

# School Starting Age

Deferral of Primary -  
September 2022



Department of  
**Education**

[www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)



## 1. Introduction

On Monday 28th February 2022, the Northern Ireland Assembly passed the School Age Bill, which will allow the parents/guardians of younger children in the year group a choice to defer their child starting primary school by one year should they wish to do so.

This leaflet provides an overview of the arrangements for September 2022. The Department understands that this is an anxious time for some parents and we hope this guide will provide reassurance about how deferral will work in practice.

## 2. What is deferral?

Deferral means delaying starting primary school for one year from September 2022 to September 2023.

Parents/guardians would withdraw their child's application from the current primary school application process for September 2022 admission. Your child would then be due to start primary school in September 2023.

Should you choose to defer Primary 1 entry, your child will have the opportunity to apply for a place in a pre-school setting when

Stage 2 of the pre-school admissions process commences on 28 April 2022.

Your child would then (unless in very unusual circumstances such as serious illness) remain within this year group throughout their time at school.

Children who defer will transfer to post-primary school in September following their 12th birthday and complete compulsory education (Year 12) in the year they turn 17, though they may of course continue to sixth form (Year 14).

## 3. Who do these arrangements apply to?

Children born on or between **1st April 2018 and 1st July 2018**.

Any child who was born before 1st April 2018 but who was due to be born **on or after 1st April 2018** if born at term.

## 4. Do I have to defer?

No. If you wish to continue with your application for primary school in September 2022, you do not have to do anything and



your child's application will continue to be processed as normal. Notification of the outcome of your application will be available to view on the Citizen Portal on 28 April 2022 if you made your application online.

We anticipate that the majority of parents of eligible children will not choose deferral for their child.

## **5. Is deferral best for my child?**

For most children, deferral is not necessary or recommended.

However, if you have concerns about your child's development, you are strongly encouraged to speak to your GP or Health Visitor to discuss your concerns. We do not expect large numbers of children to defer and the vast majority of children born on or between 1st April 2018 and 1st July 2018 will continue to start primary school in September 2022.

In making your decision about deferral, it is important to remember that the vast majority of children regardless of their age within the year group thrive at primary school and we have excellent pre-schools and primary schools in Northern Ireland.

Primary 1 and 2, which are called the Foundation Stage, enable children to learn through well-planned, challenging play, recognising that all young children learn best when learning is interactive, practical and enjoyable.

Please also be assured that children start primary school with a whole range of abilities and at different levels of maturity. Children learn at their own pace and teachers are trained to adapt the school day and all activities and learning to meet a range of children's needs, including those who are the youngest children in the year group.

If you did not have significant concerns previously about your child starting school, it is unlikely that deferral is the best option for them.

## **6. What happens if I choose to defer?**

Your application for primary school will be withdrawn and cannot be reinstated during the current admissions process (10 January 2022 - 26 April 2022) should you fail to secure a pre-school place or change your mind regarding deferral.



Your child will not be offered a primary place for September 2022 but you will have the opportunity to apply for a pre-school place at Stage 2 of the Pre-school admissions process which commences on 28 April 2022.

You can only apply to pre-schools with funded places available, a list of these providers will be published on 28 April 2022 on the EA Website along with details on how to apply. The closing date for receipt of any new applications in Stage 2 is not later than 4.00 pm on 12 May 2022.

There is no guarantee of a funded pre-school place for 2022/23, however, the Department is conscious that children are deferring Year 1 in September 2022 did not have the opportunity to defer pre-school and we will be monitoring applications very closely.

## 7. Links to Further information

More detail on the early years of primary school are available on the CCEA website at [Foundation Stage | CCEA](#).

Further information is also available on the Department of Education website [Home | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#).