Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: **REF4734**

Referrer: **A member of the public**

Admission Authority: **Amplify Education for Bristol Cathedral Choir School**

Date of advice: **05 November 2026**

Determination

In respect of the matters raised by the referrer and in accordance with section 88I(5) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I find that the admission arrangements determined by Amplify Education for Bristol Cathedral Choir School, for 2027/28 do not conform with the requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

I have also found that there is one other matter which does not comply with the requirements relating to admission arrangements in the way set out in this determination.

By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the admission authority. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of this determination, unless an alternative timescale is specified by the schools adjudicator. In this case, I determine that the arrangements are revised within one month for the reasons set out in my determination.

The referral

1. Under section 88H(2) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act), an objection has been referred to the Office of Schools Adjudicator (OSA or the Adjudicator) by a member of the public (the Referrer), about the admission arrangements for 2027/28 for Bristol Cathedral Choir School (the Arrangements). Bristol Cathedral Choir School (the School) is a secondary school for children aged 11 to 18 years. It is located in Bristol.

2. Since March 2026, the School has been part of Amplify Education (the Trust). The Trust is the Admission Authority for the School. Prior to this date, the School was part of Cathedral Schools Trust (CST). Amplify Education was formed as the result of a merger between another trust (the Trust in Learning Academies) and CST. The Trust includes 21 schools which are a mix of primary, secondary and all-through schools. Most of the schools are located in the Bristol area.

3. The local authority for the area in which the School is located is Bristol City Council (the LA or Local Authority).

4. The School has been designated as having a Church of England religious character. The Diocese of Bristol (the Diocese) is the School's religious body.

5. The parties to this case are:

- the Referrer;
- the Trust;
- the School;
- the Local Authority; and
- the Diocese.

6. For reasons that are explained in the 'Jurisdiction' section, the objection raised cannot be treated as an objection. The objector will be called the 'Referrer' and the objection will be called the 'referral' in this determination.

7. The referral relates to concerns that the School's oversubscription criteria give priority to children 'living in local authority postcode areas BS1 to BS16' when compared to those 'not living in local authority postcode areas BS1 to BS16'. This may be in breach of the School Admissions Code (the Code) and the judgement known as the 'Greenwich judgement' (see below) which state that children should not be discriminated against simply because they live outside the local authority area in which a school is situated.

8. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Trust, the Local Authority and the Diocese for their responses to my requests for further information.

Jurisdiction

9. The terms of the academy agreement between CST and the Secretary of State for Education required that the admissions policy and Arrangements for the School were in accordance with admissions law as it applies to maintained schools.

10. The Arrangements were determined under section 88C of the Act by CST, which was the admission authority for the School at the time, on 5 February 2026.

11. The current terms of the academy agreement between the Trust and the Secretary of State for Education require that the admissions policy and Arrangements for the School are in accordance with admissions law as it applies to foundation and voluntary aided schools. No changes to the Arrangements were required as a result of the change in admission authority.

12. The Referrer submitted an objection to these Arrangements on 13 September 2026. The Code requires objections to admission arrangements for 2027/28 to be made to the OSA by 15 May 2026. As this deadline was missed, the case cannot be treated as an objection.

13. However, as the arrangements have been brought to my attention, I have decided to use the power conferred on me under section 88I(5) of the Act to consider whether the Arrangements conform with the requirements relating to admission arrangements and I am treating the objection as a referral.

14. As well as the matters raised by the Referrer, I have decided to check the entirety of the Arrangements under section 88I of the Act and to determine whether or not they conform with the requirements relating to admissions and, if not, in what ways they do not so conform. I will refer to these as 'other matters' and they are covered in the section of the determination under the title of that name.

15. The Referrer made reference to previous adjudicators' findings in determinations with case reference numbers ADA2573 and ADA3284. Of course, previous determinations by other schools adjudicators do not set precedents; I have considered the Arrangements on their merits against the requirements set out in legislation and the Code in the light of the facts and circumstances as they are now.

Procedure

16. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code.

