Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference:	**VAR2819**
Admission Authority:	**Surrey County Council for St Ann's Heath Junior School**
Local Authority:	**Surrey County Council**
Date of advice:	**20 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 Surrey County Council for St Ann's Heath Junior School for 2027/28.

I determine that the published admission number for admission in 2027/28 will be 34.

The referral

1. Surrey County Council (the Local Authority, the LA) has referred to the adjudicator proposals for a variation to the admission arrangements (the Arrangements) for St Ann's Heath Junior School (the School) for 2027/28.

2. The School is a community junior school for children aged 7 to 11 in Virginia Water, Surrey. The Local Authority is the admission authority for the School.

3. The proposed variation is that the published admission number (the PAN) for admission to Year 3 in 2027/28 is reduced from 45 to 34.

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 Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code. The proposed variation has the support of the Governing Body of the School.

6. 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 20 October 2026, supporting documents and further information provided by the School at my request;
- the determined Arrangements for 2027/28 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- maps showing the location of the School and other relevant schools; and
- information available on the websites of the Department for Education, the Local Authority and the School.

9. In the interests of dealing speedily with this and the many other requests for variations at this time, 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

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. 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.

12. The major change in circumstances relied upon by the Admission Authority is set out in the referral, which states that the decline in local need for places in Year 3 in the area around the School has continued.

13. I have given careful consideration to the latest available data in order to form a view about the sufficiency of school places in the local area if the PAN is reduced as proposed. I have also considered the demand for places at the School, the reasons given for the changes in demand, the potential effect on parental preference of the proposed PAN reduction and whether the proposed reduction is justified, taking into account all relevant circumstances.

14. The Local Authority has a duty to make sure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty, it assesses the likely future number of places needed and plans to meet that need. The Local Authority uses planning areas, which are geographical areas each containing a number of schools, for this purpose. The School is one of three located in the "Virginia Water, Lyne & Longcross" planning area. The other two schools in this area are Lyne and Longcross Church of England Primary School and Trumps Green Infant School, the latter being the only feeder to the School.

15. The LA has provided the following figures of demand for places at these schools in the admission planning area:

Table 1: LA data, recent demand for places in the admissions planning area.

Planning area	1st Preference		2nd Preference		3rd Preference		4th Preference		Total	
Virginia Water, Lyne and Longcross	2026	83	2026	51	2026	32	2026	45	2026	211
	2025	100	2025	53	2025	36	2025	36	2025	225
	2024	117	2024	52	2024	32	2024	40	2024	241
	2023	131	2023	53	2023	28	2023	33	2023	245

16. Table 1 shows a continued decline in the number of preferences for places in Reception and Year 3 between 2023 and 2026. In 2026 only 83 first preferences were made.

An approved variation to the PAN for the School from 60 to 45 places meant that the area had 135 available spaces.

17. The LA has provided further data on demand for individual schools in the admissions planning area:

Table 2: LA data on recent demand for places at each school in the admissions planning area

Name of school	Relevance	1st Preference		2nd Preference		3rd Preference		4th Preference		Total	
St Ann's Heath Junior School	The School	2026	31	2026	9	2026	2	2026	1	2026	43
		2025	40	2025	6	2025	2	2025	0	2025	48
		2024	59	2024	1	2024	0	2024	0	2024	60
		2023	76	2023	12	2023	2	2023	0	2023	90
Trumps Green Infant School	A reception to Year 2 infant school which feeds the School	2026	25	2026	23	2026	17	2026	11	2026	76
		2025	40	2025	25	2025	14	2025	9	2025	88
		2024	41	2024	23	2024	13	2024	10	2024	87
		2023	33	2023	20	2023	10	2023	10	2023	73
Lyne and Longcross School	A local all through primary school	2026	27	2026	19	2026	13	2026	22	2026	81
		2025	20	2025	22	2025	20	2025	18	2025	80
		2024	17	2024	28	2024	19	2024	20	2024	84
		2023	22	2023	21	2023	16	2023	13	2023	72

18. I note the reduction in first preferences for the School from 76 in 2023 to 31 in 2026. The LA has stated that the decline in requirement for places at Trumps Green Infant School and increase in first preferences for Lyne and Longcross Primary School, is relevant to this decision. Trumps Green Infant School is the only named feeder school for the School. A reduction in first preferences for Trumps Green from 41/40 to 25 is suggestive of a continued reduction in likely demand for places at the School in 2029/30. Children enrolled at Lyne and Longcross School would be unlikely to switch schools mid-phase.

