

Cohort entry to school

The Education Act 1989 has been amended to allow schools to adopt and enforce a cohort entry policy after consulting with their community. Cohort entry refers to children starting school as a group, at the beginning of a term, as opposed to starting school on their fifth birthday.

There is evidence that successful transition from early childhood education to school has a positive effect on a child's later social and educational outcomes. Some primary schools considered that continuous entry was limiting their ability to effectively manage the transition process and made it difficult for new entrants to build relationships with their peers. The Advisory Group on Early Learning recommended amending the Education Act to enable schools to enrol students on a cohort basis. This has now passed into law and is effective from 3 July 2017 for the 2018 school year.

Schools may set policy to enrol students to start school at the beginning of the term closest to a child's fifth birthday. This would be calculated on a mid-point between the first days of two consecutive terms. A child whose fifth birthday is prior to the mid-term date can start school at the beginning of that term. If they turn five after the mid-term date, they would start the following term.

Parents would have the choice of waiting for the next cohort entry point if they felt their child was not ready to start school. Parents choosing not to start their child until the age of six must ensure they start school on their sixth birthday, regardless of a school's cohort entry arrangements. A child already enrolled at one school who moves to another does not have to wait for the next cohort intake.

Introducing cohort entry will increase the ability of schools to put in place school entry arrangements that best meet the need of their students and community.

Schools will only be able to adopt and enforce a cohort entry policy after consulting with their community. The following community groups must be consulted with: school staff, parents of current and prospective students and early childhood education providers and kōhanga reo. MOE Policy has added: "Schools can choose to consult a wider community group if they wish, which may include other local primary schools, local iwi or hapū, and their Community of Learning/Kahui Ako. Schools are also required to give at least one term notice so that those who will be affected have time to plan for the change."

Questions to ask as part of the consultation could include:

- Would you support a cohort entry policy at xyz school? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- Do you consider any individuals or groups would be disadvantaged by the adoption of a cohort entry policy at xyz school?
- Do you consider any individuals or groups would benefit from the adoption of a cohort entry policy at xyz school?
- If xyz school adopts a cohort entry policy, would you consider enrolling your child(ren) at an alternative school that does not have such a policy?
- If xyz school adopts a cohort entry policy, would you be more likely to enrol your child(ren) as a result?

Where do I get advice?

NZSTA will continue to update and advise you through factsheets, newsletters and our website.

You can call **0800 782 435** or email actupdates@nzsta.org.nz.