



# Enabling schools to introduce cohort entry

**Helping students to have a great start at school is important for their early success. In the past the Act has only provided one way for schools to manage the flow of new entrants into school, known as continuous entry. Although some schools have adopted cohort entry, they have not been able to delay the start date of any student who has turned five who does not enrol in line with the school's cohort entry policy.**

The Act has therefore been amended to enable schools to fully adopt cohort entry following consultation with their community. For schools which introduce cohort entry, new entrants can start school as part of a cohort at the beginning of the term closest to their fifth birthday rather than on their fifth birthday or soon afterwards.

#### **What are the potential benefits of cohort entry for children?**

Cohort entry is about helping children to settle better in school. There is evidence that starting school alongside other children helps children build relationships and supports a smoother entry to school life. We know that some schools are already doing cohort entry, as they believe it offers their kids the best start to their school life. It can also mean less disruption for new entrant teachers who can prepare for groups of children arriving on a specific date rather than on an individual and ad hoc basis through the year.

#### **Do schools need to do anything before introducing cohort entry?**

Schools need to consult with their staff, the parents of current and prospective students, and local early childhood services, and consider whether they find the policy generally acceptable, before introducing cohort entry.

Schools need to give at least one term's notice of the change to parents, staff and local ECE services so that those affected have time to plan for the change. This could be done through their website or in a local community newspaper. Schools also need to inform the Ministry of Education, this can be done by emailing [information.officer@education.govt.nz](mailto:information.officer@education.govt.nz).

#### **Does this mean children can start school before they are five?**

Children will be able to start at a school with cohort entry at the beginning of the term closest to their fifth birthday, or the beginning of a later term. This means that some children, depending on when in the term their birthday falls, will be able to start school up to two months before they turn five, while other children will have to wait up to two months after their fifth birthday before they can start school.

The precise cut-off dates for each term will be published in the Education Gazette and on the Ministry of Education's website. Children turning five before the cut-off date for a term will be able to start at a school with cohort entry at the beginning of that term.



**Does cohort entry impact on Ongoing Resource Scheme (ORS) funding for children with severe and ongoing needs for learning support?**

Cohort entry does not impact on ORS funding. ORS funding starts when a child starts school. Once a child has ORS funding, they receive it for the duration of their schooling.

**What can a parent do if they don't want their child to start school before they are five?**

Parents who wish to start their child in a school with cohort entry can choose to delay their child's start until the beginning of a later term or until age six if there are concerns about their child's readiness for school.

**What if parents don't want their child to start at a school or kura as part of a cohort?**

If parents don't want to start their child at a school or kura under a cohort entry policy, they may start their child at another school in their area (subject to enrolment zone restrictions) which does not have a cohort entry policy.

If all schools in the area have adopted a cohort entry policy, parents will need to comply with this policy, or start their child at school on their sixth birthday.

**Will this mean my child has to stay in early childhood education longer than they would otherwise?**

Possibly. Depending on where their birthday falls within the term, some children could stay in early learning or other care for either a slightly shorter or longer period than they would otherwise if the school their family or whānau chooses has adopted cohort entry.

**Can schools with a cohort entry policy make parents enrol their children for the start of the term after they turn five?**

No. Schools can encourage parents to enrol their children for the start of the term after they turn five, but they cannot enforce this.

**Does cohort entry apply to children turning six or transferring from another school?**

No. Cohort entry does not apply to children who have turned six, or who are transferring from another school.

A school with cohort entry cannot enforce that a child turning six, who has not yet been enrolled, start at the beginning of the term prior to their turning six. It is a legal requirement that a child enrol at a registered school from age six, but the legislation about cohort entry only applies to four and five year olds. Therefore, if not already enrolled, a child can start school on their sixth birthday, but must start school no later than their sixth birthday.

**Can a child enrolled in a cohort entry school move to a non-cohort entry school and be enrolled at the same age?**

Yes. If a child is four when they enrol in a cohort entry school, they can move to a non-cohort entry school and enrol, even if aged four.

**Will this change affect the compulsory age for schooling?**

No. Parents will continue to have the option of not starting their child in school until their sixth birthday, regardless of whether or not the school they enrol in has a cohort entry policy.

**Will cohort entry have an impact on early learning services and ngā kōhanga reo?**

Yes. If a school adopts cohort entry, this will affect enrolment patterns in contributing early learning services and ngā kōhanga reo. As part of their consultation, school boards will need to consider the views of local early learning services and ngā kōhanga reo and give at least one term's notice before changing their entry policy. This will help ensure early learning services and ngā kōhanga reo are able to manage the loss of a larger group of children at one time.



**What effect does cohort entry have on early learning services and ngā kōhanga reo, childcare and OSCAR subsidies?**

Families are still eligible for Ministry of Education ECE subsidies, including 20 Hours ECE, until their child turns six or is enrolled in school. The Ministry of Social Development will be making changes to the childcare assistance regulations so that children over the age of five remain eligible for the childcare subsidy, and children under the age of five are eligible for the OSCAR subsidy.

**Will cohort entry policies affect the quality of transitions for children who may require additional support?**

Where a child would benefit from a staggered transition to school, a transition plan can be agreed between the child's parents, the school principal and the Ministry of Education (see the fact sheet *Requiring compulsory attendance at school for under sixes*). These plans will set out expected absences during the child's transition into school, providing some flexibility for transitions for children with additional learning support needs, if needed, while still allowing them to start school in accordance with a school's cohort entry policy.

**Where can I find more information about cohort entry?**

Further information on processes for consultation and managing cohort entry is available on NZSTA's website.

<http://www.nzsta.org.nz/>

**Where are the cohort entry provisions located in the Act?**

The cohort entry provisions are located in sections 5A to 5C.

**When do the changes take effect?**

These provisions took effect from 3 July 2017. The earliest students will enter a school with a cohort entry policy will be Term 1, 2018.

**Link to key provisions**

See section 10 of the Education (Update) Amendment Act 2017 which will insert new sections 5A to 5C into the Education Act 1989.

<http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2017/0020/latest/DLM6928647.html>