



Department  
for Education

# **Delayed school admissions for summer-born pupils (2023)**

**Survey of local authorities and of parents  
and carers**

**Research report**

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**Author: Charlotte Bailey**



Government  
Social Research

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## Introduction

The School Admissions Code ('the Code') requires school admission authorities to provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. This is when children usually start school, but a child does not reach compulsory school age until the "prescribed day" following their fifth birthday (or on their fifth birthday if it falls on a prescribed day<sup>1</sup>). This means that summer-born children (born between 1 April and 31 August) do not need to start school until the September following their fifth birthday - a full academic year after they are first entitled to a place. Parents may ask for their child to be admitted to reception rather than year 1 at this point. The admission authority for the relevant school is responsible for deciding the year group to which the child should be admitted. They must make their decision in the best interests of the child concerned. The government believes it is rarely in a child's interests to miss a year of their education by beginning primary school in year 1 rather than reception,

This report is based on the fourth in a series of surveys issued to all local authorities (LAs) in England by the Department for Education (DfE) about the requests they receive for summer-born children to be admitted to reception at age 5. It also reports on a third survey of parents and carers who requested to delay admission to reception for their summer-born child.

### Local authorities (LAs)

The local authority surveys have explored the number of requests they receive, and their approach to approving requests. The first survey of local authorities was conducted in February 2017 and asked about requests to delay admission to reception until September 2016 and September 2017. The second survey, conducted in July 2018, asked about requests to delay entry to September 2018 and 2019. The third survey was conducted in October 2020 and asked about requests to delay entry until September 2019, September 2020 and September 2021. Findings from the earlier surveys indicated a significant rise in requests (and approvals) in the first two years that data was collected but demand began to slow between 2018 and 2020. One of the aims of this fourth survey is to explore whether the number of requests for delayed entry to reception have continued to plateau.

### Parent and Carers

In 2018, four local authorities<sup>2</sup> which automatically accepted all requests for summer-born children to delay entry to reception agreed to distribute a survey to parents and carers who had submitted requests. In 2020, these findings were tested with a larger sample including 42 local authorities who agreed to distribute the survey to parents/carers. This survey was repeated in 2023, with 29 LAs agreeing to distribute the survey.

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<sup>1</sup> The prescribed days are 31 December, 31 March and 31 August

<sup>2</sup> Liverpool City Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Devon County Council and Lewisham Council

## Aims and objectives

The main aims of the research were to understand:

- Trends in the number of requests for delayed entry into reception for summer-born children.
- Whether local authorities are changing their approach to handling requests.
- Factors which may be affecting demand for requests to delay entry for summer-born children.
- Parents/carers' reasons for requesting delayed entry for their summer-born children, as well as their demographics and their childcare arrangements.

## Methodology

### Survey of Local Authorities (LAs)

DfE issued an online survey to admissions leads in all local authorities in England, and the survey was live between 22 March and 21 April 2023. There are 152 local authorities in England. In some areas a single admissions service covers more than one local authority.

Responses were collected from 100 LAs (representing a 66% response rate). Of these, 40 LAs had also responded to the three previous surveys meaning that we were able to look at trends for a consistent sample of LAs covering their data for the past eight years, as well as the latest data since 2021 from a wider set of 100 LAs<sup>3</sup>.

### Survey of parents and carers

Twenty-nine LAs agreed to distribute the survey to parents/carers who had made a request for delayed entry to reception and who they had contact details for. This survey was live from 9 May to 9 June 2023. Within these LAs, responses were received from 338 parents/carers who had applied to delay their summer-born child's entry to either September 2022, September 2023, or September 2024. This response rate represents around 1 in 10 applications for delayed entry made in those LAs in the past 3 years.

## Key findings

### Survey of Local Authorities (LAs)

- Data indicated a continued shift towards more requests being automatically approved by LAs. Over a quarter of LAs (28%) had a policy of agreeing all requests, compared to 22% in 2020, and 9% in 2019.

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<sup>3</sup> Not all of the 100 LAs responding provided complete data

- Requests for delayed entry to reception for summer-born children peaked in 2021 after increasing annually since 2016, with the number of requests levelling off in 2022 and 2023<sup>4</sup>.
- Data from the 94 LAs that provided data for 2021 and 2022 shows that the number of requests has stayed relatively stable at 3,378 for 2021 and 3,340 for 2022.
- Looking at the 40 LAs that provided data for each year since 2016 allows us to assess trends amongst a consistent sample. The number of LAs who have responded to all of the surveys has decreased over time, down from 52 in 2020, and not every LA provided a response to every question. Because of this, it is important to note that this smaller sample may reflect the most acquiescent LAs, and so may not be fully representative of all LAs.
- Amongst the 40 LAs, 31 provided data on the number of requests each year, with the latest data showing further evidence of a levelling off in the number of requests since 2020. The annual rate of change in requests was +72% between 2016 and 2017, +48% to 2018, +6% to 2019, +20% to 2020, +3% to 2021, and -4% to 2022. Some of the levelling-off may be accounted for by the falling birth rate - overall, the number of children entering reception in England has gradually fallen from 663,562 in 2016/17 to 611,242 in 2022/23<sup>5</sup>.
- The approval rate for requests made to the 31 LAs has also remained relatively stable since 2019. Their responses indicate 78% of requests were agreed in 2016, 89% in 2017, 91% in 2018, 94% in 2019, 91% in 2020, 93% in 2021, 93% in 2022 and 95% in 2023.
- This survey data is consistent with school census data which shows take-up of delayed entry for summer-born pupils has slowed and is levelling off: in 2022/23 1.5% of summer-born pupils delayed entry, compared to 1.6% in 2021/22 and 1.3% in 2020/21<sup>6</sup>.

## Survey of parents and carers

- Findings from the parent/carer survey are in line with those found previously in terms of general demographics and reasons for deferral.
- Parents/carers who delayed their child's admission to reception were significantly more likely to have higher than national average incomes. Of respondents providing a

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<sup>4</sup> Data for 2023 is interim.

<sup>5</sup> Data includes both full-time and part-time students in reception. [Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics)

<sup>6</sup> School Census Spring term records 2021/22 to 2022/23. Summer-born pupils are born between April and August and delayed entrants are those who are 5 years old at the start of the academic year they are in reception. A small number of pupils repeat reception and have records when they are aged 4 and 5, these pupils are not included in the analysis.

figure, almost three quarters (73%) had a total household income of over £35,000, and over half (60%) had a total household income of more than £50,000 per year. For 17% of respondents household income was over £100,000 per year. In 2021-2022 the median household income in the UK was £35,000<sup>7</sup>.

- Eighty-four percent of respondents' children were White, compared to school census data which showed 77% of all delayed entry summer-born pupils in state-funded primary schools pupils in England were White. Within this, 76% were White British and 7% White non-British (compared to 62% and 15% in the 2022/23 school census<sup>8</sup>)
- Overall, children who delayed entry were more likely to be using more hours of fully-funded childcare in the period after they could have started school, compared to the period before they could have started school. 65% were in more than 20 hours of fully funded childcare per week before they could have started school (42% using all 30 hours and self-funding additional hours), up from 54% in 2020. The proportion using more than 20 hours of fully funded children increased to 74% in the period after the child could have started school (45% in 30 hours or more).
- Numbers of requests increased the closer the child's date of birth was to the 31 August cut-off-date. Over half of respondents indicated their child was born in August (51%) and just 3% of respondents reported that their child was born in April.
- As in previous parent surveys, parents welcomed the opportunity to delay but variation remained in levels of awareness and practice across schools and LAs, which meant it was not always a straightforward process for parents to apply. Many parents/carers had a positive experience of the process, whilst others found the process incredibly challenging.
- Many parents/carers also raised concerns around whether their child would stay in their adopted year group throughout primary and secondary school following delayed entry, or whether they would be moved back to their normal age group. In particular, parents identified concerns around having to reapply for delayed entry for secondary schools to ensure that their child did not miss Year 7.

## Limitations of the data

The data presented in this report comes with caveats which means that they should be treated as good indicators rather than absolute statistics.

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<sup>7</sup> £35,000 was the median household income in the UK before tax and benefits in 2021-22 [Effects of taxes and benefits on UK household income - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> School Census Spring term records 2022/23. Summer-born pupils are born between April and August and delayed entrants are those who are 5 years old at the start of the academic year they are in reception. A small number of pupils repeat reception and have records when they are aged 4 and 5, these pupils are not included in the analysis.

## Data from LAs

The level of data held by LAs on summer-born requests varies and they do not always collect data in a consistent way, meaning it is sometimes incomplete or has been estimated. Just over four in five LAs providing data indicated that they were using actual data rather than estimates. LAs also vary in the coverage of schools they handle or coordinate requests for (see 'School Coverage' section) again resulting in gaps in their knowledge.

Trend data has been established using returns from 40 LAs which provided data for each year since 2016, which allows us to assess trends over time amongst a consistent sample. Of these LAs, 36 provided information on whether they agree all requests automatically (Figure 2). 31 provided the number of requests for each year across all surveys (Figure 4 – 5 and Table 1). This covers about a fifth of LAs and, whilst it does provide a valuable indication, this smaller sample may reflect the most acquiescent LAs, so may not be fully representative of all LAs. For example, the proportion of LAs accepting all requests is higher in this sub-sample compared to the overall, with 42% of the 36 LAs agreeing all requests for delayed entry in 2023, compared to 28% of LAs overall in 2023.

Overall, LAs appear to have a good overview of applications and requests for delayed entry in their area but there may be some over-reporting and under-reporting in numbers. In some cases, LAs may have provided data on the number of requests (which may be to more than one school) rather than reflecting the number of individual children. Others were aware that they may not have captured all requests as arrangements are sometimes made at school level.

The number of requests received by individual LAs ranges from one or two per year in some areas, to over 200 in others. This means that, in a lot of LAs, a small increase in numbers has the potential to distort changes in proportions, as do a large change in number amongst the few LAs with the most requests.

The most recent survey collected data on requests to delay entry to 2021, 2022 and 2023. 2023 data is interim as requests often come in after the admissions round, and LAs are still in the process of approving requests.

## Data from parents and carers

29 LAs agreed to circulate the survey. Of these, 14 LAs are included in the group that have responded to all of the LA surveys since 2016. This survey was distributed to parents/carers in the 29 LAs who had made requests in the previous 3 years to delay their child's entry to reception.

