

Subject: OPEN ENROLMENT IN NURSERY, PRIMARY AND POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS –TIMETABLES	Circular Number: 2025/11 Date of Issue: 01 October 2025
Target Audience: • Principals and Boards of Governors of all Grant-Aided Nursery Schools, Grant-Aided Primary Schools, Grant-Aided and Post Primary Schools; • Education Authority; and • The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.	Governor Awareness: Essential
Summary of Contents: This Circular provides the Open Enrolment timetables for Pre-School, primary and post primary schools for admissions to take place in September 2026.	Status of Contents: Advice for Principals and Boards of Governors Related Documents: 2025/14 (Open Enrolment in Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes in Primary Schools) 2025/13 (Open Enrolment in Primary Schools) 2025/12 (Procedure for Transfer from Primary to Post Primary Schools) Superseded Documents: 2024/16 Expiry Date: Not Applicable
Enquiries: Any enquiries about the contents of this Circular should be addressed to: School Admissions Team Department of Education Rathgael House Balloo Road BANGOR Co Down BT19 7PR	Department of Education Website: www.education-ni.gov.uk Tel: 028 9127 9564 E-Mail: schooladmissionsteam@education-ni.gov.uk

INTRODUCTION

1. This Circular provides the timetables for preschool, primary and post-primary school Open Enrolment admissions to take place in September 2026.
2. This Circular should be read in conjunction with the corresponding Open Enrolment Circular as appropriate, i.e. for Nursery Schools – Circular number 2024/17, for Primary Schools – Circular number 2024/19 and for Post Primary Schools – Circular number 2024/18.
3. This Circular will be updated annually and re-issued accordingly.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'S' followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line.

SCOTT HARBINSON
Head of School Admissions Team

OPEN ENROLMENT IN PRE-SCHOOL

TIMETABLE – ADMISSION SEPTEMBER 2026

October/November 2025	Boards of Governors/Management Committees review admissions policies.
No later than Thursday 13 November 2025	Pre-Schools return amended admissions criteria to Education Authority (EA).
Wednesday 10 December 2025	EA publishes information on website about the pre-school admissions procedure and admissions criteria for schools/providers.
Wednesday 7 January 2026 (opens 12 noon) An application will be treated as <u>punctual</u> if received on or before Wednesday 21 January 2026 (12 noon). During the admissions procedure when applying the criteria <u>punctual</u> applications are considered before <u>late</u> applications are considered. During the admissions procedure applications are not considered on a 'First Come First Served Basis'.	<u>Pre-School application procedure opens with online portal available</u> Note: When an application is submitted the applicant <u>must</u> provide supporting documents if requested by ANY preference listed. (An applicant must read the published admissions criteria of their listed preferences to find out if any documentation is requested by a pre-school provider). In addition to any documents required the applicant must also upload or submit the CHILD'S BIRTH CERTIFICATE. Any applicant in receipt of benefit defined under the 'Socially Disadvantaged' criterion must provide verification. Target Age/Final Pre-School Age (not including late deferrals) only considered in Stage 1. Stage 1 closes 19 March 2026. Stage 2 opens on 23 March 2026 this includes applications related to late deferrals and underage children.
Wednesday 21 January 2026 at 12 noon Note: Online Portal will not be accessible after this date/time to apply. Will reopen in Stage 2 of pre-school procedure.	Date/time by which applicants submit application and documents in support of their application (treated as <u>punctual</u>). An application received after 12 noon on 21 January 2026 and by 4pm on 26 January 2026, treated as late. Applicants will be guided after the Online Portal closes on how to complete a late application.

