

Dear Sir/Madam,

Prematurity and starting school

Every year in the UK over 60,000 premature babies are admitted to neonatal care for specialist treatment. The challenges that these babies face do not always finish when they go home. Attention, co-ordination or simply their smaller stature can all be significant issues for a premature child. For some children this means they are simply not ready to start school at the same time as their peers.

In particular, around 5,000 babies each year are born into the 'wrong' school year; had they been born full-term they would have been placed in the year below, but by being born prematurely they end up in an older year group. For premature children, it is more appropriate to base their developmental age on their expected, rather than actual, date of birth. In many cases they have yet to fully develop the social and cognitive skills needed to start school by the September following their fourth birthday, and need more time before joining reception.

There is a growing body of evidence and guidance that children born prematurely benefit from being able to start school later than their peers. In December 2014 the Department for Education published the updated "Advice on the admission of summer born children", which reminds admission authorities to treat each case on an individual basis, taking into account the best interests of the child. It also explains in detail the developmental issues some children born premature may face, especially if they have fallen into the 'wrong' year group. You can find this advice on the gov.uk website.

I would ask you to look favourably on this request for flexibility around a premature child's entry to school. Families do not make the decision to postpone their child's school start lightly. They do so because they have genuine concerns for their child and how he or she will cope. I hope the information above, together with the government advice and supporting information from their parents, enables you to come to the right decision for this child.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Davey', written in a cursive style.

Caroline Davey
Chief Executive