

School Starting Age

Deferral of Primary
September 2024



1. Introduction

The School Age Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 allows 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 2024. 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 2024 to September 2025.

Should you choose to defer Primary 1 entry, your child will have the opportunity to apply for a funded pre-school place in a pre-school setting for September 2024. If your child is already in a funded pre-school place for the 2023/24 academic year, while they are eligible to apply for a second year of funded pre-school provision, they cannot be prioritised for a funded pre-school education place for a second time in the pre-school admissions process. These applications will therefore only be considered at Stage 2 of the pre-school admissions process and attendance at the same pre-school setting, or any setting, for a second year of funded pre-school education cannot be guaranteed.

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 2020 and 1st July 2020**.

Any child who was born before 1st April 2020 but who was due to be born **on or after 1st April 2020** if born at term.

4. Do I have to defer?

No. If you wish to apply for a Primary 1 place for your child for September 2024 you should do so in the normal manner when the 2024/25 primary admissions process commences on Tuesday 9 January 2024.

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 EA Connect portal on 25 April 2024 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 2020 and 1st July 2020 will start primary school in September 2024.

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?

Should you decide that deferral is the best option for your child information is available on the EA website <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/admissions/deferral-of-school-starting-age>. If you have any further queries you can contact the EA Primary Admissions Team for further guidance and information on the admissions and deferral processes. EA contact details are below:

Email: primaryadmissions@eani.org.uk

Tel: 028 95985595

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 \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

If you are considering deferral, you are strongly encouraged to talk to your child's pre-school leader or nursery teacher about their progress.