On or before 4pm on Monday 26 January 2026	<u>Deadline date/time</u> an applicant can provide, for any preference listed, documents in support of their application. Supporting documents will be treated as punctual or late depending on when application submitted. NB This does not refer to the birth certificate, which must be submitted for all applicants. Supporting documents received after 4pm on 26 January 2026 will be considered in Stage 2. Final date/time for Change of Preference in Exceptional Circumstances (CoPEC) requests by email to EA from applicants - including all relevant evidence. CoPEC received after this date/time will not be considered. If an applicant requires a change of preference in exceptional circumstances after 4pm on 26 January 2026 their application will need to be withdrawn and then a new application submitted when Stage 2 opens on 23 March 2026. Final date for a new pre-school application and any supporting documents (treated as late). Applicants who still need to apply after 4pm on 26 January 2026 can do so in Stage 2 of the Pre-School Admissions procedure when it opens on 23 March 2026. NB Information for pre-schools - It is important that pre-schools which are oversubscribed with applications, and which consider themselves covered by the terms of the duty to verify study carefully the 'Duty to Verify' guidance published by Dept. of Education. The date of 26 January 2026 is not a deadline date for 'Duty to Verify' to be exercised.
On or before Friday 6 February 2026	As appropriate PEG will notify any settings where there has been amendment to their provisional allocation of funded places.

STAGE ONE – CONSIDERATION OF TARGET AGE/FINAL PRE-SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN (NOT APPLICATIONS RELATING TO LATE DEFERRALS)	
On or before Tuesday 17 February 2026	Date by which providers select children at first preferences for Stage 1. Date by which providers forward EA all supporting documents received directly from the applicant for a child not selected at first preference for forwarding on to next preference. (Documents uploaded by an applicant on the EA Portal should not be returned by the provider to the EA). Providers oversubscribed with target age/final pre-school age (including deferral) applications to forward to EA <u>any underage or late deferral applications/supporting documents that were received directly by the provider from the applicant.</u>
On or before Thursday 19 February 2026	PEG consider playgroups with less than eight applications at Stage 1 for withdrawal.
Thursday 12 March 2026 (by 5pm).	Pre-School PAN / Temporary Flexibility Decisions - PEG/DE (as applicable) will issue decisions by this date/time. (Note: that the issuing of decisions will resume on 23 March 2026 following the close of Pre-School Stage 1).
Thursday 19 March 2026	<u>Close of Stage 1 Admissions Procedure</u> <u>Refer to 23 March 2026 date - Notifications to be received on that day by applicants</u>
Monday 23 March 2026	Applicants receive notification of outcome of application on 23 March 2026 by email, where one is held, or by letter from EA or where applicable from the Pre-School provider. i.e. for applications processed only in Stage 1. (Pre-Schools seek verification documents from applicants where applicable).
<u>END OF STAGE ONE</u>	

PRE-SCHOOL STAGE TWO – INCLUDES CONSIDERATION OF TARGET AGE CHILDREN WHO HAVE NOT SECURED A PLACE, APPLICATIONS RELATING TO LATE DEFERRALS AND UNDERAGE CHILDREN	
Monday 23 March 2026 Stage 2 of Pre-school Admissions Procedure commences	EA notifies applicants of children who have not yet secured a place and asks for further preferences to be submitted. EA publishes information on its website on pre-schools where funded places remain available
Wednesday 25 March 2026	Date from which applicants can lodge a Nursery Stage 1 Admissions Appeal (Applicable to Nursery Schools/Primary School Nursery Units)
Wednesday 1 April 2026 (Not later than 4pm)	Final Date for:- - receipt of target age further preferences/documents i.e. where not offered a place in Stage 1 (treated as punctual); - receipt of a New 1st time target age application/documents (Treated as Punctual); - receipt of a pre-school application related to a late P1 deferral (Treated as Punctual); - receipt of another preference(s) for an applicant who declined a Stage 1 offer (Treated as late); - receipt of new 1st time underage application/documents (Treated as late). - receipt of additional documents for underage application Supporting documents will be treated as punctual or late depending on when application submitted. NB This does not refer to the birth certificate, which must be submitted for all applicants. Supporting documents received after 4pm on 1 April 2026 will be considered after Stage 2. After 4pm 1 April 2026 any further applications cannot be submitted until 19 May 2026 when Stage 2 concludes. Funded places available list will be published on the EA website on 19 May 2026. Note: Additional funded places will not be granted to a provider for a child who has already been offered a funded place in another setting.

