Dear Colleague,

I am writing to all Early Years Leads in Local Authorities to let you know the arrangements that Local Authorities will be required to put in place for 4 year olds from September 2011 and to address some queries about the policy for 4 year olds that I have recently received.

Last year the Secretary of State announced that the Department would be accepting Sir Jim Rose’s recommendations in his Review of the Primary Curriculum on improving outcomes for summer-born children. Sir Jim recommended that, subject to parents wishes and taking into account their child’s maturity and readiness to enter Reception class, summer-born children should be entitled to start school in the September after their fourth birthday. This could be on a part-time basis if parents prefer. This recommendation is based on evidence that summer-born children in particular do better throughout their school careers if they start reception with their peers.1

The majority of local authority areas already operate a single entry point in September following a child’s fourth birthday, but presently summer born children do not have the same education opportunities across the country. Implementing this proposal will therefore provide a fair system for parents and also support the needs of summer-born children.

You will be aware that the Admissions Code has been changed to reflect this policy change and will come into force in September 2011. This gives all children an entitlement to a place in Reception from the September after their 4th birthday and

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will help ensure that summer-born children do not fall behind. The amended Code can be found at www.dcsf.gov.uk/sacode.

I am aware that a minority of parents may continue to have a strong preference for their child’s early years experience to take place outside a school setting. We have recently extended the free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds to 15 hours (from September 2010) and, in the recently published Code of Practice, have required Local Authorities to ensure that it is delivered flexibly. 4 year olds will continue to be entitled to access 15 hours of early learning and care in the PVI or maintained nursery sectors if their parents do not feel they are ready for school. Local authorities will also continue to have the discretion to offer children more than 15 hours a week in non-school settings where, in individual cases, this is the most appropriate option.

We know that the transition from nursery to full-time school can be difficult for some children. However, the evidence presented in the Rose Review is clear about the benefits to children of starting together with their peers at the beginning of the Reception year. I would encourage local authorities to work with schools and parents to manage the transition from nursery to full-time school and support parents to make the best decision about the right provision for their child. Your work on the quality of your early years provision at school and pre-school – using approaches such as the Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme - will also support good transitions.

Thank you for your support in implementing this policy to improve outcomes for summer-born children.

Yours sincerely,

DAWN PRIMAROLO