



Have your say about options for cohort entry for children aged five and over

Cohort entry is when new entrants to school start in groups at specific times of the year

1. There are two different ways that schools can start new entrants. Most schools use continuous entry where new entrants start on their fifth birthday or a date soon afterwards that their parents choose. A smaller number of schools have cohort entry. This is when new entrants start as a group at specific times during the year.
2. Parents can choose not to start their child at school until their sixth birthday, regardless of whether the school has continuous or cohort entry. All children must start school by their sixth birthday.

The law was changed in 2017 to make it easier for schools to have cohort entry

3. Cohort entry has been around for a while, but the law said that a school with cohort entry had to accept a child to start school when parents wanted a different starting date from one the schools set (cohort entry).
4. The change to the law in 2017 has made it easier for schools to use cohort entry. This change lets schools choose to fully adopt cohort entry after they've consulted with their school staff, the parents of current and future students, and local early childhood services and kōhanga reo.
5. New entrants at these schools can only start in groups at the beginning of each term. The earliest they can start school is the beginning of the term closest to their fifth birthday. This means that some children at these schools can start school when they are four, if their parents think they're ready.
6. Forty-seven schools have told us they've fully adopted cohort entry in 2018.
7. If a school doesn't have cohort entry, parents can continue to start their child at the school on a date they choose, once their child has turned five.

The Government wants to change the law on cohort entry so children don't start school before they are five

8. The Government wants to keep cohort entry, but change the law so new entrants have to be five when they start school.
9. Starting new entrants as a group can help children to settle better into school, build relationships, and have a smoother entry to school life. However, some parents and teachers have told us they're worried about four year olds starting school. Reasons for this include: New Zealand's earlier starting age than

many other countries; the benefits of play for young children; young children's readiness for school; and the lack of evidence supporting an earlier school starting age.

10. We want your views on what cohort entry for children aged five and over should look like in the future. This will help the Government to decide how it makes the law change on cohort entry.

Options on starting new entrants

11. We want your views on how often schools that fully adopt cohort entry should be able to start their groups of new entrants.
12. We have identified two options – once a term or twice a term. These options are outlined in more detail below. We looked at the impact of having more than two starting dates each term, and found that this would reduce the benefits of cohort entry for children and schools.
13. Both options could have an impact on some families and whānau as they would need to pay for a longer period of early childhood education for their child than they would under continuous entry or the existing cohort entry model. Their child would, however, still be able to get 20 Hours ECE until they start school. Eligible families and whānau would also be able to get childcare assistance provided by the Ministry of Social Development.
14. Both options could also have an impact on early childhood services due to children staying for longer and leaving in groups. This could lead to longer waiting times for children starting at early childhood services that are already full.

Option One – Allowing new entrants to start school in a group at the beginning of each term

15. Schools with cohort entry would be able to start their new entrants in a group at the beginning of each term. This would mean four starting dates each year.
16. Parents could start their child at the beginning of the term after their fifth birthday, or the beginning of a later term (but all children would need to start school by their sixth birthday). This means some children may have to wait up to between 12 and 15 weeks after their fifth birthday before they can start school, depending on when in the year they turn five. Those born in term 4 for example, may have to wait slightly longer to start school due to the summer holidays.
17. This option would result in long waiting times to start school for some children.

Option Two – Allowing new entrants to start school in a group at the beginning of the term and at the mid-point of the term

18. Schools with cohort entry would be able to start their new entrants in a group at the beginning and at the mid-point of each term. This would result in eight starting dates each year, two per term.
19. Children who turn five in the first half of the term would start at the mid-point of the term. Children who turn five in the second half of the term would start at the beginning of the next term. Parents could still choose to start their child at school on a later cohort starting date, up until their sixth birthday. This means some children may have to wait up to between 5 and 10 weeks after their fifth birthday to start

school, depending on when in the year they turn five. Again, those born in term 4, for example, may have to wait slightly longer to start school due to the summer holidays.

20. This option would result in shorter waiting times to start school than option one

Questions

- i. *Do you prefer option one or option two? Why?*
- ii. *How do you think these two options will affect children, families, whānau, early childhood education services and schools? Have we missed anything?*
- iii. *Are there any other options you think that we should look at?*
- iv. *If you are a school, how likely is it that your school will consult with your community on adopting a cohort entry policy for children aged five and over? If not, why not?*

Flexibility for cohort entry

21. We also want to know what you think about giving schools more flexibility in how they adopt cohort entry. The law currently has one option for all schools. However, we could make a law change so there are two options. This would allow schools to choose, after discussion with their community, which cohort entry option best suits the community's needs.

Question

- v. *Should the law let schools choose one option or between two options for cohort entry?*

Impact of a law change on schools that have fully adopted cohort entry

If your school has fully adopted cohort entry for 2018, it can still start new entrants before their fifth birthday until the law is changed.

Once the law is changed, your school will need to consult with your community to decide whether to adopt the new model of cohort entry or return to continuous entry. Doing consultation will let staff, current and future parents, and local early childhood education services and kōhanga reo share their views on whether they want to adopt the new model.

We will keep your school updated on any actions you need to take as Parliament makes changes to the law.

How to have your say

We need to hear what you think about the options in this discussion document by no later than **19 March 2018**. You can email your submission to cohort.entry@education.govt.nz or you can mail your submission to:

Cohort Entry Submissions
Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666
Wellington 6140
New Zealand

Your submissions will become public information. This means that a member of the public may ask for a copy of your submission from us under the Official Information Act 1982. Any submission summary we create as a result of this consultation may also mention your submission.

Please tell us if you do not want your name included in any submission summary.

Further information

If you have any questions about making a submission, or would like more information, please email cohort.entry@education.govt.nz