

Applying for a Pre-School or School Place for September 2026

Key Information for parents

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What to consider when applying for a pre-school or school place?

This leaflet provides key information on the admissions processes for Pre-School, Primary 1 and Post Primary Year 8 and signposts you to further information.

What are the date of birth ranges for applying?

The table below shows the date of birth ranges for each sector for starting school year September 2026. All dates are inclusive.

Sector/Application Type	Oldest	Youngest
Pre-School Underage	02 July 2023	01 July 2024
Pre-School Target Age & Reception*	02 July 2022	01 July 2023
Primary 1	02 July 2021**	01 July 2022
Post Primary Year 8	02 July 2014	01 July 2015

*A limited number of Primary Schools offer a Reception Class. Read carefully the Admissions Criteria to see if your chosen Primary school offers this option.

** If you deferred your child from starting Primary School in September 2025 you must apply for September 2026.

What are the Admissions Key Dates?



Sector	Admissions Criteria Published	Applications Open	Applications Close	Last date for Document Upload and Late Applications	Placement Notification
Pre-School Stage 1: Target Age and Underage	Wed 10 December 2025	Wed 7 January 2026	12 noon Wed 21 January 2026	4pm Mon 26 January 2026	Mon 23 March 2026 (Target Age only)
Pre-School Stage 2: All remaining Target Age and all Underage	Wed 10 December 2025	Mon 23 March 2026	4pm Wed 1 April 2026	——	Tue 19 May 2026
Primary 1	Wed 10 December 2025	Wed 7 January 2026	12 noon Wed 21 January 2026	4pm Mon 26 January 2026	Mon 23 March 2026
Post Primary Year 8	Wed 10 December 2025	Tue 27 January 2026	12 noon Thu 19 February 2026	4pm Tues 24 February 2026	Sat 9 May 2026

What if I do not apply during the application window?

Applications completed and submitted during the application window will be treated as punctual. After the closing date, parents will be unable to apply online but can submit a paper application no later than 4pm on the last date for Late Applications (shown above). Applications received during this time will be added to EA Connect and will be treated by schools as late applications. Please read carefully the admissions criteria for your preferred pre-schools or schools as most pre-schools or schools give priority to punctual applications.

! Having a late application could reduce your child's likelihood of gaining a place in your preferred pre-school or school i.e. some pre-schools and schools will have filled all available places with punctual applications.



Statement of Special Educational Needs

If your child is currently undergoing statutory assessment and does not yet have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, you will need to apply for a pre-school, primary or post primary school place.

If your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs, placement will be discussed with you as part of the annual review of your child's statement and therefore an Admissions application should not be made on EA Connect.

If you require more information, please contact the **Statutory Assessment & Review Service directly on 028 9031 7777, Option 1.**

You can list up to 12 preferences on the online application. You should nominate **at least 4 preferences to reduce the risk of your child not being offered a place** at the end of the process at which point the choice of pre-schools/schools with places remaining will be limited.

You may need to list more than four preferences if the pre-schools or schools you are nominating are normally oversubscribed. In the case of Post Primary applications, at least one of the schools listed should be a non-grammar school.

Please note you cannot list the same preference more than once.

Exceptions:

Pre-School Only: if you wish to apply for a pre-school funded place in a nursery school or nursery unit which offers both Full-Time (FT) and Part-Time (PT) provision.

Primary and Post Primary: If the school has an Irish Medium Unit (IMU) you may list either or both options.

Post Primary Only: If the school has a Boarding Department you may list either or both options.



Of the pupils who had not gained a place at the end of the 2025 Post Primary Year 8 Admissions process, almost 80% had listed only 1 to 3 schools. Over half of those had nominated only 1 school.

What do I need to think about when choosing schools?

- Parents have the right to express preferences for the pre-schools or schools they would like their child to attend, but no child can be guaranteed a place in any pre-school/school or any particular type of pre-school/school.
- Read the admissions criteria for each pre-school or school you are interested in and consider how well your child meets them.
- Consider the number of applications the pre-school/school received in previous years and how many pupils were admitted. This is published with the admissions criteria but remember that patterns of applications can change.
- Some pre-schools and schools give priority to applicants who have listed their pre-school/school as first preference, therefore, applicants who list the pre-school/school at a lower preference may have less chance of obtaining a place.
- Consider whether transport assistance will be available from the EA. Your admissions preferences can affect eligibility for transport assistance. Information on eligibility for transport assistance can be found on the EA website. (Primary and Post Primary only)
- All Post Primary schools, whether grammar or non-grammar, follow the same Northern Ireland Curriculum.

