



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case references: VAR2775 and VAR2776

Admission Authority: Birmingham City Council for Raddlebarn Primary School

Date of decision: 8 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 Birmingham City Council for Raddlebarn Primary School, for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number will be 30.

I determine that for admission in 2027/28 the published admission number will be 30.

The referral

1. Birmingham City Council (the Admission Authority; the Local Authority) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for Raddlebarn Primary School (the School) for 2026/27 and 2027/28 (the Arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged three to eleven in Selly Oak, Birmingham.
3. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) of the School, which applies to admissions to Reception (Year R), be reduced from 60, as determined, to 30 for the current academic year (2026/27) and 2027/28.

Jurisdiction and procedure

4. Section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) makes provision for variations to determined arrangements. Paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the School Admissions Code (the Code) say (insofar as is relevant here):

“3.6 Once admission arrangements have been determined for a particular school year, they cannot be revised by the admission authority unless such revision is necessary to

give effect to a mandatory requirement of this Code, admissions law, a determination of the Adjudicator or any misprint in the admission arrangements. Admission authorities may propose other variations where they consider such changes to be necessary in view of a major change in circumstances. Such proposals **must** be referred to the Schools Adjudicator for approval, and the appropriate bodies notified. Where the local authority is the admission authority for a community or voluntary controlled school, it **must** consult the governing body of the school before making any reference.

3.7 Admission authorities **must** notify the appropriate bodies of all variations”.

5. The Arrangements were determined by the Admission Authority on 21 January 2025 for the 2026/27 academic year and on 20 January 2026 for the 2027/28 academic year.

6. The Admission Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation 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 variation.

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:

- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 8 July 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) and ‘Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool’ (FBIT) websites), the LA, and 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. 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 from 60 to 30 as proposed, it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years.

Consideration of proposed variation

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

13. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN for the School be reduced from 60 to 30 for the 2026/27 and 2027/28.

14. The Admission Authority told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the School is that:

"The School has recently seen a drop in Reception enrolments and first-choice preferences with Reception 2026 showing 50% fewer first choice preferences than Reception 2024 and a further 8 fewer than Reception 2025. Within the planning area there are fewer pupils on roll in Reception currently compared to the previous intake. The usual in-year growth expected in this area and across the City has not been realised...a review of census data from 2025/26 academic year reflects a reduction in growth.

There are significant concerns that continued reductions in pupil numbers will affect the school's ability to carry out essential structural improvements in the coming years. Lower enrolments and reduced revenue will place considerable strain on the budget. Smaller cohorts are anticipated for Reception 2026 based on applications received so far."

15. The Local Authority cite long-term financial viability and sustainability as a concern if the current PAN remains in place with fewer children in classes than they can accommodate which leads in turn to reduced funding and financial pressure.

16. I will now consider data provided by the Local Authority to form a view about the sufficiency of school places in the local area if the PAN of the School is reduced from 60 to 30 in 2026/27 and 2027/28. I will consider the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the change in demand, and the potential effect of the proposed PAN reduction on parental preference, and whether the reduction is justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.

17. 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. The School is in “planning area 48” alongside four other schools who admit children to Year R.

18. Table 1 illustrates the number of Year R places and the number of children admitted to those schools. Table 1 also demonstrates the effect of reducing the PAN for the School on surplus places in the planning area.

Table 1: Year R places available at schools within the planning area, and the number of children admitted to, or forecast to require a place at, those schools.

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Number of places in Year R at the schools in the planning area (with current PAN of 60 in the School)	240	240	240	240
Number of children admitted to Year R (2024/25 – 206/27) and forecast for 2027/28	196	193	149	215*
Number of vacant places	44	47	91	25
Vacant places as a percentage	18	20	38	10
Forecast number of places in Year R if variation approved (with a PAN of 30 at the School in 2026/27 and 2027/28)	240	240	210	210
Forecast vacant places if variation approved	n/a	n/a	61	-5

* The LA note that analysis of census in Jan 2026 illustrates a reduction in numbers forecast for 2027/28, that is not yet reflected in data. It is highly likely this number will reduce significantly.

19. I note that in 2027/28, the LA forecast currently indicates that the planning area would have five fewer places than required if the PAN variation is approved. I have been reassured by the LA that projections are highly likely to be reduced following a review of 2025/26 census data and revised estimates. This is because in 2025/26, “the usual level of in-year growth expected in this area and across the city has not been realised.” This is further reinforced by patterns recently observed when the original forecast of 224 pupils in Year R translated to enrolment of 149 in September 2026.

