



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: VAR2817

Admission Authority: Lincolnshire County Council for Woodlands Infant and Nursery School

Date of decision: 21 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 Lincolnshire County Council for Woodlands Infant and Nursery School for 2027/28.

I determine that the published admission number for admissions to the Reception Year in 2027/28 shall be 45.

The referral

1. Lincolnshire County Council is the local authority and admission authority for Woodlands Infant and Nursery School (the School). I shall refer to Lincolnshire County Council as the Local Authority in this determination. The Local Authority has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for the School for 2027/28 (the 2027 Arrangements).
2. The School is a community school for children aged three to seven years in Lincoln. It is a co-educational school with no designated religious character.
3. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (PAN) of the School, which applies to admissions to the reception year (Year R), be reduced from 60, as determined, to 45 for 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 Local Authority on 24 February 2026.
6. The Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code. I find that the appropriate procedures were followed, and I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.
7. In considering the variation request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.
8. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:
 - the referral from the Local Authority dated 6 October 2026, and supporting documents;
 - the determined 2027 Arrangements and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
 - responses from the Local Authority and the governing body of the School to my requests for further information;
 - maps, including Google Maps and those showing the location of the School; and
 - information available on gov.uk websites (including the ‘Get Information About Schools’ (GIAS) and ‘Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool’ (FBIT) websites); and that on the websites of the Local Authority and the School.

9. 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.
10. I note here that the admission arrangements for the School for 2028/29 have not yet been determined. If I decide to vary the 2027 Arrangements by reducing the School's PAN from 60 to 45 as proposed, it will set a 'baseline' for subsequent years.
11. In the interest of dealing speedily with this and other cases, I have not considered other aspects of the 2027 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

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 in circumstances, or under certain other limited and specified circumstances.
13. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN of the School be reduced from 60 to 45 in 2027/28. The governing body of the School supports the proposed variation.
14. Having regard to the declining birth rates and Year R admissions in recent years, the Local Authority told me the following reason for seeking a variation to the PAN for the School:

“The proposal is to establish a SEND [special educational needs and disabilities] unit in each of the infant schools, and two hubs in the junior school for through provision. Each of these units, known in Lincolnshire as hubs, will have 10 LA commissioned spaces. This proposal is to reduce the PAN of Woodlands Infant School to 45 from 60 to ensure there is space for the hub within the current school footprint.”
15. I have considered the latest available data 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 45 in 2027/28. I have considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the change in demand, the potential effect of the proposed PAN reduction on parental preference, and whether the proposed reduction is justified taking into account all relevant circumstances.
16. Local authorities have a duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty, local authorities assess the likely future number of places to be needed and plan to meet that need. They use 'planning areas', which

are geographical areas and the schools within those areas, for this purpose. I have considered the data that the Local Authority has provided for the relevant planning area in which the School is located.

17. In the planning area 'Birchwood', there are five schools, including the School, for which the usual year of entry is Year R. The data set out in Table 1 show the number of Year R places and the number of children admitted to, or forecast to require a place at, those schools within the same planning area. Table 1 also demonstrates the effect of the proposed PAN reduction 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.

	2025	2026	2027
Number of places in Year R at the schools in the planning area (with a PAN of 60 at the School)	255	255	245
Number of children on roll in Year R (2025, 2026), and forecast to require Year R places (2027)	161	148	147
Vacant places	94	107	98
Vacant places as a percentage	36.9	42.0	40.0
Number of places in Year R if variation approved (with a PAN of 45 at the School)	NA	NA	230
Forecast vacant places if variation approved	NA	NA	83
Forecast vacant places as a percentage if variation approved	NA	NA	36.1

18. In addition, the Department for Education's document, "Basic need allocations 2026-27 and 2027-28: Explanatory note on methodology", refers to the need for two per cent 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." From the data above I note that the proportion of vacant places in the planning area would be well above the suggested two per cent if I agreed to the proposed variation for 2027/28.
19. I am satisfied that if the PAN of the School were to be reduced to 45 for 2027/28, there would be sufficient places for children living in the planning area and seeking a Year R place.

20. I turn now to the demand for places at the School. Table 2 shows the number of children on roll in Year R in 2025 and 2026, and the preferences data in those years. The Table uses the proposed PAN of 45 for 2027.

Table 2: The number of children on roll in Year R at the School in 2025 and 2026, and the forecast number of places required in 2027.

	2025	2026	2027
The PAN for the School	60	60	45
Number of first preferences	22	24	NA
Number of children on roll in Year R (2025, 2026), and forecast to require places (2027)	24	26	25
Vacant places	36	34	20

21. If the proposed variation is approved, parents and other relevant parties would not have been able to express their view on the reduction of the School's PAN. However, they may still consider preferences now and make their applications for 2027/28 in the knowledge that the PAN of the School is reduced to 45. Having regard to Table 2 above, I am satisfied that there is unlikely to be any frustration of parental preference if the proposed variation were to be agreed for September 2027.
22. I will now consider the impact on the School of my approving, or not approving, the proposed variations.
23. The FBIT website shows that for the financial year ending March 2026, the School had an in-year surplus of about £14,000, and a revenue reserve of about £205,000.
24. The governing body of the School said in its response to my request for further information:

“The reduction will also support a more efficient use of accommodation across the school. The release of classroom space will facilitate the establishment of the proposed 10-place SEND Hub, extending specialist provision within the Forest Skies Federation and increasing opportunities for children with additional needs to access support within their local community. The governing body considers this a significant enhancement to the school's inclusive offer and a positive use of available accommodation.

Educationally, the reduction in PAN will not adversely affect class organisation. The school will continue to organise pupils within single year group classes and does not anticipate the need for mixed-age classes as a result of the proposal. Smaller cohorts will enable staffing and resources to be deployed more

effectively, ensuring that high-quality teaching and support continue to be provided whilst maintaining financial and operational sustainability.”

25. Having considered all the matters above, my reasoning can be summarised as follows:

- If the proposed variation is approved, parents and other relevant parties would not have been able to express a view on the reduction of the School’s PAN. However, from the data given by the Local Authority, such a variation will be unlikely to give rise to any concern about the sufficiency of Year R places in the planning area. The PAN reduction will be unlikely to result in frustration of parental preference. This will allow the School to divert resources to establish a specialist provision for children with special education needs and disabilities.
- If the proposed variation is not approved, the School would be obliged to offer Year R places up to the existing PAN of 60 for any applicant in 2027/28. It would not be able to make the best use of its resources to establish the specialist provision as mentioned above, despite the likelihood of holding a number of vacant places.

26. Taking everything into consideration, I find that the variation is justified by the circumstances and I approve it.

Determination

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

28. I determine that the published admission number for admissions to the Reception Year in 2027/28 shall be 45.

Dated: 21 October 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Jackie Liu