How do schools consider applications?

Each school's Board of Governors determines the admissions criteria to be used if a pre-school/school receives more applications than it has places available. If your child's application is not selected by your first preference pre-school/school, it will then be considered by your second preference. This will be repeated until a place has been allocated or all preferences that you have listed have been exhausted. Places will be allocated to those who best meet the admissions criteria.

Is my child guaranteed a place at a school I have listed?

- No child can be guaranteed a place at any pre-school or school.
- While there are sufficient places for all children across Northern Ireland, over half of the pre-schools/schools will be oversubscribed due to parental preference.
- You need to be realistic about the chances of your child being offered a place at an oversubscribed school.



What should I do before I start the application?

✓ Find information on pre-schools and schools in your area

- Use the [Find a School tool](#) on the EA website to find details of pre-schools and schools in your area and their admissions criteria.
- Attend Open days/evenings, details of which are contained in the admissions criteria or on the pre-school/school's website.
- Check school prospectuses which are available from the pre-schools and schools or from their websites.

✓ Read the Admissions Criteria

- Read the admissions criteria for all pre-schools/schools you wish to consider. Take a note of how your child meets the criteria and if any supporting documents are required e.g. proof of address. If you have any query as to what information is being requested, you should contact the pre-school/school directly for clarification.

✓ Prepare your Supporting Documents

- Have your documents ready to upload by scanning or taking a photo on your device.
- A birth certificate must be uploaded for every child. If a birth certificate is not available, you should consult the pre-school/school to determine what alternatives may be acceptable.
- If you are applying for Pre-School and you are claiming Socially Disadvantaged Circumstances, you will need to add verifying documents to your application. See below for more information on Socially Disadvantaged Circumstances (SDC).



✓ Register on EA Connect



- If you have not already registered an account on EA Connect, you can do so now.
- If you have previously used EA Connect for Admissions or any other EA Services you can use your existing details to log in. Follow the onscreen instructions if you need to reset your password.
- If you experience technical difficulties setting up or accessing your account contact digital@eani.org.uk.

Where can I get further information?

The Admissions section of the EA website www.eani.org.uk/admissions including:

- ➔ [Applying for a School Place](#)
- ➔ [Search Admissions Criteria](#)
- ➔ [Admissions Key Dates](#)
- ➔ [Admissions Support](#) (includes videos, guidance and FAQs)



You may wish to seek guidance and advice from your child's current Leader/School Principal. Pre-schools and schools can provide information on their admissions criteria.

You can contact the Admissions Helpdesk by telephone on 028 9047 0177 or email -

Pre-School



preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk

Primary



primaryadmissions@eani.org.uk

Post-Primary



postprimaryadmissions@eani.org.uk

14+ (Dickson Plan)



seniorhighadmissions@eani.org.uk



Completing the Admissions Application

The information that you provide on the application is used by pre-schools/schools to decide which children will receive offers of a place. It is important you provide complete and accurate information. Pre-schools/schools may verify information e.g. address, to ensure that a place is not obtained through the provision of false information. Supporting documents must be uploaded as part of the application if this is requested in the admissions criteria for any of the pre-schools/schools you list.

To access EA Connect to complete an Admissions Application, visit the EA website when applications open and click '**Apply Now**'. Ensure you have all required supporting documents to hand before you begin the application.

Add Child's Details

- Provide information about your child.
- Enter your child's surname and all forenames as recorded on the birth certificate, adoption certificate or court order.
- 'Known As' names can be added in the designated boxes.
- Provide the address where your child currently lives i.e. your child's normal place of residence and not that of a child minder, other relative or a business address.
- Ensure you add the correct date of birth as this will affect which type of application you can complete.



Further Child details added to the Admissions Application:

- If your child is the eldest child of the family/only child you should tick the relevant box. Twins or multiple births can be listed as joint eldest if appropriate although each child will be treated individually by pre-schools/schools when considering applications.
- Please check if there is any particular definition of eldest child in the pre-school/school's admissions criteria and include any information which may be relevant e.g. if your eldest child attends a special school and the child applying is the next eldest child. Eldest boy or eldest girl of the family may have relevance for applications to single-sex schools.

Pre-school Only: Socially Disadvantaged Circumstances (SDC)

Legislation requires pre-school providers to give priority to children in their final pre-school year who are from Socially Disadvantaged Circumstances (SDC). The benefits as defined by the Department of Education entitling parents to claim SDC are:

- Income Support; or
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance; or
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance; or
- Universal Credit.

