

**Decision Maker:** EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Date:** Tuesday 18 March 2014

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

**Title:** SUMMER BORN CHILDREN GUIDANCE & CURRENT POSITION

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**Chief Officer:** Executive Director of Education, Care & Health Services

**Ward:** (All Wards);

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1. Reason for report

To set out the issues, context and implications of policy regarding the admission of summer born children to primary school.

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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1 That Education PDS Members note the:

- i. Current position with regards the administration of admissions for summer born children and;
- ii. Department for Education (DfE) guidance, case for change and consider the implications for Bromley of a change in the current arrangements

### Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Not Applicable Existing Policy New Policy: Further Details
  2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People
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### Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated Cost No Cost Not Applicable: Further Details
  2. Ongoing costs: Recurring Cost Non-Recurring Cost Not Applicable: Further Details
  3. Budget head/performance centre:
  4. Total current budget for this head: £
  5. Source of funding:
- 

### Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional):
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
- 

### Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement
  2. Call-in: Not Applicable
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### Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected):
- 

### Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

### 3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 Under current admissions arrangements local authorities must make provision for admitting all children in the September following their fourth birthday, although parents can defer entry until the term in which a child reaches compulsory school age (5). Admission outside of a child's age group is permissible in exceptional circumstances.
- 3.2 Campaigners for greater flexibility in the admission of summer born children to reception have presented an argument that inflexible administration of the admissions process means that many summer born children are missing a year of education or starting school too early.

#### The Admissions Code

- 3.3 Sections 2.16 and 2.17 of the Admissions Code detail the statutory guidelines with regards the admission of children below compulsory school age, deferred entry to school and admission outside of a child's usual year group:

***Admission of children below compulsory school age and deferred entry to school***

*2.16 Admission authorities **must** provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. The authority **must** make it clear in their arrangements that:*

*a) parents can request that the date their child is admitted to school is deferred until later in the academic year or until the term in which the child reaches compulsory school age, and*

*b) parents can request that their child takes up the place part-time until the child reaches compulsory school age.*

***Admission of children outside their normal age group***

*2.17 Parents of gifted and talented children, or those who have experienced problems or missed part of a year, for example due to ill health, can seek places outside their normal age group. Admission authorities **must** make decisions on the basis of the circumstances of each case, informing parents of their statutory right to appeal. This right does not apply if they are offered a place in another year group at the school. The Code (2.16) requires admission authorities to provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday.*

- 3.4 A child is not required by law to start school until they have reached compulsory school age. A child reaches compulsory school age on the prescribed day following their fifth birthday (or on his fifth birthday if it falls on a prescribed day). The prescribed days are 31 December, 31 March and 31 August. This means that a child born between 1 April and 31 August will reach compulsory school age on 31 August, that is during the summer term of the admission year (reception).
- 3.5 The Code requires admission authorities to publish that parents may request that their child attends part-time until they reach compulsory school age or that their date of admission is deferred until later in the same academic year or until the term in which the child reaches compulsory school age.

#### Government Advice

- 3.6 The Department for Education have made statements that current School Admissions Code makes it easier for parents of summer-born children to defer their child's entry. They have

stated that parents should be given greater flexibility. For instance pupils attending part time until they reach their fifth birthday or starting reception rather than Year 1, following their fifth birthday.

- 3.7 The Department for Education published non-statutory advice on the admission of summer born children in July 2013 that set out 3 key principles:
- School admission authorities are required to provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday, but flexibilities exist for children whose parents do not feel they are ready to begin school at this point.
  - School admission authorities are responsible for making the decision on which year group a child should be admitted to, but are required to make a decision based on the circumstances of the case.
  - There is no statutory barrier to children being admitted outside their normal year group.

### **The case for greater flexibility for admission of summer born children**

- 3.8 The key driver for change has been the campaign group Flexible School Admissions for Summer Born Children who are seeking greater choice for parents of summer born children.
- 3.9 The group has raised concerns about the readiness of some summer born children based on emotional and social maturity and that there should be greater parental choice about when a child starts school and in what year group.
- 3.10 They recognise that children reach readiness for school at a variety of ages and that not all summer born children are adversely affected by an early school start, but that those stand out as not being ready be allowed extra time to mature.
- 3.11 The campaign has support from other groups such as the Pre-school Learning Alliance that has stated its support for greater flexibility for parents of summer born children suggesting that the Department for Education could statutorily give parents the choice to defer entry to reception for a year enabling summer born children to go through the full education system when they are socially, emotionally and developmentally ready.

### **Current position in Bromley**

- 3.12 Currently deferred entry to reception is only considered on exception grounds and where supported by the professional evidence.
- 3.13 The decision on deferral ultimately lies with each admission authority that makes its decision on a case-by-case basis. Own admission authority schools are advised to consult with the local authority to ensure that there is fairness in decision making across the local area.
- 3.14 Although the law does not specifically prescribe the year to which a child must be admitted, there is an expectation that children will be educated within their chronological age group.
- 3.15 It is uncommon for children in Bromley to be educated outside of their age cohort. This will most usually be due to ill-health or a child having a statement of Special Education Needs (SEN) which determines deferral necessary to meet their individual needs.

- 3.16 The Early Years curriculum is designed to meet the needs of all children across the age cohort and schools and early years providers are equally expected to adhere to the required standards.

#### **4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 One of the potential impacts of any change to the present arrangements is that there would be greater uncertainty with regards pupil place planning as it would be harder to predict the when a child started schools as there would not be automatic assumption that they start with their age cohort.
- 4.2 Furthermore, holding an unoccupied place beyond the normal admission date when a school is oversubscribed, which is increasing likely as the school age population rises, could be viewed as unreasonable and/or unfair by unsuccessful applicants.
- 4.3 The extra complexities of moving away from the practice of admitting children as part of a unified age cohort also need to be considered, for instance the increased complexities in administering applications for school places at both reception and secondary transfer.
- 4.4 Any change to the school admission arrangement would need to be consulted upon in line with the Admissions Code with the earliest date for implementation September 2016.
- 4.5 The implications for a deferred child later in their life also need to be considered such as their transfer to secondary and the compulsory school leaving age.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Any change in policy could affect funding for Bromley schools as schools are funded according to the number of children on role in early October of each academic year.
- 5.2 A move away from a single age cohort entry at reception would increase the complexities of administering school admission and may require additional resources to support the processing of applications.

<b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>	<b>LEGAL &amp; PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS</b>
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	