

## PRE-SCHOOL ADMISSIONS PROCEDURE 2021 – NOTES OF GUIDANCE (STAGE 1)

The following procedures are recommended in relation to the processing of applications for admission. You should also refer to the *School Portal User Guide* and *FAQs on Digital Admissions* that will be made available on the [Digital Admissions Online Resource Hub](#) for instructions on using the School Portal and the new School Document Upload Hub. Refer also to the [Department of Education admissions timetable for 2021-2022](#).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some schools or playgroups have and may continue to encounter logistical limitations or other difficulties or having to make alternative arrangements for those involved in admission decisions. Schools/Playgroups can make necessary arrangements by putting in place appropriate measures to conduct admissions decisions, e.g. MS Teams, Skype, telephoning conferencing or other to make timely decisions on applications. In all cases you should comply with current GDPR regulations and PHA Guidance. Reminder GDPR information can be accessed [here](#).

**NOTE: When considering applications you do not need to view or act on information within the 'LEAVERS' tab on the school portal.**

### 1 APPLICATIONS FOR ADMISSION TO PRE-SCHOOL (SEPTEMBER 2021)

- The closing date for receipt for punctual applications is **12.00 noon on 29 January 2021** at which time the Citizen Portal will close and **no further applications or changes can be made online by parents**. Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, paper applications will only be made available to parents on request from the EA Pre-School Admissions Office. The paper application must be returned to the EA Pre-School Admissions Office also by the date and time to be treated as a punctual application. Pre-School providers should not accept paper applications from parents and if any applications are received by your setting, it is requested that you forward these by secure email or AnyComms+ for C2k users, to the EA Pre-School Admissions Office for processing [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk)

Parents applying online will be able to upload their child's birth certificate, along with any other verifying documents that may be requested in the admissions criteria of pre-schools using the 'EA Document Upload' to be received by the first preference pre-school by **12.00 noon on 5 February 2021**. **Documents will be available for the pre-school to access from the 'School Document Hub' from early February** - Refer to the [Hub](#) for Digital Admissions Communication updates.

**Late applications** – After the closure of the Citizen Portal at 12.00 noon on 29 January 2021 parents can request an application by contacting [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk) or our Helpdesk. **ALL** late applications must be returned to the EA Pre-School Admissions Office and will be keyed on the portal – If a parent returns their late application directly to your setting you should send securely the application to [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk) or AnyComms+ for C2k users. **Punctual applications are always considered in priority over late applications throughout the admissions procedure** i.e. a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> preference punctual application will always take priority over a late 1<sup>st</sup> preference application.

- If you are oversubscribed and where the Principal or Leader have responsibility for applying criteria and this has not been delegated to them to date, you should set up a Board of Governors or Management Committee meeting.

**See Point 11 – ‘Socially Disadvantaged Circumstances’.**

## 2 UNDERSUBSCRIBED PRE-SCHOOLS

- Pre-schools who are undersubscribed must admit **all** children eligible to enter their final pre-school year (target) whose parents indicate that this is their preference unless the pre-school’s admissions/allocation number is exceeded (this includes any late applications).
- **Complete the allocation of places on the School Portal when applications are made accessible from early February.** Guidance on how to allocate and refuse applications is available in the School Portal User Guide on the [Digital Admissions Online Resource Hub](#) . With the exception of playgroups the allocation of places at 1<sup>st</sup> preference should be completed on the school portal by **12 February 2021.** **Playgroups will receive their allocation of places on 12 February following the PEG meeting, which is due to take place on that day. Playgroup allocations will be uploaded into the school portal and soon thereafter playgroups can allocate/refuse children in line with decisions taken on applications.**
- For any paper applications (including late applications) received by the EA Pre-School Admissions Office, the child’s details will be added to the School Portal by Admissions staff and the application form and any attachments will be uploaded to the pre-school via the School Document Hub or if applicable in some cases a document may have to be sent to you by secure email or AnyComms+. If there are funded places available you should ‘Allocate’ the applicants on the School Portal.
- Further preferences, if any, will become visible and actionable on the School Portal once a higher pre-school preference has refused the application. The birth certificate and any other documentation for further preferences will automatically transfer via the School Document Hub or if applicable in some cases a document may have to be sent to you by secure email or AnyComms+.
- If you subsequently become oversubscribed due to receiving further preferences, which are on time, then any ‘late’ applications are first to be displaced. Apply your admissions criteria as published to **all** applicants, and use the School Portal to ‘Allocate’ or ‘Refuse’ applicants.
- **NB Before refusing a child it is recommended that you download the birth certificate and any other documents received from the School Document Hub as you may need to recall a child OR in the event of an appeal. (*Appeal applicable to Nursery School/Nursery Unit*)**

