



## Protocol on Accelerations and Deferrals Amended 2017

### Background

The Accelerations and Deferrals Officer Panel was set up in July 2004 in order to create a forum in which formal requests for accelerated or delayed entry to Reception and delayed or accelerated transfer to secondary school could be fully considered. In keeping with the spirit of the School Admissions Code the Local Authority (LA) has always considered these requests carefully and made decisions on the basis of the individual circumstances of each case.

In general, the policy in Cambridgeshire is not to delay or accelerate entry into Reception, through primary or transfer to secondary phase. However, paragraph 2.17 of the revised School Admissions Code of December 2014, makes it clear that: *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 and in the best interests of the child concerned. Parents have a statutory right to appeal against the refusal of a place at a school for which they have applied. This right does not apply if they are offered a place at the school but it is not in their preferred age group.*

Cambridgeshire's policy, which is compliant, with the School Admissions Code is set out in information leaflets which are available to parents upon request. The leaflets on early entry to Reception and early transfer to secondary phase were first published as appendices to the Authority's Gifted and Talented Strategy, which was launched in November 2005. A fifth leaflet sets out information for parents moving into Cambridgeshire mid-year. The leaflets are appendices to this protocol and should be read in conjunction with it.

If a school receives any requests for deferred or accelerated entry to Reception the headteacher should make parents aware that the general policy in Cambridgeshire is that pupils should enter primary school in the correct chronological year for their date of birth. Any parental request should be formally acknowledged and replied to by the headteacher and recorded on the child's school file. The headteacher should explain to the parent the process and refer them to the Local Authority.

If the child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or is the subject of a Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP), or is undergoing statutory assessment of special educational needs, the request should be directed to the relevant Statutory Assessment Team (SAT) Casework Officer.

All other enquiries or requests should be directed to the Lead Officer (c/o Admissions Team/0-19 Place Planning & Organisation Service) who will be happy to explain the policy and issues to the parents directly.

## Composition and role of the Panel

Depending on the age of the child, the Panel usually comprises at least 3 of the following:

- an Adviser 11-19 (Secondary/Special);
- a senior Educational Psychologist;
- an Adviser 3-11 (Primary)
- an Early Years Adviser
- A headteacher nominated by the Cambridgeshire Primary Headteachers group (CPH). This usually, but not always, includes the out-going chair of CPH who then serves on the panel for 2 years.

An Officer from the 0-19 Place Planning & Organisation Service co-ordinates the work of the Panel.

The Panel will consider all the information available, taking into account all aspects of the pupil's social, emotional, academic development/progress in order to come to a decision that is in his/her best long-term interests.

The Panel undertakes to:

- resolve cases in a fair and consistent manner, taking into account the impact any decision will have on the pupil, parents/carers and the school;
- take into account the views of the headteacher(s) of the school concerned in each case (sought via the Education Officer);
- reach a decision for the parent and school within a month (excluding school holidays) of receiving the written request and supporting evidence.

Panel members are aware of and share, relevant academic research e.g. in relation to the impact of month of birth on outcomes.

### Split panel decisions

In the event that the panel is unable to reach a majority view, the relevant Head of Service (or a member of the team nominated by that post-holder not involved with the case to date), will review the evidence. Where necessary, the LO will seek further information including a specialist teacher report where initial evidence did not include this, in order for the relevant Head of Service to make a final decision. If the Head of Service decides it is necessary s/he may arrange to see the child in person.

### Review of a panel decision challenged by parents

If parents challenge the decision of the panel, the Head of Service for the relevant phase, will review the evidence and the decision. If the Head of Service decides it is necessary s/he may arrange to meet the parents and child and speak to any relevant professionals involved in the child's care. His/her decision will be the final decision of the LA and will be put in writing to the parents accordingly.

## Section 1 Acceleration

When approached by parents enquiring about acceleration, officers and headteachers might like to consider and share the following points with them:

- Cambridgeshire has a well established policy of admitting children to Reception in the September after their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday;

- there are well-recognised long-term educational and social advantages for children who are older in their chronological cohort;
- with effect from September 2010 there has been universal entitlement to 15 hours weekly (38 weeks per year) pre-school provision for children the term after their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday and from 2017 extended entitlement to 30 hours weekly for working families who meet the criteria;
- the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum was designed to support the needs of the individual child whatever the setting;
- schools and settings have a responsibility to provide appropriately extending work for gifted and talented children, and if this is not happening parents should raise their concerns, invoking the school complaints procedure if necessary;
- increased age of participation, effective from 2013, requiring all pupils to remain in education or in employment with training up to the age of 18.

Attached to this protocol is an Appendix entitled *What can parents expect from schools?* It has been devised as an information/prompt sheet for parents who enquire about acceleration, to support them in their dealings with their child's school to ensure that the school is fulfilling its role with regard to able, gifted and talented pupils.

The following three sections set out the process to be followed if parents wish formally to pursue acceleration for their child.

