

Independent Review of Primary Curriculum – recommendation 14(1) - points of entry into reception class

Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 16
November 2009

Your comments must reach us by that date.

department for
children, schools and families

THIS FORM IS NOT INTERACTIVE. If you wish to respond electronically please use the online or offline response facility available on the Department for Children, Schools and Families e-consultation website (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations>).

The information you provide in your response will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations, which allow public access to information held by the Department. This does not necessarily mean that your response can be made available to the public as there are exemptions relating to information provided in confidence and information to which the Data Protection Act 1998 applies. You may request confidentiality by ticking the box provided, but you should note that neither this, nor an automatically-generated e-mail confidentiality statement, will necessarily exclude the public right of access.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.

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If your enquiry is related to the draft Code and admissions in maintained schools, DCSF early years funding and different types of provision (including full and part time provision in private, voluntary and independent sectors) you can contact the Department for Children Schools and Families by e-mail: info@dcfs.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0870 0012345.

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the Consultation Unit on:

Telephone: 01928 794888

Fax: 01928 794 311

e-mail: consultation.unit@dcfs.gsi.gov.uk

Please select the category which best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent Governor
<input type="checkbox"/> Governor	<input type="checkbox"/> National Representative Group ^v	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Representative Group
<input type="checkbox"/> Headteacher/Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Faith Organisation:School	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)

Please Specify:

TACTYC (Training, Advancement and Co-operation in Teaching Young Children) was founded in 1978, initially to support tutors of advanced courses for teachers of young children. Members are drawn from academic, advisory and training organisations and include early years practitioners in all sectors. TACTYC represents over 400 very highly qualified and experienced educators, with particular expertise in the early years.

The organisation's aims are:

- To promote the highest quality professional development for all practitioners in early childhood education and care;
- To pursue matters of current educational concern and to act as a voice for all those who work with young children;
- To facilitate effective communication and support for early years tutors, trainers, advisers and practitioners in schools and settings;
- To further the educational well-being of all young children.

There is an increasing international dimension to TACTYC's reach, partly through *Early Years, An International Journal of Research and Development*, published three times a year by Taylor and Francis/Routledge.

1 Do you agree with the proposal that the School Admissions Code should be amended to **require** all admission authorities to enable all children to start school in the September following their fourth birthday where their parents choose this?

Yes

x No

Not Sure

Comments:

Unfortunately, given the current level of provision and quality of practice in pre-school, Foundation Stage and KS1 school settings within the UK, we cannot support this proposal at the present time. If the intention is to improve the quality of early education and the educational attainment of our young children, and build a solid foundation upon which they will achieve higher levels of attainment, then the proposal is misconceived and likely to be counterproductive.

Current international evidence related to school start dates (i.e. the start of formal schooling) does not support an earlier start strategy, with higher attainments in literacy and maths, for example, being achieved in countries where children have rich, play-based, pre-school provision from an early age, but do not commence formal schooling until the age of 6 or even 7.

Evidence related to the attainments of summer born children who, if the current proposal were enacted, would almost all start formal schooling when they were just 4, also supports this position. In the UK, a number of exhaustive studies have shown that summer born children attain at lower levels throughout their educational careers, right through to degree level, and that they are significantly more likely to be assessed as having special educational needs. In countries where the entry into formal education is at 6, this effect is less marked, and completely washes out where the school starting age is 7.

Given the current structure of educational provision in the UK, however, we recognise that replacing the early years of primary schooling with separate pre-school provision is unrealistic. However, the crucial point is not where 3-6 year olds' education takes place, but the nature of the pedagogy. For this reason, it is essential, in our view, that the current proposal should not be seen as lowering the age of compulsory schooling, but should be accompanied by serious efforts continue to ensure that provision for children up to the end of the reception year and on into Year 1 comply with the expectations of the Early Years Foundation Stage. As Rose recommends, this will mean proper provision for play-based learning and a smooth transition into Key Stage 1. Indeed, we would argue that serious consideration should be given to extending the Foundation Stage, as in Wales, or to restructuring the KS1 curriculum to include a much more significant play-based element, and a consequent reduction in the emphasis on the teaching of formal literacy and numeracy (as in the most educationally successful European countries).

