Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

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Educational Psychology Service

Delayed School Entry: What does the research tell us?
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There is very limited published research available on the outcomes for children who delay entry to Primary 1. The research seems to differ for those children who were born at full-term compared to those born prematurely. ADES (2020) highlights that decisions about delayed entry to Primary 1 should be child-centred and focused on meeting the needs of the child.

Children born at Full-Term

There is no published longitudinal data on outcomes for full-term children who delay entry, or indeed for those who applied for delayed entry and were not successful. In 2012, North Lanarkshire Council completed some research considering the case studies of 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 case study 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.

The above case studies would fit with the findings 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.

In England children can start school the September after they are four-years-old, and at this point they enter Reception. Thus a child who is four-years-old on 31st August could start Reception on the 1st September, at the same time as a child who is five-years-old on 1st September. This is different from Scotland, where the youngest a child could start Primary 1 (under typical circumstances), is 4 years five and a half months.

Crawford, Dearden and Greaves (2013) found large differences in 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 are born in August vs. those born in September). There was a significant disadvantage found for those children born in August, starting school aged four years, and this disadvantage remains significant at the point of leaving school and to an extent, leaving higher education. It was not limited to attainment data, and Crawford et al concluded that the difference in age also affected a child's well-being. However in adulthood the detrimental effects do not seem to continue (i.e. no apparent impact on employment, health, happiness). The conclusion from Crawford et al's (2013) research is 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*. They recommended age-adjusting national achievement test scores to account for the fact that children born at different times of the year have to sit the tests when they are different ages. Crawford et al stated that *"it is not necessary to give parents greater flexibility over the age at which children start school, as this is not the main driver of the differences in attainment between children born at the start and end of the academic year*".

However, in 2014 the Admissions procedures in England were amended to give more flexibility in requesting delayed entry to Reception year. In 2017 the Department for Education collated data from 92 local authorities relating to the take-up rates for delayed school starts and concluded that, at this early stage there was not a significant impact of delaying admission to Reception on the performance of pupils in the Phonics Screening Check. Further evidence will be collated over time.

It is important for staff working with children in Primary 1 to ensure that each child's development is considered holistically in relation to their age. There is a risk of the youngest children being identified as having additional support needs where their skills and development are in line with their chronological age but at an earlier stage than that of their peers.

The concept of School Readiness

Meisels (1987) stated that there is no precise measure that is valid or reliable for assessing school readiness. When thinking about delayed entry to school we often think about whether the child is ready for school, but Emig, Moore and Scarupa (2001) stated that school readiness has four interrelated key components: child's readiness for school, school's readiness for child, and the capacity of families and communities to provide developmental opportunities. In a similar vein, Grimmer (2018) highlights four key components (school, child, setting and home), which she states are all influenced by environmental factors such as cultural context, socio-economic influences). Thus when reviewing an application for delayed entry information about the family circumstances, community factors and the Primary School transition should be explicitly considered.

The Growing up in Scotland (2012) research found that 47% of parents who chose to delay their child's entry to Primary 1 stated that their child was "not ready" for school. ADES (2020) stated "*it is therefore fundamental that our profession shares and educates all on a move away from an approach, and indeed a perception, around*

children being ready for school but to a view that all schools provide developmentally appropriate provision and are ready for all children" (p. 3). The flexibility offered by the Curriculum for Excellence and guidance from the Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008), Building the Ambition (Scottish Government, 2014) should serve to support play-based learning and planning to meet individual needs.

Children born prematurely

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 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.

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