## **A. Process for requesting acceleration into primary school**

**Step 1:** The onus is on the applicant to submit evidence which must include as a minimum:

- a report from the pre-school setting about the child's current level of functioning i.e. evidence of the child's attainments in the 7 areas of learning and development in the EYFS and ;
- information about the child's social functioning within the peer group.

In particular, the panel will be looking for evidence that the child:

- has met all the early learning goals, i.e. has exceeded the expectations of the EYFS;
- will be able to maintain their 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.

If there is no evidence from the current or potential headteacher giving their views on the request, the LO will seek it at this stage.

**Step 2:** The LO will circulate the case papers to those panel members appropriate to the phase and type of referral, highlighting in a covering memo the issues pertinent to the case.

**Step 3:** The panel members have 15 working days to respond in writing to the LO giving their comments upon the application and the reasons for their recommendation to approve or refuse the application for acceleration.

**Step 4:** The LO synthesises the views of the Panel Members and issues a decision letter to the parent. Where the decision is to refuse the application the LO sets out the reasons in the letter. This is copied to the headteacher where applicable. The panel members are also informed of the decision.

## **B. Mid-phase acceleration**

If a headteacher, in response to a parental request, takes the professional view that a pupil in mid-primary phase, would benefit from working with an older year group and acts upon this s/he should:

- have a signed letter of support from the parent confirming that the decision has been fully explained to them including the fact that this will not automatically result in accelerated transfer to secondary school;
- formally record the decision <sup>1</sup>, and key reasons for it (including the involvement/advice of other educational professionals such as an educational psychologist, if applicable);
- monitor progress and hold a review meeting<sup>2</sup> with the parents and class teacher annually and in the summer term when the child is chronologically Year 4 to decide whether or not to recommend accelerated transfer to secondary school.

If the conclusion of the review is to recommend accelerated transfer the headteacher should advise parents that:

- they will need to apply formally to the LA for accelerated transfer (see section C below). Ideally, applications should be made in the second half of the summer term of Year 4 and certainly no later than September in the Autumn term (when their child is chronologically Year 5) prior to the annual secondary transfer application deadline which falls at the end of October;
- the application will then be considered by the Panel (according to the steps set out in A above) together with the views of the current school and the potential receiving secondary school which will be sought by the LO.

### **C. Early transfer to secondary phase**

If a pupil's entry into **Reception** was formally accelerated following a decision from the Accelerations and Deferrals Officer Panel **and** the child has maintained his/her position in the year group above his/her chronological age, the Authority will accept that the pupil will maintain that acceleration and transfer to secondary phase a year ahead of his/her chronological cohort.

In their application for secondary transfer the parents will need to make reference to the fact that accelerated entry was formally agreed by the LA.

In all other cases where a parent wishes formally to seek early entry to secondary school for their child, the officer panel will consider the request. The onus is on the parent to submit to the LA, as a minimum:

- information regarding how their child is performing in the core subjects of the National Curriculum, English, Maths and Science;
- a covering letter explaining their reasons for their request;
- their child's views on going to secondary school a year early;

In particular the panel will be looking for evidence that the child:

- is performing on a par with the highest attaining children in the older cohort, across the curriculum;
- is mature for his/her age, confident and well adjusted;
- will be able to maintain his/her social and academic position in the accelerated year group.

If there is no evidence from the current or potential headteacher giving their views on the request, the LO will seek it at this stage.

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<sup>1</sup> The record of this meeting will need to be submitted to the LA to support any subsequent formal request for accelerated transfer to secondary school.

<sup>2</sup> The record of this meeting will also need to be submitted to the LA in the event of a subsequent formal request for accelerated transfer to secondary school.

## Section 2 Deferral

### A. Process for requesting deferred entry into primary school

**Step 1:** The onus is on the applicant to submit evidence which must include as a minimum:

- a report from the **pre-school setting** about the child's current level of functioning with evidence of the child's attainments in the 7 areas of learning and development in the EYFS, the child's social functioning within the peer group and the setting's views on the request;
- where applicable, details of any interventions/additional support the child receives in the pre-school setting;
- where applicable, reports from other professionals involved e.g. health professionals, educational psychologist, Early Years (EY) specialist support teacher.

The involvement of the EY specialist support teacher is expected as a minimum if a school/early years setting is:

- making the deferral request or
- supporting a deferral request made by the parent.

Particular consideration will be given to children who have been born so prematurely that it places them into an earlier academic year group than would have been the case had they been born on or near to their due date.

If there is no evidence/view from the current or potential headteacher the LO will seek it at this stage.

**Step 2:** The LO will circulate the case papers to the panel members, highlighting in a covering memo the issues pertinent to the case.

**Step 3:** The panel members have 15 working days to respond in writing to the LO giving their comments upon the application and the reasons for their recommendation to approve or refuse the application for deferred entry.

**Step 4:** The LO synthesises the views of the Panel Members and issues a decision letter to the parent. Where the decision is to refuse the application the LO sets out the reasons in the letter. This is copied to the headteacher where applicable.