As noted above, there was wide variation across areas in the number of requests received so respondents were not evenly distributed geographically. Over a third of respondents were located in just one LA<sup>9</sup>, so although the sample could be representative of those delaying, it is not intended to represent the national population.

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<sup>9</sup> Hampshire County Council



The department does not collect the names or contact details of parents requesting delayed entry to reception for their summer-born child, so a link to the survey was distributed on behalf of DfE by LAs that were willing to do so.

We are aware that the link was shared on social media. This resulted in an influx of responses from outside of the twenty-nine LAs. There were also numerous responses from parents whose request to delay was not for entry in 2021, 2022 or 2023. These additional responses may reflect the views lobbied by certain social media groups rather than the wider population of parents who have requested delayed entry. Because of this, to ensure that the survey results reflected current experiences of parents/carers, any response from outside the 29 LAs, or relating to requests to delay for any year other than 2021, 2022 or 2023, was removed from the dataset. This resulted in a final dataset of 338 responses.

## Background on the admissions process

The School Admissions Code ('the Code') requires school admission authorities to provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. This is when children usually start school, although a child does not reach compulsory school age (CSA) until the 'prescribed day' after their fifth birthday. Summer-born children do not need to start school until the September following their fifth birthday, although most do start in the September following their fourth birthday. Where a parent decides to delay their child's start at school and wants their child to start in reception, rather than year 1 alongside the rest of their age cohort, they must make a request to the admission authority of the school concerned. The admission authority is responsible for making the decision on which year group the child should be admitted to. The department has published guidance for admissions authorities and for parents/carers to inform their decisions<sup>10</sup>. Many requests are treated favourably by admission authorities though policies do vary.

The application round takes place each autumn term for the subsequent academic year, hence parents/carers are invited to apply for a school place in the autumn term after their child's third birthday<sup>11</sup>. LAs must provide an application form that enables parents to express their preference for a minimum of three schools. Admission authorities are responsible for allocating places based on their determined admission arrangements. For community and voluntary controlled schools, the admission authority is the LA. For voluntary aided and foundation schools it is the governing body, and for academies (including free schools, studio school and UTCs) it is the academy trust. The Code requires admission authorities to make clear the process for requesting admission out of the normal year group, but it does not prescribe a particular process. As shown below, in many cases there is an agreement that the LA co-ordinates requests across schools.

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<sup>10</sup> See [Summer-born children: advice for admission authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/summer-born-children-advice-for-admission-authorities) and [Summer-born children: advice for parents - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/summer-born-children-advice-for-parents)

<sup>11</sup> Although applications are invited in the autumn term, closing dates can vary across LAs. They are usually between January and March.

# Survey of local authorities (LAs)

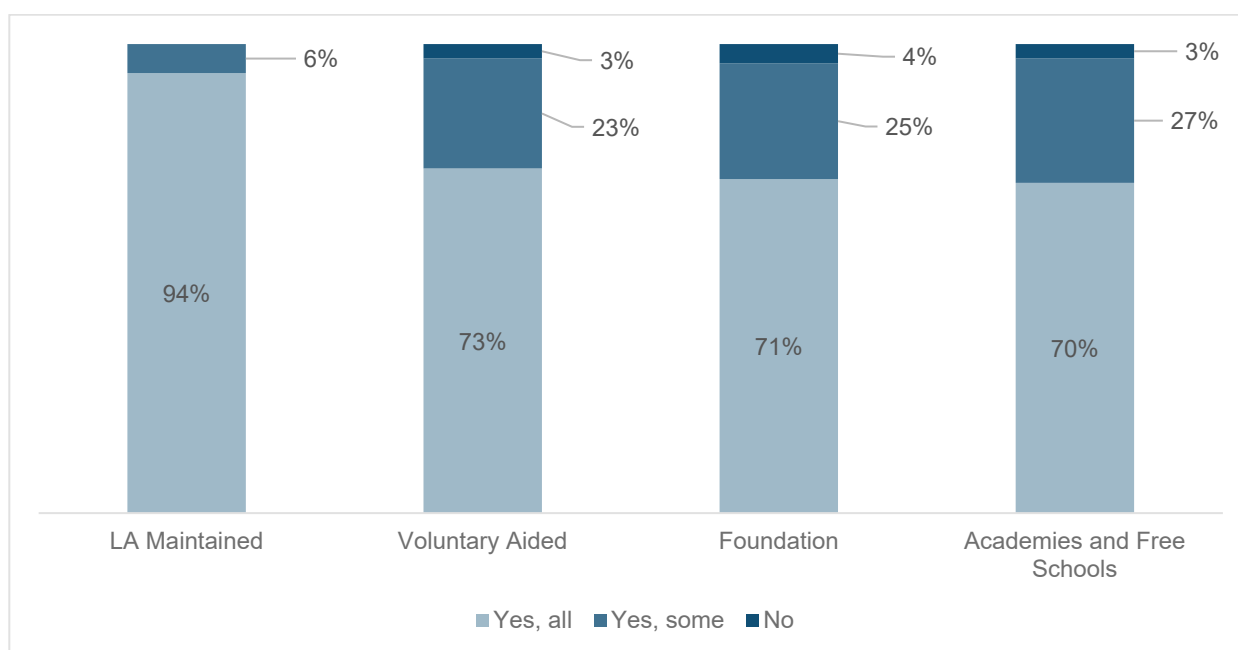
## School coverage

We asked LAs to indicate the types of schools they handle requests for delayed admission to reception for, and for which they hold data on delayed admissions.

As shown in Figure 1, 94% of LAs handle delayed entry requests for all LA maintained primary schools in their area and just under three quarters of LAs also handle all requests for other types of school in the area. This is similar to results in 2020, where 95% of LAs handled delayed entry requests for all LA maintained primary schools in their area. However, the proportion of LAs handling requests for all academies and free schools has fallen slightly from 72% in 2020 to 70%.

Around a quarter of LAs also handle requests for some (but not all) academies/free schools, foundation, and voluntary aided schools. A very small number of LAs (less than 5%) do not handle any delayed admission requests for voluntary aided, foundation schools, or academies and free schools in their area.

Overall, LAs appear to have a good overview of requests for delayed entry in their area, however feedback indicates that when parents apply directly to the schools that this information is not always provided to LAs.



**Figure 1: Types of primary school which local authorities coordinate delayed entry admissions for (2023)**

*Base: 100 LAs. Excludes 'not applicable' where none of a school type is located within the area.*

Feedback from open text boxes further illustrates the various models employed, and generally indicates schools do input into the decisions made to varying degrees -

- Centralised LA coordination for all school-types, with decisions made at school level:

“All requests are sent to the Admissions Authority (Schools/Academy Trusts) for them to make the decisions. The Local Authority co-ordinate between parents and schools.”
- Centralised LA coordination for LA maintained schools, with less coordination on applications and approvals for other admissions authorities:

“For all LA maintained schools, we will be aware of any requests that are received, however, for Academies, Foundation and VA schools, we ask to be informed of any requests and decisions but cannot be sure that we receive them.”
- Applications and agreements are decentralised, with the outcome of decisions being monitored by the local authority:

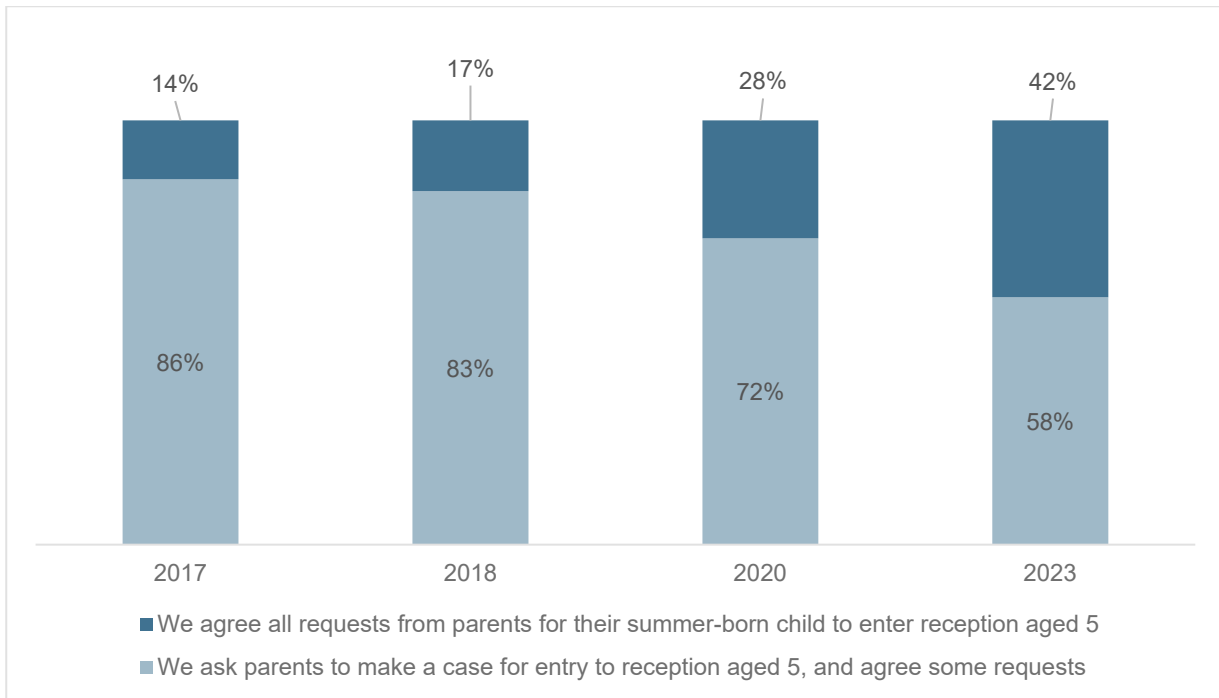
“Whilst the LA keeps a log of all requests for the different types of schools, it is the governing body and academy trust who consider the information for Voluntary Aided and academies.”

## Admissions policies

Compared to the findings from previous surveys, there appears to be a continuing shift towards more LAs now agreeing all requests for delayed entry to reception. In 2018, just 9% of LAs overall agreed all requests for delayed entry, rising to 22% in 2020, and then to 28% in 2023. 72% of LAs in 2023 reported that they ask parents to make a case for delayed entry, and then agree some requests.

When LAs were asked for how long their current policy had been in place, 88% indicated that it had been in place for over three years, increasing from 72% in 2020. 11% of LAs had updated their approach in the past one to three years, and 1% has updated their current policy in the last year.

To help show how policies have changed amongst a consistent sample, Figure 2 shows trend data amongst the 36 LAs that provided a response to this in 2023 and the three previous surveys. It indicates a shift towards more requests being automatically accepted; from 14% of this subgroup in 2017 to 42% in 2023.

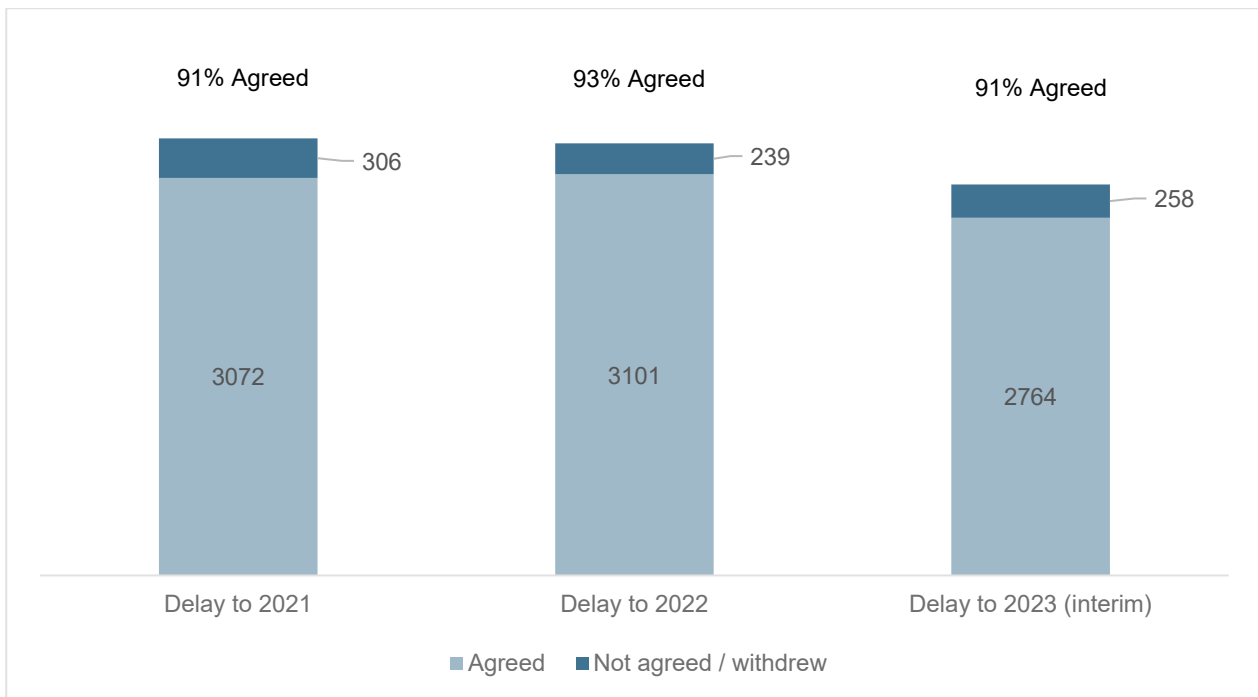


**Figure 2: Policy on how requests are handled (whether agree all or some), amongst those LAs which provided data for 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2023**

*Base: 36 LAs responding to waves 1, 2, 3 and 4, and providing data for each year*

## Number of requests and approvals for delayed entry

This section describes the number of requests and approvals for delayed entry to reception, covering data for delays into September 2021, 2022 and 2023, as reported by LAs in the most recent survey. Trends over a longer time period (since 2016) are also reported using data from 31 LAs that also participated in the three previous surveys and provided the number of requests made in each survey.

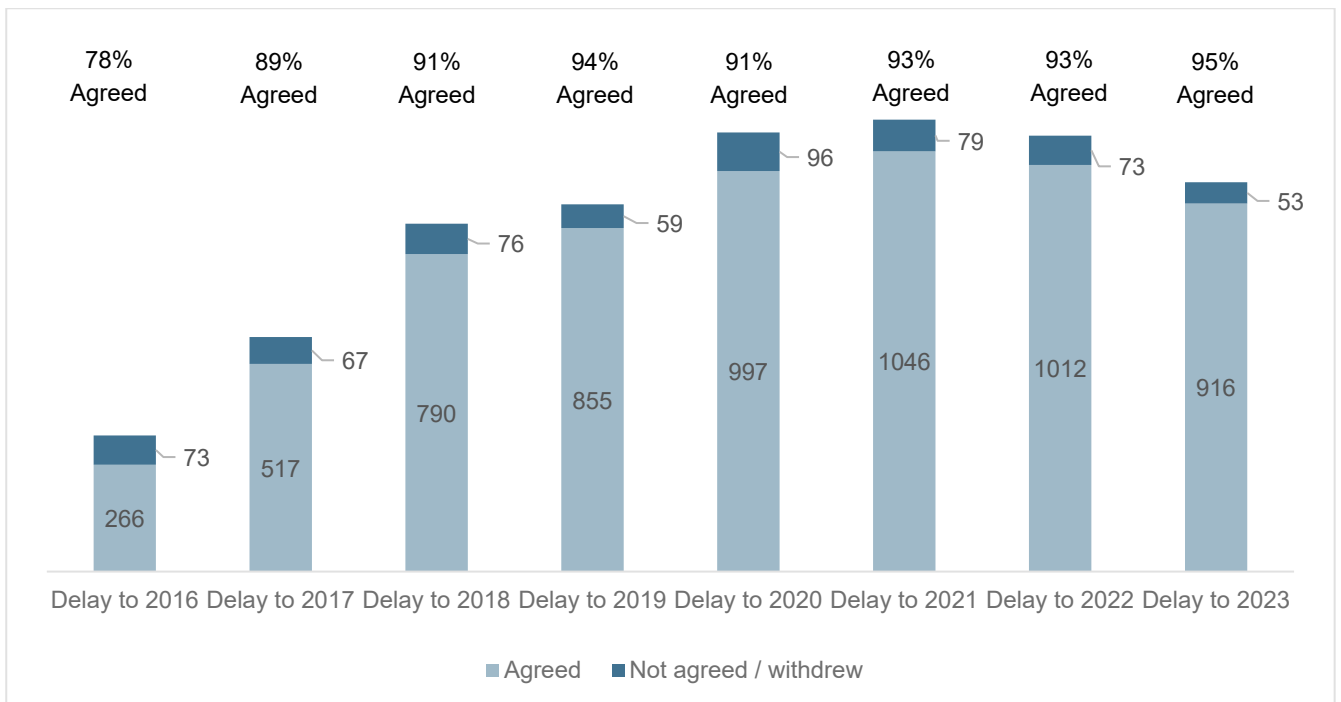


**Figure 3: Number of requests for delayed admission - reported in 2023 by those LAs providing data for 2021, 2022 and 2023**

*Base: 94 LAs. Data for 2023 is interim.*

Data from the 94 LAs that provided data in 2023 (survey wave 4) is shown in Figure 3. It shows that the number of requests made within these LAs stayed relatively stable for delays into 2021 (3,378 requests) and 2022 (3,340), but fell for delays to 2023 (3,022), suggesting that requests may have begun to plateau within these LAs. The proportion of requests agreed is similar across all three years, at 91% for delaying to 2021, 93% for 2022 and 91% for 2023 (interim data). This is a small increase on the proportion of responses accepted in previous surveys, with 89% being accepted in both 2019 and 2020, however this difference is not statistically significant. The total number of requests made continues to represent a small number of the annual intake, with in just 1.5% of summer-born pupils delaying entry in 2022/23<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> School Census Spring term records 2021/22 to 2022/23. Summer-born pupils are born between April and August and delayed entrants are those who are 5 years old at the start of the academic year they are in reception. A small number of pupils repeat reception and have records when they are aged 4 and 5, these pupils are not included in the analysis.



**Figure 4: Requests to delay admission, reported by 31 LAs providing data for all years 2016 to 2023 (responses from waves 1, 2, 3 and 4)**

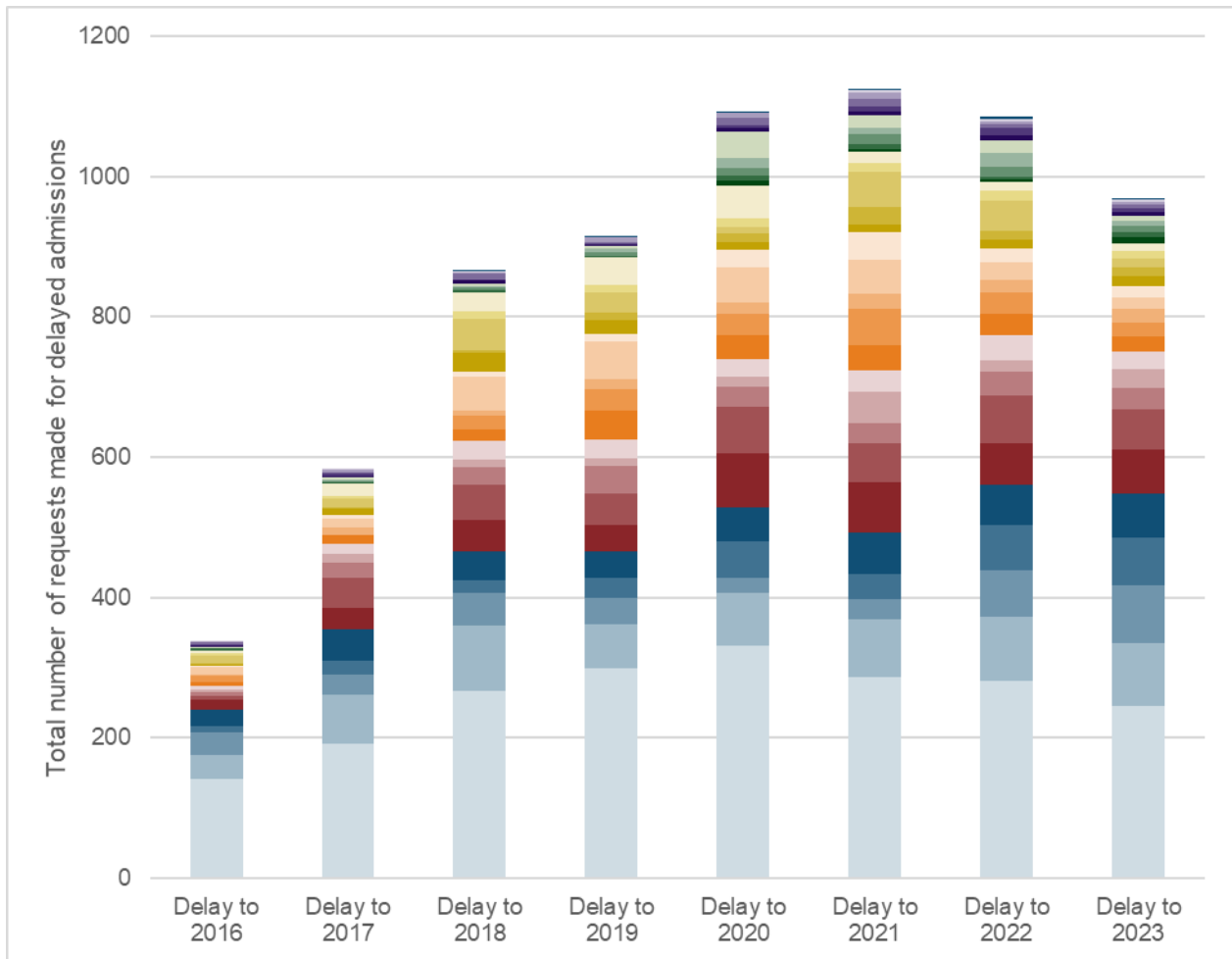
Base: 31 LAs responding to waves 1, 2, 3 and 4, and providing data for each year. Data for 2023 is interim  
13