19. The LA has stated the following further points for its case that a PAN of 45 for 2027/28 is a surplus of capacity for the School compared to local need:

- “There has been a continued general fall in birth rate in the County. At the height of Surrey’s pupil population in October 2016, there were 13,374 children who had just started in Reception classes at Surrey state-maintained schools. By October 2025,

this number had fallen to 11,950 children on roll in Reception classes which is a decrease of 1,424 or around 11% - equivalent to 47 fewer Reception classes.

- There has been a reduction in the number of applicants to the School since 2024 from a school in the Chertsey planning area, Meadowcroft Infant School, historically fed into St Ann's Heath Junior School and supported the School maintaining a PAN of 90 places and a number on roll as high as 291. Meadowcroft is now an all through primary school.

- An observed tendency for children to leave Trumps Green Infant Primary mid-year in Year 2 for local independent or primary schools. This reduces demand for Year 3 places at the School."

20. The LA has also stated that improvements in modelling methodology in the County allow more precise assessments of likely need. This has led them to state that predicted needs assessment tends to exaggerate the number of places required. The above data suggests that, as of January 2025, there were predicted to be 40 places needed in September 2026. Actual offered places in 2026 was lower at 36. The number of children admitted was only 29.

21. This tendency of projected demand being higher than actual demand is shown in table 3.

Table 3: LA data on projected and actual demand for places in Year 3 in the admissions planning area, covering both the School and children already on roll at Lyne and Longcross Primary School:

Planning Area-based Forecasts for Virginia Water, Lyne & Longcross				
Academic Year	**Year 3 places available**	**Year 3 Forecast need**	**Number on roll in September 2026**	**Shortfall on predicted need**
2026-27	75	64	58	6
2027-28	64	69	n/a	n/a

22. The LA has stated that in the near future there will only be, on average, around 64 children of Reception age residing in the Virginia Water, Lyne and Longcross planning area. The request to revise the PAN from 45 to 34 children for 2027/28 is seen by the LA as consistent with recent shortfalls in actual demand compared to forecast demand. Should 2027/28 follow the same pattern of need as 2026/27, 33 places at the School might be required. A reduced PAN of 34 would therefore be adequate for local need for on-time applicants and would allow placement of one in-year applicant.

23. Taking into account this pattern and considering the actual numbers for those currently on roll in the other schools in the local planning area, I am satisfied that a reduction of the School's PAN to 34 for 2027/28 would not leave a shortage of places in the local planning area for children whose parents are seeking a place for their child.

24. I now turn to the number of children at the School and the reasons given by the Local Authority in their referral. The request for the variation refers to the wish to align the School's staffing and budget to the reducing number of children.

25. The LA has provided the following data on the current number on roll in the schools in the admissions planning area:

Table 4: LA data on September 2026 pupil numbers at the three schools in the admissions planning area:

School	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Lyne and Longcross Primary School	30	28	30	29	27	26	28
St Ann's Heath Junior School				29	36	41	66
Trumps Green Infant School	48	46	34				

26. The roll data detailed in Table 4 has led the School to adopt an organisation based on mixed aged classes from autumn 2026. This has been driven by the School's inability to fill its revised PAN of 45 places for 2026/27 thus far. Classes are currently organised as follows:

Table 5: School organisation with effect from autumn 2026, provided by the LA.