Our view is, therefore, that the recommendation that all children whose parents wish it should be entitled to a full year in a reception class of a primary school will only succeed in its intention of creating the best opportunities for learning and development if steps are taken to protect the interests of the youngest children. At a recent TACTYC conference a panel presentation and discussion of reception class experiences was undertaken. It was very evident that a majority of delegates, from across England, were deeply concerned at the pedagogies and practices currently ongoing in reception classes. They spoke as parents, academics and researchers and pointed especially to widespread and very inappropriate pedagogies of practice for young children in reception classes. Several recent studies have confirmed this position and shown that current provision in the reception year is failing too many children, who are being misdiagnosed as having special educational needs due to inappropriate expectations and the downward pressures of targets, particularly in literacy. These difficulties are being experienced particularly by summer born children and boys, and the motivation of large numbers of young children is being undermined through a lack of understanding of how they learn best.

There are two further important considerations. First, staffing ratios are currently a key difference in provision between pre-school and primary school, and this is a significant contributor to young children's early progress. For the present proposal to work, staffing ratios in reception classes should match those required in the voluntary, independent and private sectors, namely 1:8. A further crucial difference in provision between pre-school settings and the early years of primary school relates to the quality of outdoor play and learning opportunities, which may be particularly significant for some boys.

To significantly improve the quality of provision in the early years of schooling, it is also essential that OFSTED and School Improvement Partners fully understand the pedagogy that underpins effective work in the early years/Foundation Stage so that they can challenge any current misunderstandings in schools.

While these changes are being introduced, in the immediate future, advice to parents making the choice as to when their children will start formal schooling should include information from international as well as UK research which shows that children benefit more from three years of high quality nursery or pre-school education, which is play-based, than from three years formal teaching up to the end of Y2. They should also be told that they are guaranteed a place in the school of their choice up to the time their child reaches statutory school starting age the term after he or she becomes 5. Their entitlement to 25 hours per week of free pre-school provision should also be made clear.

Local Authorities, schools and nurseries must also be made aware of these proposed changes, announced by the Secretary of State in November 2009. In

order to plan for any new arrangements they also need to know about plans for future funding.

References:

Adams, S., Alexander, E., Drummond, M.J & Moyles, J. (2004) Inside the Foundation Stage: recreating the reception year. ATL

Daniels, S., Shorrocks-Taylor, D. and Redfern, E. (2000) 'Can Starting Summer-born Children Earlier at Infant School Improve their National Curriculum Results?'. *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 26 (2), pp 207-220. UK: Carfax Publishing.

Martin, R.P., Foels, P., Clanton, G. & Moon, K. (2004) Season of birth is related to child retention rates, achievement, and rate of diagnosis of specific LD, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 37, 4, 3-7-17.

Miller, E. & Almon, J. (2009) Crisis in the Kindergarten: why children need to play in school. Alliance for Childhood.

Sykes, E.D.A., Bell, J.F. & Rodeiro, C.V. (2009) Birthdate Effects: a review of the literature from 1990-on. Cambridge Assessment.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report*, DfES

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply x

Here at the Department for Children, Schools and Families we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

xYes No

All DCSF public consultations are required to conform to the following criteria within the Government Code of Practice on Consultation:

Criterion 1: Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome.

Criterion 2: Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.

Criterion 3: Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.

Criterion 4: Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach.

Criterion 5: Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.

Criterion 6: Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.

Criterion 7: Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

If you have any comments on how DCSF consultations are conducted, please contact Donna Harrison, DCSF Consultation Co-ordinator, tel: 01928 794304 / email: donna.harrison@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 16 November 2009

Respond on line using the online response facility available at www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations .

Send by post to: Fair Access Division, DCSF, Floor 2 Area C, Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road, Darlington, DL3 9BG

Send by e-mail to : review.admissions@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk