

## Getting the Best Start Towards Positive Destinations

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### Education, Children and Families Committee

15 November 2011

#### **Purpose of report**

- 1 This report describes steps to ensure pupils benefit from a complete school Education prior to the statutory school leaving age. It sets out steps to ensure children can benefit from the 3-18 curriculum taking into account the entitlement to a preschool education, the optimum timing of entry to primary school and the opportunity to achieve national qualifications by the end of S4 and to progress to positive destinations.
- 2 The report takes into account historical patterns of school entry, research into the impact of deferred entry to school education against the background of innovations arising from a curriculum for excellence. It sets out an approach to inform parents decisions to achieve the best outcome for children and allow the targeting of resources to children with additional support needs.
- 3 It will outline the impact of this work and forward plans for this session.

#### **Background**

- 4 All children for whom the education authority are responsible are entitled to up to 2 years pre-school education and a school education up to the statutory school leaving age. In addition young people are encouraged to continue in school education for up to two additional years where they can benefit from the school education available at S5 and S6.
- 5 Over recent years there have been a number of important legislative changes that have extended learner's entitlements and the obligations on the authority. Alongside these policy developments have extended opportunities and the capacity within the curriculum to ensure that needs can be met appropriately at each age and stage.
- 6 The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act (2000) introduced changes that led to the introduction of an entitlement to up to 2 years non compulsory half time pre-school education for every 3 and 4 year old whose parents wish it. The same Act defines school education as one, which "is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential."

7 The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 places duties on local authorities, and other agencies, to provide additional support where needed to enable any child or young person to benefit from education. It defines additional support as “*provision (whether or not educational provision) which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children or, as the case may be, young persons of the same age in schools (other than special schools) under the management of the education authority*” (S1 (3)(a)). This definition applies to a prescribed pre-school child, a child of school age or a young person.

8 These changes created the environment for a new approach to thinking about school education reflected in the development of a curriculum for excellence. Unlike previous models a curriculum for excellence offers a continuous progression in learning from 3 to 18 within a single framework that is responsive to individual needs. The early level within curriculum for excellence begins for children aged 3 and continues through a period of transition to the end of primary one. At all stages, learners of all aptitudes and abilities should experience an appropriate level of education, to enable each individual to achieve his or her potential.

#### **Transition from pre school to Primary**

9 A child’s transition from Nursery into Primary 1 within the early level should be planned to ensure a smooth progression through the curriculum. The strengths and next steps for each child should be identified and shared with the primary school. Where a child requires additional or different provision to progress through the early level they will receive appropriate additional support to progress alongside their peers. School readiness should be seen as the school ready for the child.

10 Transition arrangements from pre-school to primary one take place across the city in a variety of ways. All schools try to ensure that there are good links in place with local nurseries and visits take place between establishments for children and parents. Transition information capturing the strengths and development needs of individual pupils has been improved to make information more accessible.

#### **Active learning approaches in Primary 1**

11 There is a greater awareness and importance placed on active learning approaches in primary one classes. Training has taken place with P1 teachers to ensure that methodology in the teaching of reading is in line with best practice. Parents are encouraged to visit classrooms in primary one through a range of opportunities such as soft start and shared finishes. Where possible, nursery staff are used in the first few days in primary one classes to provide additional support. Class sizes in primary one are smaller, improving teacher pupil ratios.

12 In a similar way, the senior phase of the curriculum is geared to ensure that learners can achieve national qualifications by the time they reach statutory school leaving age and are geared to make a positive progression into S5 and S6, college or other means of study appropriate to their needs and aspirations.

- 13 Through a process of self-evaluation it had become apparent that for historical and other reasons, the way in which decisions were made about progression from Nursery to Primary school in Edinburgh had not kept pace with these important developments. In light of this a process of research and review was undertaken which identified that the critical factor lay in beliefs, practices and decisions that led to avoidable deferral of entry to primary school for a significant minority of children in Edinburgh.

