

# SAME FIRST DAY

## Starting preschool and school



Government  
of South Australia

Department for Education  
and Child Development

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The educational goals for young Australians articulated in the Melbourne Declaration are lifelong aspirations. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Australian Curriculum have been developed in response to these.

In prior to school settings, the EYLF establishes the foundations for effective learning throughout life. The Australian Curriculum is aligned with EYLF and builds onto its key learning outcomes.

***“Children and young people are at the centre of everything we do and we will work to ensure positive outcomes for all young South Australians.”***

***DECD Strategic Plan 2012 – 2016 for South Australian Public Education and Care.***

The introduction of the Same First Day policy in 2013 / 2014 provides a unique opportunity for leaders and teachers to consider continuity of learning and pedagogy for young children as they make the transition from preschool into school in South Australia.

The following frequently asked questions have been developed to assist educators and leaders in sites, clusters and professional associations, to respond to queries about the Same First Day policy.

This document comprises two sections:

- **Section 1 clarifies Same First Day policy**
- **Section 2 provides guidelines**

### **Section 1 Same First Day policy**

**Question:** How will Same First Day policy affect DECD sites?

**Answer:** The only policy change is that from 2014, the start date for school is the first day of Term 1. Children will no longer be able to start at the beginning of each Term. This brings South Australia into line with other states and territories that have had single school intake for some time.

**Question:** Do children still have to be 5 years of age to start school?

**Answer:** Starting school is still determined by the date of a child's fifth birthday. However, from 2014, those children who have a fifth birthday prior to the 1 May are able to begin school on the first day of Term 1 of that year. Children who have their fifth birthday on or after the 1 May will begin school on the first day of Term 1 in the following year.

**Question:** Is there a change to when Aboriginal children or children under the Guardianship of the Minister for Education and Child Development can begin preschool?

**Answer:** There is no change to this policy. These children may begin preschool when they turn 3 years of age.

**Question:** How many hours can Aboriginal children or children under the Guardianship of the Minister for Education and Child Development, who are 3 years of age, attend preschool?

**Answer:** Aboriginal children and children under the Guardianship of the Minister for Education and Child Development may start preschool after their third birthday (subject to resource capability assessed on a termly basis).

A child may attend up to 12 hours per week initially, increasing up to 15 hours per week at the beginning of the year in which they turn 4 years of age, before 1 May.

Aboriginal children and children under the Guardianship of the Minister for Education and Child Development may have an extended period in preschool up to 6 years of age, at which time they are required to enrol in school.

**Question:** Can gifted children still enter preschool early?

**Answer:** Eligible children may commence for up to 3 hours per week in the first term of early entry, increasing to a maximum of 6 hours per week from the beginning of their second term of early entry. Early entry is decided on a case by case basis. Directors/principals may negotiate early enrolment when:

- additional time at preschool is likely to significantly improve a child's learning and developmental outcomes
- the preschool has the capacity within its current resources (staffing and assigned physical capacity)
- consultation has occurred between the director/principal, centre staff, parents and, where applicable, support personnel.

**Question:** When can gifted children start school?

**Answer:** The early entry process to school for children who are deemed to be gifted, remains unchanged.

Refer to Policy Statement Gifted and Talented Children and Students

**Question:** At what age are all children required to attend school?

**Answer.** The compulsory age at which children are expected to be enrolled in school remains at 6 years of age. From 2014, children who turn 6 on or after 1 May are able to start school on the first day of Term 1 of that year, and not wait until the following year. Alternatively, they may begin on their sixth birthday.

Once a child is enrolled at school they are expected to attend every day. This includes children who start school when they are under six years of age.

**Question:** My child's fifth birthday is on 23 May. My local independent school will have a mid-year intake. Once commencing Reception there, can my child transfer into a government school?

**Answer:** The Same First Day policy is intended to provide all children with four terms as a Reception student. Children who have started in a South Australian independent school and regularly attended for at least one term, may transfer into a DECD school and, subject to available resources (ie. a place is available), will be accommodated in the same year level and will not be disadvantaged.

Children who have spent 2 terms in Reception may be identified as a Reception student again in the following year. Consultation will occur with the child's teacher and parents regarding placement. The principal will discuss this during the enrolment process.

**Question:** What is the process for children who have been attending preschool or school in another state or territory and have moved to South Australia?

**Answer:** Children transferring from an interstate preschool or school and able to be accommodated within the existing resources of a South Australian public preschool or school, will be deemed an eligible enrolment subject to the following documentation being provided:

- Proof of interstate residence, for example contract of sale, rental agreement, gas or electricity bill with the residential address.
- A letter from the director / principal of the interstate preschool / school, acknowledging that the child meets the eligibility criteria for that state and was enrolled in and regularly attended a recognised preschool/school for a term (or the equivalent), prior to transferring to South Australia.
- Details of other circumstances that should be taken into consideration.