To assess trends amongst a consistent sample, data was compiled from the 31 LAs that provided data on the number of requests made across the four survey waves covering the period from 2016 to 2023. Figure 4 shows that amongst this group of LAs the number of requests being made more than tripled between 2016 and 2021, from 339 for delayed entry for 2016 to a peak of 1125 for delayed entry to 2021. The number of requests fell slightly in both 2022 and 2023, falling to 969 for delayed entry to 2023 (interim data). Some of the levelling-off may be accounted for by the falling birthrate - overall, the number of children entering reception in England has gradually fallen from 663,562 in 2016/17 to 611,242 in 2022/23<sup>14</sup>. The proportion of requests being accepted is similar compared to the overall - in 2022 93% of requests were accepted for this sample, with 93% of requests overall also being accepted.

<sup>13</sup> Information on requests to delay entry to 2019 was collected in both wave 2 and wave 3 surveys. We use data from wave 3 only. Information on requests to delay entry to 2021 was collected in both wave 3 and wave 4 surveys. We use data from wave 4 only.

<sup>14</sup> Data includes both full-time and part-time students in reception. [Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics)

**Figure 5: Number of requests for delayed admission per year - reported by LAs providing data for all years 2016 to 2023 (responses from waves 1, 2, 3 and 4). For illustration only.**



*Base: 31 LAs responding to waves 1, 2, 3 and 4, and providing data for each year*

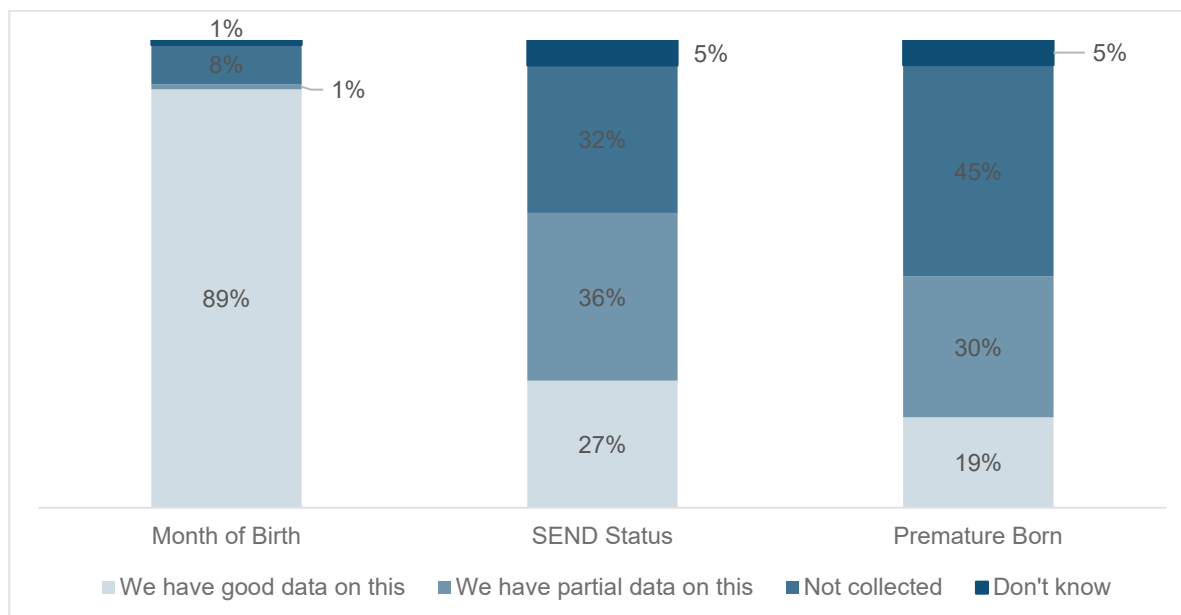
*Note: Each LA is represented by the same colour.*

It is important to note that the number of requests varies a great deal between LAs. Each year, a few LAs receive high numbers of requests, whilst most receive much fewer. For example, Figure 5 shows the number of requests received for 31 LAs between 2016 and 2023, with each colour representing the same LA each year. It shows that one LA<sup>15</sup> received the highest number of requests every year since the data has been collected for this sample of LAs. In contrast, less than half of responding LAs reported fewer than 13 requests for 2023 (median value for this year is 13.0).

<sup>15</sup> Hertfordshire County Council

## Characteristics of summer-born pupils

LAs were asked about the information they collect about summer-born children whose parents requested delayed entry to reception. Figure 6 shows that the most commonly collected information is month of birth, which 89% of responding LAs have good data on. 63% of LAs also reported having either good or partial data on SEND Status, and 49% of LAs have good or partial data on whether the child was born premature.



**Figure 6: Characteristics of summer-born pupils collected by LAs**

*Base: Month of Birth 95 LAs, SEND Status 92 LAs, Premature Born 93 LAs*

Twenty LAs also collected other characteristics (to various extents) such as gender, social/emotional/medical readiness, current nursery, schools applied for, and other reasons that parents provided such as medical reports to support requests.

## Transition to secondary school

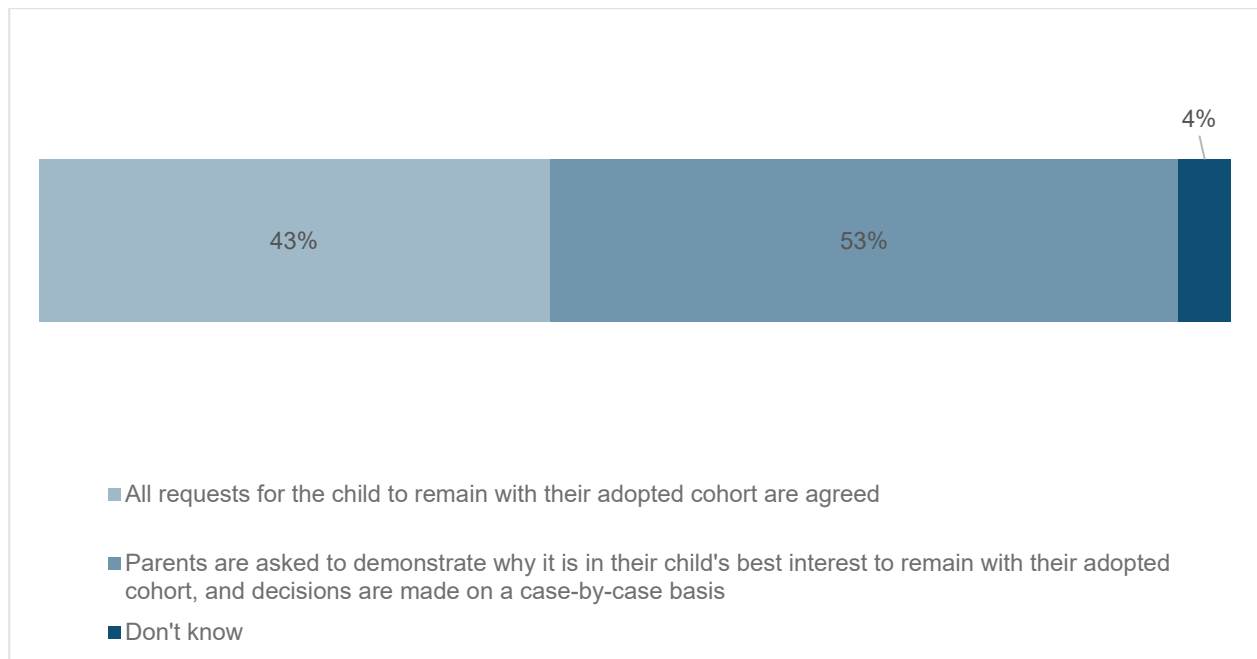
As children whose entry to reception is delayed progress through the education system, their parents are required to make further requests for them to continue to be educated outside of their normal age group, for example when they transfer from primary to secondary school.

The Department's guidance for admission authorities says that, unless there are sound educational reasons to do otherwise, the assumption should be that a child will remain outside their normal year group, as to do otherwise would result in them missing a year of school.



LAs were asked to provide information on how the transition to secondary school is handled for summer-born children. 43% of LAs reported that all requests for the child to remain in their adopted cohort are agreed, whilst 53% of LAs said that it is handled on a case-by-case basis.

**Figure 7: Policy on handling summer-born transitions to secondary school**



Base: 91 LAs

Fifty-five LAs provided written feedback on how these requests around secondary school transitions are handled, including the following which indicates there is no single common policy:

“There have only been only a few cases and we do not know of any cases which have been refused by the secondary schools.”

“Advice to parent re transfer phase should be changed, parents should not have to seek permission a year before their child is due to transfer. It should just be automatic that they stay with their current cohort.”

“In fact, we do not require a second requests to be made as all our secondary schools and academies have agreed to admit these children to their 'adopted' year group at secondary transfer and beyond.”

“All children remain with their adopted cohort”

“In the main a child educated out of year since reception, will, if they wish to remain out of year, we do however have a few academies who refuse to educate out of year.”

“Again the child is able to move up to a community high school with their adopted cohort. However other schools will make a decision on an individual basis.”

“We ask parents to make a case for entry under the summer-born ruling and agree the requests and liaise with schools where they are their own admitting authority. Discussions are needed with some schools and the requests are generally agreed.”

