



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

DETERMINATION

Case reference: VAR741

Admission Authority: The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for Alwyn Infant School, Maidenhead.

Date of decision: 22 November 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 the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for Alwyn Infant School, Maidenhead.

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

The referral

1. The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (the local authority) has referred a variation to the Adjudicator about the admission arrangements for Alwyn Infant School (the school), a community school for pupils aged four to seven, for September 2018. The variation is a reduction to 90 from the determined PAN of 101.

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 30 October 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 2018;
 - (iv) a map of the area showing the location of the school and other schools within three miles;
 - (v) a copy of the letter notifying the appropriate bodies about the proposed variation and copies of the responses received;
 - (vi) evidence that the local authority had consulted the governing body of the school before making the variation request; and
 - (vii) forecasts of pupil numbers for the area for September 2018 and subsequent years.

Background and consideration of factors

5. On 23 February 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 Windsor and Maidenhead. The PAN for Alwyn Infant School, which is in the town of Maidenhead, was set at 101.
6. Until September 2017, the school had generally been fully subscribed. The 101 children in each year group were arranged in four classes of 25 or 26 and the school was able to set a balanced budget. In September 2017, however, only 90 children were admitted into the reception year. In addition, the numbers of children in the other two year groups had reduced by a net total of 12, compared with September 2016. The overall effect of these changes was that the number on roll had fallen to 274 in September 2017, from 297 a year earlier.
7. At a meeting of the school's governing body held on 26 September 2017, the implications of these figures were discussed. It was considered not to be financially sustainable for the school to continue to operate with four classes in each year group. It was decided to seek a reduction in the PAN to 90, in order to put in place a three class structure that would comply with the regulations relating to the size of

infant 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 has provided information about the scale of the financial challenge facing the school:

“On the current numbers, the school’s class and staff structure of 4 classes per year group is unsustainable. If it does continue, the school project that they will have a deficit budget of £282,000 by the 2019/20 financial year.”

Plans are in place to reduce the school’s PAN to 90 for September 2019, through the annual consultation and determination of admission arrangements. However, the local authority regards the situation as “urgent”, and submits that the unexpectedly large fall in pupil numbers over recent months represents “a major change in circumstances.” Thus, a variation in the PAN to 90 for September 2018 is requested. The local authority says that this will make a significant impact in addressing the school’s deficit:

“If this happens from September 2018, the school project that they will still have a deficit budget, but that it will be £89,000 in 2019/20, not £282,000.”

9. The local authority does not forecast pupil numbers at a school level but its projections of the numbers of children in the Maidenhead area requiring a place in the reception year show a decrease from 917 in September 2017 to 910 in 2018 and 893 in 2019. Numbers are then expected to increase from 2020. There is a total of 979 places available in the reception year in the area for September 2018. The requested variation to the PAN at Alwyn Infant School would reduce this total by 11, producing an overall surplus of 58 places (5.9%). I regard this to be an appropriate level of surplus, which should ensure that a school place can be provided within a reasonable distance of every child’s home.
10. 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. Several responses were received from local primary schools, all of which expressed support for the variation. The headteacher of the junior school to which Alwyn Infant School is linked appreciated “the predicament that Alwyn is in” and the likely “negative impact” of a reduction of its PAN on the junior school in the future, but had no further comments to make.

Conclusion

11. A reduction in the PAN of the school from 101 to 90 will allow it to operate with three classes in the reception year, avoiding the need to have four small classes, which would be financially unsustainable. The local authority’s forecasts indicate that the demand for places in the Maidenhead area in September 2018 could still be met comfortably if

this modest reduction were to take place. For these reasons I approve the variation requested.

Determination

12. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variation to the admission arrangements determined by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for Alwyn Infant School, Maidenhead.
13. I determine that for admissions in September 2018 the published admission number (PAN) shall be 90.

Dated: 22 November 2017

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Goringe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

Schools Adjudicator: Peter Goringe