



Education Committee

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Nick Gibb MP
Minister for School Reform
Department for Education
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20 Great Smith Street
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18 March 2015

Dear Nick,

Thank you for giving oral evidence to the Committee on 4 March as part of our Evidence Check work on starting school.

As I mentioned during the session, the Committee received over 40 emails from parents on the subject of admissions arrangements for premature and summer born children, and there were over 100 comments on the evidence check forum on this topic. In response to the level of interest, the Committee has agreed that I should write to you to reiterate some of the issues explored in the session and to suggest areas on which the Department might usefully reflect.

Points arising from the Committee's work on summer born and premature children included the following:

- It was clear from the evidence we received, including the Department's own analysis, that there is a measurable effect of the month of a child's birth on academic outcomes. We also heard evidence about non-academic effects of being summer-born, including disproportionately high SEN diagnosis, bullying and placement in low ability groups. There is widespread agreement that a problem exists, on average, for summer born and premature children.
- We heard during the session that parents are having increasing difficulty in securing entry for summer born or premature children into reception at compulsory school age, rather than into year 1, and that the situation has worsened following the Government's new guidance.



We heard that there is variation in the extent to which admissions authorities are following the Government's guidance, and that, even if entry to reception is granted at compulsory school age by an admissions authority, the issue may re-emerge when applying for secondary schools or moving to a different area.

- We noted that parents do not have the right to appeal against admission into year 1 rather than reception, and that the final decision on this rests with the admissions authority rather than the parents.

Following the session we would suggest that the Department:

- Consider what further steps could be taken to communicate Government guidance on summer born admissions to admissions authorities;
- Undertake an analysis of which admissions authorities fail to provide the flexibilities described in the guidance;
- Monitor the effectiveness of the Government's guidance in altering admissions authorities' behaviour;
- Publish the available data on the number of complaints received regarding admissions into year 1 rather than reception;
- Consider whether to produce guidance for parents on how to request entry into reception rather than year 1 at compulsory school age for a premature or summer-born child;
- Consider the merits of using a child's due date rather than birthdate in the definition or interpretation of the compulsory school age, and more generally in admissions policies;
- Assess how a right to appeal a decision regarding a child's year of entry to school might be introduced;
- Undertake an analysis of the additional cost of summer born children being misdiagnosed as SEN, which might be avoided if there were more uptake of admissions flexibilities for children who are not ready to start school; and
- Investigate with Bliss whether an issue exists relating to continuity of pre-school provision for children born prematurely.



We agree with your statements during the session that "the desire for bureaucratic neatness" should not be the overriding concern for admissions authorities, and that this is "a mindset we have to change". We look forward to seeing the Government's guidance on summer born admissions being taken up by admissions authorities, and admissions decisions being made in the interests of the individual child concerned.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Graham Stuart'.

GRAHAM STUART
Chair
Education Committee