



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# Summer-born children: starting school

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2. Position in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
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## 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.

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.

In June 2020 the Department for Education published a consultation on changes to the School Admissions Code. However, changes to the position for summer-born children were not included.

The Department published a statement that it still intended to legislate to give summer-born children the right to stay in the same cohort throughout their schooling, and published [revised advice to local authorities and parents](#) in September 2020. No date has been given for when this legislation might be put before Parliament.

### 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.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 School admissions rules: admission to Reception or Year 1

The DFE published revised [Advice on the Admission of Summer Born Children](#) in September 2020. 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p3-4

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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]<sup>3</sup>

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 body<sup>4</sup>

## Local Government Ombudsman guidance

The LGO published [Guidance for councils on admitting summer born children to school](#) in December 2018.

The guidance states that parents should be made aware of whether their child will be admitted to reception class or year 1 before making their decision on whether to send their child to school earlier, before reaching compulsory school age, or wait until reaching compulsory school age.

The guidance stated that:

Parents or guardians should be able to make this decision knowing which school year (reception or year one) the admission authority considers it would be in the child's best interest to start, should they decide not to send their child to school until the September after their fifth birthday. This means that the admissions authority is obliged to inform them of this when they apply for their four year old child to be admitted out of their

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

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p6

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normal age group, even if they are not intending to have their child actually admitted until they reach [compulsory school age].

The decision on whether to admit a child to reception class or year 1 remains with the admissions authority, but, the LGO stated, while it recognised that “this is a difficult decision, more than one year in advance, but that is the test required by the [School Admissions] Code and [DfE] guidance.”<sup>5</sup>

### 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 a decision, many admission authorities focus 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. However, it is not necessary for a child to have medical or special educational needs in order for it to be in their interests to start reception age 5. Equally, there will be circumstances in which it is better for a child with developmental delay 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 teachers are trained to teach children with special educational needs and schools must use their best efforts to make suitable provision available 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](#). Where a parent is seeking to delay admission because they are worried that their child may have a learning difficulty or a disability that will make school more challenging for them, it is important to encourage them to meet with the school’s SENCo who will be able to describe the school’s approach to helping children with SEN and disability.<sup>6</sup>

### 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.

#### Transition to junior, middle 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:

Parents will need to apply once again for an outside normal year group place alongside an application for a school place and should do so when their child’s ‘correct’ cohort are making applications for a school place...

Admission authorities must consider these requests in the same way as the original request but must also take into account the

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<sup>5</sup> Local Government Ombudsman, [Guidance for councils on admitting summer born children to school](#), December 2018

<sup>6</sup> Department for Education, [Advice on the admission of summer born children](#), September 2020, p7

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.

Unless there are sound educational reasons to do otherwise, the assumption should be that children remain outside their normal year group (that is, in the year which they have been educated so far).<sup>7</sup>

## 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 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.<sup>8</sup>

## 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.<sup>9</sup>

## 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

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p11

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p9-10

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p12



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the school year in which most children take their GCSE examinations and cannot, therefore, be obliged to attend.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p13

## 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.<sup>11</sup>

### 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

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<sup>11</sup> The Scottish Government, [Chapter 2: Entry to school](#) [accessed 20 July 2015]

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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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

## 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 has published a [Guide for Parents](#) that 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:

- A child born on 1 September 2013 would start school on 1 September 2018 aged 5 years.
- A child born on 1 July 2014 would start school on 1 September 2018 aged 4 years and 2 months.
- A child born on 2 July 2014 would start school on 1 September 2019 aged 5 years and 2 months.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Welsh Government, [School Admissions Code](#), July 2013, p24

<sup>13</sup> Welsh Government, [Frequently Asked Questions on School Admissions and School Admission Appeals](#), p5 [accessed 20 July 2015]

<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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;

<sup>15</sup> Education Committee, [Evidence check: starting school – call for evidence](#), 29 January 2015

<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

## 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.<sup>18</sup>

The Minister's letter included further evidence from the Department for Education on summer-born children.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Department for Education, [Nick Gibb letter to Neil Carmichael MP, Chair of the Education Committee](#), 1 July 2015

<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

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

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<sup>20</sup> [HC Deb 7 Sep 2015 c196](#)

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consider whether we can make changes in relation to the due date versus the birth date of prematurely born children.<sup>21</sup>

The Minister wrote an [open letter](#) to parents, local authorities, schools and admission authorities, confirming these proposals, on 8 September 2015.<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup>

