



BRIEFING PAPER

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Summer-born children: starting school

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Inside:

1. Position in England
2. Position in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
3. Education Committee inquiry
4. Government's proposed changes
5. Other Parliamentary activity
6. Research and comment



Contents

Summary	3
1. Position in England	4
1.1 Who counts as a summer-born child?	4
Compulsory school age	4
1.2 School admissions rules: admission to Reception or Year 1	4
School admissions authorities	6
1.3 Special Educational Needs	6
1.4 Other key issues	7
Transfer to junior or secondary school	7
Handling parental requests for admissions out of year	7
Moving children to their normal age group	8
Impact on school leaving age	8
2. Position in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland	9
Scotland	9
Wales	9
Northern Ireland	10
3. Education Committee inquiry	11
3.1 Committee inquiry and letter to Minister	11
3.2 Ministerial response and Government action	12
4. Government's proposed changes	13
4.1 Developments in 2015	13
4.2 Developments in 2016	14
4.3 Conservative Manifesto 2017: school admissions review	15
4.4 Parliamentary Question responses (2018)	15
4.5 DfE research report (2018)	16
5. Other Parliamentary activity	17
6. Research and comment	18
6.1 Institute for Fiscal Studies research	18
6.2 Institute of Education study	18
6.3 Education Datalab research	19
6.4 Submissions to Education Committee	19
6.5 Press comment	19

Summary

Current position

There have been longstanding concerns that children born towards the end of the school year – in England, summer-born children – suffer adverse educational impacts by virtue of starting school at a younger age than their peers.

To accommodate these concerns, a degree of flexibility is provided in England whereby a parent may request that a summer-born child is admitted to school outside of their normal age group. (This is in addition to other reasons a child might be educated outside their normal age group, such as following a period of ill health.)

A school's admissions authority is responsible for making the decision on which year group a child should be admitted to. There is no statutory barrier to children being admitted outside their normal age group, but parents do not have the right to insist that their child is admitted to a particular age group.

Government advice states that decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis according to what is considered to be in the child's best interest, with particular factors such as whether the child was born prematurely to be taken into account.

Concerns and proposals for change

Concerns have been raised about the manner in which this process operates, in particular that many parents whose request is accepted find that their child's deferred entry into school may not be into the reception class but rather into year 1, meaning the child misses reception year. There can also be consequences later in education, when a child advances to secondary school or moves to a new area.

The Education Committee has recommended that the Government give further consideration to how this system is operating in practice, including whether the processes involved are sufficiently clear to parents and local authorities, and also potential reforms such as granting parents the right to appeal a decision in this area, and the use of a child's due date rather than birthdate in the definition or interpretation of compulsory school age.

In September 2015, the Schools Minister told the House that the Government would consult on changes to the School Admissions Code to amend the code to strengthen the rights of parents to choose when their child enters reception class, and to ensure children remain in the same school year throughout their education if they prefer. Plans for a school admissions review were also included in the Conservative manifesto for the 2017 General Election. However, to date no consultation has been published.

Devolution

Schools policy is devolved. This paper focuses on England, but information is provided on the relevant position in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, similar deferral processes are in place, although the differing operation of the school year means those provisions apply to children born during the winter.

1. Position in England

1.1 Who counts as a summer-born child?

In England, the term 'summer born' is used to refer to children born from 1 April to 31 August. If the parents of summer-born children decide to send them to school rather than to home educate, these children are not required to start school until a full school year after the point at which they could first have been admitted.

Compulsory school age

Compulsory school age is set out in section 8 of the *Education Act 1996* and *The Education (Start of Compulsory School Age) Order 1998*. 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.

