

Accelerated Admission to School Early entry to Reception

This information sheet offers advice and guidance to parents who are considering making a request for a school place in Reception a year ahead of that indicated by their child's date of birth and sets out Cambridgeshire's policy and procedure for responding to such a request.

In general the policy of Cambridgeshire County Council is not to accelerate pupils into Reception a year early. However, in accordance with the *Schools Admissions Code* all requests will be considered on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child taking account of the child's educational and social development. Decisions will be based on a judgement of what is best for the child both now and in the long-term. Possible immediate gains need to be weighed against a range of issues including those related to school leaving age and loss of peer group.

Educational attainments alone would not be strong enough reason for accelerating a child's entry into Reception. A child accelerated into school will remain an underage pupil throughout the whole of their education and will need to demonstrate the qualities of character, stability, application and tenacity necessary to carry them through school. Consideration must be given to the child's age, physical and emotional development, and social maturity as well as their academic ability.

Who is acceleration for?

The Local Authority (LA) firmly believes that only exceptionally gifted children should start school early. It is only such children who have the potential to thrive socially and educationally throughout the whole of their full-time education.

The majority of children, including those who are deemed gifted or talented and those born early in a school year (1st September to 31st August), are best placed within the year group indicated by their date of birth. Acceleration should only be considered when both parents and professionals agree that the needs of the child cannot be met within his or her year group.

Is my child exceptional?

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) describes giftedness as 'a blend of intelligence, personal characteristics and interpersonal skills'. Identification of giftedness is not a simple matter, but the NAGC would ask you to consider whether your child:

- has a wide vocabulary and talked early;
- asks lots of questions and learns more quickly than others;
- has a very retentive memory;



- is extremely curious and can concentrate for long periods on subjects of interest;
- has a wide general knowledge and interest in the world;
- enjoys problem-solving, often missing out the intermediate stages in an argument and making original connections;
- has an unusual and vivid imagination;
- could read from an early age;
- shows strong feelings and opinions and has an odd sense of humour;
- sets high standards and is a perfectionist;
- loses interest when asked to do more of the same.

Would acceleration be right for my child?

Sometimes a child will be gifted in a particular area, but for acceleration to be the appropriate course of action, the child should be exceptional in most or all areas. The LA will require evidence of this to ensure that the right decision is made for the child.

Both the parents and the LA must consider carefully all of the potential advantages and disadvantages that acceleration could bring for the child. The acceleration of pupils has always been contentious due to the fact that the advantages are very much balanced, and some would feel outweighed, by the disadvantages. Some of these advantages and disadvantages are listed here.

Early admission to Reception

The advantages of early admission for exceptional pupils are:

- their thought processes are more in line with older pupils and their level of understanding means that they can be better challenged and stimulated;
- pupils can have access to more appropriate resources and materials to match their levels of attainment;
- their social development may be enhanced by contact with older pupils whose own social development is at a similar level.

The disadvantages of early admission are:

- such a strategy is only appropriate for pupils who exhibit exceptional or very high ability and are therefore able to cope with all the activities and work usually provided to an older year group;
- the social development of accelerated pupils may not match their academic ability and exceptional ability in other areas. Although they may cope well with the new learning opportunities offered, they may not be able to interact socially with the older pupils;

- there is no guarantee that the pupil's rate of development will continue to be exceptional for their age as children can develop at varying rates through early childhood;
- if the school feels in the future that acceleration is no longer appropriate, the pupil may be returned to their age-appropriate year group. This may be difficult for the pupil in having to make new friends and repeat a year at school;
- at the end of their secondary education the child will be too young to leave school along with their class group or there may be difficulties with entrance to or funding for a desired form of higher education.

Making an application for early entry to Reception

Please bear in mind that very few children are admitted early to Reception but if you are thinking of making a request for accelerated entry to Reception you should discuss this with your child's pre-school provider, future headteacher and any other professionals involved, as soon as possible. Then you will need to submit your formal request by January, at the latest, in the academic year when your child has his/her 3rd birthday

If you decide you wish formally to pursue a request for early entry you will need to provide as much information and detail as possible explaining why you think that accelerated admission is the best course of action for your child. As a minimum you will need to provide:

- information regarding how your child is performing in the 7 areas of learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage (this will be available from your child's early years setting);
- a covering letter explaining your reasons for your request ;
- anything else which you feel is relevant.

The LA will, as required under the School Admissions Code, seek the views of the headteacher.

Your formal request for early entry should be sent to:

The Admissions Team, Box OCT 1213, Shire Hall, Castle Hill, Cambridge CB3 0AP

Who will make the decision?

Applications for accelerated entry into a community or voluntary controlled school are considered by an officer panel, comprising at least three of the following: a senior educational psychologist, an early years specialist, a general adviser for the primary phase and a primary school headteacher.

The LA, through its nominated officer panel, will look at all aspects of your child's case e.g. social/emotional maturity, as well as his/her educational progress. In particular the panel will be looking for evidence that your child:

- has met all the early learning goals i.e. has exceeded the expectations of the Early Years Foundation Stage;
- will be able to maintain his/her social and academic position in the accelerated year group; and
- will be physically able to cope with the demands of full-time schooling a year early.

You can expect a decision, within a working month of submitting your request and supporting information.

Applications for accelerated entry into a voluntary aided or foundation school or an Academy are usually considered by the school's governing body, except where they have opted to use the LA's panel.

Further information and contacts

If you would like to discuss any of the issues surrounding accelerated transfer to secondary school, please contact the lead officer for accelerations (0-19 Places Planning & School Organisation Service) on 01223 699779.

A copy of the admissions booklet for parents, can be requested from the Admissions Team on 0345 045 1370 or is available on line at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/admissions

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Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)
1c Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London N5 2DQ
020 7704 3370
www.ace-ed.org.uk

National Association for Able Children in Education
NACE National Office, P.O. Box 242, Arnolds Way, Oxford, OX2 9F, Tel: 01865 861879, www.nace.co.uk

The National Association for Gifted Children.
Suite 14, Challenge House, Sherwood Drive, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, MK3 6DP,
Tel: 0845 450 0221, www.nagc.org

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