



Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for Schools

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Neil Carmichael MP
Chair
Education Committee
House of Commons
14 Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

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Dear Neil

Congratulations again on your election as Chair of the Education Committee. I look forward to working with you. You will recall that I appeared before the Committee on 4 March on the admission to school of summer born children, and that your predecessor, Graham Stuart, wrote to me on this subject on 18 March. I am writing in response to that letter.

I believe that most parents are happy for their child to begin school in the September following their fourth birthday, and that only a small proportion of parents of summer born children wish them to be admitted to reception at the age of five. I am concerned, however, about the number of these cases in which it appears that children are admitted to year one against their parents' wishes and, as a consequence, entirely miss their reception year.

As you know, we revised the School Admissions Code in December last year. Some of the changes we made related to the admission of summer born children. They were intended to ensure that children's best interests are paramount and that there is transparency for parents. Unfortunately, as yet, there does not seem to have been any reduction in the number of contentious cases. I have, therefore, asked officials for advice on how this issue may be resolved. As part of this work, they will give careful consideration to the Committee's suggestions.

During the evidence session, I undertook to provide further information on a number of points. That information is attached to this letter.

With best wishes

*Yours sincerely
Nick*

Nick Gibb MP

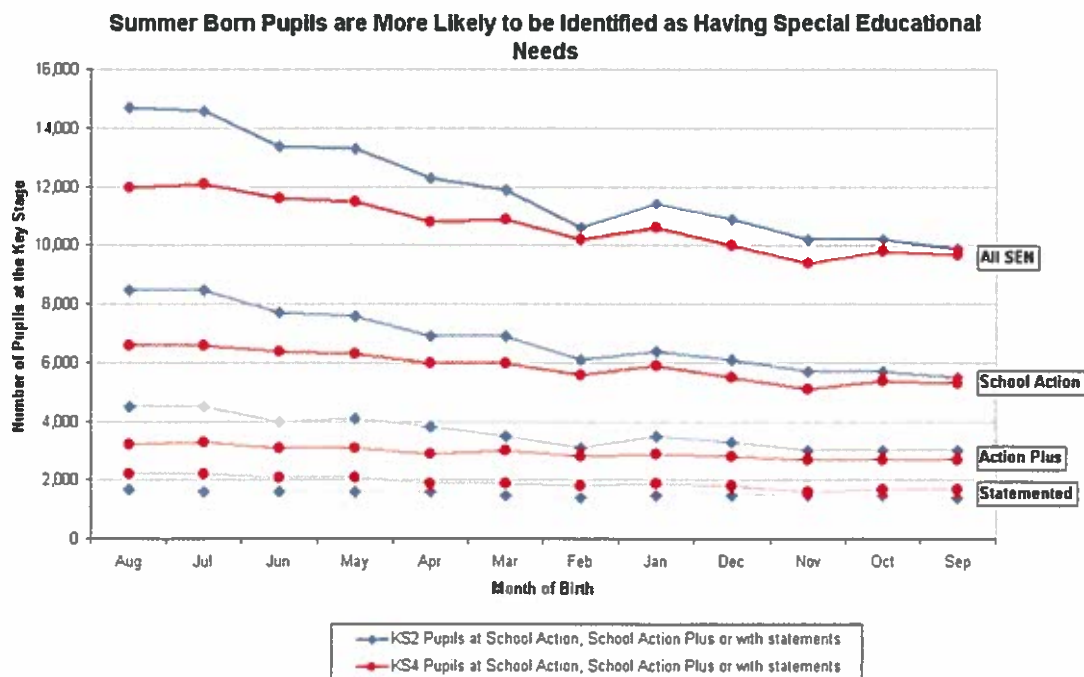
The admission of summer born children - further information for the Education Committee

Proportion of summer born children in schools in deprived areas where 100% of pupils achieve the expected standard in phonics

- In 2014, 251 schools (with 10 or more pupils) saw 100% of pupils in their year 1 cohort achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check. This represents 1.7% of all schools (with 10 or more pupils).
- Of these 251 schools, 14 had higher than average proportions of pupils identified as disadvantaged and higher than average proportions of pupils born in the summer.
- Of these 14 schools, only one had more than 20 pupils.
- In the 251 schools, the overall proportion of pupils who were summer born was 33%, compared to the national average of 34% for all schools with a year 1 cohort.
- The proportion of pupils in these schools who were classified as disadvantaged was 11%, compared to the national average of 24% for all schools with a year 1 cohort.

Identification of SEN

The evidence shows that summer born children are more likely to be identified as having SEN. The graph below indicates the relationship between children identified as having special educational needs by month of birth, which is stronger at the earlier stages of education.



The statutory definition of special educational needs includes children who have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age. Special educational provision is defined as educational provision that is additional to, or different from, that made generally for others of the same age.

Summer born children are likely to be behind their peers in their development simply by virtue of being younger than them. It appears that many schools may consequently have identified them as having SEN. We know from Ofsted evidence¹ that low attainment can be conflated with SEN and this may have, in the past, led to an over-identification of SEN. Ofsted estimated that around half of all children identified at *School Action* would not be identified as having SEN if schools focused on improving teaching and learning for all children, with individual goals for improvement. We don't have any information on what the additional cost of this over-identification may be.

The number of children identified by their schools as having SEN has declined since the publication of Ofsted's report. Guidance to schools in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice is clear that slow progress should not automatically lead to a child being recorded as having SEN. Schools are expected to consider, in light of expected progress and attainment and the views of the child and parents, what support is required and whether this can be provided by adapting the school's core teaching and learning to address the needs of individual children or whether something additional or different is required. In the Code of Practice this is referred to as *SEN support*.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project² shows that good early education can reduce the incidence of SEN. It shows that, at the age of 11, for all social outcomes, the benefits of pre-school were higher for boys, for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), and for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Entitlement to free early education for children who defer entry to school

Local authorities are currently required by legislation (the Childcare Act 2006 and associated regulations) to secure early education places offering 570 hours a year over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year for every child in their area, regardless of whether they have been born prematurely, from the start of the term following their third birthday until the child reaches compulsory school age. They are also required to secure early education places for eligible two year olds.

¹ The Special Educational Needs and Disability Review: a statement is not enough (October 2010) www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413814/Special_education_needs_and_disability_review.pdf

² Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Blatchford, Taggart (2004) The Effective Provision of Pre School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage 1. Department of Education. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090617172700/http://dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/publications/0/1160/>