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Department
for Education

Guidance

Summer born children starting school: advice for parents

Updated 27 April 2023

Applies to England


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About this guidance

Children born from 1 April to 31 August – known as summer born children – do not need to start school until the September after their fifth birthday, a year after they could first have started school. This is when summer born children reach [compulsory school age](#). This advice is to help you decide what would be best for your summer born child.

It does not apply to children with education, health and care (EHC) plans. If your child has an EHC plan and you wish them to start school in reception (not year 1) when they are 5, you should discuss this with your local authority.

Delaying your child's school start

Most children start school in the September after they turn 4.

A child does not need to start school until they reach compulsory school age.

You decide whether your child will start school before compulsory school age - the admission authority cannot decide your child should start school aged 4.

Your child will be eligible for government-funded childcare until they start school or reach compulsory school age, even if you delay their admission by a year.

[Childcare choices](#) has more information on help paying for childcare.

Starting school aged 4

If your summer born child does start school aged 4 you can, if you 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) for your child. You can discuss this with the school.

Starting school aged 5

If you decide your summer born child will start school aged 5, and you want your child to start school in reception (not year 1), you need to make a request to the school's admission authority. This is called requesting admission out of the normal age group – because children born from 1 September in one year to 31 August the following year are normally educated together in one year group.

Reception is the final year of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) and has a focus on phonics and early arithmetic. The key stage 1 curriculum begins in year 1.

If you do not make a request for admission out of the normal age group your child will start school in year 1. You should consider the potential impact of missing the reception year.

The admission authority decides whether children who start school at compulsory school age should be admitted to reception or year 1. They must make this decision in the child's best interests.

The government believes it is usually not in a child's best interests to miss the teaching that takes place during the reception year, and that it should be rare for a child to start school in year 1.

Seeking advice

Most children start school in the September after their fourth birthday, but some children will benefit from a delayed school start, particularly if their school readiness has been delayed by a medical condition or developmental delays.

Teachers understand that children develop at different rates and have different starting points when beginning school. They know some children need more support than others and are trained to adapt their teaching to suit individual children's needs.

You might find it helpful to speak to the staff at the schools you are considering for

your child, for example the reception teacher or the headteacher. You can discuss any concerns you have about your child's readiness for school, and ask them how they help children to settle in and how they would support your child.

You may also wish to visit the schools to find out more about how children learn and play in the reception year.

You can also talk to your child's early years provider. They will be able to support your child to get ready to start school and to let you know if there is anything you can do at home. They can also tell you if your child could stay at that early years setting until they are 5.

You may want to talk to any specialist services your child is involved with, for example if they see a speech and language therapist or occupational therapist, or are under specialist medical care.

The [NHS Start for Life](#) website has ideas about how to help your child learn and develop at home.

Children with special educational needs or a disability

Having special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) does not necessarily mean a child should delay starting school. It may be better for them to start school before compulsory school age so they can access the support available there.

All teachers are trained to support all children to succeed, including those with SEND. Every mainstream school must have a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) - a qualified teacher with an additional SEND qualification.

If you feel worried about your child starting school because of their SEND, you can speak to your health visitor or to staff at the school you would like your child to go to, for example the headteacher or SENCo. You can also speak to your local [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support service](#).

If your child is going through an EHC needs assessment and you intend to request admission to reception aged 5, you need to discuss this with the local authority.

Children born prematurely

A child is born prematurely if they are born before 37 weeks gestation. Some children born prematurely will have delayed social, emotional, physical or intellectual development. They may also have health problems associated with their prematurity.

If your child was born prematurely and you are considering delaying their school start, you can discuss the options with their specialists.

If, as a consequence of being born before their due date, your child falls into a different school year than if they had been born at full term, admission authorities should take account of the school year into which the child would have fallen if born at full term when considering the circumstances of the case.

Bliss, the Charity for babies born prematurely or sick, has [information about starting primary school for parents of children born prematurely](#).

Making a decision

You need to apply for a primary school place a year before your child starts school. Applications open in September and close on 15 January.

You should apply to your local authority for a school place as normal – as if your child were going to start school at age 4 – even if you think you want to delay their start until age 5. If you do not want your child to miss their reception year, you should submit a request for admission out of the normal age group to the school's admission authority at the same time.

This means you will need to decide whether or not you want to request admission out of the normal age group in the autumn following your child's third birthday. Remember that your child will do lots of growing and developing before they reach the point at which they could start school.

If you decide to delay your child starting school until the September following their fifth birthday but do not request admission out of their normal age group at this time, your child will start school in year 1.

You will need to make an in-year application for a school place for your child and the school admissions team at your local authority can advise you on when it would be best to make such an application.

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.

There is more information on [making an application](#).

Your child's education when a request is accepted

If your application to educate your child out of the normal age group is accepted, there are things to be aware of throughout your child's time in education.

Moving back to the normal age group

Headteachers decide how to educate the children in their school. On occasion, this can include moving a child to a different year group, but only when there are good educational reasons to do so. This means your child's school should continue to educate them out of their normal age group unless there are good educational reasons not to.

Changing schools

If you want your child to remain out of their normal age group when they transfer to a new school, for example if you move house or when they transfer to secondary school, you will need to submit another request for admission out of the normal age group.

The admission authority of the new school will decide whether it is in your child's best

interests to continue to be educated out of their normal age group. Unless there are good educational reasons for a child to join their normal year group (meaning they would miss a year of school), they should remain with their adopted year group.

Tests and assessments

If you will be applying to a selective school for your child, you may wish to submit your request before the other children of their age sit the entry test. Tests happen early in year 6, so you would need to submit your request before your child reaches the end of year 4 (other children their age will be in year 5 and registering for the selection test around this time).

Your child will take assessments, such as national curriculum tests and GCSEs, at the same time as the children they are being taught with.

Children are usually assessed when they reach the appropriate point in their education, not when they reach a particular age. The exception is the phonics screening check, which should be taken in the year your child turns 6, but only if they have completed the year 1 programme of study.

Leaving school

Children reach school leaving age on the last Friday of June in the school year they turn 16.

Your child will reach school leaving age at the end of year 10, rather than year 11. The school will not ask them to leave, but they will no longer be required by law to attend school and the school may not be able to enforce their attendance. Children usually take their GCSEs in year 11.

Pupils attending mainstream provision can be funded to the end of the academic year in which they are 19 years old. A child who is behind his or her chronological age group and is starting their post-16 studies at the age of 17 would be funded for the entirety of their programme.

School transport

Local authorities have to arrange free home to school travel for certain children of compulsory school age. If your child gets free travel, it may stop when they reach the end of year 10. The local authority could choose to continue arranging their travel, but they don't have to.

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