Friday 3 April 2026 (not later than 4pm)	Deadline for receipt of appeal forms for Nursery - Stage 1 to be received by EA (not later than 4pm).
On or before Tuesday 21 April 2026	Providers to advise EA of pupils selected at Stage 2 and for applications/documents of children not selected to move to further listed preference(s) for consideration in Stage 2.
Wednesday 6 May 2026 (by 5pm).	PEG consider within Stage 2 playgroups with less than eight applications for withdrawal. Pre-School PAN / Temporary Flexibility Decisions - PEG/DE (as applicable) will issue decisions by this date/time. (Note: that the issuing of decisions will resume on 19 May 2026 following the close of Pre-School Stage 2).
Friday 15 May 2026	<u>Close of Pre-School Stage 2 Admissions Procedure</u> <u>Refer to 19 May 2026 date - Notifications to be received on that day by applicants</u>
Tuesday 19 May 2026	Applicants receive outcome of Stage 2 application by email where one is held or by letter from the EA or from the pre-school. For receipt by applicants on 19 May 2026 - EA notifies applicants of children yet to secure a funded place for their child. EA publishes information on website on pre-schools where funded places remain available. Further guidance on how to apply after close of Stage 2 will be available.
Thursday 21 May 2026	Date from which applicants can lodge a Nursery Stage 2 Admissions Appeal (Applicable to Nursery Schools/Primary School Nursery Units)
Friday 29 May 2026 (Not later than 4pm)	Deadline for receipt of appeal forms for Nursery - Stage 2 to be received by EA (not later than 4pm).
June-August 2026	Independent Tribunals hear appeals.

OPEN ENROLMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

TIMETABLE – ADMISSION SEPTEMBER 2026

October/November 2025	The Department of Education to notify enrolment and admission numbers for each school, where a change is being proposed, to the Board of Governors.
October/November 2025	Boards of Governors review admissions policies.
No later than Thursday 13 November 2025	Schools return amended admissions criteria to EA
Wednesday 10 December 2025	EA publishes information on website about the primary one admissions procedure and admissions criteria for schools. <i>*Note: Final date for publication of prospectuses by primary schools. (Not later than 6 weeks before applicants express preferences).</i>
Wednesday 7 January 2026 (opens 12 noon) During the admissions procedure when applying the criteria <u>punctual</u> applications are considered before <u>late</u> applications are considered. During the admissions procedure applications are not considered on a 'First Come First Served Basis'	<u>Primary One application procedure opens with online portal available</u> Note: When an application is submitted an applicant must provide supporting documents* if requested by ANY preference listed. (An applicant must read the published admissions criteria of their listed preferences to find out if any documentation is requested by a school). *In addition to any documents required the applicant <u>must</u> also provide <u>the CHILD'S BIRTH CERTIFICATE.</u>
Wednesday 21 January 2026 at 12.00 noon Note: Online Portal will not be accessible after this date/time to apply.	Date/time by which applicants submit an application and documents in support of their application (treated as <u>punctual</u>). An application received after 12.00 noon on 21 January 2026 treated as <u>late</u> . Applicants will be guided after the Online Portal closes on how to complete a late application.

On or before 4pm on Monday 26 January 2026	Deadline date/time an applicant can provide for any preference listed, documents in support of their application. Supporting documents will be treated as punctual or late depending on when application submitted. NB: This does not refer to the birth certificate, which must be submitted for all applicants. Final date/time for Change of Preference in Exceptional Circumstances (CoPEC) requests by email to EA from applicants - including all relevant evidence. CoPEC received after this date/time will not be considered. Final date/time for a new P1 application and any documents in support of the application (treated as <u>late</u>). Applications/documents received after 4pm on 26 January 2026 will not be processed until the close of the primary admissions procedure. NB Information for schools - it is important that schools which are oversubscribed with applications, and which consider themselves covered by the terms of the duty to verify, study carefully the 'Duty to Verify' guidance published by the Dept of Education. The date of 26 January 2026 is not a deadline date for 'Duty to Verify' to be exercised.
On or before Tuesday 17 February 2026	Date by which primary schools select pupils at first preference stage. Date by which schools forward EA all supporting documents received directly from the applicant for a child not selected at first preference for forwarding on to next preference. (Documents uploaded by an applicant on the EA Portal should not be returned to the EA).
Thursday 19 March 2026	Close of P1 Admissions Procedure Refer to 23 March 2026 for notification of application outcome.
Monday 23 March 2026	Applicants receive notification of outcome of application on 23 March 2026 by email where one is held or by letter. EA Online Portal open Schools may choose to notify decision by letter for receipt by applicants on 23 March 2026.

