Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: **VAR2796**

Admission Authority: **The Governing Body of All Saints' Church of England Primary School, Wimbledon**

Local Authority: **London Borough of Merton**

Date of decision: **23 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 the Governing Body of All Saints' Church of England Primary School, Wimbledon, for 2026/27.

I determine that for the academic year 2026/27, the published admission number shall be 30.

The referral

1. The Governing Body of All Saints' Church of England Primary School, Wimbledon (the Admission Authority) has referred to the Adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for All Saints' Church of England Primary School, Wimbledon (the School) for 2026/27 (the Arrangements).

2. The School is a voluntary aided school for children aged three to eleven years in London. It is a co-educational, non-selective school located in the London Borough of Merton (the Local Authority) area.

3. The Admission Authority for the School is the Governing Body of the School.

4. The religious character of the School is Church of England. The religious authority for the School is the Diocese of Southwark (the Diocese).

5. Parties to the request are the Governing Body of the School, the Local Authority and the Diocese.

6. The proposed variation is to reduce the PAN as from September 2026 from 60 to 30 pupils.

Jurisdiction and procedure

7. 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."

8. The Arrangements were determined by the Admission Authority on 5 October 2026. This is after the deadline for determining arrangements which was 28 February 2025. This does not affect the standing of the Arrangements or my power to consider them or the proposed variation.

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

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

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

12. 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 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.

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

- the referral from the Admission Authority dated 16 July 2026 and supporting documents;

- the determined Arrangements and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- any responses received from the Local Authority, the School and the Diocese 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 Local Authority, and the School.

14. I would like to extend my thanks to the Local Authority and the School for their responses to my requests for further information. I have referred only to that which has a bearing on my determination.

15. 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.

16. I note here that the admission arrangements for September 2027 have been determined. This means that if I agree to the Admission Authority's request to vary the Arrangements for 2026/27 by 30 children as proposed, it will be for that year only and will not have a bearing on subsequent years.

Consideration of proposed variation

17. 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.

18. The PAN for the School is set at 60. The number of offers made for September 2026 was 33. Current numbers on roll in the Reception Year are 28. The current class structure at the School is set out below in Table 1.

Table 1: Current class structure and pupil numbers

Class name	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
St Ruth	28						
St Paul		15					
St Thomas		18					
St William			15				

Class name	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
St Margaret			15				
St Elizabeth				21			
St Catherine				20			
St Frances					21		
St Richard					22		
St Theodore						15	
St Isabelle						20	
St Julian							22
St Hugh							19
Total	28	33	30	41	43	35	41

19. As can be seen from Table 1, there are falling numbers at the School overall, with all year groups well below 60. The total number on roll is 251 against a capacity of 420, leaving 169 surplus places (40%).

20. This is leading to increasing financial challenges for the School and the Admission Authority is now seeking the proposed variation to reduce the PAN to 30.

21. The proposed variation has the support of the Local Authority. No response was received from the Diocese.

22. The Local Authority has a duty to make sure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty the Local Authority assesses the likely future number of places needed and then plans to meet that need. The Local Authority uses planning areas, which are geographical groups of schools, for this purpose. The planning area for the School is known as ‘Primary – Planning Area 3’ and there are 13 schools in the planning area.

23. If I were to approve the proposed variation, there would be a reduction of 30 places in the combined PAN for the planning area. This would reduce the combined PAN to 660 available places for admission to Reception in 2026/27. The Local Authority has advised that the demand for Reception Year school places in the planning area for September 2026 was 624. There would, therefore, be spare capacity of 36 places for any in-year admissions.

24. Some level of overcapacity in the planning area is prudent, but too much may lead to financial difficulties for schools. A balance, therefore, needs to be struck by local authorities

to ensure that they have enough capacity to satisfy their statutory duty to provide sufficient school places, but not too much as to lead to budget deficits in schools.

25. The DfE 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, the proportion of vacant places across the planning area would be well above the suggested two per cent if I approve the proposed variation.

26. The Local Authority also confirmed that reducing the PAN at the School would have no impact on the Local Authority's duties around place sufficiency. With numbers already falling, and with further decreases forecast, it expects no displacement would occur as a result of the proposed change. It went on to say that the Local Authority “is presently looking at ways to rationalise primary capacity to better meet falling demand. A reduction in PAN at All Saints would support this work and, as a result, we are happy to fully support it.”

27. It also confirmed that, in the unlikely event of any displacement of pupils, there are at least three alternative schools, within a mile of the School, which could offer places. This includes an alternative Church of England school.

28. I, therefore, conclude that should the variation be approved, there is sufficient spare capacity to satisfy parental demand within the planning area and to cater for any in-year admissions.

29. I will now consider whether the School's financial circumstances provide sufficient justification for the proposed variation. Table 1 above shows a pattern of decreasing admission to the School. Schools are largely funded according to the number of pupils on roll, and staffing costs typically represent the largest element of a school’s budget. Most infant and primary schools aim to have around 30 pupils to a class. If a school has classes that are many pupils fewer than 30, this can mean that the income from the number of pupils is less than the costs of providing the class. If this happens over several classes, a school can face financial challenges.

30. The School is a primary school and this means that it will be affected by the provisions of the Infant Class Sizes Regulations and paragraph 2.16 of the Code which require that infant classes (those where the majority of children will reach the age of five, six or seven during the school year) must not contain more than 30 pupils with a single qualified school teacher except in specific exceptional circumstances. The Infant Class Sizes Regulations apply to the Reception Year, Year 1, and Year 2.

31. If I approve the variation, the School will provide one class in the Reception Year. This will reduce the financial impact of declining pupil numbers in the School whilst continuing to comply with the Infant Class Sizes Regulations. If I do not approve the variation, and numbers in the Reception Year were to grow above 30 due to in-year admissions, then the School would have to revert to providing two classes in the Reception

Year in the academic year 2026/27, with the consequent additional staffing costs due to the need to employ a further teacher at the School.

32. Information provided by the School showed that the School had a cumulative deficit as at the end of the financial year 2025-26 of £136,737.77 with an in-year deficit for the same year of £91,298.31. If the variation is not approved, and the School were required to provide two classes at Reception, there would be an additional cost of £51,718, increasing any in-year deficit for 2026-2027.

33. I have considered the impact of decreasing admission numbers on the School's finances balanced against the effect that reducing the School's PAN will have on any potential in-year applications at the School. I am satisfied that there are sufficient places at local schools within the planning area to accommodate any potential in-year admissions. I am also satisfied that approving the variation request for 2026/27 will mitigate any potential adverse financial risk for the School.

34. I, therefore, find that the variation to reduce the PAN for 2026/27 from 60 to 30 is justified by the circumstances and I approve the proposed variation.

Determination

35. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by the Governing Body of All Saints' Church of England Primary School, Wimbledon, for 2026/27.

36. I determine that for the academic year 2026/27 the published admission number shall be 30.

Dated: 23 November 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: David Holland