

Admission to Pre-School Education 2017

A Guide for Parents

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Glossary of terms used in this document

Admissions Criteria	The criteria drawn up by the board of governors of each school/management of the voluntary or private provider and applied in order to select the children to be admitted if the school/pre-school setting is over subscribed.
Controlled School	Controlled schools are managed and funded by the EA through school boards of governors. A boards of governors consists of representatives of transferors – along with representatives of parents, teachers and EA.
EA	Education Authority.
Enrolment Number	The maximum number of children which a pre-school setting may have on its register at any time, as determined by the Department of Education.
Independent Appeal Tribunal	A tribunal set up by the EA, but independent of it, which hears appeals lodged by parents/guardians against the decisions of boards of governors.
Integrated School	Integrated schools are managed by a board of governors consisting of trustees or foundation governors along with parents, teachers and Department of Education representatives.
Irish-Medium School	A school or unit within a school where teaching and learning takes place through the Irish language.
Nursery Unit	An approved unit providing formal nursery education, managed as part of a primary school.
Parent	The person who has legal custody of the child.
Pre-School Provider/Setting	Funded pre-school places are available from a range of providers in a variety of settings – nursery schools, nursery units, reception classes in primary places, voluntary and private playgroups and day nurseries in receipt of funded places.
Socially Disadvantaged Circumstances	For the purposes of enrolment in pre-school this means a child whose parent is in receipt of Income Support or Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance: where an award of Income Support has been 'converted' into an Employment and Support Allowance and the Social Security Agency has confirmed that the level of benefit remains the same then the parent should continue to be treated as being in 'socially disadvantaged circumstances'.
Statutory Criteria	Criteria which the law states that schools must apply before applying their sub-criteria.
Sub-Criteria	If within one admission criterion there is oversubscription, some schools will apply a clearly defined set of sub-criteria to identify children to be admitted.
Target Age	Children born between 2 July 2013 and 1 July 2014.
Underage	Children born between 2 July 2014 and 1 July 2015.
Voluntary Maintained School	Voluntary maintained schools are managed by a board of governors nominated by trustees – along with parents, teachers, Department of Education and EA representatives.

Enrolment in pre-school: key dates

Wednesday 11 January 2017 (not later than 12 noon)	Closing date for receipt of parents applications to first preference providers. Applications received after this time and date will be considered late in Stage One.
STAGE ONE	
(Wednesday 11 January – Thursday 27 April 2017)	Consideration of applications from target age children only (ie born between 2 July 2013 and 1 July 2014).
Wednesday 29 March 2017 (not later than 4pm)	Final date for receipt and consideration of new applications, additional information and changes of preferences in <u>exceptional</u> circumstances within Stage One. Anything received after this date will not be considered until Stage Two i.e. after 27 April 2017.
Thursday 27 April 2017	Issue of letters by providers advising parents of the setting for which their child has been accepted and issue of letters by EA advising parents of those children who have not been offered a place, advising where places are still available and how to apply for these places.
Thursday 11 May 2017 (not later than 4pm)	Final date for written notice of intention to appeal against nursery schools/units admission decisions to be received by EA. (Stage One). (This ONLY applies to nursery schools/units as there is no right of appeal against a voluntary/private provider).
STAGE TWO	
(Friday 28 April 2017 – Friday 9 June 2017)	Consideration of new applications, additional preferences from target age children NOT placed in Stage One and children resident in the Republic of Ireland. Applications from younger children will also be considered at this stage in Nursery Schools and Nursery Units only
Thursday 11 May 2017 (not later than 4pm)	Date by which additional preferences from unplaced target age children are to be returned to the EA. New applications or additional preferences received after this date will be considered as 'late' and will not be considered until all punctual target age applicants have been processed within Stage Two.
Friday 26 May 2017 (not later than 4pm)	Final date for receipt and consideration of new applications, additional information and changes of preferences in <u>exceptional</u> circumstances within Stage Two. Anything received after this date will not be considered until after the issue of placement letters on Friday 9 June 2017.
Friday 9 June 2017	Issue of letters by providers advising parents of the setting for which their child has been accepted and issue of letters by EA advising parents whose children have not been offered a place and advising where places are still available if any.
Friday 23 June 2017 (not later than 4pm)	Final date for written notice of intention to appeal against nursery schools/units admission decisions to be received by the EA, (ie those children refused their admission within Stage Two). (This ONLY applies to nursery schools/units as there is no right of appeal against a voluntary/private provider).