	(Schools seek verification documents from applicants where applicable). EA notifies applicants of children who have not yet secured a place and asks for further preferences to be submitted. EA publishes information on website on schools where P1 places remain available and late application information.
Wednesday 25 March 2026	Date from which applicants can lodge a Primary One Admissions Appeal
Friday 3 April 2026 (not later than 4pm)	Deadline for receipt of appeal forms for Primary One to be received by EA (not later than 4 pm).
June-August 2026	Independent Tribunals hear appeals.

OPEN ENROLMENT IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

TIMETABLE – ADMISSION SEPTEMBER 2026

19 September 2025	Closing date for registration for academic selection (SEAG).
October/November 2025	Boards of Governors review admissions policies
October/November 2025	The Department of Education to notify enrolment and admission numbers, for each school where a change is being proposed, to the Board of Governors.
No later than Thursday 13 November 2025	Schools return amended admissions criteria to EA.
Saturday 15 November 2025	SEAG Assessment Paper 1
Saturday 22 November 2025	SEAG Assessment Paper 2
Wednesday 10 December 2025	Final date for publication of prospectuses by post-primary schools. (Not later than six weeks before applicants express preferences). EA publishes information on website about post-primary schools.
Saturday 24 January 2026	Results of Entrance Test (SEAG) received by applicants.
Tuesday 27 January 2026 (opens 12 noon)	<u>Post-primary application process opens with online portal available (from 12 noon) for applicants to apply for Year 8 admission.</u> Note: When an application is submitted an applicant must provide supporting documents* if requested by ANY preference listed. (An applicant must read the published admissions criteria of their listed preferences to find out if any documentation is requested by a school). *In addition to any documents required the applicant <u>must</u> also provide <u>the CHILD'S BIRTH CERTIFICATE.</u>
Thursday 19 February 2026 (closes 12 noon)	<u>Online portal closes at 12 noon for Year 8 post-primary applications.</u>

	Note: The online portal will not be accessible for punctual post-primary applications after this date/time. Applicants will be guided on how to complete a late application after the online portal closes. An application received after 12 noon on 19 February 2026 will be treated as late.
Tuesday 24 February 2026 (not later than 4pm)	Final date/time for Change of Preference in Exceptional Circumstances (CoPEC) requests by email to EA from applicants - including all relevant evidence. CoPEC received after this date/time will not be considered. Final date for documents in support of applications. Final date/time for new applications (treated as late). Applications/Documents received after 4pm on 24 February 2026 will not be processed until the close of the post primary admissions procedure. Last date for applicants to communicate FSME.
Thursday 5 March 2026	On or before this date post-primary schools select first preference applications. Thereafter the clearing house processing of applications continues until the end of the post-primary admissions procedure.
Wednesday 15 April 2026	Last date for schools to request temporary variations from the Department of Education. Requests received after this date may not be progressed.
Tuesday 5 May 2026 (Admissions procedure for Year 8 closes)	Close of Year 8 Transfer Procedure. Schools prepare any correspondence for issue to applicants.
Saturday 9 May 2026	Applicants receive notification of outcome of applications on Saturday 9 May 2026 via email, where one is held, or letter. EA online portal open. Schools may choose to notify decision by post/email for receipt by applicants on Saturday 9 May 2026. (Verification documents asked for by schools, if relevant, from applicants). EA notifies applicants of children who have not

	yet secured a place and asks applicants to nominate further preferences. EA publishes information on website on schools where Year 8 places remain available and late application information.
Tuesday 12 May 2026	Date from which parents can lodge a Year 8 Post Primary Appeal - online appeal portal open at 9am
Thursday 21 May 2026 (closes 4pm)	Deadline for receipt of appeal forms against Year 8 decisions by post-primary schools. Online Appeal Portal closes at 4pm.
June-August 2026	Independent Tribunals hear appeals.

In this timetable where it refers to ‘documents in support’ of an applicant’s application this means documentation such as birth certificate (in the case of admission to pre-school and primary) and any documentation/information that may be requested in the published admissions criteria of the preference(s) listed by an applicant.

In this timetable where it refers to ‘additional supporting information’ this means information that may not have been available at the time of application and applicants have by the deadline date as published to submit same.