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

- the referral dated 13 September 2026 and supporting documents;

- a copy of the minutes of the meeting of CST at which the arrangements were determined;
- the determined Arrangements for 2027/28;
- responses from the Local Authority, the Trust and the Diocese to the referral and to my requests for further information;
- maps, including comparison of local authority areas and postcode boundaries;
- a copy of the guidance on admissions provided to the School by the Diocese; and
- information available on the websites of gov.uk (including 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS) and Ofsted), the LA, the School, the Trust and the Diocese;

18. I have reviewed all the information provided by the parties. However, I have referred only to that which has a bearing on my determination.

Background

19. According to GIAS, the school is a co-educational, non-selective academy. The School was most recently inspected by Ofsted in November 2022 when it was graded as 'good' overall.

20. The published admission number for entry to Year 7 in 2027/28 is 150.

21. The Arrangements set out that any child with an education, health and care plan naming the School will be admitted first. Then, in times when oversubscribed, children will be prioritised according to the oversubscription criteria. These can be summarised as follows:

1. Looked after children and previously looked after children;
2. Probationer Choristers;
3. Music specialism places;
4. Children of staff;
5. Children who attend Cathedral Primary School, a named feeder school;
6. Children with siblings on roll at the School;
7. Other children living in local authority postcode areas BS1 to BS16 by random allocation; and

8. Other children not living in local authority postcode areas BS1 to BS16 by random allocation.

Consideration of Case

22. As well as raising matters in respect of the Arrangements of this School, the Referrer has raised similar matters in respect of the arrangements of another school within the same Trust, namely Cathedral Primary School. These matters are dealt with under a separate determination (case reference REF4735).

23. The Referrer expressed concerns that the School's oversubscription criteria give higher priority to children 'living in local authority postcode areas BS1 to BS16' (criterion 7) when compared to those 'not living in local authority postcode areas BS1 to BS16' (criterion 8). Within criterion 8, the Arrangements specifically state that 'applicants living in South Gloucestershire Local Authority whose postcode is BS15 or BS16 will be included in this category'.

24. The Referrer wrote:

> "The effect can be illustrated by two hypothetical applicants living in the same postcode district. A child living in BS16 on the Bristol side of the local authority boundary would fall within criterion 7, while a child living in BS16 on the South Gloucestershire side would fall within criterion 8. The postcode district is therefore the same; the difference in priority arises from the local authority boundary. I do not object to random allocation, postcode districts or a genuine geographical priority area. My concern is that local-authority residence itself appears to determine admissions priority.
>
> The Greenwich principle, recorded in footnote 24 to paragraph 1.14 of the School Admissions Code, prohibits disadvantaging pupils simply because they live outside the school's local authority area."

25. The following paragraph of the Code was cited by the Referrer as being breached by the Arrangements:

> "1.14 - Catchment areas **must** be designed so that they are reasonable and clearly defined (footnote 24). Catchment areas do not prevent parents who live outside the catchment of a particular school from expressing a preference for the school.
>
> Footnote 24 - R v Greenwich London Borough Council, ex parte John Ball Primary School (1989) 88 LGR 589 [1990] Fam Law 469 held that pupils should not be discriminated against in relation to admission to the school simply because they reside outside the local authority area in which the school is situated. Section 86(8) of the SSFA 1998 places an equal duty on local authorities to comply with parental preference in respect of parents living within and outside their boundary."

26. The Arrangements indicate that the Trust was aware that addresses in postcode districts BS15 and BS16 overlap two local authority areas. I asked the Local Authority to confirm that all addresses in postcode areas BS1 to BS14 (the other postcode districts referred to in the Arrangements) are located within the area covered by the City of Bristol. It told me:

> "The Local Authority can confirm that postcode districts BS1, BS2, BS3, BS4, BS5, BS6, BS9, BS10, BS11 and BS13, BS14 are within the City of Bristol local authority area. However, not all addresses within postcode districts BS1 to BS14 are located wholly within Bristol local authority area. The following postcode districts extend beyond the City of Bristol local authority area boundary:
>
> - BS7 and BS10 includes addresses within both the City of Bristol and South Gloucestershire.
> - BS3 and BS13 includes addresses within North Somerset.
> - BS8 all addresses are within North Somerset.
> - BS4, BS13 and BS14 includes addresses within both the City of Bristol and Bath & North East Somerset."

