

Subject:**ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS -
CHILDREN OF COMPULSORY SCHOOL AGE****Circular Number:**

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Audience:

- Principals and Boards of Governors of Nursery, Primary and Special schools;
- Education and Library Boards;
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;

Summary of Contents:

This Circular introduces the new provision for compulsory school age of children in primary schools with effect from the 1990/91 school year.

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Status of Contents:

Advice

Related Documents:

None

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None

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Not Applicable

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**To: Education and Library Boards,
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools,
Boards of Governors and Principals of
Nursery, Primary and Special Schools**

18 July 1990

ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

CHILDREN OF COMPULSORY SCHOOL AGE

1. Article 156 of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 amends the law relating to compulsory school age. In so far as primary schools are concerned the age at which children become of compulsory school age is changed - the text of the new statutory provisions is set out in the Appendix - and will apply to children to be admitted to primary school from the beginning of the 1990/91 school year.

2. The change to the lower limit of compulsory school age is to ensure that all children attending primary school will have a full 7 years' education before transferring to secondary school. For the 1990/91 school year and for future school years children who have attained the age of 4 on or before 1 July will commence primary school at the beginning of the September following. This will be the only date for the commencement of compulsory school attendance.

3. All children who are of compulsory school age will follow the programmes of study under the Northern Ireland common curriculum. The Department, however, has not altered its views on the nature and type of learning experiences which are appropriate for 4-year old children and on the conditions in which learning should take place. The requirement to provide the common curriculum does not remove the responsibility on schools to provide these children with ample opportunity for active learning through play and for free movement both indoors and outdoors. A wide variety of materials should be available and presented in a way which will engage the children's interest and encourage exploration. The experiences offered should promote the development of the children's language and establish the foundations for the development of early mathematical and scientific concepts. For these young children, reading, writing and mathematics should be approached through informal rather than formal activities.

4. School authorities should seek to ensure that schools are organised in such a way that the number of children enrolled in a class which contains 4-year olds and the classroom used are consistent with the need to provide them with opportunities for the learning experiences referred to

in paragraph 3. Experience has shown that this is difficult to achieve where classes consisting entirely or mainly of 4-year old children exceed 25 in number.

5. The change to the lower limit of compulsory school age means that some children as young as 4 years and 2 months will be starting primary school and although such children will be of compulsory school age, school authorities will wish to consider a phased enrolment of the very young children over a short period of time to enable the teacher to establish an appropriate relationship with children and to help them settle into school life. In order to ensure continuity of experiences these children should remain in the care of the same teacher throughout their first year at school.

ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN UNDER COMPULSORY SCHOOL AGE

6. A primary school's priority is to provide education for children of compulsory school age. However, where suitable nursery provision is not available and a school has surplus places available, children under compulsory school age may be enrolled. The common curriculum will not apply to children below compulsory school age. The needs of such children differ from other children enrolled in primary schools and school authorities should make provision for them in accordance with the recommendations in paragraph 8 below. The Department would stress that the enrolment of children below compulsory school age should not be detrimental to the provision of education for, or in any other way diminish the educational opportunities of, children of compulsory school age.

7. The Primary Schools (General) Regulations 1973 provide that children under the age of 4 may **not** be enrolled in a primary school except in a nursery class approved by the Department.

8. The Department considers that the conditions in which 4-year old children who are under compulsory school age receive their education and the education they receive should not differ substantially from those in nursery schools and classes. The following guidelines are therefore recommended to school authorities as being necessary to provide a suitable environment and curriculum for their education:

- a. the number of children in a reception class (defined as a class consisting entirely of children below compulsory school age) or a composite class of children of, and below, compulsory school age should not exceed 25;
- b. a floor area of not less than 1.4 sq m should be provided for each child in a reception class or a composite class of children of, and below, compulsory school age;
- c. the room used should allow children opportunities for active play and for free movement indoors and out of doors. Toilets and open air play space should be readily accessible;
- d. children should not follow the programmes of study under the compulsory common curriculum;
- e. children need to engage in play with a wide variety of creative materials selected and presented to them in such a way that will stimulate curiosity and encourage investigation and experiment;

f. the organisation of activities and the curriculum followed should reflect good practice such as that outlined in the Nursery Guidelines published by the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council;

g. children should be enrolled only at the beginning of school terms and their admission should be phased over a sufficiently long period to enable parents to remain in the classroom until the children can separate from them without stress;

h. schools should seek to ensure that such children remain in the care of the same teacher during their first school year.

i. the enrolment of children below compulsory school age should not:-

i. result in sub-standard accommodation being used either by a class in which children below compulsory school age are enrolled or by any other class;

ii. adversely affect the organisation of the school or the learning experiences of children who are of compulsory school age;

iii. result in any change in class for children who are of compulsory school age.

j. the establishment of a reception class in a school from within existing staffing should not adversely affect the education of other children by unduly increasing the size of other classes.

9. The Department intends to monitor the provision made for children below compulsory school age and its Inspectorate, in the course of planned inspections and incidental visits, will be looking specifically at the provision made for such children and any effect on the education of children of compulsory school age in light of the recommendations of this circular.

10. This circular supersedes paragraphs 8 and 9 and the Appendix to Circular 1977/22.

S PEOVER
Assistant Secretary

APPENDIX

Article 156 of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 substitutes new provisions for Article 46 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. The text of new Articles 46 and 46A of the 1986 Order is as follows:-

46.-(1) Subject to the following provisions of this Article, in the Education Orders the expression “compulsory school age” means any age between four years and sixteen years and accordingly a person shall be of compulsory school age if he has attained the age of four years and has not attained the age of sixteen years.

(2) Where a person attains the age of four years-

- (a) on any date occurring in the period beginning on (and including) 1st September in any year and ending on (and including) 1st July in the following year, he shall be deemed not to have attained the lower limit of compulsory school age until 1st August in that following year;
- (b) on any date occurring in the period beginning on (and including) 2nd July in any year and ending on (and including) 31st August in the same year, he shall be deemed not to have attained the lower limit of compulsory school age until 1st August in the following year.

(3) Where a person attains the age of sixteen years-

- (a) on any date occurring in the period beginning on (and including) 1st September in any year and ending on (and including) 1st July in the following year, he shall be deemed not to have attained the upper limit of compulsory school age until, or as the case may be, deemed to have attained that upper limit on 30th June in that following year or such other date as the Department may, by order subject to affirmative resolution, prescribe;
- (b) on any date occurring in the period beginning on (and including) 2nd July in any year and ending on (and including) 31st August in the same year, he shall be deemed not to have attained the upper limit of compulsory school age until 30th June in the following year or such other date as the Department may, by order subject to affirmative resolution, prescribe.

Commencement of secondary education

46A. Unless the Department otherwise directs in a particular case, a child shall commence secondary education-

- (a) where he attains the age of eleven years on a date occurring in the period beginning on (and including) 1st September in any year and ending on (and including) 1st July in the following year, on 1st August in that following year;

- (b) where he attains that age on a date occurring in the period beginning on (and including) 2nd July in any year and ending on (and including) 31st August in the same year, on 1st August in the following year.