“As an admission authority for our community schools we will always take account of the fact that the child has been educated in a different year group to the point of transferring to secondary and, unless there are sound educational reasons to do otherwise, the assumption should be that the child remains outside of their normal year group when transferring to secondary school.”

## **Open feedback from LAs**

Before the survey closed, respondents were given an opportunity to provide any other feedback on the demand for delayed school entry. Open feedback from LAs was in general very similar to feedback received in 2020, and focused on issues such as COVID-19, SEND, school preference and the complexity of the admissions process. LAs also provided specific insight into the complexity of summer-born admissions for schools which are their own admissions authority.

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

One of the most common issues mentioned was the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on the number of requests to delay entry. This was mentioned by 14 LAs, with respondents mentioning how they believed this was driving increased numbers of requests. Despite this, data on the number of requests highlights that there was not a notable increase in the number of requests during the coronavirus pandemic.

In many cases LAs explained the perceived increase in request was due to disruption to early years settings and nurseries meaning that children had reduced contact with learning environments during the pandemic. One LA explained:

“Anecdotally, we feel that there was an increase of requests for the 2021 application round, starting September 2022 citing Covid-19 as

the reason. As children had not been attending nurseries due to the pandemic, many had stated developmental delays due to this”.

### **SEND and Medical Needs**

Developmental needs, medical needs and SEND were mentioned by several LAs as reasons why parents apply for delayed entry. Two LAs specifically mentioned EHCPs, noting how some parents are using this to remain in nursery whilst going through the EHCP process.

### **School Preference**

Five LAs mentioned they had experienced some cases where they felt parents’ motive for delaying entry was driven by school preference. This was mainly when parents/carers have been informed that the child had not gained a place at their first preference school, with delayed entry giving parents ‘a second bite of the cherry’.

Two LAs mentioned how requests connected to school preference were more likely to come after national offer day.

### **Applications Process**

LAs highlighted the complexity of the process for applying for delayed admissions, and the variation in how the process works across areas.

Three LAs mentioned how the lack of official deadlines for applying for delayed entry results causes confusion, and results in parents using the process to have another go at getting their preferred school. One LA discussed how the lack of official deadlines can sometimes result in parents missing deadlines for reception applications:

“There is no deadline for applying, but there are a number of parents who have requested a delayed place for September 2023 after the closing date for reception applications, and we are still receiving requests. These students have a reduced likelihood of being offered a school of preference, and due to each admission authority being responsible for agreeing (or refusing) an offset request, they cannot be offered an alternative preference as part of the normal co-ordinated scheme processes.”

Six LAs mentioned that the number of requests they receive often changes throughout the year as some parents change their minds and withdraw their applications once the date for starting schools becomes closer, with the child then attending school with their

age cohort. One LA reported that this has increasingly happened in recent years, predominantly due to a rise in 'parental nervousness regarding their children starting school since COVID'.

Two LAs also noted the geographical variation in approach to summer-born admissions. One of these LAs noted how it can be difficult for families who are applying for schools across multiple authorities, as their application may be accepted in one area, but not the other if policies differ. One LA mentioned how they found that there are more applications for schools in more affluent areas.

### **Own Admissions Authority Schools**

Several LAs mentioned the complexity of summer-born admissions for schools which are their own admission authority. For these schools, the individual school or trust decides whether to accept the request for delayed entry to reception. LAs reported difficulties arising when one admission authority approve a request, but others so not:

“We have had one case where two of the schools preferred agreed to the delayed admission and one didn't (all own admission authority schools). This kind of scenario can create all sorts of issues.”

Four LAs also reported that they felt that some own admissions authority schools did not understand or apply the available guidance when making decisions about delayed entry, resulting in all requests to these schools being denied.

Because of this, multiple LAs felt there was a need to legislate for the right for summer-born children to have delayed entry. Eleven LAs mentioned this, and the need for improved guidance to reduce the variation in experience across areas and between LA-maintained and own admissions authority schools.

“We would support legislation on summer-born children to ensure parents receive a consistent response from all admission authorities for delaying admission to reception and securing the child's right to remain in their adopted year group at secondary transfer. This would simplify the process for parents and reduce anxiety for all concerned. There would also be benefits in relation to administrative burdens on co-ordinating authorities.”

## Survey of parents and carers of summer-born children

Twenty-nine LAs indicated that they were able to distribute a survey to parents and carers in their area on behalf of the department. The department requested that it be sent to parents/carer in those LAs who had made a request to delay their summer-born child's entry to reception in either September 2022, September 2023 or September 2024: around 3000 parents/carers according to the latest survey data. The survey was live between 9 May and the 9 June 2023 and 338 valid responses were received<sup>16</sup> which represents around 1 in 10 requests made in those LAs in the past 3 years.

### Characteristics

The parent/carer survey collected information on gender, month of birth, duration of pregnancy, and ethnicity for children whose parents applied to delay their entry to reception. Household income was also collected. Overall, the results were very similar to the findings in 2020, suggesting that the profile of children with requests for delayed entry has remained consistent year-on-year.

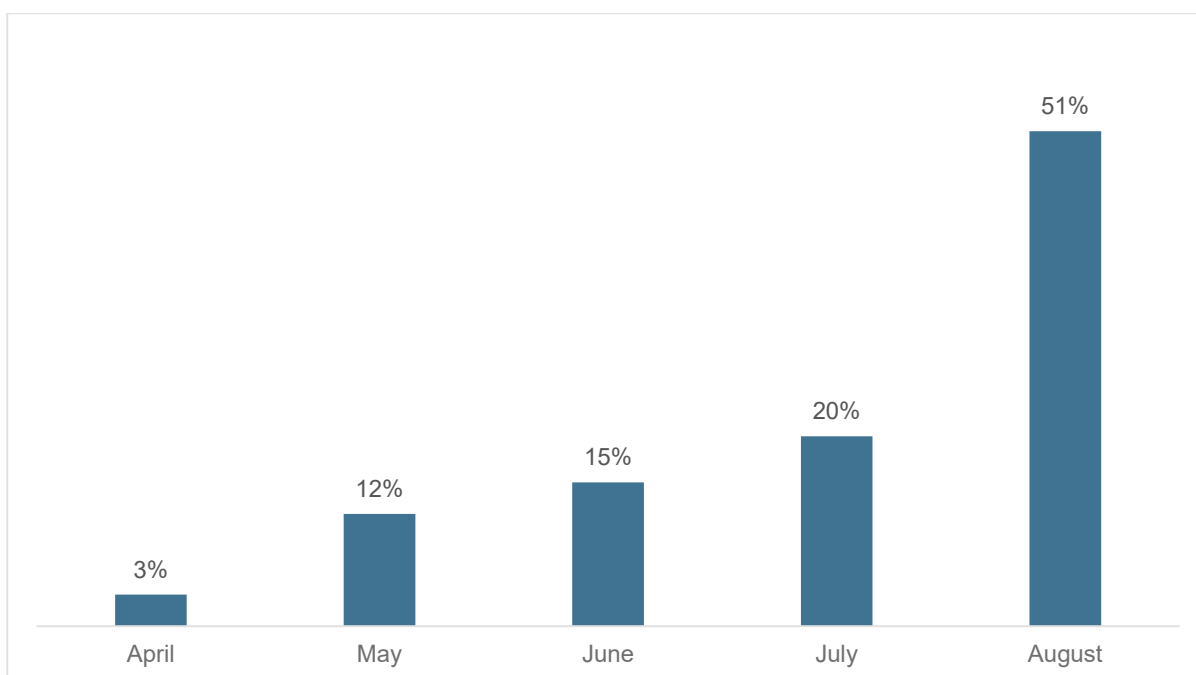
Requests for delayed entry were more common for boys than girls (64% and 36% respectively). These findings are consistent with 2022/23 school census data which showed that 65% of pupils with out-of-year birth dates were male<sup>17</sup>. This is similar to 2020, where 62% of requests were for boys, and 37% for girls. 5% of requests were for twins.

Figure 8 shows that the proportion of requests was highest amongst the youngest summer-born children, i.e. those closest to the cut-off date of 31 August. Over half of respondents indicated their child was born in August (51%) and just 3% of respondents reported that their child was born in April. This is consistent with school census data which showed that in 2022/23 47% of pupils with out-of-year birth dates were born in August, and 5% were born in April<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> See limitations section for detail on data cleaning

<sup>17</sup> School Census Spring term records 2022/23. Summer-born pupils are born between April and August and delayed entrants are those who are 5 years old at the start of the academic year they are in reception. A small number of pupils repeat reception and have records when they are aged 4 and 5, these pupils are not included in the analysis.



**Figure 8: Requests to delay entry by child's month of birth**

*Base: 338 parents and carers*

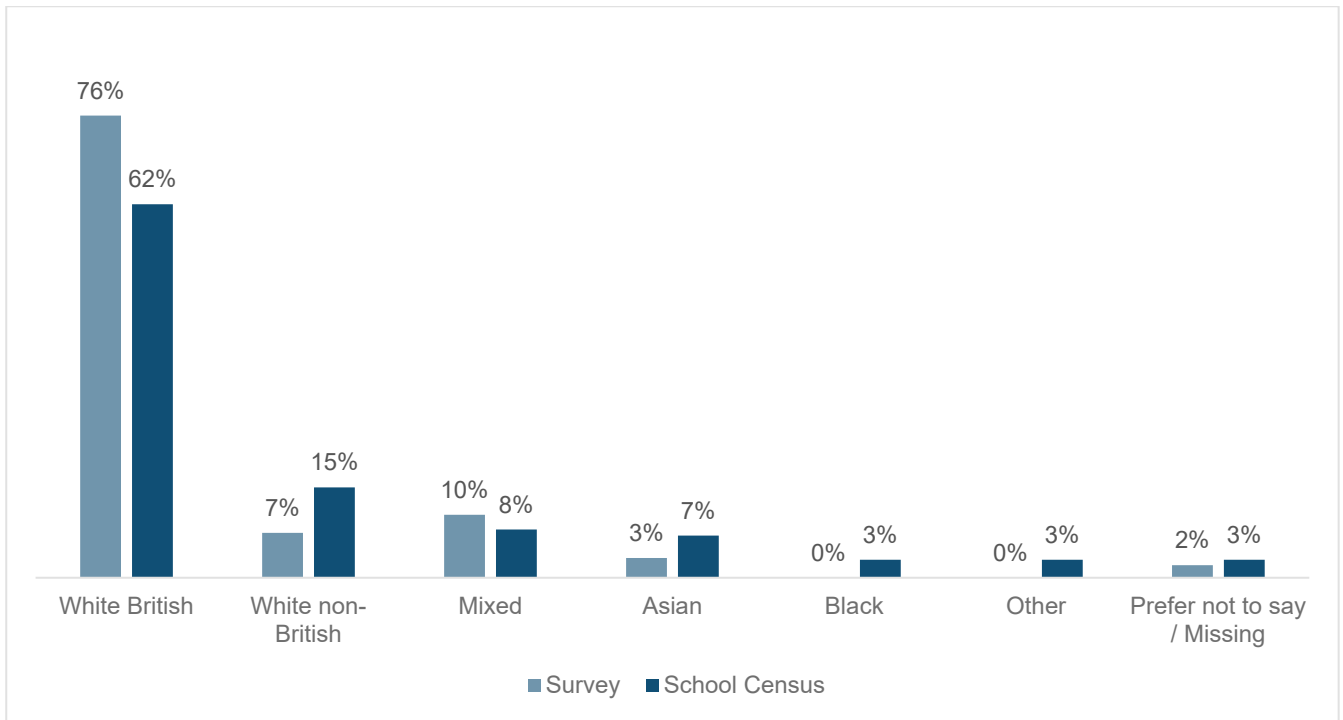
Eighteen percent of respondents indicated that their child was born premature (less than 37 weeks gestation), with 5% of children being born at less than 30 weeks. 82% of respondents indicated that their pregnancy was 37 weeks or more (full term).

