



From mountain to sea

Educational Psychology Service

Delayed School Entry: What does the research tell us?
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If you are thinking about delaying your child's entry to Primary 1 you might wonder whether it will really make a difference to their education or not. It might surprise you to know that there is very limited published research available on the outcomes for children who delay entry to Primary 1. In this summary we will share the research findings and help you understand what this might mean for you. The research seems to differ for those children who were born at full-term compared to those born prematurely so we will summarise it under these two headings.

Remember every decision about delayed entry should be made in a child-centred way. This means that decisions need to be made taking into consideration your child's individual circumstances and the things which might change for them in the next year.

The concept of School Readiness

Often parents choose to delay entry because they think their child is "not ready" for school. In fact, the Growing up in Scotland (2012) research found that almost half (47%) of parents who chose to delay their child's entry to Primary 1 stated that their child was "not ready" for school. The idea of readiness for school is tricky because as Meisels (1987) stated that there is no precise measure that is valid or reliable for assessing school readiness. This was the case in 1987 and remains the case today. Two key pieces of research (Emig, Moore & Scarupa, 2001 and Grimmer, 2018) have led to the understanding that when considering readiness for school in addition to the individual child we need to think about

- their family circumstances
- the support available in the community
- the transition process for Primary 1
- the school's ability to meet their needs

The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland are very clear that schools in Scotland should "*provide developmentally appropriate provision and are ready for all children*" (p. 3). Certainly the flexibility offered by the Curriculum for Excellence, guidance from the Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008) and Building the Ambition (Scottish Government, 2014) should allow for play-based learning and planning to meet individual needs.

Children born at Full-Term

There is no published research on the long-term outcomes for full-term children who delay entry, or for those who applied for delayed entry and were not successful.

However in 2012, North Lanarkshire Council completed a small study looking at information from nine children who had applied for delayed entry in 2010/2011. Of those nine children, five were granted delayed entry, and the remaining four were refused (or withdrew their application) and thus entered Primary one in 2010. Each child was considered individually, however the following key findings emerged:

- Parents, nursery staff and Primary staff of pupils who were granted an extra nursery year reported the main advantages were gains in confidence and improved social skills.
- Parents, nursery staff and Primary staff of pupils who were NOT granted an extra nursery year felt their child went into P1 at the right time and there were more advantages for language development, peer continuity and new challenges in P1.

These findings fit with those of Tymms, Jones, Merrel, Henderson and Cowie (2005), who considered Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) data for P1 children and P3 children. Tymms et al found no evidence for an optimum age for starting school. The cognitive progress and attitudes of children in P3 were unconnected with their age on starting school. It provided no evidence that children of four and a half were suffering by starting school too early. Nor did it suggest that five and a half year olds were inappropriately placed.

Crawford, Dearden and Greaves (2013) looked at information about educational attainment (measured via standardised assessment) between children born at the start and end of the academic year in England (i.e. between those who started having just turned 4 vs those who started having just turned 5). They concluded that *the age at which children start school and the amount of schooling they receive prior to the test explain very little of the differences.*

Children born prematurely

If your child was born before their official due date you might be considering delaying their entry to school, especially if their due date would have placed them in a different school year (e.g. if they were born on 1st January but their due date was 10th March). Odd, Evans & Emond (2016) conducted a study considering the long-term impact of entry to Primary School for English children born pre-term. In relation to delayed entry to Primary School, the researchers found that the gap in attainment (i.e. test results) was biggest throughout schooling for those children who were born, prematurely, into a different school year compared to the one they were due to be born into. They also found that adjusting scores to demonstrate how a child would perform had they had the option to delay school entry substantially reduced the impact of their prematurity on their school performance. They concluded that *delaying school entry until a child's 'correct' school year could be a benefit for children born prematurely, and particularly so for those who were born very early.*

What does this mean for me?

These are some things that you might like to think about when making an application for delayed entry to Primary 1:

- Has your child missed significant periods of their nursery education (e.g. due to ill health, moving country / area etc.)?

- What do you hope will change over the coming year (either for your child, in the Early Learning and Childcare setting, at home or in the community) that will mean your child will be ready for school next August? Are any other agencies (e.g. Speech and Language therapy, Occupational Therapy, Social work) needed to support these changes?
- Could any of these changes happen sooner? Would this mean your child could start school this coming August?
- If your child was born prematurely, would their “due date” have meant they should have entered school next August?
- If your child is born between September and December and the decision is made to delay their entry to Primary 1 then they could choose to leave school in S4 (before Christmas if they turn 16) before they have obtained formal qualifications.
- If your child has additional support needs is there evidence that would suggest they will make significant progress over the coming year which will put them in a “better place” to start Primary 1?

References

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