



Department
for Education

Summer Born Children

Starting School: Advice for parents

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Who is this advice for?

This advice is for parents and carers¹ who are considering delaying their summer born child's admission to school. It is intended to help them decide what would be best for their child. It also provides information about the options available, and about how to arrange delayed admission.

Main Points

- Children usually start school in the September following their 4th birthday. All children are entitled to a full time school place from this point.
- However, a parent does not have to send their child to school until they reach compulsory school age. A child will reach compulsory school age on a prescribed day² on or after their 5th birthday. They must receive full time education from this point³.
- This means that children born from 1 April to 31 August - summer born children – do not need to start school until the September after their 5th birthday, a full year after they could first have started school.
- School admission authorities are responsible for deciding whether to admit a child outside their normal age group⁴. They must make this decision in the child's best interests.
- Parents who are considering delaying their summer born child's admission to school should seek advice from the schools they might like their child to attend, and from any professionals involved in the care of their child, so that they are able to make an informed decision.

Commitment to amend the school admissions code

In September 2015, we committed to amend the school admissions code so that summer born children can automatically be admitted to a reception class at the age of five where that is what their parents want, and can remain with the cohort with which they are

¹ The guidance refers to parents throughout.

² The prescribed days are 31 December, 31 March and 31 August.

³ Parents are required by law to ensure their child receives a suitable full time education once they reach compulsory school age. They usually do this by securing a school place for them, but this isn't the only way. For example, they could home educate their child. For ease, though, this document generally refers to children having to attend school. Guidance on elective home education is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education>.

⁴ We will use the phrase 'normal year group' to mean the year group a child would have been in had they entered school in the September following their fourth birthday.

admitted throughout their education. We remain committed to making that change when a legislative opportunity is available.

School starting age

All children are entitled to a full time school place in the September following their 4th birthday. This is when most children start school. Children born from 1 September in one year to 31 August the following year are normally educated together in one year group.

Children are not required, however, to go to school (or other suitable education) until the first day of the school term that follows their 5th birthday. The table below summarises the date at which the child reaches what is known as ‘compulsory school age’. Children must be in suitable full-time education from this point.

For children who are under compulsory school age, once a school place has been accepted, parents may, if they wish, agree with the school a pattern of part time attendance or a deferred start until later in that school year (but not later than the beginning of the summer term). These arrangements should be discussed with the school.

Summer born children do not need to start school until the September after their 5th birthday, a full year after they could first have started school. The guidance sets out some of the issues to consider in deciding whether to delay your child’s start at school and how to make a request that your summer born child starts reception age 5.

A child born between:	... reaches compulsory school age on:	... and must be in suitable full-time education from:
1 September and 31 December	31 December	The beginning of the spring term following their 5 th birthday (usually in the first week of January)
1 January and 31 March	31 March	The beginning of the summer term following their 5 th birthday (usually following the Easter holidays)
1 April and 31 August (summer born)	31 August	The beginning of the autumn term following their 5 th birthday (usually in the first week of September)

Evidence on attainment

There is evidence that the oldest pupils in a class will outperform their peers **on average**. This means that autumn born children achieve higher results than classmates born in the spring or summer **on average**. But this does not mean every summer born child will achieve lower results than their older classmates. Most summer born children meet or exceed the expected standard in the reception year. The gap in attainment between summer born children and their peers narrows as they get older⁵. Children develop at different rates. The younger children in a class tend to make faster progress than their older classmates; though children may start at quite different levels of development, they are likely to end up at a much more similar level.

Making a decision

Most children thrive when starting school at age 4. Nonetheless, there are some children, particularly those with developmental delays or medical conditions delaying their school readiness, who would benefit from a delayed start to school. If you are considering delaying your summer born child's start at school, you should consider the implications of a delayed start to reception class set out in [Important considerations](#) and you should discuss your child's situation with relevant professionals. These discussions should ideally take place ahead of when you would normally be expected to apply for a place for your child in reception.

Don't forget, your child still has lots of time to develop between you thinking about applying for a school place and the point at which they start school. If you would like ideas of how to help your child learn and develop at home, you can visit the Department for Education's [Hungry Little Minds campaign website](#).