Twenty-eight percent of respondents indicated that their child had been diagnosed as having a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND), with a further 17% reporting that they suspected their child has SEND but it had not (yet) been diagnosed. This is an increase from 17% (diagnosed) and 12% (suspected but not (yet) diagnosed) in 2020.

Eighty-three percent of children whose parents/carers requested delayed entry were White, compared to 72% for all state-funded primary school pupils in England<sup>18</sup>. Within this, 76% were 'White British' and 7% 'White Other'. This sample has a higher proportion of White pupils than the 2022/23 school census data, which shows that 77% of pupils with out-of-year birth dates were white, of which 62% were White British<sup>19</sup>. Figure 9 shows the ethnic breakdown of respondents' children compared to all delayed entry summer-born pupils.

<sup>18</sup> [Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics) In 2022/23 in state-funded primary schools in England 63% were White British, 8% were White non-British, 7% had Mixed ethnicity, 13% were Asian, 6% were Black and 2% were from other ethnic groups.

<sup>19</sup> School Census Spring term records 2022/23. Summer-born pupils are born between April and August and delayed entrants are those who are 5 years old at the start of the academic year they are in reception. A small number of pupils repeat reception and have records when they are aged 4 and 5, these pupils are not included in the analysis.



**Figure 9: Ethnicity of children for whom the parents/carers requested delayed admission compared to delayed entry summer-born pupils in the School Census 2022/23**

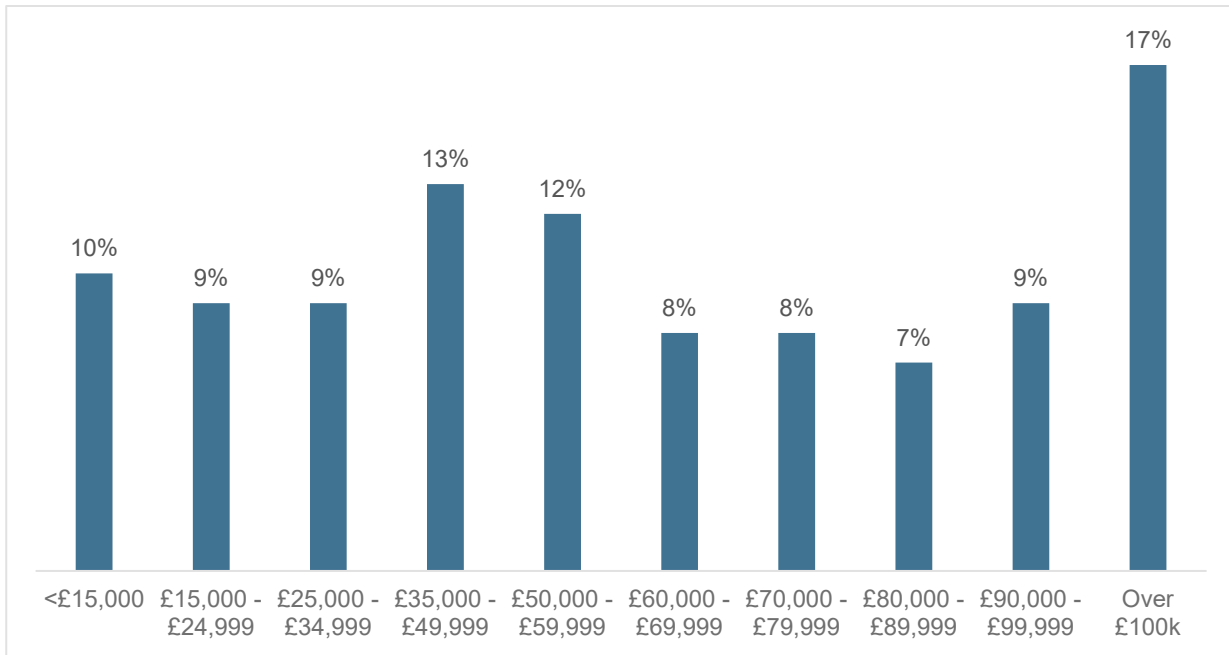
Base: 338 parents and carers, and School Census<sup>20</sup> data on delayed entry summer-born pupils in all state funded primary schools for the academic year 2022/23<sup>21</sup>.

As was found in previous surveys, Figure 10 shows that parents and carers who requested to delay their child’s admission to reception were significantly more likely to have higher than national average incomes. Of respondents providing a figure, almost three quarters (73%) had a total household income of over £35,000, and over half (60%) had a total household income of more than £50,000 per year. For 17% of respondents household income was over £100,000 per year. In 2021-2022 the median household income in the UK was £35,000<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> School Census Spring term records 2022/23. Summer-born pupils are born between April and August and delayed entrants are those who are 5 years old at the start of the academic year they are in reception. A small number of pupils repeat reception and have records when they are aged 4 and 5, these pupils are not included in the analysis.

<sup>21</sup> In the School Census 2022/23 data, Chinese pupils are included in the ‘Other’ category. In the parent/carer survey the question on ethnic group did not have a distinct option for Chinese.

<sup>22</sup> £35,000 was the median household income in the UK before tax and benefits in 2021-22 [Effects of taxes and benefits on UK household income - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/earningsandincome/articles/effects-of-taxes-and-benefits-on-uk-household-income/2021-22)



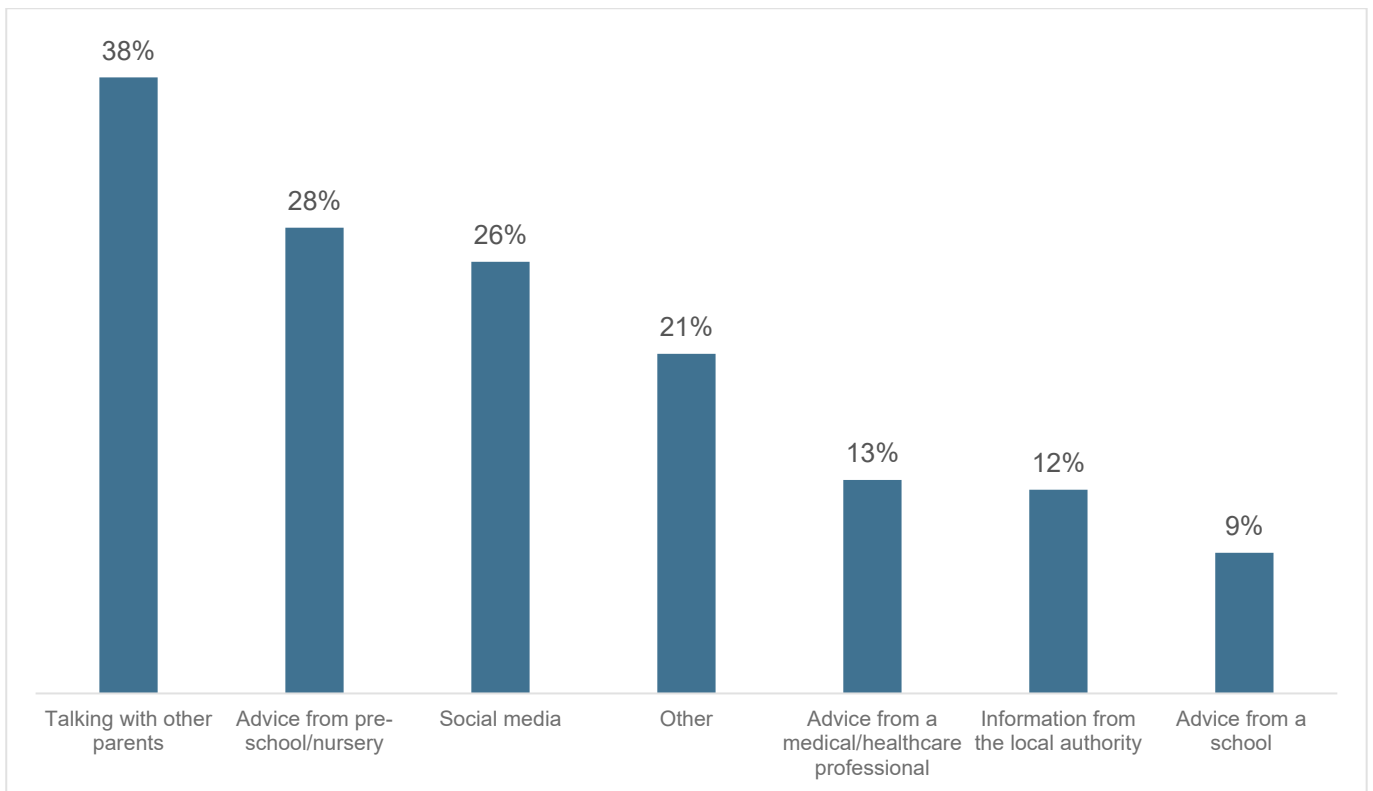
**Figure 10: Total income per year in households that requested delayed entry to reception.**

*Base: 304 parents and carers*

## Awareness

From the list of options presented, parents/carers most commonly reported 'other parents' to be how they found out about the option to delay entry for their child (38%). This was also the most common option in 2020. The second most common option was advice from pre-school/nursery (28%) followed by social media (26%). 12% of parents/carers were informed about the policy by the LA, 13% from a medical professional, and 9% from a school. Parents could choose multiple options from the list presented.