### 3 OVERSUBSCRIBED PRE-SCHOOLS

- Provisionally accept children up to the admissions number by applying the published admissions criteria.
- **Complete the allocation of places on the School Portal when applications are made accessible from early February.** Guidance on how to allocate and refuse applications is available in the School Portal User Guide on the [Digital Admissions Online Resource Hub](#) . With the exception of playgroups the allocation of places at 1<sup>st</sup> preference should be completed on the school portal by **12 February 2021**. **Playgroups will receive their allocation of places on 12 February following the PEG meeting, which is due to take place on that day. Playgroup allocations will be uploaded into the school portal and soon thereafter playgroups can allocate/refuse children in line with decisions taken on applications.**
- **NB Before refusing a child it is recommended that you download the birth certificate and any other documents received from the School Document Hub as you may need to recall a child OR in the event of an appeal (*Appeal applicable to Nursery School/Nursery Unit*)**
- For any paper applications (including late applications) received by the EA Pre-School Admissions Office, the child's details will be added to the School Portal by Admissions staff and the application form and any attachments will be uploaded to the pre-school via the School Document Hub or if applicable in some cases a document may have to be sent to you by secure email or AnyComms+. You should 'Allocate or Refuse' the applicants on the School Portal.
- You should always keep a record of applicants **in criterion order**, as it will help when further preferences are received as you know the 'cut-off' point i.e. the criterion an applicant has to meet if to be provisionally accepted. This list, in rank order, will also highlight the applicant(s) at risk of being displaced by further preference applicants.
- Further preferences, if any, will become visible and actionable on the School Portal once the first preference pre-school has refused the application. The birth certificate and any other documentation for further preferences will automatically transfer as applicable via the School Document Hub to the pre-school for consideration. This also applies to any further preference paper applications. You should 'Allocate or Refuse' the applicants on the School Portal for both online and any paper applications.

**ALL** preferences must be considered and allocated in accordance with your criteria. **REMEMBER** - a second or further preference can displace a provisionally accepted first preference if the applicant meets a higher criterion, throughout the procedure.

- This clearing house system continues until every child is accepted by a pre-school provider, their preferences are exhausted or the deadline for processing applications expires. Further preferences will not be requested from parents during the procedure.

- Duty to verify – Refer to [DE Circular 2013/24 Guidance on a Schools Duty to Verify](#) - updated 23 October 2020. Any school requesting verifying documents when the offer of a place is being made should use the sample letter(s) as contained in the above circular.

#### **4 AMENDMENTS TO A CHILD'S INFORMATION**

For any amendments to a child's information (e.g.) home address etc. you should complete the 'Applicant & Pupil Details Correction Form' which is available on the Digital Hub or you may use an alternative format to provide this information. Returns can be forwarded via email to [preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk](mailto:preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk) or by AnyComms+ for C2k users. For any documents sent via email please ensure that these are password protected for data security (guidance is available on how to do this on the Digital Admissions Online Resource Hub). Please refer to C2k guidance for instructions on how to make a return via AnyComms+. You can contact the C2k Service Desk on 0870 601 1666 if you need assistance.

#### **5 VERIFYING DOCUMENTS NOT RECEIVED BY PRE-SCHOOLS**

Where a birth certificate has not been received for a child during the admissions procedure, if this is the only qualifying information that you require, your Board of Governors/Management Committee should continue to consider the application and provisionally allocate or refuse, as appropriate to your admissions criteria. If a place is able to be offered then the placement notification should advise that 'the place is being offered subject to receiving the child's birth certificate to verify the child's age'.

Where verifying/supporting documentation, is a requirement of the pre-school's admissions criteria e.g. a utility bill or benefit verification, is not received until after 12 noon on 5 February 2021 but before the close of Stage 1 (27 April 2021) or within any Duty to Verify deadline set by the pre-school, the Board of Governors/Management Committee should continue to consider the application and allocate or refuse the child based on the information which has been submitted punctually. (E.g.) Where a benefit verification request/benefit document from a parent for a child is received late after 12 noon on 5 February 2021 but before the close of Stage 1 the child cannot be deemed as meeting the criterion that this information relates to as the information was received late in Stage 1. In such a case the information as verified would be considered for the application in question in Stage 2 and the child would be ranked accordingly.

#### **6 ADDING TO SIMS – (Applicable to Nursery Units within a Primary School)**

Development of the new Document Upload Hub has taken priority over the integration of the application details captured in the Citizen Portal and the school SIMS system. As a result, this facility will not be offered this year and schools can, if they wish, proceed with the manual input of new entrants' data as soon as it is received.