There is flexibility for parents who do not feel their child is ready to start school before compulsory school age. They may defer the date their child is admitted to school until later in the school year following their fourth birthday, providing they do not defer beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age, or beyond the start of the final term of that school year. Alternatively, their child may attend school part-time until they reach compulsory school age.¹

1.2 School admissions rules: admission to Reception or Year 1

The DFE published revised [Advice on the Admission of Summer Born Children](#) in December 2014. This provides an overview of the rules involved:

- School admission authorities are required to provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday, but flexibilities exist for children whose parents do not feel they are ready to begin school before they reach compulsory school age.
- Where a parent requests for their child to be admitted out of their normal age group, the school admission authority is responsible for making the decision on which year group a child should be admitted to. They are required to make a decision on the basis of the circumstances of the case and in the best interests of the child concerned.
- There is no statutory barrier to children being admitted outside their normal age group, but parents do not have the right to insist that their child is admitted to a particular age group.²

The statutory [School Admissions Code](#) provides more detailed information. It requires admissions authorities in England to consider

¹ Department for Education, [Advice on the admission of summer born children](#), December 2014, p4

² Ibid., p3-4

5 Summer-born children: starting school

requests from parents to allow their children to enter school a year later than would be usual, and join the reception class when they do so. Summer-born children are mentioned specifically in this context. It is up to admissions authorities to decide whether admission outside the usual year group should be allowed in respect of an individual child. There is no rule that says admissions authorities cannot admit children outside of their usual year group, but summer-born children who start in the September following their fifth birthday may be offered a place in a year 1 class, effectively 'skipping' reception.

The relevant paragraphs from the [Code](#) state (emphasis in original):

Admission of children outside their normal age group

2.17 Parents may seek a place for their child outside of their normal age group, for example, if the child is gifted and talented or has experienced problems such as ill health. In addition, the parents of a summer born child* may choose not to send that child to school until the September following their fifth birthday and may request that they are admitted out of their normal age group – to reception rather than year 1. Admission authorities **must** make clear in their admission arrangements the process for requesting admission out of the normal age group.

2.17A Admission authorities **must** make decisions on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child concerned. This will include taking account of the parent's views; information about the child's academic, social and emotional development; where relevant, their medical history and the views of a medical professional; whether they have previously been educated out of their normal age group; and whether they may naturally have fallen into a lower age group if it were not for being born prematurely. They **must** also take into account the views of the head teacher of the school concerned. When informing a parent of their decision on the year group the child should be admitted to, the admission authority **must** set out clearly the reasons for their decision.

2.17B Where an admission authority agrees to a parent's request for their child to be admitted out of their normal age group and, as a consequence of that decision, the child will be admitted to a relevant age group (i.e. the age group to which pupils are normally admitted to the school) the local authority and admission authority **must** process the application as part of the main admissions round, unless the parental request is made too late for this to be possible, and on the basis of their determined admission arrangements only, including the application of oversubscription criteria where applicable. They **must not** give the application lower priority on the basis that the child is being admitted out of their normal age group. Parents have a statutory right to appeal against the refusal of a place at a school for which they have applied. This right does not apply if they are offered a place at the school but it is not in their preferred age group.

[*The term summer born children relates to all children born from 1 April to 31 August. These children reach compulsory school age on 31 August following their fifth birthday (or on their fifth birthday if it falls on 31 August). It is likely that most requests for summer born children to be admitted out of their normal age

group will come from parents of children born in the later summer months or those born prematurely]³

A response to a parliamentary question in March 2014 outlined the position of the then Coalition Government regarding reception class places for summer-born children:

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what further steps he plans to ensure that parents of summer-born children can start their child aged five in a reception class.

Mr Laws: The parents of a summer-born child can request that the child is admitted to a reception class in the September following their fifth birthday—the point at which their peers are moving up to year 1. It is for the admission authority to consider the individual circumstances of the case before arriving at a decision.

I believe those decisions are best taken at a local level, where the admission authority in conjunction with the school head are better placed to decide the most appropriate year group for each child. There are no current plans to ensure that parents of summer-born children can always start their child aged five in a reception class—for some children this may not be appropriate or in the best interests of the child.