**Figure 11: Channels through which parents and carers became aware of the possibility of delaying their child's entry to reception.**

*Base: 338 parents and carers*

Examples given of 'other' ways parents/carers found out about the policy included: that they researched themselves; found out from friends/relatives who are teachers; are teachers themselves; or through seeing information about delayed entry on the news.

## Factors relevant for requests to delay entry

When asked to cite the main reason<sup>23</sup> for their decision to request a delayed entry for their child, 48% of parents/carers selected 'I decided my child was not ready for school'. This was also the most common main reason for delay in 2020 (41%).

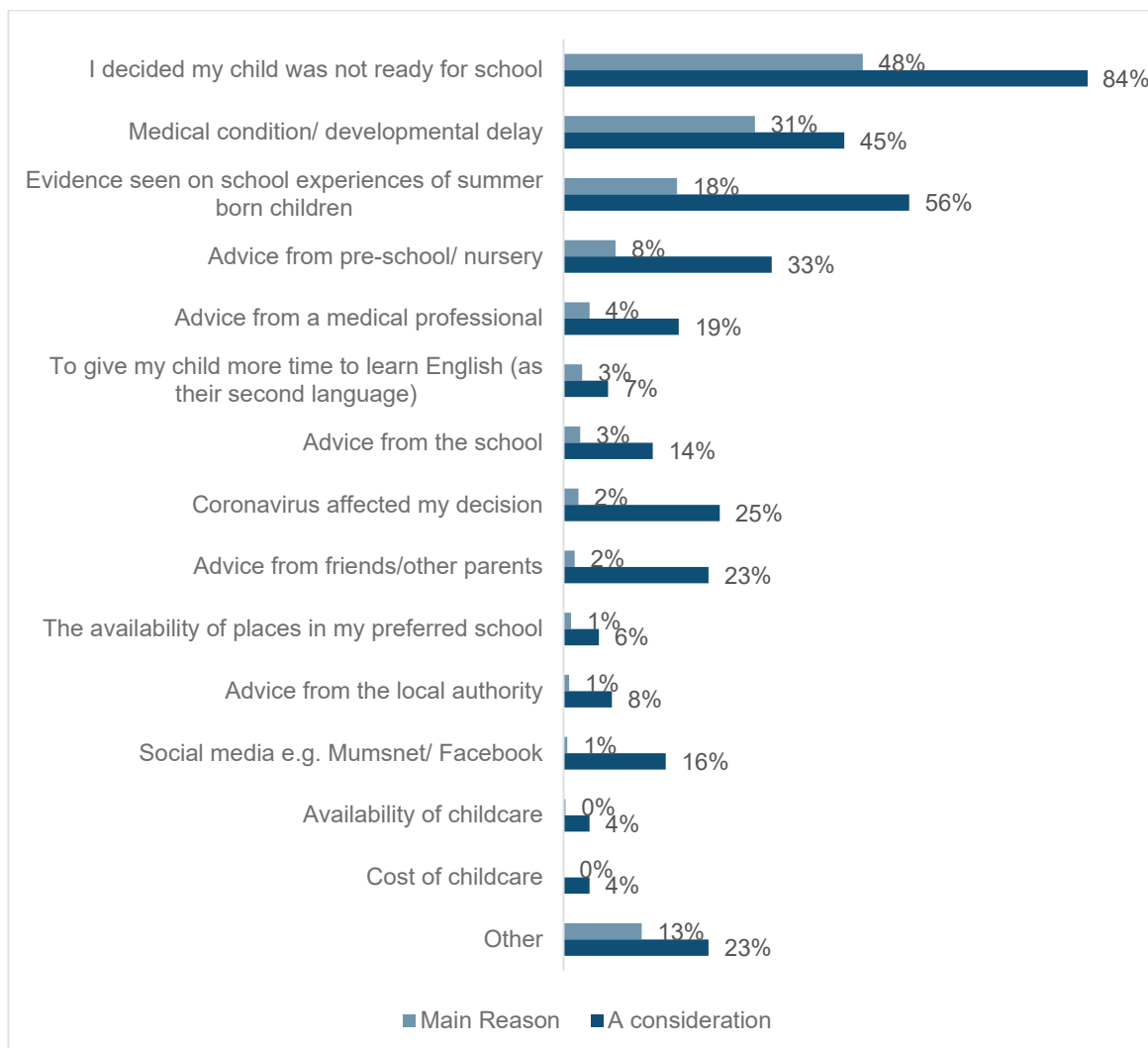
Their child's 'medical condition/developmental delay' and 'evidence seen on the school experiences of summer-born children' were the next most common main factors relevant to their decision (31% and 18% respectively).

Over three quarters of parents/carers (84%) cited 'I decided my child was not ready for school' as a consideration. 56% considered 'evidence seen on school experiences of

<sup>23</sup> Respondents were able to select more than one consideration, so percentages do not total 100. Respondents were also able to select more than one main reason, so percentages do not total 100. This means that proportions for 'Main Reason' may be inflated due to some respondents choosing multiple options. Not every respondent selected a main reason.

summer-born children' as part of their decision, and 45% considered 'medical condition/ developmental delay' as relevant to their decision.

**Figure 12: Factors relevant in parents' decision to delay entry to reception**



Base: 335 parents and carers. <sup>24</sup>

Of those that specified 'other' reasons affecting their decision, many parents/carers explained that they felt that their child was not yet emotionally, socially, or physically mature enough for school. Some parents drew on negative personal experiences as summer-born children themselves, or on their older children's experiences. Many also referenced issues with speech and language or SEND as reasons for deferring entry.

Multiple parents/carers cited evidence around the experiences of summer-born children, and mentioned that they feel that 4-year-old children are too young to start school:

<sup>24</sup> Respondents were able to select more than one consideration, so percentages do not total 100. Respondents were also able to select more than one main reason, so percentages do not total 100. This means that proportions for 'Main Reason' may be inflated due to some respondents choosing multiple options. Not every respondent selected a main reason.

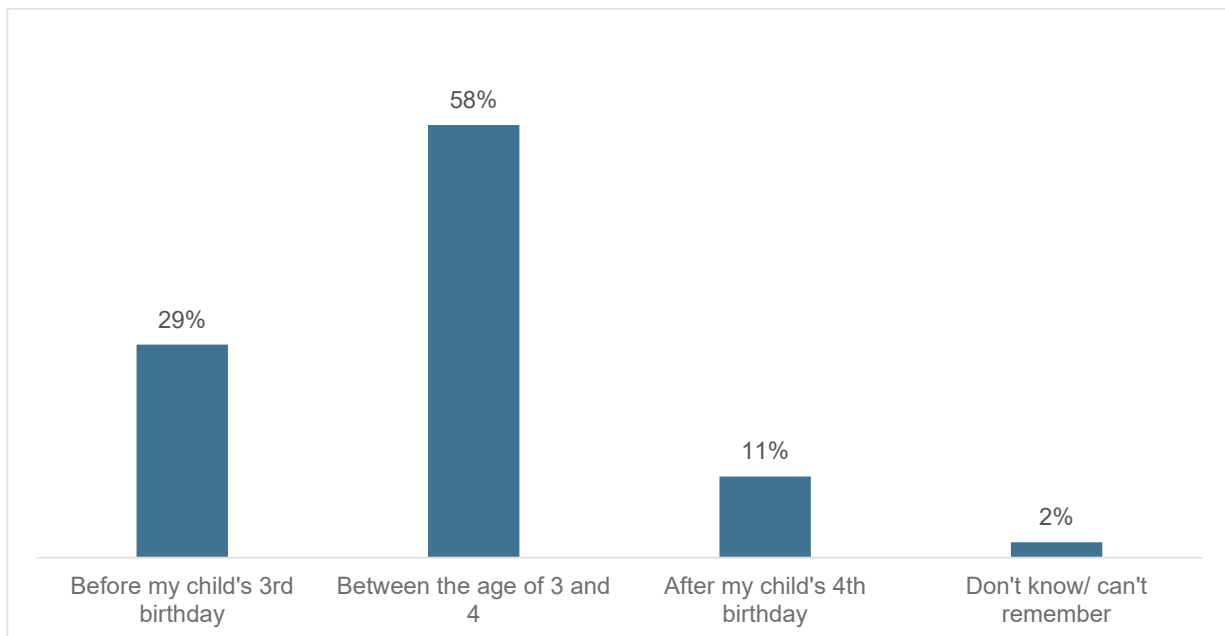
“The british education system compared to other european models that children start later and have better outcomes. Emotional health and wellbeing of my child entering an education system that is very academic focused when research shows us children should be playing until much later. Play based learning is not the same thing as play. My child would benefit from another year of play and development so when she enters the british education aystem [sic] she has more chance to thrive instead of just survive”

Multiple parents also mentioned that their child was born premature or early, and so would have been in the following school year had they been born at 40 weeks. A few parents/carers also mentioned that their child was adopted and so they wanted additional time to ‘attach’ and catch up on developmental delays resulting from early life upheaval or trauma.

## Timing of decision

Over half of respondents (58%) initially decided to delay their child’s entry when the child was three years old. This is very similar to 2020 (59%). Almost a third (29%) decided early than that, before the child’s 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday, and 11% decided after the child had turned four.