**Question:** What happens when preschool children arrive from overseas?

Children who arrive from overseas during the year must comply with the age requirements under the Same First Day policy. This means that children who turned four on or before May 1, can enrol in a preschool at any point in the year, soon after arrival in South Australia. Depending on their arrival date, this may mean that they only access part of their 4 term entitlement before transitioning into school at the start of the following year. A family may choose to delay the start in the preschool until the following year, in order to gain the full four terms of access. Children must be enrolled in school by the time they turn six years of age.

**Question:** The preschool child who arrived from overseas has minimal English. How can s/he access the Intensive English Language Program?

**Answer:** The Intensive English Language Program (IELP) is not affected by the Same First Day policy and enrolls throughout the year. Most reception students with minimal English are eligible to enrol in the Intensive English Language Program within 18 months of arrival. In general, the child must be 5 years of age when commencing in an Intensive English Language Centre. The exception to this is enrolment of children in Term 1 who are eligible to enrol if turning five on or before May 1. These children may or may not have previously attended preschool. For further information, go to <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/literacy/pages/esl/scope/?reFlag=1>

**Question:** The Preschool Enrolment Policy allows access to preschools for all children. Can all children who need support with English language development enrol in an IELP?

**Answer:** No. Holders of some visa subclasses, such as tourists or international students are not funded by DECD. For further information go to <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/literacy/pages/esl/about/> and click on Visa Subclass in the left menu bar.

**Question:** What happens when school children arrive from overseas?

**Answer:** Children who have started school overseas must comply with the age requirements under the South Australian Same First Day policy. Students aged 5, with minimal English may enter the Intensive English Language Program, soon after arrival. They do not need to wait until the start of the following year.

For further information about matters relating to starting preschool/ school and the Intensive English Language Program go to <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/literacy/pages/esl/scope/?reFlag=1>

Click on the Intensive Language Program in the left menu bar then select Entering the IELP at Reception Year Level

**Question:** Is there any flexibility with the 1 May cut-off date?

**Answer:** No. This brings South Australia into line with other states and territories that have had single school intake for some time.

**Question:** Under the Same First Day policy, when do students who currently have extended time in pre-school because of developmental concerns, start school?

**Answer:** Extended time in preschool is no longer available. In exceptional, unforeseen circumstances, a child may extend their attendance at preschool for up to one term only.

This transitional arrangement must be negotiated between preschool and school site leaders in consultation with staff, parents/guardians and, where applicable, support services or specialist agencies, to meet the individual needs of the child.

Whilst attending preschool during this period, the child must be enrolled at the school.

**Question:** What is the expected attendance for children starting school for the first time?

**Answer:** Children who are enrolled in school are expected to attend every day. There is no policy relating to the length of the school day for the first week.

In exceptional circumstances the principal, teacher and parents may, in the best interest of a particular child, decide to adjust the length of the school day during this period.

## **Section 2 Guidelines**

**Question:** What are the benefits of Same First Day policy?

**Answer:** The new system will provide a more stable environment for children, with fewer changes to classes throughout the year.

Both preschools and schools will in general have a single cohort of children throughout the year, and that means teaching and learning plans are able to be applied over the whole period of the year. A small number of children may enter through the year if transferring from interstate or arriving from overseas.

With the current differential entry points, preschools and Reception classes may regularly have to accommodate different groupings which then influence consistency in the learning program.

International research indicates that a consistent and common first year in Reception benefits children for the remainder of their schooling

**Question:** How will preschools and schools cater for the change in age and maturity range of children in preschools and those starting Reception (some children could be almost a year older than others)?

**Answer:** Our teachers are experienced at differentiating the learning program to cater for the particular needs of every child.

Children's experiences, skills, understandings, interests and abilities will vary. Teachers use their professional training and expertise to cater for the particular learning needs of every child. This is already happening in preschools, Reception classes and other levels of schooling. This will not change.

**Question:** Is there a change to staffing ratios to support younger children being in school settings?

**Answer:** No. Funding provided to schools enables each junior primary class ratio to be on average, no greater than 26 children.

In addition to this funding, the Government's early years funding (weighted in favour of complexity) is provided to further reduce Reception to year 3 class size. Decisions about how this funding is applied will be made by the principal in consultation with the Personnel Advisory Committee (PAC).

**Question:** What resources will be provided to alter facilities and equipment to suit younger children being at school?

**Answer:** School communities will continue to make local decisions regarding the resources they have available to provide appropriate equipment to meet the needs of their students.

**Question:** Are there any resources that will help preschools and schools consider transition to school when Same First Day starts?

**Answer:** DECD has developed a number of resources to support preschool and school educators and leaders as they work together with staff and communities to review transition practices.

These are now available on the DECD transition to school website

[www.decd.sa.gov.au/transitiontoschool](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/transitiontoschool)

Australian Curriculum Implementation Officers and grants are available to schools to support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum including in the first year of school.

Central Office Early Years Curriculum Officers are available to support the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework.

*How can I find out more information?*

If the Frequently Asked Questions do not provide the information you need, you are encouraged to contact:

- the policy officer designated as contact person on the relevant policy
- colleagues in your local partnership to share practices and generate joint solution (consistent with policy requirements)
- your Early Childhood Leader, Primary Australian Curriculum Implementation Officer and/or your Educational Leader for further support.