[\[HC Deb 12 March 2014, c249W\]](#)

School admissions authorities

Depending on the type of school involved in a particular case, the admissions authority responsible for making these decisions will differ. The respective authorities are:

- Academies (including Free Schools): the Academy Trust
- Community Schools and Voluntary Controlled Schools: the local authority
- Foundation Schools and Voluntary Aided Schools: the governing body⁴

1.3 Special Educational Needs

The [advice](#) on summer-born children makes particular reference to children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and the particular considerations that may arise in summer-born children with SEN:

We are aware that, in making their decision, many admission authorities have focussed on whether the child has any particular medical or special educational needs which mean their development is significantly below the expected levels for a child of their age.

The government would agree that, in general, children should be educated in their normal age group, with the curriculum differentiated as appropriate, and that they should only be educated out of their normal age group in very limited circumstances.

However, parental requests for summer born children to be admitted to reception rather than year one at the age of five are different from any other parental request for admission out of the

³ Department for Education, [Schools Admissions Code](#), December 2014, p25

⁴ *Ibid.*, p6

7 Summer-born children: starting school

normal age group, as it is only in these circumstances that the child is being admitted to school for the first time.

The parents of summer born children must be able to make a decision about whether their child is ready to go to school before compulsory school age confident that, if they decide not to send them to school until age five, the decision about the year group they should be admitted to at that point will be made in the child's best interests.

This will require the admission authority to take account of the child's individual needs and abilities and to consider whether these can best be met in reception or year one. It will also involve taking account of the potential impact on the child of being admitted to year one without first having completed the reception year. The views of the head teacher will be an important part of this consideration.⁵

1.4 Other key issues

The Government's [advice](#) provides the position on a number of other key issues relevant to children educated outside of their normal year group. A brief overview of some of the most significant is provided in this section.

Transfer to junior or secondary school

When a child who has been educated outside of their normal year group moves to another school, their parent will need to again request for them to be educated outside of their year group:

Where a child has been educated out of their normal age group, the parent may again request admission out of the normal age group when they transfer to junior or secondary school. It will be for the admission authority of that school to decide whether to admit the child out of their normal age group. They must make a decision on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the child's best interests, and will need to bear in mind the age group the child has been educated in up to that point.⁶

Handling parental requests for admissions out of year

School admissions authorities must have their own procedures in place for deciding whether a child should be admitted outside of their normal age group. The advice recommends that the process put in place:

- requires the parent to make an application for their child's normal age group at the usual time, but enables them to submit a request for admission out of the normal age group at the same time
- ensures that the parent receives the response to their request before primary national offer day.

If their request is agreed, their application for the normal age group may be withdrawn before a place is offered. If their request is refused, the parent must decide whether to accept the offer of a place for the normal age group, or to refuse it and make an in

⁵ Department for Education, [Advice on the admission of summer born children](#), December 2014, p6

⁶ Ibid., p9

year application for admission to year one for the September following the child's fifth birthday.

Where a parent's request is agreed, they must make a new application as part of the main admissions round the following year.⁷

Moving children to their normal age group

The advice makes clear that, after a child has been admitted, the decision on how best to educate them, including potentially moving them to their normal age group, is the responsibility of the head teacher. It notes that any decision to move a child to a different age group should be taken in consultation with the parents.⁸

Impact on school leaving age

The advice provides the following information on the position regarding children who have been educated outside their normal year group when they reach the school leaving age:

A child ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday of June in the school year they become 16. If a child is educated outside their normal age group (i.e. is in year 10 when this date is reached) the school will continue to receive funding for that child but the child will no longer be of compulsory school age during the school year in which most children take their GCSE examinations and cannot, therefore, be obliged to attend.

