

Education & Home Affairs Panel
Scrutiny Office
Morier House
St Helier
JE1 1DD

10 November 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

We are writing further to your request in the JEP on the 1st October 2015, for help carrying out a review on whether the needs of Jersey children are being met, in relation to the age they start school and we would be grateful if you would take our views into consideration when reviewing this matter.

Our son [REDACTED] was born two weeks early on the [REDACTED]. Had he been born closer to his due date he would have automatically become one of the oldest children in his year and would not have started school until he was 5, but as the current rules stand he will most likely be the youngest. We also have an older daughter who was born in the middle of September and we feel she benefited from the fact she did not start school until she was just 5 and thus ready for the challenges of education. We have seen first hand how much a child can mature from the age of 4 to 5 to become ready for school. At the age of 2 we already feel that our son may not be mature enough to start [REDACTED] education at 4; he is a boy and typically boys are less mature and have shorter attention spans than girls during their early years. We do not wish for him to lose a whole year of play based learning at nursery in order to start his formal education. We are sure that we are not the only parents that feel our summer born child will simply not be equipped to enter school at the current starting age.

As we are sure you are already aware Jersey has one of the youngest starting school ages in the world alongside the UK, even at the age of 5 children in Jersey are starting school sometimes a whole 2 years earlier than some of the Scandinavian countries. The academic and professional evidence carried out in the UK recently reported the detrimental effect on a Summer Born Child "SBC" typically being only 4 and being the youngest in their year. According to the research they have lower average educational achievement than their older peers throughout schooling and being the very youngest in the class often struggle and become disruptive, because they do not have the maturity of their older peers. They are also more likely to be identified as having Special Educational Needs than their older classmates. So the evidence would suggest that some 4 year olds are just not ready for school.

We have voiced our concerns that [REDACTED] will be too young to go to school at 4 to friends and family, many of whom are teachers and the response we always receive is "he will cope" which does not fill us with confidence or reassurance. We do not want our son to cope, we want him to thrive and enjoy education and be ready to learn. Every child should be given the opportunity to thrive and achieve their potential by starting school when that child is emotionally and physically ready, in a class of other children starting school at the same time and to receive the benefit of a full year of the Reception curriculum and the gentle introduction to school that it provides.

As I understand the law at the moment, [REDACTED] will not be of compulsory school age "CSA" until the period beginning the first day of the school term in which his 5th birthday falls. If we were to decide to delay his entry to school until he was of CSA, it would mean his education would

start the term beginning [REDACTED], therefore missing out on two terms in Reception which is vital preparation for Year 1. Entry at this time may also potentially causing disruption for his teacher and other children, as he would have missed out on part of the curriculum and also developing social relationships with his peers, which would also be detrimental for him. Our only alternative at the moment is to allow him to start before CSA in [REDACTED], when he may not be emotionally or physically ready for school, rather than our hope which is to delay his start at school until September 2018 when he has just turn 5.

No doubt during the course of your consultation you may hear alternate views to ours from those who feel this is merely sour grapes from those with SBC and that "someone has to be the youngest". We often feel that this misconception clouds the issue, which is that SBC are simply too young to attend Reception at the age of just 4 and that they should still be given the opportunity to received this experience once they have turned 5, if their parents believe it is in their best interests to delay them. To clarify, this is not about avoiding being the youngest in the year, it's about ensuring those who are the youngest are ready.

We have been following the Summer Born campaign in the UK with interest and we were delighted when the government reviewed and listened to the opinions of those parents who felt strong enough to fight for the best possible start for their children. It is the clear intention of the UK school minister Nick Gibb and the Department of Education to permit SBC to start in Reception at the age of 5 if their parents so choose. In his letter dated 8 September 2015, Mr Gibb made it clear that parents and teachers are best placed to decide what is right for their child and that SBC should have the same opportunities to excel at school as their peers and he urged schools in the UK to take immediate action in advance of any proposed changes. It filled us with so much hope that Jersey to might also be brave enough to review our legislation and make changes so that parents of SBC can opt to delay their child's schooling until the September after their 5th birthday if their parents decide. Now that this process has begun we hope that you will take our views into consideration and realise that we are trying to do what is in the best interest of our son and we hope that you will to. We welcome the opportunity the panel has given us to provide this feedback and hope you will allow parents in Jersey to have their say and positively influence how their children are educated.

Should the scrutiny panel decide that changes need to be made to the starting school age in Jersey and hopefully that SBC should be allowed to delay their entry to school until they are 5, we would hope that you would urge the States and Department of Education to take immediate action to allow parents the right to decide on their child's education, in advance of any proposed legal changes to the law as Nick Gibb the Education Minister in the UK did, so that no more children are not forced into education sooner than they should be.

Yours faithfully

Caroline & Lloyd Foley

[REDACTED]