	Number of pupils and organisation	
Year 3	29 (PAN 45)	3 classes of 21/22
Year 4	36	
Year 5	41	4 classes of 27/28
Year 6	66	
Total	172	7 classes

27. The LA has stated that while the move to mixed-age classes has created a model for the future, the organisation adopted is not efficient for the provision of education to current students. This data, and the low demand for places outlined in Table 1 and Table 2, has led the School to submit this revised model for its organisation in 2027/28, consistent with the request for variation.

Table 6: Planned School organisation for 2027/28 with a revised PAN of 34, provided by the LA.

Year Group	LA Forecast 2027-28	
Year 3	27 (PAN 34)	2 classes of 28
Year 4	29	
Year 5	36	3 classes of 25/26
Year 6	41	
Total	133	5 classes

28. I note that with a PAN of 34 for 2027/28, this planned organisation would still be deliverable. The two mixed age classes for Year 3 and Year 4 students could be allowed to expand to 32/31 pupils and would still be within the norms of mixed aged classes for that age. The School has stated that it has the capacity to operate at that class size.

29. In contrast, the LA states “if the PAN were maintained at 45, additional in-year admissions could be accepted up to the published admission number without prejudice, potentially resulting in year groups significantly larger than those envisaged within the school's planned mixed-age structure. Whilst schools are expected to accommodate in-year applicants where places are available, the cumulative effect of such admissions could create operational challenges and reduce the effectiveness of the proposed class organisation.”

30. I have been provided with information regarding the School’s financial position to support the variation request:

> “The School strongly feels there is a financial benefit to reducing the number of classes in the 2027/28 academic year. Having 5 classes would mean that the equivalent of 5 full-time class teachers is required.
>
> **Table 7: School provided data on financial effect of different models of School organisation, 2026/27 and 2027/28.**

	Current year 2026-27 with 7 classes		Proposed Structure 2027-28 with 6 classes		Proposed Structure 2027-28 with 5 classes	
n/a	**Total FTE**	**Total Salary***	**Total FTE**	**Total Salary***	**Total FTE**	**Total Salary***
Class Teachers	7.21	£491,532	6	£440,100	5	£369,132

It is important to also share that the forecast for 2027/28 submitted to the Local Authority shows a deficit carry forward balance of (£183, 376). Reducing the number of class teachers will support the school to improve the carry forward and move to a place of financial security.

Maintaining the PAN at 45 for 2027/28 will bring additional risk to the school, as in-year applications could be made which would increase the number of children in each of the two lower school classes, making class arrangements not feasible. There would be disruption to the classes whilst we aimed to recruit another teacher. The reduction in PAN affords us security in our class structure for the academic year. Therefore, the school support the reduced PAN of 34 for 2027/28 academic year.

Additionally, the Governing Body would like to share that the school are working with HR to formulate a business case for a redundancy process due to the falling roll. In order to finalise this in a timely way and ensure teaching staff have as much time as possible for consultation and ongoing recruitment, this is due to be completed in the spring term. Reducing the PAN officially for the 2027/28 academic year at the current time, would support the school in this process."

Summary of findings

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

    a. The proposed variation does not give rise to significant concerns about the sufficiency of Year 3 places in the area for 2027/28. It is consistent with a possible reduction in the number of places needed in the admissions planning area in the future.

    b. There is no indication of any potential for the frustration of parental preference.

    c. The proposed variation will allow the School to plan with certainty for the long-term re-organisation of its classes and the implementation of vertical grouping. This will make a significant difference to the School's financial position, and hence to its ability to meet the needs of the existing children on roll. If the

proposed variation is not approved, there remains a risk of a significantly negative financial and organisational impact on the School, with detriment to those children already at the School and to others who may lose out, if funding has to be diverted to pay for the provision of an extra class for 2027/28.

d. 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 2018/19 than it currently expects to, there remains the capacity in the building for it to do so.

32. After carefully weighing up the above factors, I conclude that the proposed variation is justified by the circumstances, and I approve it.

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 Surrey County Council for St Ann's Heath Junior School for 2027/28.

I determine that the published admission number for admission in 2027/28 will be 34.

Dated: 20 November 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Paddy Storrie