The government is changing the law so that all young people will be required to continue in education or training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 in 2013 and until their 18th birthday in 2015. Young people will have a choice about how they do this. It could be through full time education in school or college, an apprenticeship or full time employment combined with part time education. However, the date on which they cease to be of compulsory school age will remain unchanged.⁹

⁷ Ibid., p7-8

⁸ Ibid., p8-9

⁹ Ibid., p9

2. Position in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Scotland

The school system in Scotland operates with a different timeframe to that in England, so the children affected by these concerns are not 'summer-born'. Nonetheless, similar [provisions on deferring school entry](#) are in place for the children who would be at the younger end of their school year group:

In Scotland, the school year begins in mid-August. Any single school year group consists of children born between the beginning of March in one year and the end of February the following year. Children born between March and August start school in the August of, or following, their fifth birthday. Those born between September and February start school in the August prior to their fifth birthday. As such, children in Scotland usually start school between the ages of 4.5 and 5.5 years old.

However, parents of children born between September and December can request to defer their child's entry to the following August. These deferrals are not automatic and are subject to approval by the local education authority. Parents of children born in January and February may also choose to defer their child's entry; these requests are automatically approved. Children with birthdays in January and February and whose entry to school is deferred are eligible for a further year of funded pre-school education whereas those with September to December birthdays who are deferred are not. Children whose entry is deferred will tend to be aged between 5.5 and 6 years old at the time they start school.¹⁰

Wales

The Welsh Government's [School Admissions Code](#) makes allowances for children to be admitted to school outside of their normal age group. It notes that requests for admission outside the normal year group may be considered in particular cases, although it refers to exceptional ability or ill health rather than the child concerned being born at the end of the school year:

3.30 Although most children will be admitted to a school with their own chronological age group, from time to time parents seek places outside their normal age group for gifted and talented children, or those who have experienced problems or missed part of a year, often due to ill health. While it would not normally be appropriate for a child to be placed in a year group that is not concurrent with their chronological age, admission authorities should consider these requests carefully and make decisions on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in consultation with the parents and the school, and specifically in relation to what is most beneficial to the child. Due regard should also be given to the Educational Psychologist's report where available, and clear reasons ascertainable for such a decision to be made.

3.31 If it is decided that there are grounds to consider an 'out of year' application, parents refused an application for a place at a

¹⁰ The Scottish Government, [Chapter 2: Entry to school](#) [accessed 20 July 2015]

school have a statutory right of appeal. However, there is no right of appeal if a place has been offered but not in the desired year group.¹¹

The Government's FAQs page on school admissions issues includes the following overview:

Q 23. When does my child have to start full-time school?

By law children have to be in school full-time in the term after they are five. Before that time you can ask the admission authority if your child can go to school part-time or put off starting school until later in the school year. This is known as deferred entry. Your child will have to go to school before the end of the summer term or they will lose their place in the class and you will have to reapply for a place. If you do not take up the place offered in the same school year, your child would not normally join the next Reception class but would join the class in which they were originally offered a place.¹²

Northern Ireland

Children in Northern Ireland begin compulsory education earlier than children in the rest of the UK, at four years old. The Northern Ireland Department of Education [website](#) sets out that, if a child reaches the age of four between 1 September of a given year and 1 July of the following year, they should begin compulsory schooling in the following year. If a child turns four between 2 July and 31 August of a given year, they will not begin compulsory education until the following September. The website provides the following examples:

- If a child's 4th birthday is on 15 September 2012, they are 4 years of age between 1 September 2012 and 1 July 2013. This child would start compulsory education in September 2013.
- If a child's 4th birthday is on 5 July 2012, they are 4 years of age between 2 July 2012 and 31 August 2012. This child would start compulsory education in September 2013¹³

¹¹ Welsh Government, [School Admissions Code](#), July 2013, p24

¹² Welsh Government, [Frequently Asked Questions on School Admissions and School Admission Appeals](#), p5 [accessed 20 July 2015]

¹³ Department of Education Northern Ireland, [When is it compulsory for a child to start school?](#) [accessed 20 July 2015]

3. Education Committee inquiry

3.1 Committee inquiry and letter to Minister

In January 2015, the Commons Education Select Committee [launched](#) an ‘evidence check’ inquiry on school starting age, including provisions for those born in summer months or born prematurely.¹⁴ At the conclusion of its inquiry, the Committee wrote to the Minister, stating that:

- It was clear from the evidence we received, including the Department’s own analysis, that there is a measurable effect of the month of a child’s birth on academic outcomes. We also heard evidence about non-academic effects of being summer-born, including disproportionately high SEN diagnosis, bullying and placement in low ability groups. There is widespread agreement that a problem exists, on average, for summer born and premature children.
- We heard during the session that parents are having increasing difficulty in securing entry for summer born or premature children into reception at compulsory school age, rather than into year 1, and that the situation has worsened following the Government’s new guidance.
- We heard that there is variation in the extent to which admissions authorities are following the Government’s guidance, and that...the issue may re-emerge when applying for secondary schools or moving to a different area.
- We noted that parents do not have the right to appeal against admission into year 1 rather than reception, and that the final decision on this rests with the admissions authority rather than the parents.¹⁵

The Committee made several suggestions to the Department on the strength of its findings, including that the Government should:

- Consider what further steps could be taken to communicate Government guidance on summer born admissions to admissions authorities;
- Monitor the effectiveness of the Government’s guidance in altering admission authorities’ behaviour;
- Consider whether to produce guidance for parents on how to request admission for a premature or summer-born child into reception class, rather than year 1, at compulsory school age;
- Consider the merits of using a child’s due date rather than birthdate in the definition or interpretation of the compulsory school age, and more generally in admissions policies;

¹⁴ Education Committee, [Evidence check: starting school – call for evidence](#), 29 January 2015

¹⁵ Education Committee, [Letter to Nick Gibb](#), 18 March 2015

- Assess how a right to appeal a decision regarding a child's year of entry to school might be introduced.¹⁶

3.2 Ministerial response and Government action

In July 2015, Nick Gibb [responded](#) in a letter sent to the new Education Committee formed following the General Election. The Minister expressed concern at the number of cases where children are admitted to year 1 against their parents' wishes, and that Government action had not reduced the number of contentious cases. He stated that he had asked Departmental officials to look into how this issue might be resolved.¹⁷

The Minister's letter included further evidence from the Department for Education on summer-born children.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Department for Education, [Nick Gibb letter to Neil Carmichael MP, Chair of the Education Committee](#), 1 July 2015

¹⁸ Ibid.

4. Government's proposed changes

4.1 Developments in 2015

An [adjournment debate](#) on the guidelines in place for the admission of summer-born children to school took place on 7 September 2015. Stephen Hammond, who secured the debate, praised the existing guidelines but raised concerns with how they were being applied in practice:

First, although there is no statutory barrier to a child being admitted outside their normal age cohort, there is no right to insist or to appeal. Although the guidelines state that the rationale must be set out, they do not confer any extra rights. Secondly, some authorities allow delayed entry into education but then insist that the child begins in year 1, rather than in reception, thus removing all the hoped for benefit of starting a year later. Thirdly, some authorities, as I pointed out when describing the case in my constituency, allow a child to defer entry at primary level but give no guarantee that the child will remain in that cohort post-primary school. Finally, there are any number of similar problems for the parents of premature and pre-term babies. Some local authorities take no account of prematurity or the due date.¹⁹

The schools Minister, Nick Gibb, stated in [closing the debate](#) that the Government would, subject to public consultation, amend the School Admissions Code to strengthen the rights of parents to choose when their child enters reception class, and to ensure children remain in the same school year throughout their education if they prefer:

We have therefore decided it is necessary to amend the admissions code further to ensure that summer-born children can be admitted to reception at the age of five, if this is what their parents wish, and to ensure that those children are able to remain with that cohort as they progress through school. We have already begun the work necessary to implement the change. We will conduct a full public consultation in due course and, subject to parliamentary approval, we will introduce these further changes to ensure that no child is forced to start school before they are ready.

