

Consultation Document: Proposed Reduction of Planned Admission Number (PAN) for Cherry Tree Academy

Introduction

Cherry Tree Academy is consulting on a proposal to reduce its Planned Admission Number (PAN) from 45 to 30 pupils per year group, effective from the 2026/2027 academic year. This document outlines the rationale for the proposed reduction.

Current Context and Pupil Numbers

The current PAN of 45 was set to accommodate anticipated demand for school places in the area. However, actual pupil numbers across most year groups are significantly below this capacity. As of the 2024/2025 academic year, the pupil numbers in each year group are as follows:

EYFS	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2
Reception: 34 pupils	Year 1: 32 pupils Year 2: 34 pupils	Year 3: 37 pupils Year 4: 32 pupils Year 5: 29 pupils Year 6: 45 pupils

This pattern of under-subscription in most year groups highlights the disparity between the PAN and the actual number of pupils attending the school.

Forecasted Pupil Numbers

The childcare Sufficiency Assessment and Schools Organisation Plan 2024¹ is an annually updated, nationally recognised document that provides a comprehensive review of early years and school place pressures within the Wakefield district. As part of Wakefield Council's statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places, the plan incorporates current and projected pupil numbers, birth rates, and school capacity, alongside the impacts of legislation, funding, policies, and housing developments. We have consulted this plan to inform our proposal.

The data for Cherry Tree Academy highlights a consistent under-utilisation of places, with forecasted pupil numbers (NOR) remaining significantly below the Published Admission Number (PAN) of 45 across the next five years. For example:

- Reception (R) numbers decline from 30 in 2023/24 to 25 by 2027/28.
- Similar patterns of lower-than-capacity numbers are seen across all year groups, with NOR fluctuating between 27 and 38.

¹ <https://www.wakefield.gov.uk/schools-and-education/schools/schools-information/schools-organisation/schools-organisation-plan/>

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Deputy Designated Person for Safeguarding: Mrs S Cannon, Mrs P Millard, Ms K King and Mr P Wright

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- This persistent under-enrolment reflects declining birth rates in the Carleton Primary Pyramid, as evidenced by the NHS birth data, which shows a significant drop of 30 children for the 2027/28 cohort.

The reduction in PAN would take effect starting with the Reception intake for 2026/27 when forecasts indicate that only 30 pupils will require a place. For 2027/28, forecasts further suggest a decline, with only 25 pupils expected to need a place. (See highlighted figures below.)

				R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Cherry Tree Academy	Actual	PAN	2023/24	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
		NOR		30	30	39	33	29	43	42
	Forecast	PAN	2024/25	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
		NOR		38	31	30	38	33	27	42
		PAN	2025/26	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
		NOR		35	38	31	30	38	33	27
		PAN	2026/27	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
		NOR		30	35	38	31	30	38	33
		PAN	2027/28	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
		NOR		25	30	35	38	31	30	38

Surplus Places Across the Carleton Primary Pyramid

When considering pupil numbers across the Carleton Primary Pyramid as a whole, there is a clear surplus of places. The total PAN across the pyramid is 210 per year group, but NOR is projected to drop to 151 for Reception in 2027/28. Schools such as Badsworth CE JI School, Carleton Park JI School, and others also exhibit under-capacity, meaning sufficient places exist even if Cherry Tree Academy reduced its PAN to 30.

Housing Development Impact

Although the Local Plan 2036 identifies housing developments, the majority of new dwellings have already been completed, with only a small number under construction or pending approval. The forecasted pupil yield from these developments is unlikely to offset the declining birth rates and surplus capacity across the area.

Rationale for Reducing the PAN

1. Mismatch Between PAN and Actual Pupil Numbers

The current PAN of 45 is not reflective of the actual demand for places at Cherry Tree Academy. With pupil numbers consistently below capacity, maintaining the current PAN creates inefficiencies in resource allocation and planning. Given the combination of declining birth rates, forecasted under-

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utilisation, and surplus places across the Carleton Primary Pyramid, a reduction in PAN at Cherry Tree Academy is both justified and necessary to ensure sustainable school provision.

2. Challenges in Managing a PAN of 45 when the school isn't full

Resource Allocation: Staffing and resourcing decisions are made based on the PAN, but lower pupil numbers result in underutilised resources. This creates financial challenges and budget strain and limits the school's ability to invest in other areas to improve educational outcomes.

Infant Class Size Laws: In Reception, Year 1, and Year 2, class sizes are close to or above the statutory limit of 30 pupils per class (34, 32, and 34 pupils, respectively). To comply with infant class size laws, the school has needed to split these year groups into smaller classes, requiring additional teaching staff and creating mixed-age classes. This is financially unsustainable going forwards.

3. Impact of Inward Mobility

Inward mobility in Reception presents unique challenges, as the school is legally required to admit pupils who join throughout the year. This disrupts established class structures and places additional strain on staffing and resources. Consequently, the school must either redistribute existing resources or employ additional staff, neither of which is financially viable under the current PAN and pupil numbers.

4. Futureproofing and Stability

The current PAN and trend around pupil numbers hampers the school's ability to plan confidently for future years, as unpredictable class sizes may persist without a reduction in PAN. Reducing the PAN to 30 will create a more predictable and manageable class structure, ensuring compliance with regulations and a stable learning environment for pupils. This will give greater certainty in terms of staffing needs, curriculum delivery, and financial viability.

5. Enhancing Educational Quality

Reducing the PAN (Published Admission Number) to 30 will enable the school to maintain class sizes of 30 across all year groups, fostering more individualised attention and support for pupils. Given the context that the school operates in, this would be the best way to support improvements in education quality.

Summary of Pros and Cons of the Proposal

Pros:

- Stabilises class sizes, creating a more predictable environment for curriculum delivery.
- Improves the quality of education by ensuring smaller, more manageable class sizes and reducing the reliance on mixed-age teaching.

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- Enables more efficient allocation of resources, reducing financial strain.
- Supports long-term planning for staffing and other operational requirements.
- Reflects actual demand for places, aligning the PAN with local demographic trends.
- Reduces operational complexity.

Cons:

- May limit parental choice if demand for places increases unexpectedly in the future.
- Requires adjustment in admissions planning, potentially impacting local families.

Proposed Timeline for Implementation

If the reduction in PAN is approved, it will take effect from the 2026/2027 academic year. This means that the Reception intake for September 2026 will be capped at 30 pupils.

Invitation to Provide Feedback

We invite parents, carers, staff, and members of the local community to share their views on this proposal. The consultation period will run from Monday 16th December to Wednesday 29th January 2025. Feedback can be submitted via:

- Email: cherrytreeoffice@watertonacademytrust.org
- Post: Cherry Tree Academy, Cobbler's Ln, Pontefract WF8 2HN

The deadline for all feedback is midday on 29th January 2025.

Next Steps

Following the consultation period, all feedback will be reviewed, and a final decision will be made by the Trustees of Waterton Academy Trust (who are the admission authority for Cherry Tree Academy). The outcome will be published on the school's website by 31st January 2025.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this proposal. Your input is highly valued and will help shape the future of Cherry Tree Academy.

Mr Adam Dawson

Headteacher

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