NOTE: A target age child will always get priority over an underage applicant during the Admission Process (From 11 January 2017 to 9 June 2017).

Procedure for enrolment and further information

1 Which children qualify for pre-school education?

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

Pre-School places are available for those children who are in the target age group ie who were born on or between 2 July 2013 and 1 July 2014. If there are still places available underage children ie those born between 2 July 2014 and 1 July 2015 may also be admitted – but funded places for these children are only available in nursery schools or nursery units. Voluntary/private settings normally accept children from three years of age but only those born between 2 July 2013 and 1 July 2014 will be eligible for a funded place. The target age groups are outlined in the statutory criteria for each pre-school setting.

Children who are undergoing statutory assessment for special educational needs should apply for a pre-school place. This will ensure that a child is considered for a pre-school place in the event that the statutory assessment determines that he/she does not require a statement of special educational needs.

2 Where are pre-school places available and how do I obtain further information?

Pre-school places are available in:

- Nursery schools;
- Primary schools with nursery units;
- Voluntary/private settings that have funded pre-school places (hereafter called **providers**).

Funded pre-school places in the voluntary and private sector only applies to part-time provision (normally 5 sessions per week, each lasting at least 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). A few schools have both full-time and part-time sessions. Information on the duration of classes/sessions is included with the admissions criteria for each provider.

All funded pre-school education centres must follow common curricular guidance to plan and organise the children's learning and are inspected regularly by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Parents should be aware that pre-school providers may levy charges for certain services offered (eg snacks, lunches, extra-curricular activities) once a child is admitted to a pre-school setting. Any such charges should not relate to the delivery of the pre-school curriculum, and for non-statutory providers (ie voluntary or private providers) should not relate to the minimum period of 2.5 hours pre-school education which is funded by the Department of Education. Charges may vary between providers, so parents/guardians may wish to clarify with their preferred providers the extent of any applicable charges prior to submitting an application.

A child is only entitled to one funded place in a school or playgroup or private nursery eg a child may not have a funded place in a playgroup in the morning and attend a nursery school in the afternoon.

- Reception Class Provision

In addition to pre-school providers some primary schools have reception classes for children who have reached their 4th birthday but are under compulsory school age (ie children born after 1 July 2013). Arrangements for admissions to these reception classes are entirely different to those relating to nursery classes.

Parents may apply to both using separate application forms for nursery and reception. Information is available from the primary school in which you are interested, or from the EA website www.eani.org.uk/admissions

Should I arrange for my child to transfer from a funded pre-school place to a reception class in a primary school from his/her 4th birthday?

Department of Education advice is that this would not be in your child's best interests. Transferring your child to a reception class during the year is disruptive to his/her educational and social development and should be avoided. In addition, advice from the Department's Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is that while some reception provision is of a good standard, the quality of provision across the sector is uneven.

- Paying Places

Many voluntary, private playgroups and private day nurseries may also have fee-paying places available for pre-school children. The arrangements for admission as described in this document, do not apply to fee-paying places. Parents should make direct contact with these providers.

While there is no guarantee that a child will receive a funded pre-school education place during the child's final year of pre-compulsory education, the objective of the Pre-School Education Programme is to have a good quality pre-school education place for every child in the final year of pre-compulsory education, whose parents wish to avail of such a place. While it would be the EA's wish to match provision to parental preference, it is recognised that a minority of parents will not be able to access a funded place in their preferred education setting.

3 Must my child go to pre-school?

No. Pre-school education is not compulsory, however, good quality pre-school education has important benefits. Parents make application for a funded place on the understanding that their child will attend for 5 days per week. This will enable your child to benefit fully from a quality pre-school experience.

4 Where can I get an application form?

Application forms can be obtained from any provider or from the EA's website: www.eani.org.uk/admissions

5 Completion of application form

Only one application form can be submitted and on it list **all** the providers where you would be willing to accept a place (continue on a separate sheet if required). All parents seeking a funded pre-school place for their child **must** complete an application form, even if their child's name is already on a waiting list for admission.

SECTION A

Complete your child's name (as per birth certificate), date of birth, home address including house number and postcode, and parent details. If you change your address during the process please inform the EA in writing.

SECTION B

This section allows you to list up to **six** preferences ie six places where you would consider sending your child and to state the reasons for your preferences. You are strongly advised to list more than one preference, as there is no guarantee that you will be successful in obtaining a place at your first preference provider as they may receive more applications than they have funded places. In areas where this is the case, it is recommended that you list at least four preferences, if practical.