27. The potential impact of oversubscription criteria 7 and 8 to discriminate against pupils simply because of where they live is, therefore, potentially greater than for just those applicants who have a BS15 or BS16 postcode and live in South Gloucestershire.

28. In response to these concerns, the Trust stated:

> "Relating to oversubscription criteria 7 and 8. The Admission Authority was aware of the Greenwich judgement but the intention of the arrangements was not to give priority on the basis of local authority residence or to disadvantage applicants residing outside the City of Bristol, but rather to support access to a local community school serving the Bristol area.
>
> Having reviewed the arrangements following receipt of the referral, the Admission Authority recognises that on interpretation the effect of the criteria is that children living within the specified postcode area may be afforded different priority depending upon whether their home address falls within the administrative area of Bristol City Council or South Gloucestershire Council. This was not the intention, but the Admission Authority understands why this raises a question as to whether the criteria are consistent with the principles established by the Greenwich judgment and the requirements of paragraph 1.14 of the School Admissions Code.

The Admission Authority has sought to establish the rationale for the distinction between addresses falling within the respective local authority areas. However, given the historic nature of the arrangements, it has not been possible to identify contemporaneous evidence demonstrating the basis upon which that particular geographical distinction was originally drawn. The Admission Authority does not therefore seek to advance a retrospective justification for the boundary which cannot now be evidenced.

The Admission Authority welcomes the Adjudicator's consideration of the matter and will comply with the Adjudicator's determination, including making any amendments to the admission arrangements required by that determination within the applicable timescale."

29. I am of the opinion that the Arrangements are in breach of admission law. This is because, although mentioned only in a footnote of the Code, the effect of the Greenwich judgement is mandatory, as set out in Section 86 (8) of the SSFA 1998. There is an equal duty for admission authorities to comply with parental preference irrespective of whether they live within or outside a local authority boundary. In this case, the School's Arrangements give a higher priority for a school place to children who live within postcode districts located within the City of Bristol Local Authority than children who live in the same postcode district but within a different local authority area.

30. I, therefore, find that the admission arrangements determined by the Trust for Bristol Cathedral Choir School, for 2027/28 do not conform with the requirements of admissions law.

31. As set out above, the Trust accepts that the Arrangements are in breach of the Code, albeit unintentionally, and it has indicated a willingness to amend its Arrangements accordingly. I am grateful for this positive response.

32. By virtue of section 88K(2), my decision is binding on the Admission Authority. The School Admissions Code requires the Admission Authority to revise its Arrangements within two months of this determination, unless an alternative timescale is specified by the schools adjudicator. In this case, I require the Admission Authority to revise its Arrangements within one month. This is for the reasons set out below.

33. The Local Authority provided me with data regarding the number of first preference applications received (to be referred to simply as the number of applicants), the local authority areas and the postcode districts where those applicants lived for 2024-2026. This information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Information relating to the number of applicants for a Year 7 place at the School, including the local authority areas and the postcode districts where those applicants lived, for admissions between 2024 and 2026 (data provided by the LA on 6 October and 2 November 2026)

	Admission Year 2024/25	Admission Year 2025/26	Admission Year 2026/27
Number of applicants (first preferences only)	282	253	219
Number of applicants not living in the LA's area	34	27	24
Number of applicants not living in the LA's area but living in BS1 to BS16	15	10	12
Number of applicants not living in the LA's area but living in BS1 to BS16 who were offered a place at the School	10	4	7
Number of applicants not living in the LA's area but living in BS1 to BS16 whose applications were withdrawn	0	2	1
Number of applicants not living in the LA's area but living in BS1 or BS16 who were not offered a place at the School	5	4	4

34. Table 1 shows that over the last three years between 10 and 15 children each year may have been given lower priority for a school place because of living within a BS1 to BS16 postcode district but outside of the Local Authority's area. However, it also shows that many of these children were offered a place at the School. This is likely to be because they were offered a place under a higher eligibility criterion such as having attended the feeder school or having a sibling on the School's roll. In reality, criterion 8 is likely to have had an unfavourable impact on securing a school place for a maximum of five children per year.