### **Main report**

- 14 If a child is not yet aged 5 at the start of a school session their parent has the legal right to delay their child's entry into primary school until the following session after they have turned 5.
- 15 If a child's birthday is between the start of January and the end of February it is the duty of the Council to fund an additional year in nursery if this is requested by the parent. If a child's birthday is between mid August (the start of a school session) and the end of December funding for an additional year in nursery is provided at the discretion of the authority.
- 16 Edinburgh has had the highest number of children experiencing discretionary deferred entry in Scotland. The figures for Edinburgh are three times higher than authorities of a similar size.
- 17 Before initiating any change it was important to establish whether there were any advantages in the unusually high level of deferrals in Edinburgh so we reviewed the international research evidence base.
- 18 The Psychological Services found that North American research shows that children who have their school entry delayed are more likely to leave education without achieving formal qualifications. UK research shows children who are the oldest in a cohort may initially make quicker progress in their attainments when they start school but this difference is no longer evident three years into school (a summary of the key findings of the research are included as appendix 1).
- 19 Delaying school entry has resource implications. If the Council approves an additional year there is a cost. In addition it can reduce the likelihood that new parents will be able to access the nursery closest to their home, At the same time valuable early resources tied up in this way restricts the development of other provision in early years such as 0-3's and children in need.
- 20 In 2009 a working group was created to review and revise the current deferral procedures and publicity material. Nurseries were asked to submit an action plan showing how children with mid August to December birthdays had been supported and what support they would plan to offer if funding for an additional year was granted. An appeals process was also put in place. This made little impact on the overall figures. It was evident that a more active approach to inform and engage parents and practitioners was required.
- 21 In 2010-2011 deferral briefings were held in the five neighbourhoods. Research findings were shared at these events and discussions with staff facilitated. Information was also shared with chairs of parent councils, health visitors and social workers. There was a 50% reduction in applications for delayed entry to school for children with mid August to December birthdays in Spring 2011 the numbers applying for a discretionary deferral fell from 214 in 2010 to 109.

- 22 The reduction in the number of deferrals in 2010/11 has started to release resources to allow development and support work to take place in early years. Plans are developing to enhance outreach support, in the form of early years hubs, to parents and children from pre birth to three.

### **Next Steps**

- 23 This session follow up briefings are being held with staff and parents in areas of Edinburgh where the deferral rate has been particularly high. Guidance is being provided for professionals and parents when considering the possibility of a delayed school entry.
- 24 Information will be requested from centres to ensure that where a deferral is granted a plan is in place to provide for a child's additional support needs.
- 25 A sample of children who have and have not experienced delayed entry into primary one will be followed up.
- 26 We are continuing to raise awareness of the more active and flexible curriculum in primary one with the implementation of a curriculum for excellence and of effective practice in planning transitions for children from nursery into school.

### **Financial Implications**

- 27 This initiative enables more efficient use of existing resources. It brings Edinburgh in line with the rest of Scotland by maintaining the selective use of deferrals in exceptional circumstances whilst ensuring that all children can receive their full entitlement of pre-school education. In addition it allows the redirection of resources to priority needs and reduces the risk of young people reaching statutory school leaving age before fully completing their school education.

### **Equalities Impact**

- 28 See above, giving some children additional time in pre-school can impact on other children being able to access their full entitlement in their local area. This proposal is therefore also about equity of access.

### **Environmental Impact**

- 29 Nil.

### **Recommendations**

- 30 Committee is recommended to:
- 1) Commend the research and implementation programme underpinning this initiative;
  - 2) Agree that resources released through greater efficiencies arising from the reduction in deferrals be reinvested early years services to support improved outcomes for children in line with the authority's priorities.

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Appendices      1. Summary of main points from research

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Wards affected      All

Single Outcome  
Agreement

Background  
Papers

**Primary Deferrals-key points from research**

- The way that our school system is set up means there's up to 11 months variation in children's age in a typical class and this variation increases where delaying school entry is common. This can affect teacher's expectations of children and may lead to younger children appearing to have additional support needs when this is in fact not the case.
- Initially children who are relatively older in a year group may make more rapid progress than their peers with respect to attainment. However most research studies find that this variation reduces and is no longer evident three years into school.
- Children's experiences at home and their socio economic and ethnic background have 13 times more impact on their progress in school than their age when they start school.
- Longitudinal follow up studies in the USA find that delaying the school entry of children with additional support needs does not offer them significant benefits in the longer term.
- Children who have their school entry delayed will reach the school leaving age of 16 before completing their education. Research studies find that these children tend to drop out of secondary education earlier without achieving qualifications.
- Research studies find there is a higher rate of social emotional and behavioural difficulties at secondary level amongst children who have had their school entry delayed.
- Research shows that parents and education staff who support delaying school entry tend to hold a 'maturational' model of school readiness. This model argues what is required to help children develop new skills and learn and be ready for school is simply more time. In preparing children to make the transition to school an interactionist model of readiness, which looks at what supports need to be put in place to enable a child to progress, is a more constructive perspective to take.