



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

DETERMINATION

Case reference: VAR734

Admission Authority: Hampshire County Council for Westfields Junior School, Yateley.

Date of decision: 19 September 2017

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Westfields Junior School, Yateley.

I determine that for admissions in September 2018 the published admission number (PAN) shall be 90.

The referral

1. Hampshire County Council (the local authority) has referred a variation to the Adjudicator about the admission arrangements for Westfields Junior School (the school), a community school for pupils aged seven to eleven, for September 2018. The variation is a reduction to 90 from the determined PAN of 105.

Jurisdiction

2. The referral was made to me in accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) which states that:

“where an admission authority (a) have in accordance with section 88C determined the admission arrangements which are to apply for a particular school year, but (b) at any time before the end of that year consider that the arrangements should be varied in view of a major change in circumstances occurring since they were so determined, the authority must [except in a case where the authority’s proposed variations fall within any description of variations prescribed for the purposes of this section] (a) refer their proposed variations to the adjudicator, and (b) notify the appropriate bodies of the proposed variations”.

I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.

Procedure

3. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation, guidance and the School Admissions Code.
4. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:
 - (i) the local authority's form of referral of 23 August 2017 and supporting documents;
 - (ii) the determined arrangements for September 2018 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
 - (iii) a copy of the local authority's booklet for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September 2017;
 - (iv) a copy of the letter notifying the appropriate bodies about the proposed variation;
 - (v) evidence that the local authority had consulted the governing body of the school before making the variation request; and
 - (vi) information about the allocation of places at the school in September 2017 and forecasts of pupil numbers for subsequent years.

Background and consideration of factors

5. In January 2017 the local authority determined its admission arrangements for the 2018/19 academic year, including the PAN for all community and voluntary controlled schools in Hampshire. The PAN for Westfields Junior School, which is in the town of Yateley, was set at 105.
6. The children at the school are organised into twelve classes across the four year groups. The numbers of children admitted to the school in 2015, 2016 and 2017 were 98, 99 and 100 respectively. This means that class sizes are in excess of 30. If the school were to be fully subscribed, there would be 35 pupils in each class.
7. At a meeting of the school's governing body held on 18 May 2017, the headteacher explained the difficulties caused by large class sizes. These included the level of support teachers are able to give to individual children and the recruitment of teachers who may be put off by having a class as large as 35 pupils. Although a reduction in PAN would lead to a reduction in the school's budget over time, it was felt that this made "*more financial sense*" than meeting the cost of learning support assistants to work in the larger classes. The governing body agreed to ask the local authority, as the admission authority for the school, to seek a variation to its admission arrangements.
8. The local authority expects that, if the PAN were not reduced, around 100 pupils would be admitted to the school in September 2018. For

almost of these pupils, their parents will have made the school their first preference. The reduction in PAN that has been requested would mean, therefore, that some parents would not be able to obtain a place for their children at the school they most prefer. As the effect of the change requested would be to remove a potential benefit from a group of families, I need to be satisfied that the varied arrangements would meet the Code's requirement for fairness (paragraph 14).

9. The school was not oversubscribed in September 2017 but I asked the local authority to provide me with a breakdown of how the places for the 100 pupils admitted in September 2017 would have been allocated in accordance with the school's oversubscription criteria, had it been necessary to do so. This is summarised in the table below:

Looked after children and previously looked after children	2
Children living in the catchment area	52
Children living outside the catchment area who are siblings of children at the school	13
Children living outside the catchment area who attend the linked infant school	22
Other children	11
Total	100

10. The table demonstrates that if the PAN had been 90 in September 2017, all pupils living in the catchment area of the school, all siblings of current pupils and all who attend the linked infant school would have been allocated a place. The PAN for Westfields Infant School is 90. The local authority's forecasts show that across the Yateley and Frogmore planning area, within which the school falls, there will be 279 pupils requiring places in year 3 (that is, the year that pupils are admitted to junior schools) in September 2018, an increase of eight from 2017. There are 312 places available, which would reduce to 297, if the reduction in PAN that has been requested were to be approved. After 2018, pupil numbers in year 3 in the planning area are forecast to decline quite sharply, to 246 in 2020.
11. It is impossible to make absolutely precise predictions as to the numbers of pupils who will seek places at a particular school in the future. However, I consider that it is very likely that the pattern of applications for places at Westfields Junior School in September 2018 will be very similar to that for September 2017. If this proves to be the case, the group of applicants that may be unsuccessful in obtaining a place at the school will comprise children who do not live in the catchment area and do not have at siblings at the school or attend the linked infant school. I do not consider that these applicants would be unfairly treated if they were unable to obtain a place at Westfields Junior School. There is considerable surplus capacity at the nearest neighbouring junior school, Frogmore Junior School. In 2017, eight of the children admitted to Westfields Junior School had previously attended Frogmore Infant School.

12. In accordance with paragraph 3.6 of the School Admissions Code, the local authority has informed the appropriate bodies of its proposal to reduce the PAN. No responses have been received.

Conclusion

13. The reduction in the PAN of the school from 105 to 90 will allow the school to operate with classes of 30, thereby alleviating some of the difficulties that larger classes have caused. Although this may well result in oversubscription for places in September 2018, I am satisfied those applicants who are unable to obtain a place at the school will not be treated unfairly, as they will not be living in the catchment area of the school or have siblings there. The reduction will bring the PAN into line with that of the linked infant school and the overwhelming majority of children attending Westfields Infant School (probably all whose parents wish them to) will still be able to obtain a place at the junior school. For these reasons I approve the variation requested.

Determination

14. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variation to the admission arrangements determined by Hampshire County Council for Westfields Junior School, Yateley.
15. I determine that for admissions in September 2018 the published admission number (PAN) shall be 90.

Dated: 19 September 2017

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Peter Goringe