

Policy for the admission of children starting primary school outside of their normal age group



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Introduction

This policy sets out how Sefton Local Authority, and the individual admission authorities of all Sefton schools, will manage requests from parents/carers for a child to start primary school outside of their chronological age group (a child's normal year group based on their date of birth). This policy also reflects the requirements of the School Admissions Code 2021, paragraphs 2.18 – 2.20. There is no statutory barrier to a child being admitted outside of their normal age group. Whilst parents/carers do not have the right to insist that their child is admitted to a particular age group, they may make a **request** for this to happen. For example, if a child is gifted or talented, has special educational needs, a developmental delay or has experienced ill health.

In addition in April 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) published non-statutory guidance for all admission authorities for summer born children (those born on or between 1st April and 31st August) whose parent/carer may **choose** to send their child to school in the **September following their fifth birthday**. In doing so the parent/carer may also request that the child is admitted outside of their normal age group – to Reception rather than into Year 1. The DfE have published specific guidance for parents/carers of summer born children which you can view using the link or on the gov.uk website and search for '[summer born children](#)' .

IMPORTANT – Parents/carers who do not live in Sefton but wish to name a Sefton school as a preference, **must** submit any request for admission outside of normal age group to their **home local authority**. The home local authority should forward their request to Sefton, as part of the Inter Authority Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme.

Children educated outside of their normal year group and school leaving age

Before making a request parents/carers should consider the following:

A child ceases to be of statutory school age on the last Friday of June in the school year in which they become 16 years of age. If a child is educated outside of the normal age group (i.e. is in year 10 when this date is reached) the child will no longer be of compulsory school age during the school year in which most children will be taking their GCSE examinations. In addition all children are now required to continue in education, training or employment until they reach their 18th birthday. This could potentially mean that a child could legally leave school once the statutory leaving age is attained without completing year 11 or sitting their GCSEs.

Compulsory School Age

In Sefton, all schools provide for the admission of children in the September following their fourth birthday. This is the ordinary school starting age, and most parents/carers are happy for their child to start school at this point. By law, a child is not required to start full time education until the child has reached compulsory school age.

Most children will thrive if they are admitted into reception class aged 4. However, some parents/carers may be concerned that their child is not ready for school at that age. Sefton encourages all parents/carers who may be considering delaying their child's admission until they reach compulsory school age, to visit the schools they wish to apply for. The school can explain the provision on offer in reception class and how it is tailored to meet the needs of the youngest children, and any other support that may be available for their child.

A child **MUST** start full time education once they reach compulsory school age. This is on either 31 December, 31 March or 31 August following their **fifth** birthday, whichever comes first. If a child's birthday is on one of those dates the child reaches compulsory school age on that date. For example:

- If a child reaches compulsory school age on or by **31 December**, they must start full-time education at the beginning of the Spring Term in **January**.
- If a child reaches compulsory school age on or by **31 March**, they must start full-time education at the beginning of the Summer Term in **April**.
- If a child reaches compulsory school age on or by **31 August**, they must start full-time education at the beginning of the Autumn Term in **September**.

Defer starting in reception class until later in the school year

For children who are below compulsory school age, once a school place has been offered as part of the main primary admissions round, parents/carers may if they wish, agree with **the school** a pattern of part time attendance or a deferred start until later in the school year. **These arrangements MUST be discussed and agreed with the headteacher of the school concerned.** Parents/carers **must** make an application for a school place in the usual way, and within the published timescales. This will ensure that a school place is allocated and held for the child until they start school. A child whose start date is deferred, **must** start school **no later than the beginning of the summer term** of the school year for which the offer of the school place was made.* In these cases the child would still move up to Year 1 with their normal age group in the following September. *As stated in the School Admissions Code 2021 para 2.17(b).

It is expected that all children will start primary school in the school year that they turn 5. The Government has however set out specific arrangements for 'summer born children' - children born from 1 April to 31 August. However, this **does NOT apply to children with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP)**. If a summer born child has an EHCP and a parent would like them to be admitted into school at age 5 and start in reception, this must be discussed with the designated Local Authority SEN Team as part of the EHCP process. The school admissions team is not involved in the process of allocating a school place to children who have an EHCP.

Summer Born Children - children with dates of birth on/between 1 April and 31 August

Parents/carers of 'summer born children' can if they wish, make a decision that their child will not start school until the September **after their fifth birthday**, a full year after they could have first started school. The DfE supports the rights of parents/carers to make this decision but does not believe it should become the norm for summer born children to begin reception at age 5. A request for admission outside of the normal age group is separate from an application for a school place. Parents/carers **must** still make an application for a school place in their child's normal age group, at the usual time.

