

CONSULTATION ON DEFERRING SCHOOL STARTING AGE

EASY READ

WHAT CURRENTLY HAPPENS?

Most children in Northern Ireland attend pre-school for one year before starting primary school. Government provides a pre-school place for every child whose family want it but children do not have to attend pre-school.

Children then start primary school aged 4 or 5. Currently, children who turn 4 on or before 1st July start school at the beginning of September that year. Children turning 4 between 2nd July and 31st August do not start school until the following year when they are 5 years old.

This means children born in April, May and June are the youngest in the school class whilst those born in July, August and September are the oldest.

WHAT IS THE CONSULTATION ABOUT?

This consultation is asking for your views about whether there should be a change to the law to allow more flexibility around the age when very young children start school.

WHY CHANGE NOW?

We have excellent schools and children learn through playing in the early years of primary school. Most children, regardless of their age within their class, enjoy and do well at primary school.

Some parents feel, however, that starting school shortly after their fourth birthday is not right for their very young child. They have concerns about their child making friends, being ready for the longer school day or managing using the bathroom. There is also evidence that older children in the class tend to do better on average than those who are younger.

WHAT DOES THE DEPARTMENT THINK?

The Department thinks there should be a change to the law to allow greater flexibility in school starting age for the youngest children in the class born between 1 April and 1 July.

Most of these children would continue to start primary school at the usual time but, if their parents wished, these children could start primary school one year later.

Parents could also apply for their child to start pre-school one year later.

The child would then attend pre-school from September following their fourth birthday and start primary school in September following their fifth birthday. This is important as it means there would not be a gap between pre-school and primary school for the child.

A parent may choose for their child to delay starting primary school at any point before their child starts Year 1. If the child has already attended a

government funded pre-school, they would not receive a second funded pre-school year, if they start primary school later.

WHAT ARE THE QUESTIONS?

The Department of Education would like to know what you think. You will be asked for your opinion on the Department's proposals, but you can raise other issues if you wish to. The key questions are:

 **Do you agree or disagree there should be more flexibility within the Northern Ireland education system for some children to defer school starting age?**

This would mean that in the future some children can start Year 1 in primary school later than the law now allows. .

 **Do you agree or disagree that parents of the youngest children in the year born between 1 April and 1 July can request to defer starting school?**

This would means instead of starting Year 1 in primary school shortly after their fourth birthday, these children could start school following their fifth birthday.

 **Do you agree or disagree that children who defer should receive one year of government funded pre-school in the same manner as other children within the year group?**

This would mean that children who start school later will still receive one year of pre-school paid for by the Government, the same as all other children.

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

The Department of Education is keen to hear your views. You can share your thoughts in lots of ways. The fastest way is to fill out the online survey [here](#) but you can also download a questionnaire from the DE website [here](#)

This questionnaire can be completed online until 5pm on 4 January 2022.

If you prefer, you can write to us via email or post responses to:

SchoolStartingAge@education-ni.gov.uk

or

Flexible School Starting Age Team

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