Admission authorities may have been reluctant to agree to parental requests because they felt it would open the floodgates—that large numbers of parents of summer-born children would want them to be admitted outside their normal age group—and that, as a consequence, the admission system would become impossible to manage. I do not believe this to be true. The reception year of school is the final part of the early years foundation stage, and we know that most parents are happy for their child to go to school at this point, confident that they are ready for the challenge. We believe that only a small proportion of parents of summer-born children wish them to be admitted to reception at the age of five—for example, children born in the late summer months or born prematurely. On that point—the first of the three my hon. Friend made—I will further

¹⁹ [HC Deb 7 Sep 2015 c196](#)

consider whether we can make changes in relation to the due date versus the birth date of prematurely born children.²⁰

The Minister wrote an [open letter](#) to parents, local authorities, schools and admission authorities, confirming these proposals, on 8 September 2015.²¹

In October 2015, the Minister indicated in [response](#) to a Parliamentary Question that the Department hoped to have a draft Admissions Code ready for consultation in the new year.²²

4.2 Developments in 2016

In January 2016, Stephen Hammond raised the consultation during Education Questions in the House of Commons. The Minister [responded](#) that:

Mr Gibb: [...] Subject to parliamentary approval, we have decided to amend the school admissions code to support summer-born children to enter school in the reception year if their parents decide to defer their start at school. We are now considering other, consequential changes to the code, including whether the due date rather than the birth date of premature children should be used for determining when they will begin school, and we will conduct a full public consultation in due course.

[...] it is important that we consider the other changes we need to make to the school admissions code at the same time as making changes to the rules regarding summer-born children. The work is ongoing, and we will begin the consultation in due course.²³

In September 2016, the recently appointed Education Secretary, Justine Greening, [told the Education Committee](#) that the Government would be taking steps on this issue “shortly” and that:

The reality is that the challenges are faced by probably parents of mid to late July and August children. What I want to do is make sure that as we take this forward we are clear about who we particularly want to give more options to.²⁴

An [adjournment debate](#) on summer-born children was held on 10 October 2016, led by Stephen Hammond. The Minister raised concerns about potential misuse of changes that the Government wanted to guard against, and also stated that the Government believed significant cost could be involved:

We will support summer children in the best way we can, but it is important that we also consider the wider impact of any policy changes. It would clearly not be right for every summer-born child to delay starting school until they are five, as many will be ready to take on the challenges of formal schooling earlier. In developing this policy, we want to make sure that parents have the information that they need to make informed decisions about their child’s education. We also need to ensure that parents do

²⁰ HC Deb 7 Sep 2015 c198-200

²¹ Department for Education, [Summer-born children to get the right to start school later](#), 8 September 2015

²² [PO 12741, 29 October 2015](#)

²³ [HC Deb 25 Jan 2016 c14](#)

²⁴ Education Committee, [Oral evidence: Role and Responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Education](#), HC 196, 14 September 2016, Q295

not use the flexibilities as a mechanism by which to gain an unfair advantage in the admissions system by applying for a place in the reception class of their preferred school for when their child is four, and again for when their child is five. Furthermore, while we want to provide admissions flexibility where it is most needed, we also want to ensure that we do not create unintended consequences for the early years sector.

We have been considering all these issues carefully as we develop the policy. In particular, we have carried out work on the likely cost of full implementation. First indications show that the costs are high. These are, however, based on a limited amount of information on why parents might choose to defer their summer-born child's admission to school. This is why we are starting to collect more information and data before making a decision on how to roll out any changes. [...]

The costs may well be neutral to a school, but may not necessarily be neutral to the system as a whole, if children stay in early years provision for longer than they would otherwise have done and therefore spend an extra year in the education system.²⁵

4.3 Conservative Manifesto 2017: school admissions review

The [Conservative Manifesto](#) for the 2017 General Election proposed to conduct a review of school admissions policy.²⁶

No further steps on a potential review have been taken since the election. In response to a [Parliamentary Question](#) in November 2017, the Schools Minister stated that the Government "routinely keep the admissions system under review."²⁷

4.4 Parliamentary Question responses (2018)

In response to a Parliamentary Question in March 2018, the Schools Minister restated that the Government was considering amendments to the School Admissions Code for summer-born children:

Nick Gibb: The Department is giving careful consideration to how these changes may be made in a way that avoids unintended consequences elsewhere in the system. Any changes to the Admissions Code will require a statutory process, including consultation and parliamentary scrutiny. The Department will consider the appropriate time for consulting on these changes in the context of competing pressures on the parliamentary timetable.

