

From: Sara Devitt [REDACTED]
Sent: 01 October 2015 12:42
To: Scrutiny
Subject: Education & Home Affairs Scrutiny

Dear Ms Doublet

I would like to make comment about the current policy for starting age in Jersey and my experience of other jurisdictions. My oldest son was born on [REDACTED] and started his schooling in the Republic of Ireland. In Ireland they are very flexible about starting age and if the child is born after April they can wait until they are 5 to start school. Consequently my son started school when he was 5 years and 1 day. We moved to Jersey after he had completed his first year of school in Ireland and because of the rigid approach here he was made to go straight into year 2 so effectively missed year 1 completely. He is an able child and had had the benefit of [REDACTED] again in Ireland so was able to cope. However it wasn't until my next child was in year 1 that it was obvious how much foundation work in English and Maths my older son had missed and had to cope without.

I feel that this inflexibility particularly with children moving from other jurisdictions is unacceptable and detrimental to the child.

My second point is that for summer born babies there is huge disadvantages to them starting school at age 4. This is even more evident when they start secondary school. While they may be capable academically it is the social skills and maturity that has them at a disadvantage. At this age different children mature at different rates so if the "summer baby" hits puberty late then they can be up to 2 years behind their "peers" in maturity. This can lead to any number of emotional problems at a time when peer pressure is at its greatest. This element has led us to removing our oldest son from the Jersey system completely and he is now at boarding school in Ireland which has allowed him to go back to the more appropriate year for his birth date.

Birth order in a family as well as gender have a huge impact on how well a summer born child will cope with starting school at age 4 and the people best placed to assess this is their parents. I feel strongly that if the parents wish to keep their child back until they are 5 they should be allowed to without any stigma – it is far easier to do this at age 4 than have children retaking their final year of primary school because they are not emotionally ready to go to secondary school. The system used in Ireland works – it is a discussion between parents and the school as to whether the child is ready and that flexibility is hugely beneficial to children born in the summer months.

When I had my interview at the primary school in Jersey I was told in no uncertain terms that if I wanted to hold my child back a year that it wasn't permitted. Flexibility is the key and listen to the parents.

I hope that my views will help your assessment and I am happy to discuss this further if required.

Regards

SARA DEVITT