Seeking advice and information

Before deciding to delay your child's school start, you should talk to the schools you might like them to attend including those where you have a good chance of being allocated a place. You should also visit the schools to find out more about how children learn and play in the reception year.

Teachers understand that children will have developed at different rates before starting school, and have different starting points when beginning school. They are trained to adapt their teaching to suit an individual child's strengths and needs and understand that some children may need extra support. You should discuss any concerns you have about

⁵ On average a non-summer born pupil who scored a GCSE Grade 6 in English and Mathematics would also score a Grade 6 in six more subjects. A summer born pupil who scored a GCSE Grade 6 in English and Mathematics would also score a Grade 6 in four more subjects, and a Grade 5 in two others.

your child's readiness to start school with the school. You should ask the school what they do to help children to settle and what additional support may be required for your child.

There are a number of other professionals you can talk to about whether your child is ready for school, what additional support could be provided or required and whether your child might benefit more from a deferred start to school or starting at age 4 and accessing the support available in school:

- Your child's current early years provider: they should also be able to support your child in getting ready to start school and give you advice about anything more you might be able to do at home. They will also be able to tell you whether your child could continue to attend that nursery or early years setting if your child did delay admission to school.
- Other specialist services: Where your child is involved in other specialist services such as speech and language therapy or occupational therapy, or is under specialist medical care, you should consider discussing this question with them.

Children with special educational needs

If your child has special educational needs (SEN), this does not necessarily mean that they should defer or delay starting school. For some children with SEN, it may be better to start school before compulsory school age so that they are in a school where they can fully access the support available.

All schools and all teachers are trained to teach children with SEN⁶. Schools must use their best endeavours to secure provision for all pupils who have SEN or a disability, as set out in the [Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years](#). Every school and nursery has a Special Educational Needs coordinator (SENCo).

If you feel worried about your child starting school because of any SEN or disability they have, you should speak with your health visitor, the key staff at the school you want your child to go to, such as the head teacher or SENCo and consider speaking to your local SENDIAS service⁷.

Children born prematurely⁸

Not all children born prematurely will have significant developmental delay but some children born prematurely have social, emotional, physical and intellectual development behind that of their peers and some children may also have additional health problems

⁶ Further information about SEN support can be found here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

⁷ <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/information-advice-and-support-services-network/find-your-local-ias-service>

⁸ A child born prematurely is defined as one born before 37 weeks gestation.

associated with their prematurity. If this is relevant to your child and you are considering deferring their start at school, you should discuss the options with your child's specialists.

In addition, as a consequence of being born before their due date, a child may fall into a different age group than if they had been born at full term. When considering the circumstances of the case, admission authorities should take account of the age group into which the child would have fallen if born at full term.

Case Studies

Child N

Parent's perspective

N was very obviously developmentally delayed compared to her peers at nursery. She had only started to talk 6 months prior to what should have been her start date at primary school. When I raised the possibility of delaying N's school start by a year, the SENCo (SEN coordinator) and the headteacher agreed it was a good option and fully supported us. Although the process was not always straightforward, our request was agreed and N stayed on at her nursery where she had an additional year to grow and learn. During this year N grew in confidence, her speech improved enormously, skills such as playing, sharing and independence grew and, importantly, she was able to ask for help and communicate her needs.

I feel that if N had started school aged 4, she would have undoubtedly struggled. She would not have been as independent, she would have been frightened, nervous and overwhelmed by the class and she would not have been able to participate in class without a huge amount of support. When N started mainstream primary school she had little trouble settling in, and now is very happy, content and confident. She is at a similar level to her peers. She is one of them!

Nursery's perspective

When N started in nursery, her family was already known to us as they were receiving support from the Children's Centre. The SENCo had visited N in her pre-school setting and it was agreed that our nursery was the right setting for N's pre-reception year due to the level of expertise and SEND experience at the nursery.

N was 37 months old when she joined us and was assessed as working at around 22 months on the Development Matters age bands at this point. 1:1 funding was requested, and N was supported in class for 30 hours by a Nursery Assistant. Although N was making progress, the gap was not closing enough for her to be working at similar age to her peers in a mainstream reception class. Following discussions with N's parents, the decision was made for her to be removed from her chronological year group and spend an additional year with us. N continued to attend for 30 hours per week with 1:1 support and received a diagnosis of ASD in July 2018.