Only list the providers that are included on the EA website www.eani.org.uk/admissions and ensure that the published name (not local name) is used. If a provider has more applications than places available, it must select children for admission by applying the admissions criteria. It is vitally important that you give the provider all the information that is relevant to either the statutory criteria or the sub-criteria determined by the provider. If all applicants meet the statutory criteria, it is the individual provider's sub-criteria that determine which children are selected for admission. These sub-criteria could include whether the child has a family connection with the school/playgroup eg a brother or sister previously attended, the distance of a child's home to the school/playgroup, etc.

If you do not put the information on the form as to how your child meets a particular criterion then the provider cannot give your child consideration under this criterion. Some further examples of relevant information are given on the application form but you should examine the criteria of those providers that you are listing as preferences, consider how your child meets these and list this under each of your preferences and attach any verifying documents if requested by each provider.

Preferences - The legislation recognises up to two preferences to a provider where full-time and part-time places are available. This means if you would prefer a full-time place for your child at a provider but would also be willing to accept as a lower preference a part-time place you should name that provider twice on the form. This can be consecutively but is not necessarily the case, eg

- 1 Provider A full-time place
- 2 Provider B full-time place
- 3 Provider A part-time place

However, the legislation does not differentiate between a part-time morning session and a part-time afternoon session. The distribution of part-time places i.e. a morning or an afternoon session is a matter for the provider.

SECTION C

The statutory criteria require providers to give preference to children from socially disadvantaged circumstances in their target age year. This is defined by the Department of Education as a child whose parent is in receipt of Income Support or Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance: where an award of Income Support has been 'converted' into an Employment and Support Allowance and the Social Security Agency has confirmed that **the level of benefit remains the same** then the parent should continue to be treated as being in 'socially disadvantaged circumstances'. When parents/guardians apply for places for their child on this

basis they must have their application form stamped by the Social Security Agency to confirm they are in receipt of Income Support, Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment Support Allowance where an award of Income Support has been 'converted' into an Employment and Support Allowance and the level of benefit remains the same.

NB The onus is on parents/guardians to ensure that the form is stamped and submitted to the first preference setting on or before 12 noon on Wednesday 11 January 2017.

SECTION D

Read the declarations, sign and date the application form. If you are in any doubt or there are points which you wish to clarify attach an explanatory note. If a parent/guardian gives false or misleading information (eg date of birth, home address) and because of this the child obtains a place, the place will be withdrawn. If you are in doubt you should check with the first preference principal/playgroup leader and/or obtain advice from the EA.

Verifying Documents

- Birth Certificates are required with the application form.

Some providers request other verification documents with the application form. Others indicate that they may contact parents if they require further information.

Please read the admissions criteria carefully, not just for your first preference provider but for all the providers named on your application form.

Where documents are requested before/during the procedure, acceptance will be conditional on documents being supplied, and it is important that they are submitted within the timescale requested by the provider.

The provision of false or incorrect information, or the failure to provide verifying documents according to the required deadline, may result in either the withdrawal of a place, or the inability of a provider to offer a place.

6 Who do I return the form to?

The form must be completed and returned with your child's birth certificate to your first preference provider on or before 12 noon on Wednesday 11 January 2017.

7 Admissions procedure

(a) How do pre-school providers decide who to accept?

If a pre-school provider has sufficient places all eligible children will be accepted. If a provider has more applications than funded places it will be required, by law, to give priority to:

- (i) Children from socially disadvantaged circumstances* in their final pre-school year ie born between 2 July 2013 and 1 July 2014 (inclusive)
- (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 school or any other premises.

*Children from socially disadvantaged circumstances means a child whose parent is in receipt of Income Support or Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or an award of Income Support which has been converted into an Employment and Support Allowance and the level of benefit remains the same. When parents apply for places for their child on this basis they must have their application forms stamped by the Social Security Agency to confirm that they are in receipt of a qualifying payment.

Pre-school providers will implement this legal requirement through application of the statutory admission 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.

The admissions procedure is in two stages:

Stage One of the procedure (Wednesday 11 January 2017 – Thursday 27 April 2017) deals only with target age children.

Stage Two of the procedure (Friday 28 April 2017 – Friday 9 June 2017) deals with those target age children who did not secure a place during Stage One and who have now nominated further preferences from a list of settings with vacant places, children resident in the Republic of Ireland and those children not yet in their target age year ie underage.