**Figure 13: Age of child when the parents/carers decided to delay their entry to reception**



*Base: 338 parents and carers*

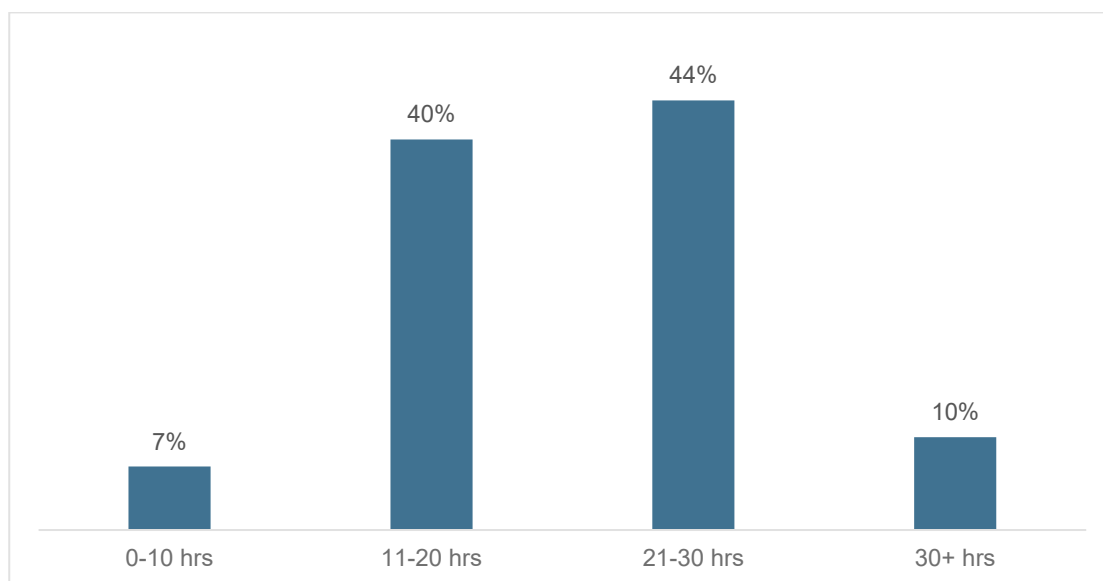
Around a third of parents/carers (38%) indicated they applied for a place in their child's normal year group as well as requesting a delayed entry into the following academic year. For parents who also applied for a place in their child's normal year group, 49% made the final decision to delay their child's entry before their first offer of a school place. 44% made the final decision after their first offer of a school place, falling from 60% in 2020.

Open feedback indicated that some people felt they wanted to keep their options open in case their application to delay was unsuccessful, or if they changed their mind. Some explained that the LA advised them to also apply for a place in their normal cohort, or that they were waiting for an EHCP. Many indicated that they felt that their child simply wasn't ready for school as the start date approached – *“As soon as I submitted the form (she was not long turned 3) the reality that she would soon be starting school hit me and I knew she was not emotionally school ready”*

## Childcare provision

The vast majority of parents/carers (94%) reported that their child attended a nursery or preschool<sup>25</sup>. For children who did attend a nursery or preschool, 61% started before their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday, with an additional 37% starting between the age of 3 and 4.

**Figure 14: Number of hours of childcare used in a typical week at age 4**



Base: 200 Parents and Carers

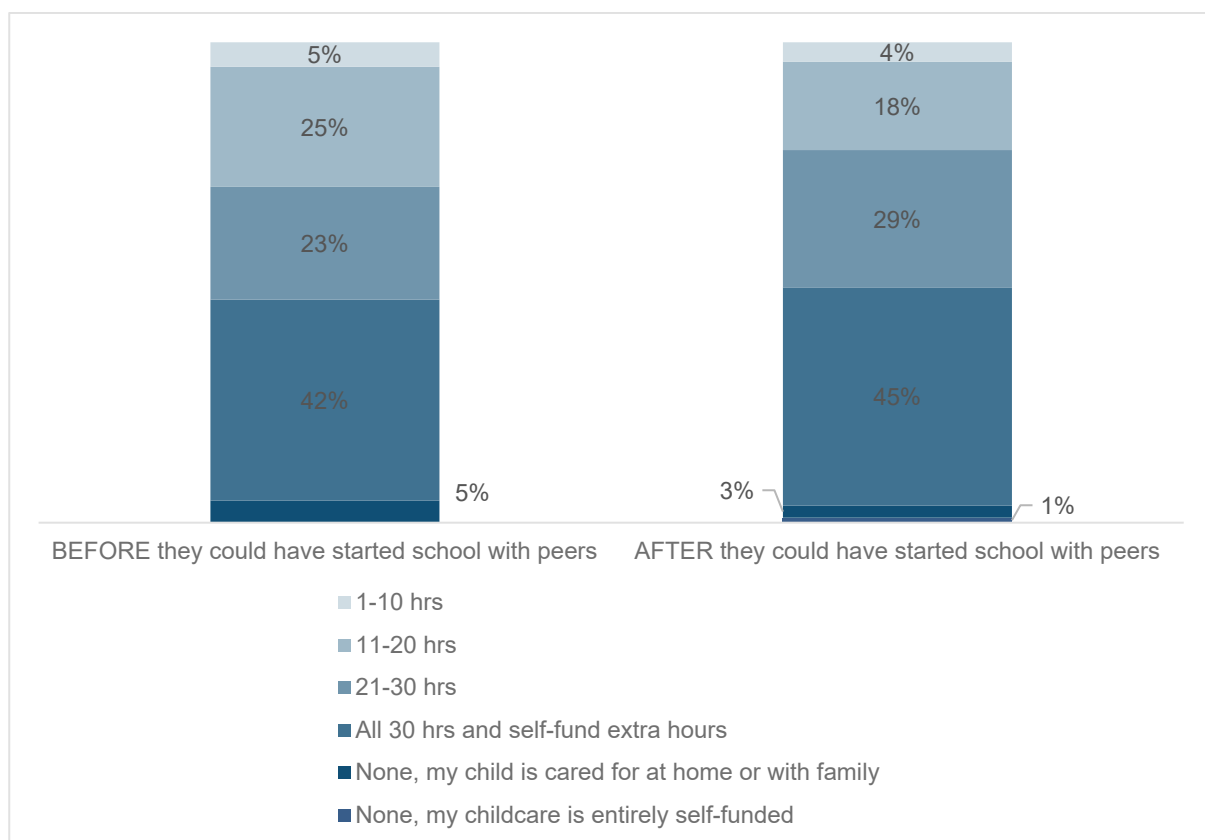
Amongst children attending a nursery or preschool, the median number of hours attended when they were aged four was 22 hours a week, compared to 17 hours per week

<sup>25</sup> Parents were asked to include nursery schools, nursery classes attached to a primary or infants' school, day nurseries, pre-schools, and special day nurseries or units for children with special educational needs

in 2020. The mean was 22.08 hours and the mode was 30 hours. 61% of parents/carers reported that their child met the criteria for 30 hours of fully funded childcare per week<sup>26</sup>.

Overall, children with delayed entry were more likely to be using more hours of fully funded childcare in the period after they could have started school, compared to beforehand (Figure 11). 65% were in more than 20 hours of fully funded childcare per week before they could have started school (42% used all 30 hours funded childcare and some self-funded additional hours) which rose to 74% in the period afterwards (45% using all 30 hours and self-funding additional hours). This is an increase from 54% and 62% respectively in 2020. 5% of respondents did not use any funded childcare before, and 4% did not use any after the child could have started school.

**Figure 15: Fully-funded hours of childcare used before and after child could have started school with peers**



Base: 196 parents and carers

<sup>26</sup> Some children aged over 3 and not at school are entitled to free early education referred to as '30 hours free childcare'. This is available where each parent (or the sole parent in a lone parent household) works at least 16 hours per week earning at least the National Minimum Wage, but less than £100,000 per year.

## Open feedback from parents and carers

In general, parents/carers used the open feedback to provide additional information on why these chose to apply for delayed entry for their summer-born child. This feedback was very similar to feedback provided earlier on in the survey (see 'Factors relevant for requests to delay entry' section) and also to previous surveys.

Unlike previous surveys, 24 parents/carers raised concerns around whether their child would stay in their adopted year group throughout primary and secondary school following delayed entry or would be moved to their normal age cohort. Of these, 12 parents noted that their admissions authority would only allow them to delay entry if their child joined school in year 1 with their age cohort, rather than starting in reception. Several of these responses mentioned that this was related to specific own-admissions authority schools. Parents also identified concerns around having to reapply for delayed entry for secondary schools to ensure that their child did not miss Year 7.

A minority of parents/carers who responded to the open feedback question were very positive about the opportunity to delay their child's entry to school, with one responding it was the 'Best decision we have ever made'. In general, parents/carers felt it was the right decision for their child in order to allow them time to mature or catch up emotionally, socially, physically or developmentally. Some parents described the process as straightforward and highlighted the useful support they received from both schools and local authorities with their applications.

The majority of responding parents, however, felt that the process was challenging, and struggled with a lack of communication from local authorities throughout the process. Parents also felt that own admission authority schools and head teachers were not fully informed about the guidance, which supports the choice to delay entry for summer-born pupils. 25 parents noted a 'postcode lottery' for applications, with large variation in approaches between authorities. Because of this, many parents/carers called for legislation or greater standardisation, with some responding that all applications should be accepted.

Parents also identified issues around applying for delayed entry for children with SEND. Parents/carers mentioned confusion around the guidance on delayed admission for children with an EHCP, with the main guidance not being applicable to children with an EHCP. Parents felt like this confusion resulted in their applications being unfairly rejected by local authorities.

## Conclusion

Overall, the number of requests and approvals for delayed entry for summer-born children peaked in 2021, having increased annually since 2016. The number of requests fell year-on-year in 2022 and 2023, however 2023 data is interim. The total number remains a small proportion of the eligible cohort, with just 1.5% of summer-born pupils delaying entry to the 2022/23 school year<sup>27</sup>.

The main reason for requesting delayed entry to reception reported by parents/carers was that they felt their child was not ready for school. Many parents also considered evidence seen on school experiences of summer-born children, and advice from preschool or nursery as relevant to their decision. Parents/carers often indicated in their feedback that they felt it was the right thing to do for their child, who they felt benefited from having more time to develop emotionally, socially, and/or physically. There were clear differences amongst parents/carers in terms of reporting a smooth and easy process in some LA areas and it being a more difficult and stressful experience in other areas. Parents also felt that schools and head teachers were not fully informed about the guidance, and numerous parents identified a 'postcode lottery' for applications, with large variation in approaches between authorities.

Parents/carers who requested to delay their child's admission to reception were significantly more likely to have higher than national average incomes. The children were more likely to be White than other primary school pupils.

According to the parent/carer survey, over half of all the children for who a request had been made to delay entry were born in August, and a fifth were born in July (just 3% were born in April). In most cases, the children attended as much, or more hours of fully funded childcare in the period after they could have started school until their delayed date of entry.

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<sup>27</sup> School Census Spring term records 2022/23. Summer-born pupils are born between April and August and delayed entrants are those who are 5 years old at the start of the academic year they are in reception. A small number of pupils repeat reception and have records when they are aged 4 and 5, these pupils are not included in the analysis.



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For any enquiries regarding this publication, contact us at: [charlotte.bailey@education.gov.uk](mailto:charlotte.bailey@education.gov.uk) or [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

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