20. It was clear from the data provided by the Admission Authority, that the LA has a picture of recent / projected demand in schools in its planning areas that changed significantly during 2025/26 due to reductions in inward migration to the area and birth rates that have led to reduced numbers of children looking for Year R places. I am satisfied that the LA understands the level of demand and a reduction in the PAN in 2027/28 is highly unlikely to result in there being too few places available in the planning area.

21. The Department for Education's document, "Basic need allocations 2026-27 and 2027-28: Explanatory note on methodology", refers to the need for a two percent surplus capacity "to provide an operating margin for local authorities. This helps to support parental choice, pupil population movement, and general manageability of the system." Table 1 illustrates significant and increasing capacity in the planning area between 2024 and 2026, well above the 2 percent recommendation. It is clear that in 2026/27 there are more places in the planning area than are required.

22. I now turn to the demand for places at the School. Table 2 shows the number of children who identified the School as their first preference between 2024 and 2026.

Table 2: The number of children who applied to the School and were admitted in 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27.

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
The PAN for the School	60	60	60
Number of first preference applications	42	29	27
Number of children admitted or offered places	47	33	33
Number of vacant places	13	27	27

23. I note that the number of children admitted to or offered places in Year R at the School for the last three years is above the proposed PAN, which would mean that if the PAN is reduced, then it is possible that demand could be higher than the number of places available. Once places have been offered, the offer cannot be withdrawn, therefore, should the variation for 2026/27 be approved it is likely the School will have a higher number of pupils in Year R than the PAN of 30.

24. The School Admissions Code does allow admission authorities to admit above PAN subject to Infant class sizes are limited to 30 (as set out in The School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 2012 and in paragraph 2.16 of the Code). 33 pupils in Year R in 2026 means that there needs to be places in more than one class in Year R to accommodate all the places required in Year R.

25. The LA has shared that the School intends to "operate mixed age classes in KS1 and run a hybrid model of continuous provision with 3 groups due to lower intakes." Therefore, the School will evolve from six classes in KS1 to eventually three. It is possible for the School to accommodate 33 pupils in mixed age classes in 2026/27 because of class sizes in Year 1 and Year 2. I am satisfied that the School and LA have adequate plans in place to manage the demand for places in 2026/27.

26. The LA also informed me that the School is considering the long-term viability of its current nursery provision. This is likely to reduce demand for Year R places in the School further.

27. The rationale for reducing the PAN from 60 to 30 is linked to the School's financial position. In March 2026, FBIT showed the School with an in-year deficit of £74k and a revenue reserve deficit of £479k. This indicates an extremely challenging financial position for the School. The LA forecast a deficit of over £500k at the end of the current financial year. They state:

"This has been exacerbated by small group sizes in lower year groups as they have 36 pupils spread over two classes."

28. The LA state:

"The proposed reduction is one of the ways they can make any significant savings as a school and deliver a model that sees the in-year deficit halting and debt recovery over a 5-year plan which is also recommended by the DfE's SRMA [School Resource Management Advisor] working alongside Raddlebarn to support in debt recovery."

29. I have considered the impact of decreasing admission numbers on school finances balanced against the impact that 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. Additionally, as infant class sizes are limited to 30, the cost of a teacher and the resources necessary for an infant class, when compared to, say, a junior or secondary school teacher / class (where numbers are not limited), has to be borne by proportionately smaller income from the children admitted to infant classes.

30. In order to secure the long-term financial sustainability of the School, the LA and governors are seeking to make financial savings. This is facilitated by reducing the number of infant classes. I have considered the competing needs of providing the school places that parents want for their children and the financial viability of the School.

31. The Admission Authority has presented a compelling argument for the variation it proposes illustrating reduction in forecast demand for places in Year R means that parental preference is unlikely to be frustrated and that there are suitable places available in the planning area. By implementing the proposed changes, the School will begin a debt recovery plan that means the financial sustainability of the School is more secure. I accept that the LA has provided compelling evidence that it will be able to manage school places in the planning area by reducing the PAN at Raddlebarn Primary School for 2026/27 and 2027/28 from 60 to 30.

32. I determine that the PAN for 2026/27 and for 2027/28 will be 30.

33. 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

- 34. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Birmingham City Council for Raddlebarn Primary School, for 2026/27 and 2027/28.**
- 35. I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number will be 30.**
- 36. I determine that for admission in 2027/28 the published admission number will be 30.**

Dated: 8 October 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Mr Philip Lloyd