By the end of her second year at our nursery, N was working in line with her adopted cohort at 30-50 months secure and above in all aspects. She started mainstream school in reception out of her normal year group with an EHCP and 25 hours of support.

Child J

Parent perspective

My son was born 8 weeks prematurely and, as a result, his development was delayed in comparison to other children his age, particularly his speech. When it was time to apply for a school place, I was very concerned that he wasn't ready for school as he still barely spoke at all. I very much wanted to delay his school start until the next year but the head teacher of the school where he was offered a place convinced me to visit and speak to the class teacher. The teacher explained exactly how my son would be supported and how they could meet his needs if he started in reception aged 4 including working with his speech therapist to ensure joined up support. Even though I still had some reservations, I decided to trust the school. Within a few months of him starting school I knew I had made the right decision. He settled in well and, with the stimulation the school environment provided, the company of other children and the support he was given, he rapidly caught up with his peers. By the end of primary school, he was exceeding age related expectations and I now feel that delaying his school start would have held him back.

Important considerations when considering a delayed start to school

Moving back to the normal age group

Once a child has been admitted to a school, it is for the head teacher to decide how best to educate them. This may, on occasion, include deciding that a child should be moved to higher or lower age group, including moving a child who has been admitted out of their normal age group, into their normal age group. This decision should only be made where there are sound educational reasons to do so and in consultation with the child's parents.

Transfer to other schools

As children whose school start has been delayed move through the system, they will reach transition points. For children who have attended an infant school, this will be when they move up to junior school. In some areas of the country, this could be when the child moves to middle school. For other children, this will be when they reach secondary age. The decision by one admissions authority does not bind other admissions authorities. If you wish your child to remain outside of their age group when they transfer to a new school, you will need to apply once again for an outside normal year group place. It is possible that a new admissions authority will decide that it is in your child's best interests to return to their normal year group and so your child would miss a school year.

Admission authorities must consider these requests in the same way as the original request but must also take into account the fact the child has been educated in a different year group up until this point.

For many children, it will be right for them to remain with their adopted year group but it is possible that others may be better off joining their normal year group. All decisions should be made taking the circumstances of the case into account and considering all of the child's needs, including their social and emotional needs.

You should make this request alongside an application for a school place and should do so when their child's normal year group are making applications for a school place. This means that a summer born child that started in reception a year later than is usual, would apply for a secondary school place and for an out of year group place when they are in year 5 rather than year 6.

Government funded childcare

If you delay your summer born child's start to school by a year, they will be eligible for government-funded childcare until they start school.

All three and four year olds, and the most disadvantaged two year olds, are entitled to 15 hours of early education provision per week for 38 weeks of the year. Since 2017, three and four year olds with working parents have been entitled to 30 hours of early education per week for 38 weeks of the year. More information is available [here](#).

National Curriculum Tests

Children are assessed when they reach the end of each key stage, not when they reach a particular age. There are no age requirements as to when children must take their GCSEs or other assessments.

Implications of your child turning 16 before year 11

A child ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday of June in the school year they turn 16. They are not legally required to attend school after this point. A summer born child who has been educated out of their normal age group will normally cease to be of compulsory school age at the end of year 10 (unless they have returned to their original year group during their time in education). This would mean that they will be under no obligation to attend school in year 11 when most children take their GCSEs.

The school will not ask your child to leave because they are no longer of compulsory school age, but they may not be able to enforce their attendance.

Home to school transport

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport to eligible children. To be eligible, a child must be of compulsory school age. If your child is eligible

for free home to school transport, they will cease to be eligible for it when they cease being of compulsory school age even if they have not yet finished their GCSEs. Local authorities can choose to continue to provide free transport at this point, but they are under no duty to do so.

Alternative Provision

Local authorities have a duty to make arrangements for the provision of suitable education, other than at a school, for children of compulsory school age who otherwise would not receive a suitable education, whether that is because they are ill, have been excluded, or for another reason. This duty will not apply in relation to a child who ceases to be of compulsory school age before they finish their GCSEs⁹.