[\[PQ 133279, 27 March 2018\]](#)

A separate response from the Minister commented on the potentially significant costs of granting summer-born and premature children the right to start reception at the age of five.

Nick Gibb: The costs of this change would depend on the level of take up, which is difficult to predict. We are gathering evidence to help us better estimate the likely take up and costs. If large

²⁵ [HC Deb 10 Oct 2016 c136-137](#)

²⁶ [Conservative Manifesto 2017](#), p50

²⁷ [PQ 113399, 24 November 2017](#)

numbers of parents choose to delay their summer born child's entry to reception, the costs could be significant.

[\[PQ 133280, 27 March 2018\]](#)

4.5 DfE research report (2018)

In May 2018, the Department for Education published a [report](#) summarising the results of two surveys, one issued to local authorities, the other to parents of summer-born children who have requested to delay their child's admission to reception.

Some key findings were:

- A significant rise in the number of requests in surveyed authorities during 2015-2017
- A consistent approval rate of 75% for requests in 2016 and 2017
- Significant variation between areas, both in terms of requests made and those accepted
- In general, fewer requests being made in areas where the policy is only to grant requests that are supported by strong evidence, with more requests received in areas where a higher proportion of requests are agreed
- Delayed admissions significantly weighted towards the end of the 'summer' (April-August) period, with 53% born in August
- Parents with higher incomes were significantly more likely to delay their summer-born child's admission to reception. However, the report stressed that small sample size means this finding is at best indicative
- In certain local authorities there was a sizeable discrepancy between the proportions of black and white British primary pupils relative to the proportion of survey respondents in those same areas, with white British respondents being vastly overrepresented
- An increase in phonics scores of 0.87 marks for delayed entry summer-born children between 2014/15 and 2015/16, although the report stated that is not a statistically significant improvement.²⁸

²⁸ Department for Education, [Delayed school admissions for summer born pupils: Research report](#), May 2018, p5-6

5. Other Parliamentary activity

Early Day Motion and Westminster Hall debate

In 2013, Annette Brooke tabled an Early Day Motion, signed by 24 Members, on summer-born children:

That this House notes with concern the robust and consistent evidence from around the world on birth date effects, which in England shows that summer-born children can suffer long-term disadvantages as a result of England's inflexible school starting age; believes that the Government should ensure that parents of summer-born children are able to exercise their right to defer their child's school start up until the statutory school start time, if that is their choice, without losing a place offered at the school of their choice for the September after their child's fourth birthday because of funding issues; and calls on the Government to ensure that parents also have the choice of placing their child in a school reception class, rather than Year 1, at statutory school age, that is the September following their fifth birthday.²⁹

Ms Brooke subsequently secured a Westminster Hall debate on the school starting age, held in September 2013 [[HC Deb 4 Sep 2013, c134-143WH](#)]. Ms Brooke raised concerns about how the existing position “the impacts on individual children who are simply not ready in their emotional, social and cognitive development to start formal school.”³⁰

The then schools Minister, Elizabeth Truss, responded for the then Government that:

In general, what we want to do is to encourage flexibility and responsiveness to parental needs. There is a wealth of evidence about the importance of following a specific child's development. We are trying to encourage that development through more flexibility over pedagogy, based in the early years and in school, so that teachers can adjust teaching practice according to where the child is in terms of their level of development. A combination of empowering parents about deciding which year their child joins school and giving teachers the flexibility to teach in the best interests of the child, rather than jumping through hoops in a particular year, will help to ameliorate the situation.

