	N/A
Number of first preferences	221	181	176	N/A	N/A
Number of admissions or offers for 2026/27 as of 31 August 2026	213	182	174	162 forecast	173 forecast
Vacant places known or forecast	23	9	9	46	N/A

18. Table 1 shows a reduction in the sum of the PANs for the schools in the planning area with an increase for admissions in 2027/28 partly accounted for by the PAN for the School being 90 compared to 75 for 2026/27. If the sum of the PANs for the planning area were reduced by 15, as proposed, from 208 to 193 for 2027/28, then the number of vacant places would reduce to 31, if I assume the forecast is accurate. Thirty-one vacant places would be over 16 per cent of the number of places available and a high proportion. I am assured that if the PAN were reduced to 75 for admissions in 2027/28 that there would be sufficient school places in the area.

19. As I explained above, if I agree the variation for the 2027 arrangements, this will set a baseline for future years. If the sum of the PANs were to reduce by 15 to 193 and the forecast for 2028/29 were to be accurate, then there would be 20 vacant places, which would be over ten per cent, which is ample. Based on this evidence I believe that setting the PAN at 75 would not create a shortage of places in the planning area for reception age children.

20. I will now consider demand for the School and the reasons for requesting the variations. The School is one subject to the School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 (the Infant Class Sizes Regulations). These 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. It is more economical to provide classes that have 30 or close to 30 pupils. If the class size is significantly smaller, then the costs of providing the class can be higher than the income derived from the pupils. In other words, if a class has around 23 pupils, for example, then the costs of providing the class are likely to be higher than the income derived from the pupils within it. This can lead to financial deficit over time if not addressed. As an infant school, all classes at the School are subject to the Infant Class Size Regulations.

Table 2: information on admissions to the School

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
PAN	120	75	75	90
Number of first preferences	97	71	56	N/A
Number of admissions or offers for 2026/27 as of 31 August 2026	105	70	71	65 forecast
Vacant places known or forecast	15	5	4	25

21. The number of admissions to the School have decreased sharply since 2024 and this decrease may increase for 2027/28. There is no evidence that parental preference will be frustrated if the PAN is reduced to 75 in the 2027 arrangements.

22. The local authority has provided information on the School's finances. These show a risk of financial deficit being aggravated further if the School has to provide nine classes, as could be required, if the PAN remains at 90 for 2027/28. It seems unlikely that more than 75 children will seek a place at the School if the PAN were to remain at 90. However, if applications for more than 75 children were received, the local authority would have to admit them if the PAN remained at 90 and this would create problems for class organisation and could create additional costs that would be hard to address.

23. In addition, as there is minimal risk that parental preference will be frustrated, and the reduction will give the School the opportunity to plan, I agree that the proposed variation is justified by the circumstances and I agree that the PAN can be set at 75 in the 2027 arrangements.

Determination

24. 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 Petersfield Infant School for 2027/28.

25. I determine that for admission in 2027/28 the published admission number shall be 75.

Dated: 6 October 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Deborah Pritchard