

# Rising 4s Policy Review

## Consultation Report



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County Council



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### Background

Carmarthenshire is the only one of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales to have a Rising 4s Policy, whereby children can leave part-time nursery education and enter full-time primary education in the term of their fourth birthday. A policy change would mean the implementation of either of the following options:

- Children enter full-time provision in the term following their fourth birthday. This is the case in three other LAs, which include Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire's nearest neighbours.
- Children enter full-time provision in the September following their fourth birthday. This is the case in eighteen other LAs.

The rationale for change was presented to Cabinet in October 2022 and although there was broad agreement that consulting on removing the Rising 4s Policy would be desirable, Cabinet understandably wished to explore the implications in more detail. Carmarthenshire operates a very mixed economy of pre-school provision across the Authority. There is a mixture of maintained and non-maintained early years settings and a combination of both 3-11 and 4-11 schools. Between them they provide 10 hours per week of statutory education for nursery children and a range of wrap around care options to meet varying demand across the county. Provision is further complicated by the geographical context of Carmarthenshire with schools in urban, rural, and often remote rural settings.

Removing the Rising 4s Policy would mean that children currently in part-time provision in both maintained and non-maintained settings would remain in that provision for a longer period of time before becoming eligible for full-time depending on which of the above options were to be implemented. This could have implications for existing capacity to meet wrap around care requirements as well as provision of the 10 hours education element in some settings.

A gap analysis has been undertaken to identify the potential impact of removing the Rising 4s Policy in each individual school. The gap analysis illustrates the complexity of the picture in Carmarthenshire but enables the Authority to provide recommendations for schools where gaps in provision may be created by removal of the Rising 4s.

On the 11th December 2023 Cabinet considered the Gap Analysis Report and resolved to consult on the removal of the Rising 4s Policy during the annual admissions consultation exercise in January 2024, for potential implementation in September 2025.

An extensive consultation exercise took place between 19th January and 1st March 2024.

The purpose of this report is to summarise the results of the consultation.

### Options

Consultees were asked to consider three options:

- **OPTION A:** Admit full time learners to primary schools in the school term of their fourth birthday (current arrangements)

- **OPTION B:** Admit full time learners to primary schools in the school term following their fourth birthday.
- **OPTION C:** Admit full time learners to primary schools in the September following their fourth birthday.

Consultees were also asked an additional standard Welsh Language question:

- We would like to hear your thoughts on the **possible impact on the Welsh language**. Please provide any additional mitigation measures below regarding the proposals:

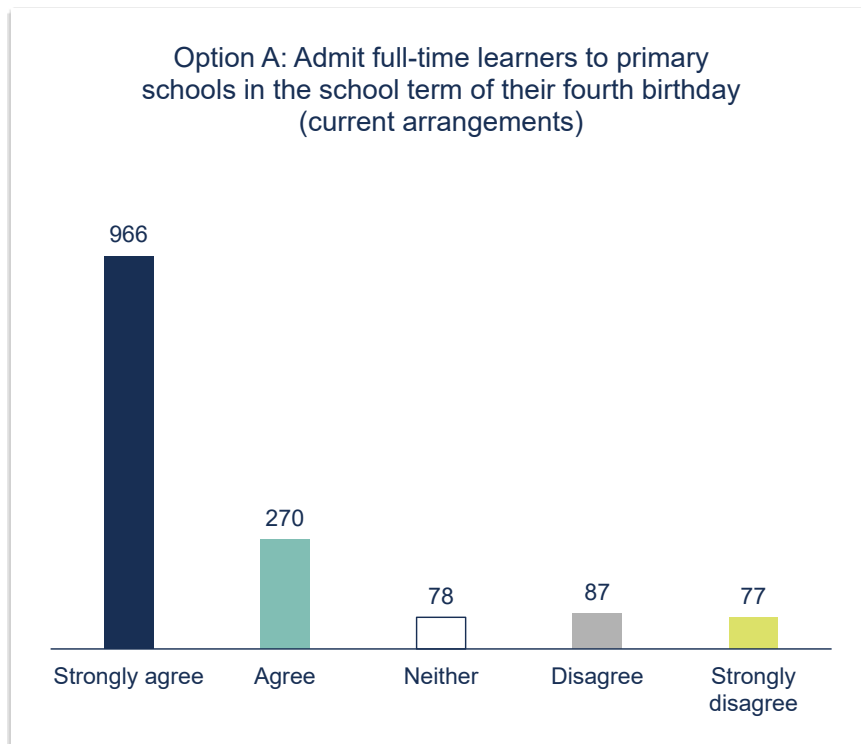
### Responses

Overall, a total of **1494** responses were received for the consultation.

The responses to the individual questions are provided below.

**Question 1 - OPTION A:** Admit full time learners to primary schools **in the school term of their fourth birthday** (current arrangements).