Such decisions are best made at a local level. We have been clear with local authorities about where their responsibilities lie, and about the fact that we want to see them being flexible and giving the parents the choice for their five-year-old child of joining reception or year 1. Having too much central guidance the other way would be wrong. What we need to do is to ensure that local authorities are absolutely aware of their responsibilities.³¹

²⁹ [Early Day Motion 213, session 2013-14.](#)

³⁰ [HC Deb 4 Sep 2013 c134WH](#)

³¹ [HC Deb 4 Sep 2013 c142WH](#)

6. Research and comment

This section provides some recent think tank research into the impact of starting school relatively 'early' on summer-born children, as well as submissions to the Education Committee and press comment on the subject. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to provide a flavour of recent material and comment in this area.

6.1 Institute for Fiscal Studies research

In May 2010, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), published a working paper [When you are born matters: the impact of date of birth on educational outcomes in England](#), which found that:

...the month in which you are born matters for test scores at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16, with younger children performing significantly worse, on average, than their older peers. Furthermore, almost all of this difference is due to the fact that younger children sit exams up to one year earlier than older cohort members. The difference in test scores at age 16 potentially affects the number of pupils who stay on beyond compulsory schooling, with predictable labour market consequences. Indeed, we find that the impact of month of birth persists into higher education (college) decisions, with age 19/20 participation declining monotonically with month of birth.³²

The IFS, alongside the Nuffield Foundation and ESRC, published a report called [When You Are Born Matters: Evidence for England](#), in May 2013, which highlighted "large differences in educational attainment between children born at the start and end of the academic year," and evidence of impact in other areas such as the likelihood of being assessed as having SEN at school, as well as children's self-esteem and confidence in their own ability. However, the paper found "little evidence" that these detrimental effects persisted into adulthood.³³

6.2 Institute of Education study

A working paper published by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute for Education in March 2013, [In-school ability grouping and the month of birth effect](#), found that:

...the youngest children in a school year are far more likely to be placed in the lowest ability groups than autumn-born pupils.

The research found that, by age seven, September-born children were nearly three times as likely to be in the top stream as those born in the following August. If the children were not only streamed, but also grouped by ability within their class or year for specific subjects, then the age differences became even more marked.

³² Institute for Fiscal Studies, [When you are born matters: the impact of date of birth on educational outcomes in England](#), May 2010 [accessed 20 July 2015]

³³ Institute for Fiscal Studies, [When You Are Born Matters: Evidence for England](#), May 2013, p1-2. See also the IFS Observations article, [When should summer born children start school?](#), 12 September 2013

The report raised concerns that as a result ability grouping might have “particularly negative consequences” for younger children.³⁴

6.3 Education Datalab research

In March 2017, Education Datalab [published analysis](#) indicating that August-born pupils close the gap in attainment as they progress through schooling but remain behind September-born peers by the end of Key Stage 4.³⁵

6.4 Submissions to Education Committee

A range of institutions and individuals submitted [written evidence to the Education Committee](#) on the issue of the school starting age, particularly summer born children.

6.5 Press comment

The following articles discuss the issue of summer-born children:

- Guardian, [Summer-born children in danger of being left behind, says school study](#), 4 June 2015
- Guardian, [Too much, too young for summer-born children forced into 'big school'](#), 2 June 2015
- Daily Mail, [Mother's victory opens way for thousands of 'summer babies' to start school late so they aren't the youngest in class](#), 17 April 2015
- Huffington Post, [Do Summer Born Children Always Come Last?](#), 17 August 2014
- Huffington Post, [Summer-Born Children Behind By End Of First Year At School](#), 14 August 2014
- RSA, [Blog: you say you want a revolution](#), 16 September 2015
- Institute of Education blog, [Who benefits when summer-born children start school later?](#), 22 September 2015

³⁴ Centre for Longitudinal Studies, [Ability Grouping in Primary School may reinforce disadvantage of summer-born children, study finds](#), 8 March 2013; also reported in Guardian, [Summer-born children suffer educational inequality, study finds](#), 8 March 2013

³⁵ Education Datalab, [Getting Older Quicker](#), 3 March 2017

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