

Deferred and delayed entry to school

The law in England and Wales says that children must be receiving a full-time education by the start of the school term after their fifth birthday. In Bristol there are 6 school terms and the school year runs from 1 September to 31 August with varying start and finish dates depending on the school. A child is of compulsory school age on the 1 January, 1 April, or 1 September following their fifth birthday.

Month of child's birth	When they become of compulsory school age
September to December	Beginning of Term 3
January to April	Beginning of Term 5
May to August	Beginning of September in the next academic year

Applications for a school place are made to school admissions in the local authority you live in. See our website for more information about [Apply for a new reception primary place](#).

Parents and carers may feel that their child is not ready to go to school in the September of the school year in which they reach the age of five. For example, your child was born in the summer months, between 1 April and 31 August and will be four years and a few weeks old when due to start school, or your child was born prematurely and if born nearer the expected due date would attend school the following school year.

If you think your child is not ready to start school, you may have heard about the option to defer or delay your child taking up a school place. This guidance aims to help explain what these terms mean and help you decide what is best for your child.

Schools take children of four and five years old with a whole range of abilities at the beginning of the school year, starting in the reception class. Teachers are used to adapting the school day and all activities and learning involved in the first year at school to meet a range of children's needs, including those that are the youngest in the year group.

If you want to know more about a particular school, arrange to meet with the school and ask what they will do to make sure your child settles well. By giving the school information about your child in advance, sharing in your child's experience of school and keeping in close contact with your child's class teacher throughout the first terms, your child should settle happily into school.

Deferred School Place

This is when a child, usually whose birthday is in the summer, starts school in the reception class but in January or April, rather than at the start of the school year in September. For a deferred school place, you need to apply for a school place for your child in the normal way.

When you are told by the local authority which school has a place for your child you need to accept the school place and tell the school in writing that you have accepted the school place and want to defer your child's start to January or April depending on your child's month of birth. The school place will be reserved for your child until either the beginning of Term 3 or Term 5.

Month of child's birth	When they become of compulsory school age
September to December	Beginning of Term 3
January to August	Beginning of Term 5

Things to think about if you are considering deferring your child's entry to school

If you are worried about your child not being ready for school it is useful to know that learning in the reception class has a play-based curriculum and teachers will be adapt the activities and routines in the classroom for a wide range of children with differing abilities and ages, including those who are young in the year.

Children in the reception class follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum, which is also followed in nurseries, preschools and by child minders.

Speak to your preferred school(s) before applying for a school place about how they tailor provision for the younger children in the reception class, both in the reception year and future years, as your child moves through the school. The school may be able to reduce your concerns about your child's readiness for school.

By starting a term or two later than most of the other children in the reception class your child may miss a range of activities designed to help the children settle and become familiar with the school's routines.

By starting a term or two later than most of the other children in the reception class your child will be joining an already established year group of children. Social groups and friendships may already be taking shape before your child joins the class.

If you think your child has or may have special educational needs, this may not necessarily be a reason to defer entry to school. You may want to discuss admission to school with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) of your child's early years setting before deciding.

Delayed School Place

This is when, for a specific and individual reason, a child starts school in September but a year later than usual. The child could be admitted a year late into the class with children of the same chronological age, so would start school in Year 1 and miss the Reception Year, or the child could be admitted into a class with children who are a year younger than his or her chronological age and start in a reception class.

If a child has additional needs and has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), or is being assessed for an EHCP then a decision about delayed school entry will be made during the assessment process, or through a review of the EHCP. The decision will be made at a Statutory Special Educational Needs Team Panel.

If the above does not apply, but your child was born in the summer months, between 1 April and 31 August and you have reasons to believe that your child should be considered for a delayed entry to school, you should apply for a school place for your child in the normal way and select the option to request delayed entry.

You will need to apply to your home local authority by the closing date of 15 January 2026.

Send with your application a letter from the Head Teacher(s) of your preferred school(s) outlining their response to your request to delay your child's entry to school. When contacting your preferred schools explain your reasons why the request to delay entry to school should be agreed. Send any professional evidence such as a letter or report from a medical professional working with your child with your application.

The admission authority for the school will consider all the submissions and decide to agree or decline the request to delay admission to school based on the best interests of your child.

If your request is agreed, your application will be withdrawn, and you will need to make a new application for the following school year by 15 January.

Note if your request to delay entry is not agreed there is no right of appeal against the decision.

Types of School	Admission Authority
Academy and Free School	Academy/School Trust
Community or Maintained School	Local Authority
Foundation School	Governing Body
Voluntary Aided School	Governing Body
Voluntary Controlled School	Local Authority

Schools take children with a whole range of abilities at the beginning of the school year, starting in the reception class. Teachers are used to adapting activities and learning involved in the first year of school to meet a range of children's needs,

including those that are the youngest in year and may struggle with some day-to-day tasks.

Schools will offer support to help your child settle into school. If you feel your child is struggling to settle, ask to speak to the class teacher, or other members of staff such as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator or Head Teacher.

Delaying starting school for a year and going into Year 1 class with the same chronological age children.

If your child is starting school a year late and going straight into Year 1, your child might need to stay for another year with a nursery, preschool, or childminder for what would have been the reception year.

If your child is starting a year later than normal and going straight into Year 1 you will need to make an in-year school application from early June onwards for a Year 1 place in the following September. There is no guarantee that a Year 1 place will be available for your child to start the next school year even if a place was offered in the past.

Starting a year later than other children who have been together for a year in the reception class your child will be joining an already established year group of children. Social groups and friendships will already be established when your child joins the class. Delaying starting school for a year and going into reception class with younger children.

Things to think about if you are considering delaying your child's entry to school

Your child will be at school in the year below their chronological age, with children younger than them. If your child changes school, for example transfers from primary to secondary education at the end of Year 6, or transfers from infant to junior education at the end of Year 2, your child may at the discretion of the receiving school be placed in their chronological age group. This could mean your child will have to miss a year of the national curriculum.

A delayed transfer into a school is agreed with the existing Head Teacher; if there is a change of Head Teacher in the existing school the replacing Head Teacher may not agree to continue the delayed arrangement. Your child would have to join their chronological year group missing a partial or a whole year of education.

If your child is at school in the year below their chronological age, with children younger than them, your child may become more physically and socially mature than his or her peers as he or she progresses through school.

If your child is at school in the year below their chronological age, they would legally be allowed to leave school the term after their sixteenth birthday, a full year before other young people in their year group. This may well be before any examinations are taken.

How to find out more

For general enquiries about the school admissions process and what to do email school.admissions@bristol.gov.uk.

[Summer-born children: school admission - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

For impartial information and advice if your child has any additional needs contact SEND and You. Information is available online at [Home - SEND and You](#)