A total of **1478** responses were received for **Option A**.



From the table above over 80% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that **Option A** (current arrangements) should remain. Whilst just over 10% disagreed / strongly disagreed.

A summary of the reasons given by respondents as to why they strongly agreed / agreed for **Option A** to remain is as follows:

- Full time education at an earlier age advantageous to those children that find nursery provision is not challenging enough.
- Childcare costs are high and do not encourage two-parent families in full-time employment.
- Supports parents to continue working part or full time.
- Allows part-time workers to increase their working hours.

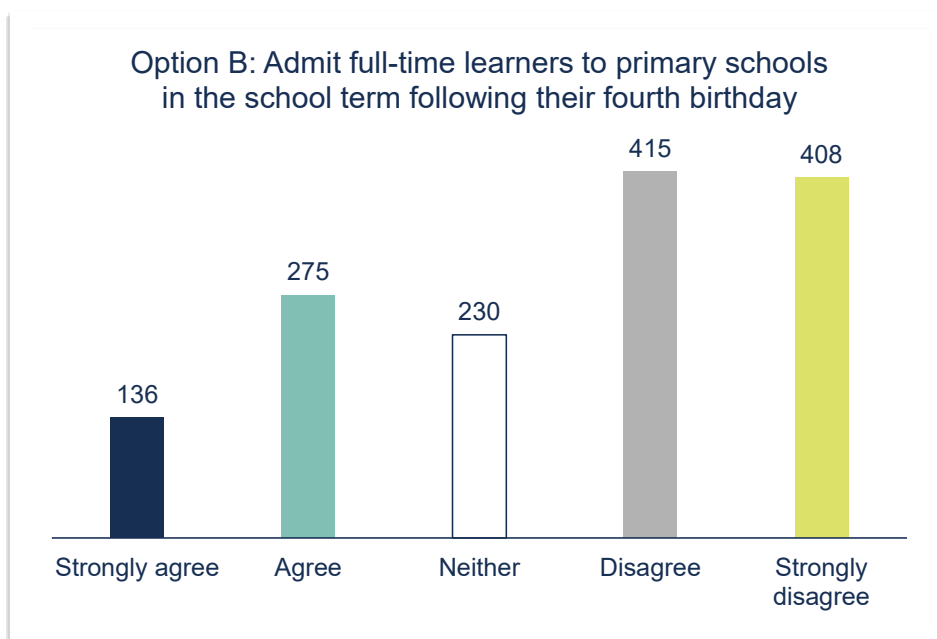
- Not all childcare provision supports the wraparound childcare needs of working parents.
- Development of Welsh language skills may suffer for those from non-Welsh speaking families starting later.
- Admission of pupils to school allows staff in non-maintained nurseries to support younger learners.
- Lack of full-time Welsh language childcare provision.
- Waiting lists for childcare settings.
- Risk of English language families not sending their children to Welsh language schools.
- Lack of childcare in rural areas.
- Benefits a child's social development.

A summary of the reasons given by respondents as to why they disagreed / strongly disagreed for **Option A** to remain is as follows:

- Learners should be full time after turning 3.
- Children physically and mentally unready to start school at 4.
- Potentially distressing for young children starting school full time.
- Pupils should not start school until they are 5.

**Question 2 - OPTION B:** Admit full time learners to primary schools **in the school term following** their fourth birthday.

A total of **1464** responses were received for **Option B**.



From the table above just under 30% of respondents strongly agreed / agreed that **Option B** should be implemented. Whilst just over 55% disagreed / strongly disagreed.

A summary of the reasons given by respondents as to why they strongly agreed / agreed for **Option B** to be implemented is as follows:

- Allows children to start full time education as soon as they are ready.

A summary of the reasons given by respondents as to why they neither agreed nor disagreed for **Option B** to be implemented is as follows:

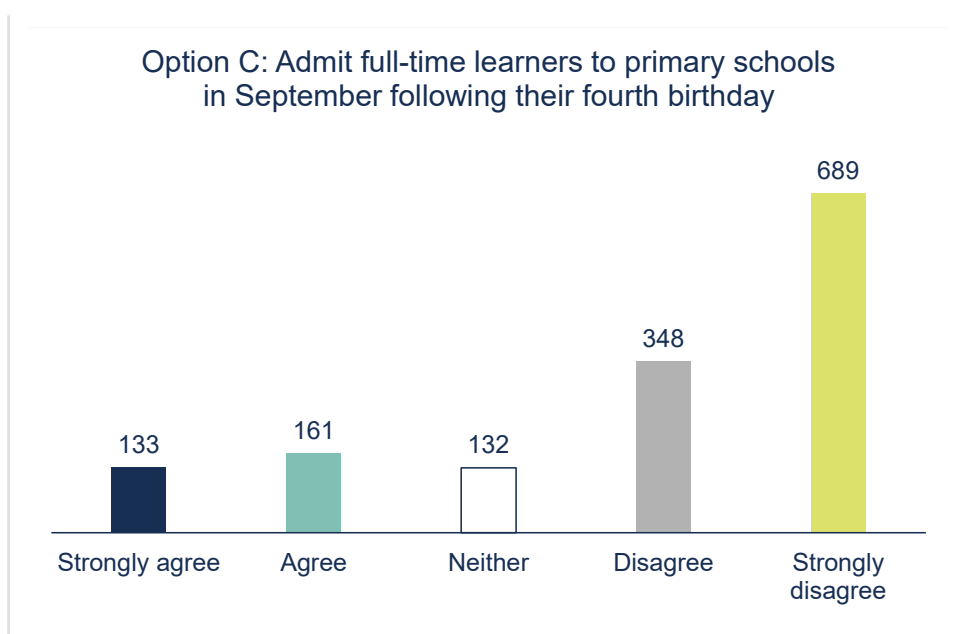
- Allows children to familiarise themselves with attending school before they become full time.
- Full time education may not be suitable for all 4 year olds.

A summary of the reasons given by respondents as to why they disagreed / strongly disagreed for **Option B** to be implemented is as follows:

- Childcare costs and availability.
- Children should be admitted to full time education as soon as possible.
- Challenging for working parents.
- Later start may be detrimental to children with ALN.
- Losing the opportunity to be immersed in the Welsh language early.
- Children may lost developing their social skills.
- Pupils should not start school until they are 5.

**Question 3 - OPTION C:** Admit full time learners to primary schools **in the September following** their fourth birthday.

A total of **1463** responses were received for **Option C**.



From the table above just over 20% of respondents strongly agreed / agreed that **Option C** should be implemented. Whilst just over 70% disagreed / strongly disagreed.

A summary of the reasons given by respondents as to why they strongly agreed / agreed for **Option C** to be implemented is as follows:

- Parity with the admission policies of surrounding counties.

A summary of the reasons given by respondents as to why they disagreed / strongly disagreed for **Option C** to be implemented is as follows:

- Missed learning opportunities and experiences of learners who start school later.
- Challenging for working parents to maintain employment and make career choices.
- Childcare costs and availability.
- Pupils should not start school until they are 5.

**Question 4** - We would like to hear your thoughts on the possible impact on the Welsh language. Please provide any additional mitigation measures below regarding the proposals:

A summary of the responses provided by respondents to Question is as follows:

- Adoption of Welsh by pupils from non-Welsh speaking households is better because of the current policy.
- Introduction of Welsh to children from non-Welsh speaking households may suffer from starting school later.
- Welsh language schools may suffer as parents of non-Welsh speaking families may choose other language provision at another school.
- Working parents may opt to send their children to childcare settings for wraparound care instead of children attending Welsh medium schools as they currently do under Option A.
- The number of non-Welsh speakers arriving at school is already significant and early structures assist in developing their Welsh language skills.
- Difficulty meeting the 1,000,000 Welsh speakers by 2050.
- May result in a lower requirement for Welsh language provision across the county.
- No impact – children will absorb when they become full time, regardless of when that is.
- Negative impact on the availability and quality of Welsh medium childcare settings.
- Loss of learners to other catchments where Welsh language childcare provisions can cater to need.

### Summary

A summary of the number of responses is provided below.

Option	Response				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
A	966	270	78	87	77
B	136	275	230	415	408
C	133	161	132	348	689

Option	Response		
	Agree	Neither	Disagree
A	1236	78	164
B	411	230	823
C	294	132	1037

A summary of the number of responses in percentage terms is provided below.

Option	Response				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
A	65.4%	18.3%	5.3%	5.9%	5.2%
B	9.3%	18.8%	15.7%	28.3%	27.9%
C	9.1%	11.0%	9.0%	23.8%	47.1%

Option	Response		
	Agree	Neither	Disagree
A	83.6%	5.3%	11.1%
B	28.1%	15.7%	56.2%
C	20.1%	9.0%	70.9%

## Conclusion

It is clear from the responses received that the majority of respondents wish for the status quo (**Option A**) to remain the Primary full time Admission Policy of Carmarthenshire.

Second to the status quo is **Option B** which would mean that pupils would start full time primary education the term after their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The least popular option is **Option C** which would mean that pupils would start full time primary education in the September after their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## Recommendation

The gap analysis information considered previously suggests that removal of the Rising 4s Policy so that children move from nursery to reception classes and begin full-time education later, would mean there would be opportunities redistribute funding to enhance childcare, create more 3-11 schools across the county where required and therefore increase equity in provision.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of Officers that the Authority proceed with the implementation of **OPTION B**: - Admit full time learners to primary schools in the school term following their fourth birthday.