Parents/carers of a summer born child should submit a request for '**admission outside the normal age group**' at the same time as making their application for a school place in their child's normal age group. A form to request admission outside the normal age group and further advice is available from the School Admissions Team or on the Sefton website at:

www.sefton.gov.uk/schooladmissions

In making such a request a parent is asking an admission authority to decide on which age group the child should be admitted into when they do start school, (in the September after their fifth birthday) i.e.: Reception or Year 1. The government believes that it is rarely in a child's best interest to miss a year of their education, however the decision on which year group can best meet the child's needs is one that an admission authority must make, before it can offer a place in that age group. The government recommends that it should be rare for an authority to refuse a parental request.

Other children (who are not summer born) & admission outside of their normal age group

Current guidance from the DfE states that "the government would agree that, in general, children should be educated in their normal age group, with the curriculum differentiated as appropriate. **Children should only be educated outside of their normal age group in very limited circumstances.**" Parents do not have the right to insist that their child is admitted to a particular age group, but they may make a **request** for this to happen.

Where a parent/carer is thinking about delaying their child's admission to reception class, perhaps because the child may have a developmental/learning difficulty or disability, the parent/carer should read the guidance published on the Sefton council website and talk to the schools they wish to apply for. This should include the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and any other professional(s) who may be involved with their child. This will allow parents/carers the opportunity to discuss the schools approach in helping children with special educational needs or disabilities.

If a child has an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP), delaying a school start **must** be discussed with the Local Authority SEN Team as part of the EHCP process.

In some cases parents/carers may make a request for delayed entry as their child is undergoing an assessment for an EHCP. Evidence that this is ongoing may be sufficient to make a decision on the request. The EHCP does not need to be finalised before making a request for admission outside of the normal age group.

Parents/Carers must make an application for **admission outside the normal age group** and also apply for a primary school place in the main admission round at the same time and within the published time scales. If a parent/carer has evidence from professionals involved with their child's care or treatment, it would be helpful for this to be submitted as part of the request to admit outside of the normal age group. For example this could include evidence from:

- A speech and language therapist
- A paediatrician
- An Occupational Therapist.
- A Social Worker
- The child's current nursery or childminder - around the child's progress within the early years setting and their social and emotional development.

It is not a requirement that parent/carers supply evidence if they do not have it. However it would be helpful to aid in decision making if evidence was available. Requests will still be considered even if there is no professional evidence available. The Local Authority's Panel will seek advice and opinions from Sefton's Special Educational Needs Inclusion Service (SENIS) - Early Years Team, before making a decision.

Decision making panel

A panel of Sefton Local Authority Officers will consider requests for a child to be admitted outside of their age group, based on individual circumstances and what is considered to be in each child's best interests, This will include taking into account:

- The parents/carers views.
- Information about the child's academic, social and emotional development. This will involve requesting information from the early years setting the child is currently attending.
- Any professional involvement with the child including any medical professional where relevant.
- Whether they may naturally have been in a lower age group if it were not for being born prematurely.
- The potential impact on a child of being admitted into their normal age group and missing a year of their education as a consequence.

- The opinion of the Headteacher of the school(s) named as a preference on the request form. If a request is received late (after national offer day), the opinion of the Headteacher of the school that has already been offered to the child.
- If the child has already been educated outside of the normal age group and is transferring to a new school.

In Sefton we have a set up a panel of professionals who will consider each request, including any of the information shown above. Parents/carers will be required as part of the request form, to give consent for the School Admissions Team to contact the child's nursery for a report on their child's progress. The panel will consist of professionals that may include:

- Early Years Service Manager.
- Early Years SEND Team Leader.
- Principal Admissions Officer.
- Inclusion Co-ordinator.
- Inclusion Consultant.

Other professionals may be invited to give advice when appropriate.

It is not necessary for parents/carers to attend the panel meeting as the parents/carers views will automatically be taken into account. The panel will aim to meet once per month or more often if required, depending on the number of requests received.

IMPORTANT: If a parent/carer moves into the Sefton area from elsewhere and a request for the child to be admitted outside of normal age group has been previously agreed by a different admission authority, **there is no requirement for Sefton to honour that decision.** You will need to reapply to Sefton Local Authority by making a fresh request for admission outside of normal age group for Sefton schools.