### Deferred entry requests for summer born children

For summer born children i.e. those with a date of birth between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> August the LA operates a permissive approach.

The LO who co-ordinates the work of the panel carries out a 'desk top' review with the presumption to agree to requests for summer born children to enter **Reception** in the September after their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday provided:

- there is evidence specific to the child (i.e. not just reference to academic research) to support the request
- the headteacher of the receiving school has no concerns
- the request is driven by the best interests of the child and not because, for example, the parents have failed to secure a place in their preferred primary school or because it would be more convenient for the parents if the child delays his/her entry into Reception

Where the above criteria are not met or the co-ordinating officer has concerns, the case will be referred to the panel for more detailed consideration.

In these circumstances the panel will be reduced to 3 members:

- an early years practitioner/specialist
- a primary adviser
- a primary headteacher

The LA's advice is that parents should still complete a Reception application even if they are applying for deferred entry. If their request for deferred entry is agreed they can always decline the offer.

### **B. Mid-phase deceleration**

If a headteacher, in response to a parental request, takes the professional view that a pupil in mid-primary phase, would benefit from working with a younger year group and acts upon this s/he must:

- have a signed letter of support from the parent confirming that the decision has been fully explained to them including the fact that this will not automatically result in delayed transfer to secondary phase
- formally record the decision <sup>3</sup>, and key reasons for it (including the involvement/advice of other educational professionals such as a specialist support teacher or educational psychologist and medical professionals if applicable) and the planned action for the next 12 months including how to return the child to his/her correct year group if possible
- monitor progress and hold a review meeting<sup>4</sup> with the parents, class teacher and other relevant professionals, in the summer term when the child is chronologically Year 5 to decide whether or not to recommend delayed transfer to secondary phase and **if this is the conclusion of the review**
- advise the LA that the child should be allowed to delay his/her transfer, by submitting to the LO documentation covering the initial decision to defer the child mid-primary phase, AND minutes/recommendations of the Year 5 review meeting (see footnotes 3 and 4) AND the following:
  - up-to-date teacher assessments of the child's performance in National Curriculum English, Maths and Science
  - if applicable, details of any interventions/additional support the child is receiving at primary school;
  - if applicable a copy of the child's two most recent Individual Education Plans (IEPs);
  - if applicable, reports from other agencies e.g. medical professionals, the specialist teaching service, Educational Psychologist, who may be supporting or working with the child;
  - a cover letter explaining their reasons for the request;
  - the child's view on going to secondary school a year late.

The above information should reach the LA no later than September in the autumn term prior to the secondary transfer application deadline, which falls at the end of October, when the child is chronologically Year 6.

Please note, the LA's advice is that parents should still complete a secondary application form even if they are applying for deferred transfer. If their request for deferred transfer is agreed they can always decline any Year 7 place already offered.

### **C. Delayed transfer to secondary phase**

If a pupil's entry to **Reception** was formally delayed following a decision from the Accelerations and Deferrals Officer Panel **and** the child has maintained his/her position in the year group below his/her chronological cohort, the LA will accept that

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<sup>3</sup> The record of this meeting will need to be submitted to the LA to support any subsequent formal request for deferred transfer to secondary school.

<sup>4</sup> The record of this meeting will also need to be submitted to the LA in the event of a subsequent formal request for deferred transfer to secondary school.

the pupil will maintain that delay and transfer to secondary phase a year behind his/her chronological age.

In their application for secondary transfer, the parents will need to make reference to the fact that deferred entry was formally agreed by the LA.

In all other cases where a parent wishes formally to seek delayed transfer to secondary school for their child, the officer panel will consider the request. The onus is on the parent to submit to the LA, as a minimum:

- information regarding how their child is performing in National Curriculum English, Maths and Science;
- if applicable, reports from other agencies e.g. medical professionals, the specialist teaching service, Educational Psychologist, who may be supporting or working with the child;
- if applicable, details of any interventions/additional support the child is receiving;
- if applicable, a copy of the child's two most recent Individual Education Plans (IEPs);
- a covering letter explaining their reasons for the request;
- the child's views on going to secondary school a year late.

In particular the panel will be looking for evidence that the child is unable, even with appropriate differentiation and support, to access the curriculum in their chronological cohort.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst the above procedures should cover all the likely eventualities concerning acceleration and deferral, it remains the case, in accordance with the LA's general, stated policy that only exceptional, individual circumstances will necessitate a child entering or transferring to a year group below his/her chronological age.

## **Notes**

This protocol takes account of the School Admissions Code and relevant advice or guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE) e.g. its publication of December 2014 on *Advice on the admission of summer born children*.

Applications for deferred/accelerated entry into a community or voluntary controlled school are considered by the LA's Accelerations and Deferrals Officer Panel. Applications for acceleration/deferral into schools where the LA is not the co-ordinating admissions authority are usually considered by the school's governing body, except where they have opted to use the LA's panel and where the LA is the co-ordinating authority for Reception and Year 7 admissions