35. Under criteria 7 and 8, places are allocated via random allocation. If the small number of children affected by the inclusion of criterion 8 had been included in the group of children eligible for random allocation under criterion 7, there is no way of knowing whether all, some or none of them would have been offered a place. However, statistically, the inclusion of

those children would not have had a significant impact on the likelihood of any applicant being offered a place at the School via the random allocation process.

36. The national closing date for secondary school applications for 2027/28 was 31 October 2026. As a result, the great majority of parents seeking a Year 7 place for their child for next September will have already applied. Parents may have taken the Arrangements into consideration when selecting a potential school for their child.

37. The school admissions system is predicated on fairness and clarity, and, in my opinion, it is reasonable to expect that offers of a school place should be made on the basis of the arrangements in place at the time of the application unless there is significant mitigation for a change to be made. In this case, I find that that there is significant mitigation as I have found that the Arrangements are unlawful. Furthermore, based on applications received in previous years, there is likely to be little negative impact on the chances of any one applicant being offered a place at the School if the arrangements are changed to comply with admissions law at this stage of the admissions cycle.

38. I, therefore, find it is rational to require the Admission Authority to revise its Arrangements within one month to allow offers for a place in 2027/28 to be made using arrangements which are in line with admissions law.

39. I also note that in circumstances such as these, the Admission Authority is permitted to make such an amendment without a determination from a schools adjudicator, as set out in paragraph 3.6 of the Code which states, in part:

> "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 Schools Adjudicator or any misprint in the admission arrangements."

As requested in my initial communications to all parties, the Trust has properly waited for the publication of this determination before making any changes to the School's Arrangements.

Other matters

40. Having considered the Arrangements as a whole it appeared to me that there were other matters which do not conform with requirements of the Code. These matters are set out below (paragraphs of the Code are indicated where relevant).

41. Firstly, the Arrangements contain a number of hyperlinks to access additional forms, for example, a probationer chorister supplementary application form. When I checked the Arrangements on the School's website on 24 September 2026, these links did not work. This is in breach of paragraph 14 of the Code which states, in part, that parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated. The Trust has subsequently taken action to address this administrative oversight, and the issues have been rectified.

42. Secondly, in the section titled 'Applicant's home address', the arrangements set out some details about how a child's home address may be determined in specific circumstances. However, this section also states, 'Where satisfactory evidence cannot be provided, the Admission Authority will determine the address to be used for allocating a school place.' Paragraph 1.13 of the Code includes the requirement that the Arrangements '**must** include making clear how the 'home' address will be determined'. The Arrangements do not, therefore, fully meet this part of the Code.

43. In its response the Trust said:

> "The Admission Authority acknowledges the concern that this provision may not provide sufficient detail regarding how a child's home address would be determined where satisfactory evidence of residence is not available. We have included proposed alternative wording below for your comments."

44. I welcome the Trust's response on this matter. However, as an adjudicator, my jurisdiction is for the Arrangements determined and to decide whether they comply with all relevant legal requirements. It is not open to me to determine how the Arrangements should be and it is for the Admission Authority to address any non-compliance issues within the required timeframe. I cannot, therefore, advise on the suggestions made.

45. As the Admission Authority has accepted that changes are required, I will not discuss this matter further other than to make clear that the Code requires that the Arrangements be amended to address the points set out here. The Admission Authority must address this matter, as permitted by paragraph 3.6 of the Code, within one month of the date of this determination.

Determination

46. In respect of the matters raised by the referrer and in accordance with section 88I(5) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I find that the admission arrangements determined by Amplify Education for Bristol Cathedral Choir School, for 2027/28 do not conform with the requirements relating to admission arrangements in the ways set out in this determination.

47. I have also found that there is one other matter which does not comply with the requirements relating to admission arrangements in the way set out in this determination.

48. By virtue of section 88K(2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the admission authority. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authority to revise its admission arrangements within two months of this determination, unless an alternative timescale is specified by the schools adjudicator. In this case, I determine that the arrangements are revised within one month for the reasons set out in my determination.

Dated: 05 November 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Catherine Crooks