#### **7 TEMPORARY FLEXIBILITY**

Nursery schools/units can apply for additional places (maximum class size of 30) in certain circumstances. Details of the Temporary Flexibility policy will be issued by the Early Years Team of the Department of Education at the **end of January/early February 2021**.

## 8 PLACEMENT NOTIFICATION

The pre-school admissions procedure for Stage 1 (Target) closes on Tuesday 27 April 2021. **Parents of Target age children who applied online can log on to the Citizen Portal on Wednesday 28 April 2021** with the username and password used when making their application to find out the outcome. Pre-Schools may choose to notify parents by post, letters for receipt on 28 April 2021.

**NB For any children accepted where an application was made using a paper form, the pre-school will need to issue a letter for receipt on 28 April 2021.**

Pre-Schools are not required to write to any parent whose child you were not able to accept. EA will post letters for receipt on 28 April 2021 to those parents whose children are not accepted by any pre-school (unplaced) and parents will be directed to the EA website to access a list of pre-schools where funded places remain available. Parents whose children are unplaced will be requested to nominate further preferences from this list, which they will be required to return to the Education Authority to be forwarded for consideration by pre-schools.

**NB The method of communicating by post to parents may be subject to review in line with any Covid-19 PHA guidance.**

**9 WHEN WILL PENULTIMATE (UNDERAGE) APPLICATIONS BE VISIBLE TO NURSERY SCHOOLS/UNITS–** Applications have been visible in January 2021 but consideration of applications will not commence until Stage 2 from 28 April 2021.

**10 GUIDANCE ON STAGE 2:** will be communicated at a later date. **IMPORTANT:-** Pre-School providers whether oversubscribed or undersubscribed at the close of Stage 1 (27 April 2021) should remember that Stage 2 does not close until 9 June and until that date you may have preferences as submitted by parents to consider and take decisions whether to 'Allocate or Refuse'. **Please continue to check the school portal, school portal email, document upload portal and as applicable AnyComms+ throughout Stage 1 and also in Stage 2.**

**11 SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED CIRCUMSTANCES:-** The onus will be on the parent to provide the benefit verification **if they have ticked or not ticked the box on the online form.** For a parent to do this, since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic the EA have put in place a process with the Department for Communities (DfC) to enable parents to obtain verification of benefit electronically. The DfC offices are currently closed to the public and only appointments by exception may be available.

The verification process with DfC is for all benefits as defined in the socially disadvantaged circumstances criterion **with the exception of Universal Credit.** Universal Credit claimants can upload their current UC online statement within the 'Document Upload' portal showing they are currently in receipt of UC.

For all other defined benefits under the socially disadvantaged circumstances criterion parents are guided after they complete their online form to complete a Benefit Verification form hosted also on the EA website. The data from this form is then sent securely by the EA to DfC who verify the requests. **\*The EA will then**

**send the information for children to the 1<sup>st</sup> preference provider securely to the school portal email or for C2k users via Anycomms+.** This information is unable to be uploaded into the EA Document Hub as the parents hold the unique document upload link for their application. Where a child is refused due to oversubscription at the statutory criterion and where that child's application has proof of receipt of benefit, then the EA will forward to the subsequent pre-school provider.

The EA will also advise pre-schools, with the exception of Universal Credit, if DfC are unable to provide verification for the benefit that the parent claimed to be in receipt of. The EA has also advised parents that they will only contact them where DfC is unable to verify their benefit.

Within the online Citizen Portal we have reviewed the Socially Disadvantaged section of the online form, in that, we have provided additional tick boxes as follows in addition to the general socially disadvantaged tick box. Two additional tick boxes are available to parents i.e. tick if in receipt of Universal Credit, tick if in receipt of other listed benefits (this would be as per the definition as published in your admissions criteria). If not ticked on the Citizen online form but the parent does provide benefit verification through document upload or via DfC refer to point 5 of this document.

**\*The EA will forward the benefit verifications as received from DfC to pre-school providers during the week beginning 1 Feb 2021. Thereafter verifications will be sent for consideration in line with the admissions timetable (Refer to point 5 of this document and DE's timetable as published).**

During the admissions procedure if a parent's circumstances change and they are in receipt of a benefit, as listed, this would be processed in line with the Department of Education's timetable.

Where a parent has made a pre-school application other relevant forms as verified by DfC, such a current dated letter verifying current receipt of benefit as defined under the Socially Disadvantaged Criterion may be accepted should the parent decide to provide this.

## 12 CONTACT DETAILS

Pre-School Admissions Office, Education Authority

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