NB: A target age child will always get priority over an underage pre-school age child during the admissions procedure.

(b) Application of the criteria/procedure

Stage One

- If there are more places available than there are applications, then the provider will accept all these applications.
- If there are more applications than places available, then the board of governors/management committee must select children for admission by firstly applying the statutory criteria in order and, if necessary, their sub-criteria. The application forms of those children not selected will be returned to the EA for onward transmission to the next provider named on the application form.

This procedure continues until:-

- The child is selected by a provider named on the form;
- All preferences named have not selected the child;
- The time allowed for Stage One has elapsed.

During Stage One - Changes of preferences in Exceptional Circumstances/New applications/
Additional information

Apart from those necessitated by exceptional circumstances, no changes of preference will be processed during Stage One. If you wish to change your preference, for any reason other than in exceptional circumstances, you must withdraw the original application and submit a new application. If this occurs after 12noon on Wednesday 11 January 2017 your new application will be treated as a late application. If you wish to change your preference because of exceptional circumstances, eg you have moved house and this necessitates a change of

preference, you must submit a written request for a change of preference to the EA for approval along with verification of the exceptional circumstances. If approved, the EA will amend the original application form and send it to the new first preference provider. If the original form was received on time by the original first preference provider, it will be regarded by the new first preference provider as a punctual first preference application. The final date by which the EA will process any changes necessitated by exceptional circumstances is Wednesday 29 March 2017 at 4pm.

Wednesday 29 March 2017 at 4pm is also the final date by which the EA will process any additional information or new applications. After this date changes of preference in exceptional circumstances/additional information/new applications will not be processed until Stage Two.

Recalling children refused admission within Stage One

If any places subsequently become available in an oversubscribed setting (between Friday 28 April 2017 – Friday 9 June 2017) these places should be allocated immediately to any children refused admission in Stage One and according to their place in the rank order at the end of Stage One.

Stage Two

At this stage school based providers with places available consider applications received for target aged children who were unplaced at the end of Stage One and who have now nominated further preferences, new applications for target age children, children resident in the Republic of Ireland and any applications received for underage children.

Voluntary and private providers with places available will consider applications for target age children who were unplaced at the end of Stage One who have now nominated further preferences, new applications from target aged children and children resident in the Republic of Ireland. These settings are not permitted to consider applications from underage applicants.

The procedure similar to that described for Stage One will operate.

During Stage Two - New applications/Additional information

Friday 26 May 2017 (4pm) is the final date for receipt and consideration of new applications or additional information within Stage Two. After this date changes of preference in exceptional circumstances/additional information/new applications should be communicated directly to the provider(s) of your choice but will not be considered until after the issue of placement letters on Friday 9 June 2017.

Waiting Lists – please refer to each individual providers policy if you wish your child's name to be placed on a waiting list should a vacancy arise in an over-subscribed provider after Friday 9 June 2017.

(c) When would my application be considered late?

Stage One:

If your application form is received after 12 noon on Wednesday 11 January 2017 your application will be treated as late and will not be considered until all punctual target age

applications are considered. If the setting has less applications than available places (ie undersubscribed) your child will be offered a place.

Please note, that due to the restrictions of the timetable, it may not be possible to process all the preferences listed on an application form by Thursday 27 April 2017.

Note: If your application is received after Wednesday 29 March 2017 it will not be considered until Stage Two of the procedure.

The EA does not have the discretion to treat an application received after 12noon on Wednesday 11 January 2017 as punctual.

Stage Two:

Consideration of new applications and additional preferences from target age children not placed in Stage One and children resident in the Republic of Ireland. Applications from underage children will also be considered at this stage in Nursery Schools and Nursery Units only.

Unplaced target aged children whose application was 'late' in Stage One will now be treated on an equal basis with all other applications in Stage Two.

Any new applications/additional information/additional preferences received after Thursday 11 May 2017 will be considered as late in Stage Two. Whilst these will be processed up until Friday 26 May 2017 they will not be considered until all punctual target age applications are considered.

Please note, that due to the restrictions of the timetable, it may not be possible to process all the preferences listed on an application form by Friday 9 June 2017.

Underage Applicants (children born between 2 July 2014 – 1 July 2015)

If your application is received after 12 noon on Wednesday 11 January 2017 it is late and will only be considered in Stage Two of the process if the nursery schools/units listed are undersubscribed.

