

Kirsty Williams AC/AM  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-832  
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/01860/18

David John Rowlands AM  
Chair - Petitions committee.  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA

[government.committee.business@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:government.committee.business@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

6 August 2018

Dear David

Thank you for your letter dated 25 July asking for my opinion on the issues raised in the petition to amend the *Schools admissions code* relating to children born in the summer.

By law, children in Wales must be in school full time in the term after their fifth birthday. However, all local authorities in Wales offer places in reception classes for parents before their children reach compulsory school age in accordance with their published admission arrangements. Children are also offered free part-time nursery education the term after their third birthday if parents wish to take advantage of this.

The responsibility for admissions to community and voluntary controlled sits with local authorities; they are responsible for the vast majority of schools in Wales. Welsh Ministers do not normally intervene in individual school admissions decisions. In carrying out their statutory responsibilities in relation to school admissions, admission authorities must act in accordance with the school admissions code.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

[Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The current options for parents in Wales who wish to apply for a school place outside their children's age group is to defer entry or make a request to the authority for admission outside the normal year group.

Deferred entry is where a parent can ask for their children to go to school part-time or put off starting school until later in the school year. A child will have to go to school before the end of the summer term or they will lose their place in the class and parents will have to reapply for a place. If a parent does not take up the place offered in the same school year, the child would not normally join the next reception class but would join the class in which they were originally offered a place. The parent would not be able to defer entry beyond the beginning of the term after the child's fifth birthday, nor beyond the school year in which the original application was accepted.

While it would not normally be appropriate for a child to be placed in a year group that is not concurrent with their chronological age, admission authorities should consider these requests carefully and make decisions on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in consultation with the parents and the school, and specifically in relation to what is most beneficial to the child. Due regard should also be given to the Educational Psychologist's report where available, and clear reasons ascertainable for such a decision to be made. The Welsh Government expects the admission authority to apply this requirement conscientiously.

The petition mentions other administrations within the UK, but it is difficult to compare like for like because the education systems provide for different age ranges and children will begin more formal elements of education at different stages of child development.

So far, I am not convinced on the basis of their claims in respect of the Foundation phase. The Foundation phase in Wales offers a unique educational experience for our children of 3 to 7 years. It is an innovative framework designed to meet the diverse needs of each individual child, regardless of their stage of development. It is intended that this framework for our youngest learners is appropriate to their stage of learning rather than focusing solely on age-related outcomes to be achieved.

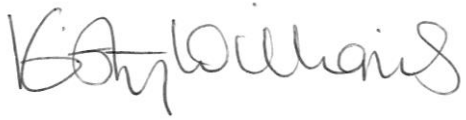
One of the key principles of the Foundation Phase is that children move on to the next stages of their learning when they are developmentally ready and at their own pace. This type of provision can assist all children who enter school with a wide range of maturity and developmental needs, over a longer period before they enter the more formal stage of schooling in year 3 (key stage 2). The Foundation Phase Profile is an assessment framework which supports the identification of children's developmental and learning needs – including personal and social development. This supports practitioners in providing a curriculum that is appropriate to each child's stage of development.

I recognise that the provision in England and Scotland are different, but their education systems for early years are different as well. It does not necessarily mean that Wales should follow the same provision. I want to be assured that they understand Welsh context in full, including the approach to the early years, the curriculum and accountability in reaching its conclusions. I have a sincere interest in the evidence they have to support their claims.

I have noted the three points in the petition they have asked to be considered in relation to amending the *School admissions code* for children born in the summer. The Schools admissions code will be reviewed later this year. In conducting the review I can assure you that consideration will be given to the question of strengthening the Code in relation to children who are born in the summer. Any changes to the code will be subject to full consultation where everyone interested can express their views on any aspect of the code.

I trust that this information will be useful to you as you consider the petition.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

**Kirsty Williams AC/AM**

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