

Meeting:	Harrow Admissions Forum
Date:	21 October 2009
Subject:	Flexible entry to reception
Responsible Officer:	Heather Clements, Director of Schools and Children's Development
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Anjana Patel, Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report considers the proposal put forward in a public question to Cabinet as to whether the borough would consider allowing more flexible entry to school by allowing younger children to start school a year later.

Recommendations:

The Admissions Forum is requested to:

1. Note the report and consider the views of the Educational Psychology Service, Achievement & Inclusion Service and the Early Years Service
2. In light of these comments, decide whether the current admission arrangements meet the needs of the younger and less developed children or whether a change is required.

Reason: (For recommendation)

To ensure Harrow's admissions policy is meeting the needs of the younger and less developed children at the time of admission to school.

Section 2 – Report

The following questions were asked at the Cabinet meeting on 16 July 2009.

Background

Question

“Research commissioned by the government done by IFS, published in 2007, showed that sometimes even up to the age of 16, the youngest pupils are still behind their older counterparts. The school secretary has said last year that summer-born children should be allowed to defer entry for up to a year, following that, is the borough is considering allowing more flexible entry to school by allowing younger children to start school a year later and also, as there is so much being said about younger children falling behind, how does the borough specifically cater for these younger and less developed children during their first years at school (reception till year 2)?”

Answer: The Council has not yet determined any possible future admission arrangements for younger children. This would be discussed at the Admission Forum before any changes were introduced. Any decision taken would be made in the light of guidance in the School Admissions Code of Practice and from the DCSF. All provisions for Early Years education take particular care to ensure that all children are assessed on entry to nursery school and, whatever the child's development and skills at that point, appropriate activities are then planned to help them make good progress. We are actually discussing this already, so your question as come at the right time.

Supplemental Question:

Is the Council considering, in addition to the assessments that are done in the beginning of the year to allow for assessment of specific younger children before they start school to check, not just whether they are at the right milestone for their own age but how they are compared to the skill they need to have by starting school and the academic work that they need to deal with?

Supplemental Answer: Yes. As I said, we are discussing that, so we will look at that and make a decision on the evidence and what we need to do, we will be doing. I understand that you wanted to meet with me and I am prepared to meet with you and the officers whenever it is appropriate.

Current situation

The school admissions Code of Practice requires that where admission authorities for primary schools offer places in reception classes to parents before their children are of compulsory school age, they **must** allow parents to request that their child's entry be deferred until later in the same school year. The effect of this is that the place is held for that child and is not available to be offered to another child. The parent is not able to defer entry beyond the beginning of the term after the child's fifth birthday, nor beyond the academic year for which the original application was accepted.

In Harrow all children start in Reception in September. This covers children born on 1 September to 31 August. In the past two years, the Admissions Service has received no formal requests for deferred entry at the time of application. However, one or two cases a year are brought to our attention by schools of parents requesting deferred entry after the school place has been allocated. Such requests are agreed at a local level.

More flexible entry to reception could mean some children would be admitted to school outside of their chronological age group. This would have an impact throughout their school career. If a change to the admission rules were to be agreed allowing deferred entry for a full school year children would be chronologically Year 1 when they start school. They would transfer to high school, would sit exams and enter sixth form a year later than their age-related peers. Issues could arise if the child in question later developed at a pace that meant they were academically, socially and emotionally more mature than the children in their age group. Because the child would have reached statutory school leaving age in Year 10, there would be no requirement on the parent to ensure they completed their secondary education.

If a change to the current admission arrangements is proposed, then this would need to form part of the annual consultation on admission arrangements for September 2011/12.

Comments from the Educational Psychology Service

There is no strong evidence that supports educating children out of their chronological age group is in their best interest. The Early Years curriculum provides sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of younger and less developed children and offers opportunities for phased admission and/or part-time placement until the child reaches statutory school age. Younger and less developed children are better placed in school where they can be observed and monitored. Once a child has started school and professional staff have had an opportunity to undertake an assessment the school, in partnership with parents, can agree for the child to spend an extra year within the early years curriculum (in exceptional circumstances).

There is a lot of flexibility in the system already and within the current statutory requirements it would be difficult to move beyond this.

Comments from the Achievement and Inclusion and Integrated Early Years and Community Services.

These services work with schools to support the full implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the provision of a play based curriculum within year one which is fully differentiated to meet the needs of all children. Whilst acknowledging that some schools have not traditionally offered a play based curriculum, Harrow in partnership with the National Strategies has been running a transition programme that has looked at practice between Reception and Year 1. This has brought together those practitioners from Harrow schools to discuss how to meet children's needs and fully differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of all children so they all make good progress.

The borough, together with partners ensures that schools get a wide range of support and advice to support them in providing the best possible early education for children this includes:

- Access to the Every Child a Talker project
- Training and continuing professional opportunities
- Specific projects to look at developing best practice to roll out across Harrow

Work is currently taking place to support schools with making good "On Entry" assessments. This work is being guided by the Early Years Foundation Stage and key National Strategies documentation, in particular Progress Matters. Guidance will be issued to all schools from Achievement and Inclusion and Integrated Early Years and Community Services this Autumn.

The recommendation from the Review of the Primary curriculum by Sir Jim Rose, that the preferred pattern for entry to school should be the September following a child's fourth birthday. It would seem at odds with the report to adopt a change in council policy when flexibility and support are the key to a successful transition. Schools already adopt a sensitive and consultative approach with parents over readiness for full time school. A high quality, responsive Early Years Foundation Stage provision would do much to close the gaps in achievement for some summer born children. This is what Achievement and Inclusion and the Early Years Team are working together to ensure that every child experiences.

Implications of changing admission arrangements to allow for flexible entry to reception.

There would be costs involved in implementing such a process, such as input from the Early Years Team and the Educational Psychology Service.

Once children are of statutory school age, parents are required to ensure that their child is in receipt of full-time education sufficient for his/her age, aptitude and ability. If a more flexible approach to entry to reception were to be adopted, then there could be implications for monitoring and assessing how parents were meeting this requirement.

Financial Implications

If this proposal was implemented there may be minor implications for Schools Funding Formula that would need to be considered.

Risk Management Implications

Once children are of statutory school age, parents are required to ensure that their child is in receipt of full-time education sufficient for his/her age, aptitude and ability. If a more flexible approach to entry to reception were to be adopted, then there could be implications for monitoring and assessing how parents were meeting this requirement.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: ...Emma Stabler....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: ...8.10..09.....		
Name: ...Linda Cohen...	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date:.....8.10.09		

*Delete the words "on behalf of the" if the report is cleared directly by Myfanwy or Hugh.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Madeleine Hitchens, Manager, Place Planning & Admissions
Service 020 8424 1398

Background Papers: N/A.

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES