



**EDUCATION AUTHORITY NORTHERN IRELAND**

**PARENT GUIDE TO PRE-SCHOOL ADMISSIONS 2021/2022**

## Key Dates in the Pre-School Admissions Procedure for 2021/2022 school year

Read in this guide 'Age to apply for a funded pre-school place for 2021/2022'

Thursday 7 January 2021 at 12.00 noon	Pre-School application procedure opens with online Citizen Portal available.
Friday 29 January 2021 at 12.00 noon	Closing date/time for receipt of punctual applications (online Citizen Portal closes). Paper applications received after this date/time for a Target Age child will be late (Stage 1) and Underage (late throughout the procedure).
Friday 5 February 2021 at 12.00 noon	Final date for which requests for consideration of changes of preference in exceptional circumstances, new (late) applications and additional information in support of applications will be accepted.
February 2021 to April 2021	EA operates a clearing house to process applications according to parental preference (Stage 1 Target Age).
Tuesday 27 April 2021 (Stage 1 of pre-school procedure closes)	Parents can receive notification of outcome of Pre-School (target age) applications via Online Portal ( <b>opens 28 April 2021</b> ). Pre-schools may choose to notify parents by post, letters for receipt on <b>28 April 2021</b> . EA will notify parents of children yet to secure a place.
Wednesday 28 April 2021	Stage 2 commences
Wednesday 5 May 2021 at 4.00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a). Further Preferences for unplaced Stage 1 target age child (treated as punctual);</li> <li>• b). New first time Stage 2 target age application/documents (treated as punctual); Received after 4pm on 5 May treated as late.</li> <li>• c). New preference (treated as late) for target age child who was offered a funded place at Stage 1–Parent wanting to refuse offer;</li> <li>• d). New first time Stage 2 underage application/documents (treated as late).</li> </ul> <p>New additional documents for an underage punctual application (treated as punctual).</p> <p><b>5 May 2021 is the final date</b> (a) to (d) inclusive will be accepted and processed in accordance with this timetable. If received after this date it will not be considered by the pre-school provider until after the close of Stage 2.</p>
Wednesday 12 May 2021 at 4.00pm	Final date/time for Stage 1 appeal form(s) against the decision of a Board of Governors (Nursery School/Nursery Unit) to refuse admission to a child to be received by EA.
Wednesday 9 June 2021 (Stage 2 pre-school admissions procedure closes)	Parents can receive notification of outcome of Pre-School (target age) applications on <b>10 June 2021</b> . Pre-schools may choose to notify parents by post, letters for receipt on <b>10 June 2021</b> . EA will notify parents of children yet to secure a place.
Wednesday 23 June 2021 at 4.00pm	Final date/time for Stage 2 appeal form(s) against the decision of a Board of Governors (Nursery School/Nursery Unit) to refuse admission to a child to be received by EA.

## Pre-School Admissions in Northern Ireland

The Education (NI) Order 1997 gives you, as a parent, the right to express a preference as to the pre-school which you wish your child to attend. All parents seeking a funded pre-school place for their child are required to submit an application form in accordance with the arrangements set out below. The EA website and this guidance describes the arrangements which the Education Authority (EA) has made to enable you to state your order of preferences and to seek a place for your child in your preferred pre-schools.

Priority will be given to children resident in Northern Ireland at the time of their proposed admission.

## Age to apply for a funded pre-school place for school year September 2021 to June 2022

**Target Pre-School Age** – If your child is **born on or between 2 July 2017 and 1 July 2018** they will be in their **final pre-school year (Target Age)** for the school year 2021-2022. You can apply for a funded place for your child in either:-

- a nursery school; or
- a nursery unit in a Primary School; or
- a voluntary/private playgroup provider participating in the pre-school education programme

**Penultimate (Underage)** – If you apply for your child who is underage **born on or between 2 July 2018 and 1 July 2019** **underage children may only be admitted after target age children are admitted and funded places remain.** For a child who is **underage** you can **only** apply to either:-

- a nursery school; or
- a nursery unit in a Primary School

*Parents of an **underage child** cannot apply to a voluntary/private playgroup provider participating in the pre-school education programme.*

*Parents of an **underage child** will have the opportunity to apply for their child's final pre-school year when the application process for September 2022 – June 2023 opens next year. You can check the EA website again in December 2021 for application information.*

## What is a funded Pre-School?

A funded pre-school place is provided under the Pre-School Education Programme.

- It normally consists of five sessions per week, each lasting 2½ hours per day during the school year.
- **In nursery schools and primary schools with nursery units**, attendance takes the form of full day (4½ hours per day) or part-time (2½ hours per day, either morning or afternoon sessions).
- **Nursery schools and Primary schools with nursery units** can offer either full time or part time sessions which can be either morning or afternoon.
- **A few Nursery schools and Primary schools with nursery units** have both full-time and part-time sessions.
- **Voluntary/Private Playgroup providers** only offer part time sessions (2½ hours per day).

## Do I need to apply for a funded pre-school place?

Pre-School Education is **not compulsory** although good quality pre-school education has important benefits. Parents make application for a funded place on the understanding that their child will attend 5 days per week if offered a place. This will enable their child to benefit fully from a quality pre-school experience.

### Exceptions

#### **Special Educational Needs**

If your child is undergoing statutory assessment you still need to apply for a funded pre-school place. However, **you should not complete an application if your child has a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN Stage 5)**. Your child's placement will be arranged through the EA's Special Educational Needs Department.

## Where can I find out about pre-schools and their admissions criteria?

Use our 'School-Search' section on the EA website to search for pre-schools in your area and read their admissions criteria.

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, pre-schools are unable to hold open days/evenings. For the pre-schools you are considering you may wish to contact them or check their website if they have one, for further information.

Other sources for this information may include:

- [Education Training Inspectorate](#) DE ETI may hold some Pre-School Inspection Reports.
- [Early Years Organisation](#)
- [Family Support NI](#)

## How do I apply for a funded Pre-School place for the 2021/2022 school year?

The easiest way to apply is online using the Citizen Portal. User guides are available on the [EA website](#). You can apply online between:

**12.00 noon (GMT) on Thursday 7 January 2021  
and  
12.00 noon (GMT) on Friday 29 January 2021**

We encourage parents to apply online and digital assistance help will be available in January 2021 by contacting Admissions Helpdesk 028 9598 5595.

If you are unable to apply online, paper applications will be available on request only from the Pre-School Admissions Office, Education Authority. If you require a form please contact (a paper form will be available in Irish):-

Tel: Admissions Helpdesk 028 9598 5595

Email: [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk)

By Post: Pre-School Admissions Office, Education Authority, 1 Hospital Road, Omagh  
BT79 0AW

## Completing your child's application

Before you commence your child's application it is important that you read the guidance on the EA website on the admissions procedure as well as the admissions criteria of the pre-schools you are interested in sending your child to.

When completing the application you will need to make sure you include all the relevant information about how your child meets the criteria as this is what pre-schools will use when applying criteria and making decisions on which children will be offered places.

You must use your child's current home address and not that of a childminder or grandparent.

It is important that you carefully choose the correct name of the pre-school(s) you are going to list as some pre-schools have similar names. As some pre-schools have similar names you should also check the address along with a local identifier e.g. St Mary's PS NU, Omagh, St Mary's PS NU, Banbridge, etc.

Any abbreviations within a pre-school provider's name or referred to in this website are as follows:-

PG = Playgroup

FT = Full-time

PS NU = Primary School Nursery Unit

NS = Nursery School

PT = Part-time

If you apply after the closing date/time for punctual applications i.e. 12 noon on Friday 29 January 2021 you will need to complete a paper form as the Citizen Portal will not be accessible and your application will be treated as a late application. *Refer in this guidance to 'What happens if my application is late?' for further details.*

## What does socially disadvantaged circumstances mean when applying for a funded pre-school place?

Legislation requires pre-school providers to give priority to children in their final pre-school year who are from socially disadvantaged circumstances.

The Department of Education has defined socially disadvantaged circumstances as applying to a child whose parent is in **receipt of any of** the following benefits:-

- (i) Income Support; or
- (ii) Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance; or
- (iii) An award of Income Support which has been converted into an Employment and Support Allowance and the level of benefit remains the same; or
- (iv) Universal Credit.

If you are in receipt of any of these benefits you must provide verification.

When you complete an application you will be asked to tick the benefit you are in receipt of.

A parent in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) will be able to upload later in the application process their current UC online statement showing they are in receipt of UC. Refer to guidance on Document Upload.

A parent in receipt of Income Support **or** Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance **or** an award of Income Support which has been converted into ESA and the level of benefit remains the same will be able to complete a benefit verification request form later in the application process at **[www.eani.org.uk/benefitverification](http://www.eani.org.uk/benefitverification)**. The Department for Communities (DfC) will then verify any of these 3 benefits and the EA will advise your pre-school of first preference if verified or not verified. **We will ONLY contact you if DfC are unable to verify your benefit.**

## How many preferences should I list?

The process for admission to pre-school is preference based and it is not always possible to accommodate everyone's first preference. For this reason, a parent is encouraged to list a number of preferences **that they would be prepared to send their child to**. You should list at least four preferences and on the Citizen Portal you can list up to six preferences and if you wish to list more than six preferences you should email the additional preference and reasons for preference to the Education Authority at [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk) clearly stating your child's details.

Please note you cannot list the same preferences more than once. The **only exception** to this is if you **wish to apply for a nursery school or nursery unit which offers both Full-Time (FT) and Part-Time (PT) provision, in which case, you will need to list the pre-school provider twice, in your order of preference, if you want the provider to consider your application for both Full-time and Part-time e.g. (this is an example, but use the provider's correct name when listing preferences):-**

1<sup>st</sup> Provider A FT

2<sup>nd</sup> Provider B

3<sup>rd</sup> Provider A PT

You should be aware that after Tuesday 27 April 2021 (Close of Stage 1) a number of pre-schools will have allocated all their funded places. Therefore, it is important that you give very careful consideration to the stated order of your preferences and ensure all relevant information is provided for the first preference pre-school by 12 noon on Friday 5 February 2021.

*(When applying in Stage 2 of the pre-school admissions procedure refer to key calendar dates in this guidance).*

## Previewing and Submitting my application

You should check all the information carefully before submitting the form. You should ensure that *all* relevant information/reasons for preference(s) are provided to enable *all* the pre-schools you have listed as preferences to consider your child's application. *You and you alone are responsible for ensuring that all relevant information/reasons for preference are provided.*

If you do not provide relevant information/reasons for preference you may reduce the chance of your child being admitted to a pre-school of your preference. *Likewise, if you do not list a number of preferences that you would be prepared to send your child to, you may reduce the chance of your child being offered a funded place.*

It is also your responsibility to ensure that the information you provide is correct. Pre-schools may verify information provided as part of your child's application and information found to be false or misleading can lead to non-admission.

The information that you provide on the form or in support of your application is covered by the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 – General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

If you complete a paper application this should be returned to the Pre-School Admissions Office, preferably by email [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk) or by post to Pre-School Admissions Office, Education Authority, 1 Hospital Road, Omagh BT79 0AW. A birth certificate and any other documents required by any of the pre-school preferences you have listed should be securely attached to the form. Please do not send original birth certificates.

## I have previewed and submitted my online application. What happens next?

Once you have successfully submitted your application you will receive an email confirmation from the Education Authority. Read this email carefully, as it will advise you about further information that will follow regarding uploading your supporting documents. If you do not receive the email, check your Junk or Spam accounts.

In order to complete the admissions process, you will receive a further email from Education Authority Admissions. This email will include a link to the 'EA Document Upload Tool' which will allow you to upload your child's birth certificate and any other supporting documents that your listed preferences may require. Please allow up to 3 working days for this email to arrive and check your junk/spam folder regularly. The link can be used until **12.00 noon on 5 February 2021**.

The EA Document Upload tool is very straightforward to use. Information can be uploaded using your smartphone, tablet, laptop or computer. It is recommended to use Google Chrome browser if you are using a laptop or computer to upload documents. Using a smart TV is not recommended.

Further information on how to upload documents can be accessed on the [Education Authority](#) website.

## Documentation in support of an application

### Birth Certificate

A birth certificate is required by all pre-schools to check your child's age.

**Check the admissions criteria on the EA website for each of the pre-schools you have listed to confirm the supporting documents required.** Some pre-schools ask for additional documentation to support or verify information on your child's application. This documentation may be requested at the time of application, during the process or at the notification of placement. You should follow the requirements of individual pre-schools and ensure you provide your documents within the required deadlines. **The admissions criteria will indicate if verifying documents are being requested at the time of application.** If so you will need to provide the information for any preference(s) listed preferably by 29 January 2021, and not later than 12.00 noon on Friday 5 February 2021.

If you do not supply documents requested this could lead to the withdrawal of a place or the inability of a pre-school to offer a place to your child.

If a pre-school has asked for verifying documents which you do not have, you should email or phone the pre-school directly to ascertain what they will accept as an alternative.

*(Stage 2 of the pre-school admissions procedure - refer to key calendar dates in this guidance).*

### Applying to an Integrated Nursery Unit?

If you list an integrated primary school nursery unit as a preference on your online application you will be presented with an additional question (specific to this preference only) which asks you to select your child's community background from a drop down menu of Protestant, Catholic or Other/None. You may provide any additional information relating to a pre-school's criteria in the 'Preference Reasons Continued' section for each pre-school listed e.g. if you are in a mixed religion marriage.

The details that you provide will only be disclosed to the relevant integrated primary school nursery unit at the point when your child's application is required to be considered by that setting (and will not be shared with any other pre-school listed).

It is important that you provide the detail requested so that the integrated primary school nursery unit can apply their criteria to the different categories.

If you complete a paper application you will need to carefully read the admissions criteria of the setting you are listing and follow their instruction on how this information is to be submitted to their setting.

If you choose to indicate your child's religion on the Education Authority's paper application form (which is not recommended) then you should be aware that this is done at your own discretion and in the knowledge that this 'special category data', in terms of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), may be seen by other individuals or pre-schools that you have listed as preferences, and the Education Authority takes no responsibility for any use made of it by any person.



## What happens if my application is late?

During the admissions procedure when pre-schools are applying their criteria **punctual** applications will be considered before **late** applications are considered.

The application procedure opens on 7 January 2021 at 12.00 noon and an application submitted by the closing date of 29 January 2021 at 12.00 noon will be treated as a punctual application.

An application received after 12noon on 29 January 2021 will be treated as a late application - (Target Age – Late in Stage 1 and an Underage – Late throughout the procedure).

**The Education Authority does not have the discretion to treat an application received after 12 noon on Friday 29 January 2021 as punctual.**

Having a late application could reduce your child's likelihood of gaining a place in your preferred pre-school i.e. should the pre-school you are applying to receive more applications than it has funded places available it will firstly consider all punctual applications (including second and subsequent preference applications) before your application is considered.

All late applications will have to be made on paper as the online Citizen Portal will not be accessible after 12 noon 29 January 2021. Application forms will be available to download from the EA website from 12 noon 29 January. You can submit a late application to the Education Authority by email [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk) or by post to Pre-School Admissions Office, Education Authority, 1 Hospital Road, Omagh BT79 0AW. Only those received by 12 noon on 5 February 2021 will be processed within Stage 1 of the pre-school admissions process. Applications received after this date will not be considered until Stage 2 of the admissions procedure.

*(Stage 2 of the pre-school admissions procedure – refer to key calendar dates in this guidance)*

## How are admissions decisions made and by whom?

If a pre-school has sufficient funded places all eligible children will be accepted. In the event of the number of applications being greater than a pre-school's admissions number the Board of Governors of a Nursery School/Nursery Unit or the Management Committee of a Voluntary/Private Playgroup will apply their published admissions criteria to all applicants to determine which children will be offered places up to their admission number.

Pre-schools are required, by law, to give priority to:-

- (i) Children from socially disadvantaged circumstances in their final pre-school year i.e. born on or between 2 July 2017 and 1 July 2018
- (ii) Children not falling within sub-paragraph (i) in their final pre-school year; and who at the time of their proposed admission will not have a pre-school education place, whether full-time or part-time, at another pre-school or any other premises.

Pre-school providers will implement this legal requirement through application of the statutory admissions criteria. If there are more applications meeting a particular statutory criterion than there are places available then the provider will select between these applicants by applying its own sub-criteria; these sub-criteria normally differ from provider to provider. Responsibility for drawing up and applying a pre-school's admissions criteria rests with the Board of Governors or Management Committee.

If your child is not accepted by your first preference pre-school your child's application will be considered by your second preference pre-school. The process will be repeated until your child has

secured a place or all preferences that you have listed have been exhausted. Places will be allocated to those who best meet the admission criteria.

## I'm planning to move house, what address should I use?

**The address you use on your child's application must be the home address at which they are currently resident.** It cannot be that of a childminder or grandparent.

If you are planning to move house before the beginning of the school year (September 2021) you should indicate this on your application form under 'Preference Reasons' giving as much information as possible about the planned date of moving and address, if known.

If you move house during the admissions procedure you should notify the Education Authority when the move is completed by emailing [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk) and providing your child's name and date of birth and indicating the new address and when you moved. The Education Authority will ensure the pre-school(s) to which you have applied are notified. You may be asked for documentation to verify that you are resident in your new home. It will be up to the pre-school(s) which you have applied to, to determine whether it can take account of your new address when applying the admissions criteria. (Boards of Governors / Management Committees can only use a new address once your child is residing at the new address).

### **Accepted documents to verify your new address include:**

#### **House move:**

- Tenancy agreement
- Rates bill
- Sale of house agreement

## Living outside Northern Ireland at time of application

You can still make an application for a pre-school place. However, priority is given to children residing in Northern Ireland at the time of their proposed admission.

If you are moving to Northern Ireland, when completing the application, you must use the address you are residing at the time of the completion of your application. Boards of Governors / Management Committees can only use a new address once your child is residing at the new address. You should notify the EA in writing when you have moved and you will need to provide verification of your move.

## Adding new/additional information

During the admissions procedure if your circumstances change in a way that may be important for the admissions process you should contact the Education Authority in writing or by emailing [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk) to provide this new information. Friday 5 February 2021 at 12 noon is the final date/time by which the Education Authority will accept the information. After this date new/additional information will not be processed until Stage 2 of the procedure, after 27 April 2021.

*(When applying in Stage 2 of the pre-school admissions procedure refer to key calendar dates in this guidance).*

## Changes of preference(s)

Depending on when you decide to change your preferences different rules apply:-

### **Before 12 noon on Friday 29 January 2021**

If you wish to change your preferences before 12 noon on Friday 29 January 2021 and had applied using the online Citizen Portal you can make changes to your application by logging in to your account and clicking on 'Change your application'.

On-screen warnings will indicate that your application is unsubmitted and that it cannot be processed unless you **resubmit** it.

You can add/delete preferences and/or change the order of preferences listed using the arrow keys on the 'Your Preferred Pre-Schools/Schools' page.

Ensure that you also update your reasons for preference as appropriate.

**You should preview your form and satisfy yourself that all the information is correct before you resubmit your application by the closing date/time of 12 noon on Friday 29 January 2021. It is your responsibility to ensure you have resubmitted your application otherwise it cannot be processed.**

If you have changed your order of first preference or added a new preference check the admissions criteria on the EA Website for each of the pre-schools you have listed to confirm the supporting documents required. If applicable refer to the information on Socially Disadvantage circumstances on the Education Authority website regarding Benefit Verification.

If you have applied using a paper application you will need to contact the Pre-School Admissions office in writing (preferably by email) to withdraw your form and complete and submit a new application to the Pre-School Admissions office by the closing/date time of 12 noon on Friday 29 January 2021.

### **Between 12.00 noon Friday 29 January 2021 and 12.00 noon Friday 5 February 2021**

Apart from those necessitated by exceptional circumstances, no changes of preference will be processed if received after 12 noon on Friday 29 January 2021. If you wish to change your preference, for any reason other than in exceptional circumstances, you must withdraw your original application by emailing [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk) and submit a new paper application to the Pre-School Admissions office.

If this occurs between 12.00 noon on Friday 29 January 2021 and 12.00 noon on Friday 5 February 2021 your new application will be processed within the admissions procedure as a late application. *Refer to the section "What happens if my application is late?"* for further details.

If you wish to change your preference due to exceptional circumstances you must submit a request in writing to the Education Authority (preferably by email) to [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk) on or before 12.00 noon on Friday 5 February 2021. Verification of the exceptional circumstances must be provided with your request. If approved, the Education Authority will send you a pro-forma to complete with your new list of preferences (in order of preference and including your reasons for preference as they relate to the admissions criteria). If the original application was received by 12 noon on 29 January 2021 then your 'changed' application will be processed within the admissions procedure as a punctual application.

Documents which may be acceptable to verify your exceptional circumstances may include e.g. a tenancy agreement, rates bill or sale of house agreement (for a house move) or a letter from family support officer, medical professional, (for family related circumstances) or a letter from an employer (in the case where you have changed jobs since the submission of your application). All documents must be recent.

### **After 12.00 noon on Friday 5 February 2021**

After 12.00 noon on 5 February 2021 changes of preference in any circumstances will not be processed until after Tuesday 27 April 2021.

## **How and when will I be notified of the outcome of my pre-school application?**

There are **two dates of notification**

### **Stage 1 (Final pre-school year (Target Age))**

Stage 1 of the admissions procedure closes on Tuesday 27 April 2021 and on **Wednesday 28 April 2021** parents of target age children will receive the outcome of their application by logging into the Citizen Portal on 28 April with the username and password used when making their application. Pre-Schools may choose to notify parents by post, letters for receipt on 28 April 2021.

If your child is not offered a place the Education Authority will write to you and provide you with information on pre-schools which still have funded places available at the close of Stage 1 and a request for further preferences for processing in Stage 2.

### **Stage 2**

On **Thursday 10 June 2021** parents who submitted further preferences in Stage 2 for their child who was unplaced in Stage 1, any new Stage 2 target age and underage children will receive the outcome of their application. If your child is not offered a place the EA will write to you and provide you with information on pre-schools which may still have places available at the close of Stage 2 of the admissions procedure.

Details of the appeals procedure will also be accessible on the EA Website at the end of Stage 1 and Stage 2 admissions procedure. (The appeals procedure is only applicable for Nursery Schools/Nursery Units and not Playgroups).

## **What happens if I do not get a place in Stage 1?**

If you applied online or by paper and did not obtain a place in Stage 1 you will be asked by EA to nominate on a proforma the names of further pre-school providers who still have places available at the close of Stage 1. This list will be available on the EA website on 28 April 2021.

5 May 2021 at 4.00 pm is the last date for:

- Nomination of further preferences for children who were unplaced in Stage 1
- New Target age first time application (treated as punctual), if after 4pm on 5 May (treated as late)
- New preference (treated as late) for target age child who was offered a funded place at Stage 1 – Parent wanting to refuse offer
- New Underage first time application/documents (treated as late)
- New additional documentation for underage who applied before 29 January 2021 (treated as punctual)

## My child has been offered a place at close of Stage 1 or close of Stage 2 in one of my preferred preferences which I now wish to refuse.

The key aim of the Pre-School Education Programme is to ensure a funded pre-school place is available for every child whose parents wish it. The process for admission to pre-school is preference based, and it is not always possible to accommodate everyone's first preference. For this reason, parents are encouraged to list a number of preferences in their pre-school application form **that they would be prepared to send their child to.**

If your child has been offered a place in either Stage 1 or Stage 2, in one of your nominated preferences, which you now wish to refuse, you can withdraw your application and make a new application which will be treated as 'late' to any provider who still has funded places available - **IMPORTANT:** if you now decide to apply to an oversubscribed provider that provider will not be granted an additional place for your child in their setting as additional places are not granted for children who had previously been offered a funded place within the pre-school admissions procedure for 2021/2022.

## Applying for a Reception place in the school year September 2021 - June 2022

### What is a Reception Class?

A limited number of primary schools have a Reception class/group for children who are aged four at the date of their admission but who are not yet compulsory school age (i.e. children whose fourth birthday is after 1 July in a year).

Children in Reception classes do not follow the primary one element of the Northern Ireland curriculum and **cannot** be admitted until they reach their fourth birthday.

Children who are not of compulsory school age will only be selected for admission after all children of compulsory school age have been allocated a place.

### Which schools have Reception provision?

You can use the 'Search School' facility to find out if a primary school in your area has a reception class

Schools that admit children into reception classes will also indicate this in their admissions criteria.

It should be noted that the majority of primary schools do not have reception provision and where it does exist children of compulsory school age must be given priority. Therefore you should consider applying for a funded pre-school place through the separate pre-school admissions procedure.

## Can I apply for a funded pre-school place and a place in a reception class?

**Yes** you may apply for both a pre-school place and a place in a reception class. These are two separate application procedures and therefore you will need to complete two separate applications. For information on applying to a Reception Class can be viewed under the Primary Admissions Guide available on the [Education Authority](#) website.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## My child is under the age of 2, can I apply for pre-school?

**No**, if your child is under the age of 2 you can make contact with the Early Years Organisation or Family Support NI for further advice

[Early Years Organisation](#)

[Family Support NI](#)

## Is Pre-School compulsory?

**No**, although good quality pre-school education has important benefits. Parents make application for a funded place on the understanding that their child will attend 5 days per week. This will enable their child to benefit fully from a quality pre-school experience.

## Do I need to put my name down or register with a pre-school provider?

**No** and even if you have given your name to a provider, you will still need to apply for admission.

## Can my child attend a funded place in the morning and one in the afternoon?

**No.** A child is only entitled to one funded place in a nursery school/unit or playgroup or private nursery e.g. a child may not have a funded place in a playgroup in the morning and attend a nursery school/unit in the afternoon.

## Can my child be enrolled for a second year in pre-school?

If your child is already attending pre-school and is at the age to apply for a second year, you still must complete an application. There is no automatic entitlement to a second year placement.

## Can my child do another year in funded pre-school instead of starting primary school?

**No.** A child over compulsory school age is not entitled to a funded pre-school education place. Our information leaflet entitled 'School Starting Age – A Guide for Parents' includes information on the legislation that determines compulsory school age, making your own arrangements to educate your child of compulsory age and advice on what to do if you have concerns about your child settling into primary school. The School Starting Age guide is available on the [Education Authority](#) website.

## Can I complete more than one application?

**No.** If you have made more than one application you will have made a false declaration. In the event that parents are discovered to have lodged more than one application form, then the first application lodged will normally be treated as the formal expression of parental preference and all other applications will not be considered.

## What happens when parents cannot agree on which pre-schools to apply to or the order of preferences?

In cases where parents cannot agree on the preferences for their child, they should endeavour to do so as soon as possible to minimise the risk of their child being unplaced. If mutual agreement is not possible ultimately you may need to obtain a Specific Issues Order from the court. If you require further advice you should contact the Education Authority.

### **How do I inform a pre-school who offers a morning and afternoon session?**

Pre-School legislation enables parents to list full-time or part-time preferences, it does not recognise morning and afternoon sessions as preferences. The admissions criteria will inform you if a pre-school offers a morning and afternoon session. You can mention a morning or afternoon session when listing your reasons for preference in your application. The allocation of a morning or afternoon session is a decision taken by the respective pre-school and there is no guarantee that you will be offered a morning session over an afternoon or vice-versa.

### **What curriculum is taught in pre-school?**

All funded pre-school education centres must follow common pre-school curricular guidance to plan and organise the children's learning.

### **Who can I speak to about a pre-school provider's published admissions criteria?**

The Board of Governors of a Nursery School or Primary School with a Nursery Unit and the Management Committee of a Voluntary or Private Playgroup are responsible for determining and applying their own admissions criteria. Any queries on the content of the published criteria should be directed to the pre-school provider. During COVID-19 as many pre-schools may be operating on a restrictive access parents may wish to email or telephone the pre-school provider.

### **Can I pay for my child's pre-school education?**

If you wish, you may contact any private or voluntary provider of your choice directly with regard to a fee paying place for your child.