



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

DETERMINATION

Case reference: VAR752 & VAR753

Admission Authority: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council for Meadowhead Community Infant School and Meadowhead Community Junior School

Date of decision: 9 April 2018

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council for Meadowhead Community Infant School and Meadowhead Community Junior School for September 2018 and September 2019.

I determine that the Published Admission Number (PAN) for entry to Reception Year (YR) at Meadowhead Infant School will be 60 and for entry to year 3 (Y3) at Meadowhead Junior School will also be 60.

The referral

1. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council has referred proposals for variations to the admission arrangements for Meadowhead Community Infant School and Meadowhead Community Junior School for September 2018 and September 2019 to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. The schools are community schools for children aged 3 to 7 (infants) and 7 to 11 (juniors) in Blackburn.
2. The proposed variations are to reduce the PAN in both schools from 90 to 60.

Jurisdiction

3. The referrals were 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".

4. I am satisfied that the proposed variations are within my jurisdiction.

Procedure

5. In considering this matter, I have had regard to all relevant legislation, and the School Admissions Code (the Code).

6. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:

- the referral forms from the local authority dated 8 March 2018 and supporting documents;
- the determined arrangements for 2018 and 2019 and the proposed variations to those arrangements;
- a copy of the local authority's booklet for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September 2018;
- governing board minutes from both schools where the proposals for variation were discussed;
- a map showing the location of the schools;
- correspondence from both schools indicating full agreement with the proposals;
- details of the consultation process carried out prior to the request for variations;
- details of the determination of arrangements for both years; and
- the admission arrangements for 2018 and 2019.

The proposed variation

7. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council has made a request for variations to the PANs of both schools, reducing from 90 to 60. Over the past four years there has been a decrease in the numbers of pupils being admitted to the schools. The local authority consider this to be a major change in circumstances for the schools. It suggests that excessive surplus places have created significant challenges for the schools in respect of providing cost effective class structures and managing to maintain balanced budgets. It further suggests that a reduction in the PANs will assist the schools' governing boards to provide stability in their long-term planning and allow them to continue

to secure high quality educational outcomes for the pupils currently on roll while continuing to provide an appropriate number of places for future pupil numbers in line with demand.

Consideration of the case

8. Both schools are community schools and the local authority is the admission authority. The infant school caters for pupils between 3 and 7 and currently has 213 pupils on roll including the nursery class. The net capacity of the school is 270. The junior school caters for pupils between 7 and 11 and currently has 257 pupils on roll. The net capacity of the school is 341. Neither school has been oversubscribed in recent years and both schools are well under their capacity with numbers entering the schools in the past three years reducing. The local authority projects that future numbers are likely to be in line with current numbers admitted.
9. The admission arrangements were determined in February 2017 (for the 2018 admissions) and February 2018 (for the 2019 admissions) by the local authority in line with the Code.
10. Currently the number of pupils on roll is as follows;

Year group	Number of Roll
Infants	
Reception (YR)	48
Year one (Y1)	54
Year two (Y2)	58
Juniors	
Year three (Y3)	60
Year four (Y4)	63
Year five (Y5)	57
Year six (Y6)	77

11. The admission arrangements show that if the schools are oversubscribed the priority for admission is given as follows:
 - Looked after and previously looked after children
 - Pupils attending the infant school (junior school only)
 - Siblings

- Pupils with exceptional medical, social or welfare needs
 - Distance from school.
12. The local authority explains that a large new housing development is planned in the area, which will provide 1260 new properties. The number of surplus places at the schools (and at other schools in the area) will not accommodate the pupils from the new development and the local authority plans to make other provision for the children from the new housing development.
13. The local authority also explains that the Meadowhead area has a high percentage transient population and therefore it is not considered an area where a contingency level of additional school place capacity is required.
14. The admission authority undertook an extensive consultation exercise between December 2017 and January 2018 proposing these reductions in PAN and received no comments on them. The consultation included all those groups required in the Code for a full consultation process. Such a full consultation is not, in fact, required for variations to determined arrangements as these require only a notification of these groups. Therefore the local authority has been particularly thorough in this respect.
15. The governing boards of the schools were consulted and they discussed the variation at meetings on 12 September 2017 (infants) and 6 September 2017 (juniors). Proposals were explained in terms of a reduction in numbers on roll and future predictions, the efficiency of planning for staffing and resources and fewer places being available for in-year admissions. Both governing boards agreed that a request for a variation to the PAN was necessary.
16. Both schools responded to the submission of the variation request and both said that *“During the whole process we have consulted with and worked closely with Blackburn with Darwen Local Authority and we feel that the submission made is a thorough and accurate reflection of our views”*.
17. I understand that the current number of surplus places in the area will not accommodate the expected increase in numbers arising from the new housing development and that a new provision is planned.
18. I also understand that projected numbers of admissions in future do not rise above the current numbers and that a reduction in PAN will enable both schools to admit a two form entry for 2018 and 2019 and I agree that this may allow more efficient planning of staffing and resources.

Summary

19. Numbers on roll in these two schools have fallen in the past few years

and numbers predicted for future years stay the same. Both schools are undersubscribed and therefore with PANs of 90 there is uncertainty around the number of classes and levels of staffing and resources.

20. I agree that this situation constitutes a major change in circumstances for the schools and that a reduction in PAN such that both schools can plan for a two form entry provides stability for the governing boards and enables them to plan staffing and resources more efficiently. I therefore approve these variations.

Determination

21. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variations to the admission arrangements determined by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council for Meadowhead Community Infant School and Meadowhead Community Junior School for September 2018 and September 2019.
22. I determine that the Published Admission Number (PAN) for entry to Reception Year (YR) at Meadowhead Infant School will be 60 and for entry to year 3 (Y3) at Meadowhead Junior School will also be 60.

Dated: 9 April 2018

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Ann Talboys