If you have an entitlement to any of these benefits tick the box to confirm, when completing the pre-school application and you must provide verification to show an entitlement to the qualifying benefit. Visit <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/admissions/pre-school-admissions-guide> for guidance on what verification documents are needed before you begin your application.

Post Primary Only: Free School Meals Entitled/Entitlement (FSME)

Children entitled to free school meals may be prioritised for admission to some schools. Tick the box if your child is registered as being FSME. If your child becomes FSME registered after the closing date when your application has been submitted, inform the EA by email to postprimaryadmissions@eani.org.uk.



School Choices

- ✓ Carefully select your pre-school/school choices as some pre-schools/schools have similar names e.g. St Patrick's College, Banbridge, St Patrick's College, Dungannon etc.
- ✓ Indicate clearly if a sibling already attends a pre-school/school. List the names of all the siblings already attending.
- ✓ In the text box provided, include any information that is relevant to enable each pre-school/school listed as a preference to apply its admissions criteria. It is extremely important that you give all the information that is relevant because if you do not put the information on the application as to how your child meets a particular criterion then the pre-school/school cannot give your child consideration under this criterion.
- ✓ List the pre-school/school choices in order of preference.
- ✓ We recommend that you list at least 4 pre-school/schools, and in the case of Post Primary including at least 1 non-grammar school.



Additional Questions

Depending on the schools you have chosen, additional questions may be presented, answer questions as appropriate.

Post Primary and 14+ Only: Special Circumstances and Special Provisions

Schools which use entrance tests may consider medical or other problems which may have affected performance in the test(s). This is known as special circumstances. Details of how to claim and the supporting documents required are set out in the admissions criteria of each school.

Special provisions refer mainly to pupils transferring from schools outside NI, pupils who have received more than half of their primary education outside NI, or may include cases where a child was unable to sit any entrance tests. To find out more contact individual Post Primary schools.

Upload Supporting Documents

Upload your child's birth certificate and any other supporting documents requested in the criteria of any of your pre-school/school preferences. You can use the file finder on your device or choose to use your devices camera while in the application. Check the Admissions Key Dates to see the final date for uploading supporting documents. If you do not have access to a document required by your chosen pre-school/school, you should consult the pre-school/school to determine what alternatives may be acceptable.

Review Application Summary

On the Application Summary page you will be able to check all the information you have provided on your child's details and the application. If you need to make any changes you can click 'Edit' on the section and return to the appropriate screen. When you are satisfied the information is correct, click 'Continue'.

Submit

Read the Terms and Conditions, click the check box and click 'Submit'. You will receive confirmation of submission on the screen and by email. You can edit your application up until the closing date.



Please note this is not on a first come first served basis and pre-schools and schools will allocate places after the application closing date.

How will I find out if my child has been offered a school place?

You will receive a placement notification email on the morning of notification day. You can also log in to EA Connect to view the outcome of your child's application on the same day. Pre-schools/Schools may also write to you to advise a place is being offered and provide a welcome pack. If your child has not yet been placed the EA will write to you on the same date and you will be asked to list further preferences from a list of pre-schools/schools which still have places remaining.





Before you Apply:

- ✓ Read the Admissions Criteria for each pre-school or school you wish to nominate.
- ✓ Prepare your supporting documents: check the Admissions Criteria to see what is required for each pre-school/school.

Using EA Connect for the first time:

- ✓ Go to EA Connect and Register*.
- ✓ Click on the emailed link to verify your account.



*If you have already registered on EA Connect for any EA service you should use your existing log in details. Follow on-screen prompts if you need to reset your password.

Making your Admissions Application:

- ✓ Log in and confirm the data protection statement. Please ensure you select '**Admissions**' to move forward with an application.
- ✓ Click '**Add Child**' to enter your child's details and save. If your child details are already on EA Connect, click the edit icon to check the details are correct.
- ✓ Click '**Apply Now**'.
- ✓ Answer all questions as appropriate, following the on-screen prompts.
- ✓ Upload your child's birth certificate and any other supporting documents requested in the criteria of any of your pre-school/school preferences.
- ✓ Check all details on the Application Summary (you can select 'edit' to change any details from here).
- ✓ Click '**Continue**', confirm the Terms and Conditions and '**Submit**'. You will receive email confirmation that your application has been submitted.
- ✓ After submission you can log in to view or edit your child's application up until the closing date.



If you are experiencing any difficulties with your EA Connect account, please email digital@eani.org.uk.



For all other admission queries, please visit www.eani.org.uk/admissions or contact the Admissions Helpdesk on 028 9047 0177.

Pre-School



preschooladmissions@eani.org.uk

Primary



primaryadmissions@eani.org.uk

Post-Primary



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