Delaying your child's admission to school until the September after their 5th birthday

If you decide to delay your summer born child's school start until the September following their 5th birthday, you have 2 options:

- Make an in year application for a place for the September following their 5th birthday. They will begin school in year 1, as the other children in their age group will be moving from reception to year 1 at this point. Talk to your local authority's school admissions team about when it would be best to make such an application. It is important to remember that some schools are likely to be full at this point, and unable to offer you a place. Schools are unable to 'hold' a place for your child from the previous year. Consider, also, the potential impact of missing the reception year with its focus on phonics and early arithmetic.
- If you do not want your child to miss reception year, you may request that they are admitted out of their normal age group, to reception instead of year 1, in the September following their 5th birthday. This application is best made when you would normally be expected to apply for your child's place at primary school (ie before 15 January after your summer born child turns 3 although precise deadlines vary by admission authority). This is considered in more detail in the next section.

Requesting admission outside a child's normal age group

If you decide to delay your summer born child's school start until the September following their 5th birthday and wish them to start school in reception, you must make a request (a formal application) for them to be admitted out of their normal age group. This is because

⁹ The duty also does not apply to a child who is of compulsory school age but will cease to be of compulsory school age within the next six weeks and has no public exams or assessments to complete.

the rest of the children in their normal age group will have already finished reception and will be moving into year 1.

The admission authority must consider your request.

Making a request

You must make your request to the school's admission authority. The admission authority for the school will depend on what type of school it is.

Type of school	Admission authority
Community school	Local authority
Voluntary controlled school	Local authority
Voluntary aided school	Governing body
Foundation school	Governing body
Academy (including free schools)	Academy trust

In some areas, academies and other schools that act as their own admission authority have agreed that the local authority can make these decisions on their behalf.

The admission authority for one school is not required to comply with a decision made by the admission authority of another school, so it is important to make a request for admission out of the normal age group to every school at which you plan to apply for a place. You should consider whether your child is likely to be offered a place at one of these preferred schools, having reviewed the criteria against which places at the school will be allocated when there have been more applications than places available (the oversubscription criteria). Even where the admission authority (for example the local authority or an academy trust) is the same, different conclusions could be reached for different schools about how best to meet a child's needs, so it is important to know that the level of support available in each school could differ.

Admission authorities must set out as part of their admission arrangements the process for requesting admission out of the normal age group. You should be able to find these on their website. They will normally expect you to make your request alongside an application for your child to be admitted to reception class at age of 4. This is so that, if your request is refused, you still have the option of sending your child to school at age 4, if you wish, so they do not miss the reception year.

Outline process to apply for summer born child to start reception aged 5

1. **Parent** discusses support available from schools with head teachers
2. **Parent** requests admittance outside normal age group and applies for a reception place
3. **Parent** provides evidence to support their request
4. **Admission authority** decides whether to admit outside normal age group
5. If the request is **approved** –
admissions authority notifies parent
parent withdraws application for reception place for this year
parent applies for reception places the following year
6. If the request is **rejected** -
admissions authority notifies parent and provides reasons for rejection
parent decides whether to accept reception place this year, or delay child's start until following September and apply for a Year 1 place that year
parent rejects offer of reception place - child does not attend school this year and parent must apply for a Year 1 place.
parent accepts reception place for this year - child starts school in reception.

Information to include

You should provide some information about your child and why you think they should be educated out of their normal age group. This will help the admission authority to make a decision about in which year group your child should be educated. You should also provide evidence to support your request, if it is possible to do so. However, you are not expected to obtain evidence you do not already have. If your child is undergoing assessment for an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), you should provide evidence that this is ongoing, along with the professional evidence in support of an EHCP. There is no requirement for an EHCP to be finalised.

Factors the admissions authority will take into account in making a decision

Whilst it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list, the School Admissions Code requires admission authorities to consider:

- Parent's views
- Information about the child's academic, social and emotional development
- Where relevant, the child's medical history and views of a medical professional

- If the child is moving, or going to move, from an infant to a junior school or a primary to secondary school or has just moved into your area, the year group they have been educated in up to that point
- If the child was born prematurely, what age group the child would have fallen in, if the child had been born on time.
- The view of the head teacher **must** be taken into consideration.

This could include looking at evidence or issues such as:

- Any evidence from a health or social care professional who is involved in the care or treatment of the child for example speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, social worker, paediatrician.
- The view of any nursery or other early years setting the child attends and any records of the child's development.
- Whether the child's premature birth has caused health problems or developmental delays that mean the child would benefit from a delayed school start.
- The progress the child has made in an early years setting, including the rate of progress.
- What can the nursery setting provide the child that a reception class would not?

