Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: **VAR2822**

Admission Authority: **Leeds City Council for Lawnswood School**

Date of decision: **17 November 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 Leeds City Council for Lawnswood School, for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number will be 250.

The referral

1. Leeds City Council (the Admission Authority, the LA) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for Lawnswood School (the School) for 2026/27 admission year (the Arrangements).

2. The School is a community school for children aged 11 to 18 years in Leeds, West Yorkshire. It is a co-educational, non-selective school with no designated religious character.

3. The Admission Authority for the School is the 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 variation is reducing the published admission number (PAN) for the current academic year from 270 to 250.

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 Admission Authority on 12 February 2025.

8. The Admission Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code.

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

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

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

- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 19 October 2026 and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 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 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS)), the LA, and the School.

12. I would like to extend my thanks to the LA and the School for their responses to my requests for further information.

13. 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.

14. I note here that the Arrangements for 2027/28 have been determined and that the PAN has been reduced to 240. This means that if I agree to the Admission Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by reducing the PAN from 270 to 250 as proposed, it will be for the remainder of 2026/27 only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.

Consideration of proposed variation

15. 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.

16. The Admission Authority told me that the reason for it seeking a variation for the School is that, following admissions to year 7 in September 2026, the actual demand for places in the School was lower than expected. Reducing the PAN for this academic year would allow the School to plan teaching groups and class sizes with greater certainty, minimising disruption for pupils and ensuring efficient staffing and resourcing.

17. The governing body of the School is fully supportive of the decision.

18. The Admission Authority maintained a PAN of 270 for year 7 in 2026/27, because at the time the Arrangements were determined, the LA projected that demand for places would require 270 places in the School for the LA to meet the statutory duty to ensure there are enough school places for pupils in the area.

19. In April 2026, 267 children were offered a place in year 7 at the School. However, in September 2026 only 252 children joined year 7. At the time of the school census in October 2026, there were 248 pupils on roll in year 7 at the School. There are no pupils waiting for places.

20. The School told me that 222 pupils attended year 7 induction in July 2026, which suggested that it was extremely unlikely that 267 pupils would arrive in September. As a consequence the School took staffing and resource decisions to accommodate a smaller cohort. When 252 enrolments were confirmed, the School confirmed its curriculum organisation so that pastoral groups and core subjects include a maximum class size of 30 alongside one smaller group to support transition for the most vulnerable pupils.

21. The LA stated that:

> "The school's PAN has already been reduced to 240 for admission in 2027/28 through the normal consultation and determination process. The proposed variation would therefore provide a more gradual transition between the current PAN of 270 and the determined PAN of 240, helping to align the admission arrangements for 2026/27 with those that will apply from 2027/28."

22. 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 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. There are four schools offering year 7 places in the planning area.

Table 1 : Extract of LA data illustrating demand for places in year 7 in the planning area for 26/27 and 27/28.

School	PAN 26/27	1st preference 26/27	2nd preference 26/27	Projected demand for 27/28
Lawnswood (the School)	270	114	151	217
Ralph Thoresby	180	109	83	197
Horsforth	285	346	248	294
Abbey Grange	240	298	274	254
Total	975	867	756	962

23. I raised my concern with the LA and the School in respect of the possible demand for places at the School in 2026/27 which, if I was to agree to reduce the PAN to 250 for the remainder of the year may result in parental preference being frustrated.

24. The LA provided information regarding the number of preferences for each school in the planning area for the last three years. Table 1 illustrates the pattern of total number of applications in the planning area being less than the number of places available. As illustrated, the School had 265 first and second preference applications in 2026, which translated into 252 pupils starting in September, that reduced to 248 pupils on roll in the first few weeks of the autumn term.

25. The School highlighted that, at time of writing, they have two places available in year 7 and no pupils on a waiting list. The School also illustrated the history of substantial pupil mobility. So far in 2026/27, 8 pupils have left year 7, and five have joined. In 2025/26, 33 pupils left year 7 and 30 joined during the academic year.

26. Based on the information provided by the School and LA, I am satisfied that reducing the PAN to the proposed level is unlikely to frustrate parental preference should pupils seek to join the School in year 7 during the current academic year. Table 1 illustrates that the number of places available in the planning area is higher than the number of applicants for places in the area, there are sufficient appropriate places at schools within the planning area. 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.

27. I accept that the LA has provided evidence that it will be able to manage school places in the planning area if the PAN at Lawnswood School is reduced for 2026/27 as

proposed. The School and LA have provided assurance that the School has capacity to accommodate any pupils allocated to the School through the LA Fair Access Protocol (FAP), based on historic patterns. For example, in 2025/26, two pupils joined the School through FAP across all year groups.

28. I, therefore, agree that the PAN for 2026/27 will be reduced from 270 to 250.

29. I note here that 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 than it currently expects to, there remains the capacity in the building for it to do so.

Determination

30. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Leeds City Council for Lawnswood School, for 2026/27.

31. I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number will be reduced to 250.

Dated: 17 November 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Mr Philip Lloyd