(d) When will I be notified?

There are two dates of notification:

Stage One

(Target aged children ie born between 2 July 2013 – 1 July 2014)

Providers will issue letters to this group on Thursday 27 April 2017 advising those parents whose children they are accepting. The EA will also advise parents of those children not selected by any provider and will include information regarding places available if any and a request for further preferences for Stage Two.

Stage Two

(Unplaced target age children, new applications, children resident in the Republic of Ireland and underage children ie born on or between 2 July 2014 and 1 July 2015)

Providers will issue letters to this group on **Friday 9 June 2017** advising those parents whose children they are accepting. The EA will also advise parents of those children **not** selected by any provider and will include information regarding places available if any.

(e) When will any document(s) that I have attached to my application form be returned to me?

All original documents will be returned to you by the provider where your child is placed. The EA will return all documents to those who have been unsuccessful in securing a pre-school place on **Friday 9 June 2017**.

8 Can I submit more than one application form?

NO. If you submit more than one application form 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 application forms will not be processed.

9 Can I indicate a preference for a non-funded place on the application form?

NO. This procedure only relates to the provision of funded places. If you are interested in a paying place at a voluntary or private provider you should contact the provider directly. If you name a setting that does not offer funded places, the EA will not process this preference but will uplift the next preference listed that has funded places and process accordingly.

10 Do I need to complete a new application form if my child is already attending a nursery school/unit?

YES. There will be no automatic entitlement to a second year of pre-school education placement.

11 Appeals

(a) Can I appeal against a decision not to admit my child?

Only in the case of applications made to a nursery school or nursery unit can you appeal to an Independent Appeal Tribunal. However, the Tribunal's powers are limited. An appeal can only be brought on the grounds that the school's criteria were not applied or were not correctly applied in deciding to refuse a child admission to the nursery school/unit.

There is no right of appeal to the Independent Appeal Tribunal against a decision by a private or voluntary provider or where a parent has indicated a preference for a morning part-time place and an afternoon part-time place is offered (or vice versa).

Tribunal Members can only consider information available to the board of governors at the time it made its decision. New evidence cannot be considered.

(b) How do I appeal?

If you wish to appeal the decision of a board of governors in not accepting your child you should notify the EA **in writing** on or before:

4pm on Thursday 11 May 2017 for Stage One children

4pm on Friday 23 June 2017 for Stage Two children

If your letter indicating your intention to appeal is not received by the specified date and time it will not be processed. Recorded delivery or email is recommended. Letters/emails notifying of an intention to appeal should be sent to the Clerk of the Tribunal (Nursery), c/o the Education Authority. Contact details are provided at point 12.

Please give your child’s name, date of birth and the nursery school(s)/unit(s) that you wish to appeal against. An appeal form and details of the appeals procedure will be issued to you on receipt of your written intention to appeal.

12 Education Authority contact details:-

Armagh Office 3 Charlemont Place The Mall Armagh BT61 9AX Tel: 028 3741 0088 / 028 3741 0085 / 028 3751 2309 Email: admissions-sr@eani.org.uk	Ballymena Office County Hall 182 Galgorm Road Ballymena BT42 1HN Tel: 028 2566 1379 Email: admissions-ner@eani.org.uk
Belfast Office 40 Academy Street Belfast BT1 2NQ Tel: 028 9056 4080 Email: admissions-br@eani.org.uk	Dundonald Office Grahamsbridge Road Dundonald BT16 2HS Tel: 028 9056 6981 Email: admissions-ser@eani.org.uk
Omagh Office 1 Hospital Road Omagh BT79 0AW Tel: 028 8241 1458 Email: admissions-wr@eani.org.uk	

13 Notes

- (a) The Department of Education has indicated that in order to qualify for funded places a provider must have enrolled at least 8 children in their immediate pre-school year. Parents should be aware therefore that providers can be required to withdraw, or may withdraw voluntarily, from the programme at any time. In the unlikely event that this happens the EA will uplift the next preference listed that has funded places and process accordingly.
- (b) The advice which has been given is based on the Education (NI) Order 1998 and the related regulations. While every effort has been made to ensure that the information is accurate, it is given as guidance and not as an authoritative interpretation of the law.
- (c) The information contained in this document relates to the 2017/18 school year and is correct at November 2016. Any changes made to the arrangements set out in this document during the 2017/18 school year will be published on the EA website.