### 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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup>

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

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<sup>21</sup> HC Deb 7 Sep 2015 c198-200

<sup>22</sup> Department for Education, [Summer-born children to get the right to start school later](#), 8 September 2015

<sup>23</sup> [PQ 12741, 29 October 2015](#)

<sup>24</sup> [HC Deb 25 Jan 2016 c14](#)

<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

### 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.<sup>27</sup>

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."<sup>28</sup>

### 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

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<sup>26</sup> [HC Deb 10 Oct 2016 c136-137](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Conservative Manifesto 2017](#), p50

<sup>28</sup> [PQ 113399, 24 November 2017](#)



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

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

In October 2018, the issue was raised at Prime Minister's Questions. The Prime Minister stated that:

We are concerned that some summer-born and prematurely born children whose parents choose to delay their entry to school until compulsory school age may be missing essential teaching in a reception year. I understand that the Department for Education is looking at how best to make changes without creating unintended consequences elsewhere in the system. It is important that it looks at it in that sense.

[\[HC Deb 10 Oct 2018 c135\]](#)

### 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.<sup>29</sup>

### 4.6 June 2020 statement

In June 2020, the Department for Education announced a [consultation on the School Admissions Code](#), to consider changes where children are

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<sup>29</sup> Department for Education, [Delayed school admissions for summer born pupils: Research report](#), May 2018, p5-6

admitted to school in-year.<sup>30</sup> It was, however, announced that changes to the admission of summer born children would not be considered as part of the consultation.

In a [statement](#) released on the same day as the Admissions Code consultation, the Department for Education stated that keeping summer-born children in the same cohort group throughout their education would require legislation:

We are unable to make the summer born change at the same time [as the changes proposed in the consultation], because a provision to enable children to remain in a particular cohort goes beyond the remit of the code and therefore requires primary legislation. We remain committed to making these changes in due course.<sup>31</sup>

The statement set out the Department's view, and related [research](#), that admission authorities are increasingly flexible when responding to parents' requests for summer-born children to be admitted to school outside of their 'normal' year, with almost 9 in 10 being agreed in 2018/19.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, the Department stated that it intended to publish guidance for local authorities on summer-born admissions during summer 2020, in light of remaining instances of drawn-out disputes or children missing reception year. Advice would also be published for parents who were unsure about the best course of action for their child.<sup>33</sup>

## 4.7 September 2020: revised guidance

In September 2020, the DfE published [revised guidance for schools and also advice for parents](#) who are considering delaying their summer-born child's admission to school.

Both documents restates the Government's commitment 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 admitted throughout their education. We remain committed to making that change when a legislative opportunity is available.<sup>34</sup>

In response to a Parliamentary Question in November 2020, the Schools Minister stated:

**Nick Gibb:** [...] The guidance will help ensure that decisions are taken in the best interests of the child concerned. It remains our

<sup>30</sup> Department for Education, [Changes to the School Admissions Code](#), 26 June 2020

<sup>31</sup> Department for Education, [Updated statement on admission of summer-born children: 2020](#), 26 June 2020

<sup>32</sup> Department for Education, [Delayed school admissions for summer-born pupils \(2019\)](#), 21 October 2019

<sup>33</sup> Department for Education, [Updated statement on admission of summer-born children: 2020](#), 26 June 2020

<sup>34</sup> Department for Education, [Advice on the admission of summer born children](#), September 2020, p4; see also [Summer Born Children Starting School: Advice for parents](#), September 2020

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intention to legislate to change the school admissions code when an opportunity is available.<sup>35</sup>

## 5. 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.

### 5.1 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.<sup>36</sup>

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.<sup>37</sup>

### 5.2 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.

<sup>36</sup> 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]

<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

### 5.3 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.<sup>39</sup>

### 5.4 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.

### 5.5 BBC investigation: ‘postcode lottery’ for parents

In October 2018, the [BBC published an article](#) setting out findings that parents who want to delay their child's first year of school have varying success rates depending on where they live. The report stated that some councils approve 100% of requests, while others turn down more than half.

The article also set out that figures supplied under the Freedom of Information Act stated that 2,243 requests were made to 110 local authorities in England to defer starts to the 2018 school year, an increase of 18% on the previous year.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 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

<sup>39</sup> Education Datalab, [Getting Older Quicker](#), 3 March 2017

<sup>40</sup> BBC News, [Summer baby school delays: Parents face postcode lottery](#), 24 October 2018

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