[If the request to admit outside of normal age group is agreed by the panel](#)

If the panel agrees to the request the Admissions Team will withdraw the admissions application made for the normal year group. Parents/carers **must** then make an application for a school place as part of the next years primary admissions round. Agreeing to a parents/carers request to admit a child outside of their age group **does not guarantee a place at any school named as a preference**, nor does it give any additional priority for the child to be offered a place next year. That application will be considered as a new application, in accordance with the schools admission criteria at that time, and along with all other requests for pupils to join reception class for that year.

[If the request to admit outside of normal age group is refused by the panel](#)

Admission authorities are not required to automatically agree for a child to be placed outside of their normal age group and may decide that a school place can only be offered in the normal age group. Should the panel decide to refuse a request, parents/carers will receive a clear explanation as to why the panel believes it is in the child's best interest to be admitted into their normal age group, even though this could mean that the child will miss a year of their education. In these circumstances the parent will need to decide between two options:

- 1) Accept the offer of a place in reception class in the child's normal age group - the September after the child turns 4 - with the option of deferring until later in the year or part time attendance.
Or
 - 2) Refuse the offer of a place in reception class and subsequently make an In Year application for admission into Year 1 in the September following the child's fifth birthday.
- Information about applying for an In Year admission is available on the Sefton council website.

Parents/carers **do not have a right to an appeal** if they have been offered a place and it is not in their preferred year group. They may, however, make a complaint using the local authority complaints procedure, details of which are also available on the Sefton council website.

Once a child has been admitted to a school it is for the Headteacher to decide how best to educate them. A child who is admitted outside of their normal age group will usually remain outside of their age group for all years of their schooling. Any decision to move a child to a different age group should be based on sound educational reasons and be made by the Headteacher in consultation with parents/carers.

Early education funding if a child delays starting school

All 3- to 4-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours per week free childcare for 38 weeks of the year. Some families with eligible working parents/carers may be eligible for 30 hours free childcare. When a parent chooses to delay or defer their child's admission to school, the child remains entitled to receive early years funding only until they reach compulsory school age. Any additional hours will need to be funded privately by parents/carers. Once a child starts attending school in reception, even if part time attendance has been agreed, any early years funding ceases as the school place is then fully funded.

If a school preference is refused when the school offer is made

If a parent/carer is not offered a place at one of their preferred schools during the primary admissions round, they will be advised of their right to appeal against that decision. Delaying a child starting school should **NOT** be used as a method to re-apply for a primary school place of their choice in 12 months' time. Each year the number of applications and how many children are offered a place under each individual admission criterion varies. There is absolutely no guarantee that a child will stand any greater chance of being admitted to a school of their choice next year.

Children who are younger than the ordinary school starting age

It would be **extremely rare** for an admission authority to **agree that a child can be admitted into school early**. i.e. before they have reached the ordinary school starting age (in the September following their fourth birthday). However in line with government guidance, consideration will still be given if a parent/carer requests this. Parents/carers are advised to discuss a request carefully with the school(s) they are considering as the school is best placed to advise parents/carers on the benefits or negatives of making such an important decision about their child's education.

A request will be considered on an individual basis, taking into account the parents/carers view, the information available and the view of the Headteacher of any school named as a preference. This is why it is really **important to discuss this matter with a Headteacher(s) before making a request** to the local authority.

Parents/carers can make a request on the same basis as that set out previously within this policy, with the exception that they **cannot apply for a primary school place** within the normal admissions round, until a decision has been reached by Sefton's Out of Normal Age Group Panel. Parents/carers should supply supporting evidence with such a request to demonstrate how it would be in their child's best interest to start school outside of their normal age group and before they have reached the usual school starting age.

Further information and contact details

Sefton School Admissions Team www.sefton.gov.uk/schooladmissions

Email: admissions@sefton.gov.uk Telephone: 0151 934 3590

Special Educational Needs & Inclusion Service (Early Years Team)

www.seftondirectory.co.uk/localoffer

Email: SENIS@sefton.gov.uk Telephone: 0151 934 2347

Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Service

(SENDIASS) are a free, confidential and impartial service offering information, advice and support to parents and carers of children and young people with SEND. In Sefton this service is delivered by the national charity – **KIDS**. They can provide information and advice on all matters relating to SEND. Contact SENDIASS by email: seftonsendiass@kids.org.uk or telephone: 0151 433 7442 or online at: <https://www.kids.org.uk/sendias-home>.

Contact details for all schools within Sefton are available on the Sefton website using the '[Find a School](#)' link. Contact the school directly to discuss any concerns about your child starting school or if relevant, also speak to the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) at the school.

The information contained within this policy is correct at the time of publishing in January 2025.

END OF POLICY DOCUMENT

