

Early Entry to School Frequently Asked Questions

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1. What is early entry ?

Answer: Children may begin Kindergarten if they are four years old on, or before, 1 January in the year of enrolment. Children must begin Prep if they are five years old on, or before 1 January in the year of enrolment.

In every community there is a small number of children who are 'gifted'. Their cognitive development is advanced for their age. This means their ability to think, understand and process information is more advanced. There is more information about what it means to be gifted in question 4.

Such children can benefit from starting Kindergarten or Prep up to six months earlier than usual. This is called as 'early entry to school'.

Parents/carers of a gifted child can apply to an expert committee. The committee is called the Early Entry to School Cross Sectoral Placement Committee. The committee will consider the child for early entry to Kindergarten or Prep. The Committee includes people from:

- all school sectors (Government, Catholic and Independent)
- parents/carers
- a school principal
- an experienced early childhood teacher and
- a registered psychologist.

2. Why is early entry to Kindergarten or Prep available ?

Answer: Gifted children are advanced in their cognitive development. Placing them with peers closer to their stage of development is a better match for their abilities. This means placing them with an older group who are closer to their stage of development. It helps to ensure that they are challenged and are learning new things. Including how to learn from their mistakes, rather than repeating things they can already do. This means they are engaged and learning how to learn, from the beginning of school.

Early entry provides gifted children with classmates who have similar interests and skill levels. So, they develop essential social skills and positive relationships to give them a sense of belonging. In the longer term it may avoid later grade skipping.

3. Is early entry for children born in January and February who seem to be ready for school?

Answer: No.

An early start to school means the child will always be younger than their classmates. If the child's cognitive development is advanced, they are likely to cope with the learning and social demands of school.

If their cognitive development is typical for their age, being younger than classmates can put them under pressure. This can cause unnecessary stress and anxiety for the child.

A registered psychologist can assess a young child's cognitive development. The assessments measure their understanding of language, ability to think and solve problems. This provides a measure of the child's ability, compared with other Australian children the same age. It gives a good sign of the child's potential for success

at school. For early entry to be recommended the assessment needs to show that the child is in advance of 98% of other children their age.

Early entry is for children whose cognitive development is in the top 2% of the population.

Evidence of a child's development is collected from their parent/carers. This is in the early entry application form. There is also a social and emotional checklist for an early childhood educator or child carer to complete.

4. What does it mean to be 'gifted'?

Answer: The formal definition of giftedness used by the Department of Education is:

"Students who are gifted have the capacity for advanced development relative to their age peers. In at least one ability domain:

- cognitive
- physical
- creative or
- social

to a degree that places them at least among the top 10% of their age peers."

Within this group of 10% of children there is a range of levels of giftedness. From 'mildly' gifted (1 in 10 children) through to 'extremely' gifted (less than 1 in 100,000 children).

Children who are mildly gifted should begin school at the usual age. Children assessed by a psychologist as being in the top 2% of the population for cognitive function, may apply for early entry.

Gifted children often walk and talk early. They can show extreme curiosity and ask complex questions. They often have an exceptional memory and excellent powers of observation. They show an early interest in numbers, reading and may teach themselves without prompting. They can be very sensitive, intense and/or show a well-developed sense of humour. They may relate better to older children than those of their own age.

It is important to know that being well ahead in one of these areas does **not** automatically mean that the child will be advanced in all areas. Some children are cognitively gifted while being similar to other children their age socially and emotionally. Children can be gifted in some areas while at the same time having a communication difference or physical disability.

The important thing to keep in mind is that each gifted child is unique. They will have individual strengths and needs. Families and educators must take into account the 'full picture' of the child before applying for early entry.

5. How do I know if my child may be gifted?

Answer: Parents/carers are often the first to notice that their child may be developing differently. A good resource for parents/carers to identify possible giftedness in their child is the [Early Entry to School for Gifted Students Application Form \(225 KB, PDF\)](#). The form contains two checklists parents/carers can use to think about their child's development and educational needs.

The first checklist describes fifteen characteristics of gifted young children. Parents/carers share examples of their child's development and behaviour for each characteristic.

The questions on the second checklist refer to how the child copes in a group situation. This checklist is completed by an early childhood educator or child carer who knows the child well.

Parents/carers use the checklists to think about their child's development and the behaviours. If the child shows the characteristics to a strong degree, parents/carers may consider having them formally assessed for cognitive giftedness by a psychologist.

[Is My Child Gifted?](#) is a good place to get information. If parents/carers think their child may be gifted it can be helpful to contact the local Tasmanian Association for the Gifted (TAG) group for further information, resources and support.

6. Is early entry suitable for all gifted children?

Answer: A child who starts Kindergarten or Prep early is likely to be the youngest in their class throughout school. They need to be able to succeed across all areas of learning and relate to an older peer group. Research shows that for some gifted children, this is exactly what they need to thrive, and so early entry is a successful strategy for them.

However, early entry doesn't suit the needs of every gifted child. If they are not keen to start school it can cause anxiety and stress for the child. It is possible they may have to repeat a year later on at school if early entry turns out to be inappropriate for them.

While it is important to consider early entry as a possible strategy, it is not appropriate for all gifted children and each child needs to be considered individually.

7. Should I apply for early entry for my child?

Answer: If parents/carers think their child may be cognitively gifted, they should also consider their child's physical, social and emotional ability to cope with school.

[Kindergarten in Tasmanian Government Schools](#) website gives information about the sorts of activities children do at Kindergarten age. This can help parents/carers decide whether their child is ready for Kindergarten.

If parents/carers are unsure they can talk with a professional such as:

- an early childhood educator
- school psychologist
- the school principal
- a member of senior staff, or
- Kindergarten teacher

Making an appointment to ask questions and discuss concerns is a good idea. If parents/carers think their child may be cognitively gifted and will cope with school, they can apply for early entry using the process outlined below.

8. What is the process for early entry?

Answer: Parents/carers should read [Early Entry to School for Children who are Gifted Cross Sectoral Guidelines \(PDF, 484 KB\)](#). The Guidelines give details of the process that is used for early entry, the criteria used, important dates, application form and details of people to contact for further information.

9. What options other than early entry are available for gifted children?

Answer: Early entry is just one way to challenge gifted children. There are many strategies that are available to schools and parents/carers to meet the needs of gifted children.

- Participating in activities at libraries and playgroups.
- [Talk, Read and Play Resources](#) are helpful for parents/carers.
- [Launching into Learning](#) has fun activities to do at home and ideas to get ready for school.
- Providing activities at home that develop their strengths and interests. [Supporting Gifted Children in the Early Years \(PDF, 1009KB\)](#) has some ideas and resources.
- Schools support acceleration or grade skipping for some gifted students. Please check with your school sector to find out more.

10. How can I best support my gifted child at school?

Answer: The education of your child is an important ongoing partnership between you, the school and your child. Every child has a unique profile of learning strengths and needs. It is important to work closely with the school to provide an appropriately challenging and personalised program for them.

One of the most positive things parents/carers can contribute to their child's education is keeping communication with the school. Give your child's teacher time to get to know them. Professional learning is available for teachers. Keep in mind this could be the teacher's first time teaching a gifted student. All gifted learners are unique and there isn't a "one size fits all" strategy.

11. Do all school sectors support gifted students in the same way ?

The early entry process is the same for all school sectors. After a child has been successfully granted early entry to school it is important for parents/carers to ask their school what supports are available. Each school will be able to provide information about how they meet the needs of gifted students, within their unique context.