

**ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUMMER-BORN CHILDREN**

Report of the Director of Children's Services

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**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This report sets out some of the implications of a proposed change to admission arrangements for summer born children

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Schools Forum is asked to note this report.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 The Government has recently announced that it intends "to amend the school admissions code further to ensure that summer-born children can be admitted to the reception class at the age of 5 if it is in line with their parents' wishes, and to ensure that those children are able to remain with that cohort as they progress through school, including through to secondary school. All children born from 1 April to 31 August are 'summer-born' for admissions purposes."
- 3.2 Given the high level profile of this issue, and the timing of the announcement at the start of 2016 application process, the county council has amended its policy regarding reception applications from summer born children to follow the government's future required approach. The 2016 primary admissions literature will include the following advice:

***Reception Entry and Summer born children***

*Legally, a child does not have to start school until the start of the term following their fifth birthday*

*Recent guidance from the Minister of State for Schools, Nick Gibb MP, has indicated that the government intends to amend the School Admissions Code to allow summer born children to be admitted to the reception class at age 5 if it is line with their parents'*

wishes. Summer born children are those born between 1 April 2012 and 31 August 2012. Currently summer born children are expected to start reception at the age of 4.

*In anticipation of this change to School Admissions Code, which will require public consultation, Hertfordshire County Council has amended its policy regarding summer born children. If your child was born between 1 April and 31 August 2012, and you do not believe they will be ready to start Reception in the 2016/17 academic year, you may instead make an application for your child to start Reception in September 2017.*

- 3.3 The Government has stated that there will be a consultation on this proposal, and we expect to respond. There will be technical and implementation issues on which we will comment, but it would seem that the main thrust of the policy is now set and we believe that it is important now to take the necessary steps best to implement it in the interests of schools, parents and children.
- 3.4 The change will not directly impact on admission and eligibility arrangements for nursery aged children. Children are eligible to access a free early education (nursery) place from the term after which they are three until the child reaches compulsory school age, the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday. This entitlement is delivered in Hertfordshire by childminders, preschools, day nurseries, independent schools, maintained schools and academies. If a parent wants to defer their child's entry into a reception class until the term after which they are five, the setting where the child is accessing their free early education entitlement will continue to receive funding for the hours a child is attending up to 15 per week, 570 hours per year. Current rules round nursery admissions will remain unchanged, and children must be admitted if they are eligible for funding and meet the relevant admission criteria.

#### 3.4.1 Implications of the policy change

This is a policy change which might prove to be very significant, as it affects c40% of each age cohort. It remains to be seen whether this change is one which parents take advantage of on an occasional basis, or whether it becomes seen as a change to when children are normally expected to enter primary schools. There are at least 5 areas of potential impact:

#### 3.4.2 Capacity planning for schools

Depending on the extent to which admissions to reception are postponed, there could be a marked drop in the requirement for reception places in September 2016. This affects directly capacity planning for that year – we may need to defer temporary expansions that would otherwise have happened. But it might also affect choices round temporary versus permanent provision for September 2016. Longer term, school numbers will not be affected.

There may also be instability in numbers from year to year, as parental choices adjust to reflect what becomes the prevailing view on whether it's a good idea to enter school later or not.

Since our capacity planning is dealing with underlying changes of a couple of percent each year, potentially this change might more than wipe out any growth that we would otherwise have expected.

### 3.4.3 Schools funding

There will be a one-off drop in schools-block DSG flowing into the county compared with what would otherwise have been the case; there may well be somewhat higher levels of surplus places in some schools and consequent pressures on schools budgets. But as things stand a summer-born child aged 5 in a nursery education setting (full time) who had deferred admission to Reception would be funded at a higher level than a child of the same age in a reception class. The aggregate effect on schools is therefore difficult to judge and may be quite variable from place to place.

There has been some concern that the change will disproportionately impact small rural primaries which may have attracted a number of summer born children whose parents thought a small-school setting better for their summer born children.

### 3.4.3 Early years funding

The changes do not affect entitlement to the free offer, but would be likely to affect take up. The changes will take place a year before the time the free early entitlement to 30 hours is likely to come into effect for working parents – which removes any financial incentive for those eligible to move their children from a nursery setting into school.

There will also be a permanent increase in demand for nursery provision, perhaps most strongly felt in schools, where we will need to consider carefully with schools the extent to which such provision on a 30 hour basis becomes generalized.

### 3.4.4 Impact on school operation and educational outcomes

The evidence that summer born children are currently disadvantaged implies that the changes will positively affect measured outcomes. For the children in question, they will, as a result of the changes, be entitled to an extra year of publicly funded education than would otherwise have been the case, in that they will be able to attend nursery education provision for longer without reducing time spent in Primary School. Autumn and spring born children are, in consequence, relatively disadvantaged for the future. Year groups will, in future, contain a wider than 1-year range of ages, and the assessment system - meeting age-related expectations - become consequentially less clear. In schools which in any case have mixed age groups, children of the same chronological age in the same class will on occasion be in different cohorts and, it would seem, be measured against different progress standards. The average age of children at all the measured attainment stages will be higher than now.

Questions are raised for schools with nursery class provision as to how they manage the integration between this and Reception – what the curriculum

is for older children in Nursery and how it converges with what would otherwise be taught in primary, whether children are taught in age bands in larger schools, how to manage wide age ranges in earlier years, how to manage older children in Primary settings.

#### 3.4.4 Admissions processes

Depending on the exact form that changes to the Admission Code take, there might be scope for parents to seek to achieve places in preferred schools by means of their choices round times of entry. This would tend to increase the unpredictability of the admissions process and the complexity of administration.

#### 3.4.5 Required research:

We are planning to undertake some research as soon as practical, to help inform our response to the consultation but also capacity planning at both Early Years and Primary school level.

This will include both survey based research to ask parents what they might have done/might do, and also monitoring of trends in parental opinion manifested in forums such as Mumsnet which may be powerful in influencing behaviors.

## **5. Contents of report**

### 5.1 Body of report

## **6. Conclusion**

### 6.1 Forum is asked to note the report