The admission authority's decision

When they receive your request, the admission authority is required to make a decision on the basis of the circumstances of the case and in your child's best interests.

When they have made a decision, the admission authority must provide you with the reasons for that decision in writing. If your request is refused, the admission authority would therefore normally explain why they think it is in your child's best interests to be educated in their normal age group.

What happens next?

If your request is agreed

This does not mean your child has been, or will be, offered a place in the reception year at your chosen school. It means that you will need to withdraw the admissions application for a place in the normal year group (the application for a place to start reception age 4) and you will then be able to apply for a place in reception along with other parents applying for a reception place in the following admissions year¹⁰ ie by 15 January. It remains possible that your child could be refused a place if there have been more

applications received than there are places available at the school, and other applicants have been ranked higher based on the school's oversubscription criteria.

If your request is refused

You have a number of options. You can delay your child's school start until compulsory school age and make an in-year application for them to start school in year 1. It is important that you make this in-year application for the following school year even if you have been offered a reception place for the current school year because, this place will be lost if your child does not take up that reception place before the start summer term. You should be aware that it is possible that the year 1 class may be full¹¹ and so may not have space for your child.

However, if you do not wish your child to miss the reception year, providing you have also made an application for a school place in your child's normal age group, you can accept this place and either take up a full time place from the September following your child's 4th birthday or agree with the school a pattern of part time attendance or a deferred start until later in that school year (but not later than the beginning of the summer term).

Complaints

If you are unhappy with the admission authority's decision to refuse your child a place out of their normal age group you should complain directly to them, in the first instance. Parents whose request for delayed entry is refused have no statutory right to appeal this decision. (The purpose of the appeals process is to consider whether a child should be admitted to a particular school, not the year group into which they should be admitted.)

If you remain unhappy once you have exhausted the admission authority's complaints procedure, you may then refer a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, in the case of maintained schools (including community, voluntary controlled, voluntary aided and foundation schools), or the Education and Skills Funding Agency, in the case of an academy.

The legal requirements for admission authorities considering requests for admission out of the normal age group are set out in paragraph 2.17 to 2.17B of the School Admissions Code.

¹¹ Infant classes are restricted to 30 pupils under infant class size legislation.

Glossary

<i>Admission Authority</i>	The body responsible for setting and applying a school's admission arrangements.
<i>Admission Arrangements</i>	The overall procedure, practices and oversubscription criteria used in deciding the allocation of school places, including any device or means used to determine whether a school place is to be offered.
<i>Compulsory School Age</i>	The age at which a child is required to have suitable full-time education. A child reaches compulsory school age on the prescribed day following his or her fifth birthday (or on his or her fifth birthday if it falls on a prescribed day). The prescribed days are 31 December, 31 March and 31 August.
<i>Deferred entry</i>	This refers to a situation where a child secures a school place in his or her normal age group but does not take up that place until later in that school year.
<i>Delayed entry</i>	This term describes a summer born child who starts school at compulsory school age (5), whether this is in Year 1 or reception.
<i>Governing Body</i>	School governing bodies are bodies responsible for conducting schools. Governing bodies have three key roles: setting strategic direction, ensuring accountability, and monitoring and evaluation.
<i>Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman</i>	An independent, impartial and free service that looks at complaints about councils and some other authorities and organisations, including education and admission appeals.
<i>National Offer Day</i>	The day each year on which local authorities are required to send the offer of a school place to all parents who have applied for a place. For primary pupils, this is 16 April.
<i>Normal Admissions Round</i>	The period during which parents are invited to express a minimum of three preferences for a place at any state-funded school, in rank order on the common application

	form provided by their home local authority. The deadline for parental applications is 15 January for primary places.
<i>Reception Year</i>	Defined by Section 142 of the School Standards and Framework Act (SSFA) 1998 as a class in which education is provided which is suitable for children aged five and any children who are under or over five years old whom it is expedient to educate with pupils of that age.
<i>School Year</i>	The period beginning with the first school term to begin after July and ending with the beginning of the first such term to begin after the following July.
<i>Summer born child</i>	A child born between 1 April and 31 August.



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