

Dear Sean,

I am writing to you as Education Spokesman about an issue which I have a great interest.

I am a parent of a boy whose June birthday makes him the youngest in his yeargroup at school. I was part of a group who made a Presentation to the Education Committee in Nov 2010 asking for some flexibility in the school starting age. A letter has been sent to the Education Committee and I hope you will support our call for an amendment to current legislation to allow a little flexibility in the current system.

At the time of our initial presentation I explained how my husband and I took the difficult decision to keep our young son back from attending primary school when he had just turned four. Thankfully we had a very supportive playgroup and an understanding Principal of the school where we wanted our son to attend the following year. And we had the finances to pay for another year in playgroup.

That extra year has made such a difference to my child's educational learning. He now loves school and is excelling in all areas of school life emotionally as well as academically. I have met many other parents who have a young for year child who is constantly playing catchup the whole way through school. I feel very strongly that these children may not have such a negative school experience if they had not been forced to enter formal school at such a young age.

At the time I had to tell the Education Board (who were very unsupportive) that I was home schooling. This is not an option for many parents.

It is worth noting that our neighbours in the Republic do not have to legally attend school until the age of six. In practice most attend by five. We are just looking to provide parents with greater choice.

I hope you will support our request for some flexibility in the current system.

Thank you
Roisin Gilheany (Omagh mother of 3 boys)