

5th July 2021

Dear 

Thank you for your letter dated 1st July 2021. Although the committee feels it has now answered all of our queries, in fact the committee has still not responded to the question which it is legally obliged to answer. If the committee would rather not engage with us any further (thank you for the future well wishes), that is their decision; however, we will be proceeding in the school's complaint process – a stage 2 complaint letter has been sent this morning to the Clerk to the Governing Body. Our complaint is not about **what** has been decided, but rather **how** it has been decided.

Ultimately, if we do not receive from the admissions authority a lawful answer to the question, after going through the school's complaint process, then we can take this matter to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. We would rather engage with you than have to escalate it this far; we will set out further suggestions below for how to engage.

The committee has not responded **at all** to any of the points raised in our previous letter (dated 30th April 2021), in which we set out the question as follows:

When our children start school aged 5 in September 2022, to which year group would they be admitted? If the answer to this is Year 1, then your reasons need to set out how you consider it to be in our twins' best interests to miss the entire year of education that is Reception.

We understand from Mrs Pickup's email dated 18th June 2021, in response to my stage 1 complaint, that the committee was seeking further advice from School Governor Support and the Admissions Team as to how to answer our previous letter, as the committee felt they had given clear reasons for their decision in their letter dated 28th April. We refer again here to a guidance document produced by the DfE, should this be helpful to you:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-born-children-school-admission/admission-of-summer-born-children-advice-for-local-authorities-and-school-admission-authorities>

We note that Mrs Pickup (in her email dated 18th June) stated that the children would be admitted to Year 1 (if sufficient places), however we have not heard this from the committee, and you still have not set out how you have considered it to be in our twins' best interests to miss the entire year of education that is Reception. In your latest response (dated 1st July) you have simply quoted and answered another question that I asked Mrs Pickup in her role as the head teacher, not the committee, as part of our stage 1 complaint rather than our request. Of course the committee needs, by law (School Admissions Code, 2014, section 2.17) to take into account the head teacher's views; yet it also needs, by law, to balance these with the parents' views and with the **best interests** of the children. Furthermore, we note that in this quotation of my email you have omitted the final part of my question, which was: "how is it in these children's best interests **to miss an entire year of education?**" This is essentially why the question has still not been answered in a lawful manner, and the committee's three responses so far have been grossly inadequate on this point.

The admissions authority is being asked to decide what is in the children's **best** interests. It may be helpful to phrase the question differently:

- Why would it be **more** detrimental to join Reception age 5 than to miss the Reception year entirely?
- Would attending Reception age 5 be **more** beneficial than missing the Reception year entirely?
- What is the potential impact on the children of being admitted to Year 1 without first having completed the Reception year – is this overall a **more** negative or **more** positive impact?

The committee's response to the question I asked Mrs Pickup outlined mitigation that is in place for children who have missed out on Reception. It seems a period of transition from Early Years to Key Stage 1 learning would essentially take the place of an entire year of education, the year of education that Ofsted, in their Bold Beginnings report, stated is a "unique and important" foundation. However, mitigation is not **best** interests, it is not **better** than the alternative. If mitigation is even necessary, this is admitting that the children would in some way be missing out compared to what the alternative offers. Would the "interventions appropriate to the needs of the children" that you provide even be necessary if the children started in Reception rather than Year 1? Furthermore, the responsibility of this mitigation seems to fall on one member of experienced staff. What would happen should this member of staff leave the school (permanently or temporarily) for whatever reason? Resting your reasoning on one person does not sound very robust to us.

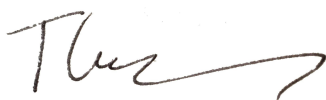
We note in the school's Attendance and Absence Request policy that attendance in school is important, and we absolutely agree. This policy states that "attendance of less than 95% [...] has been shown to compromise pupil attainment". Missing the entire year of Reception amounts to around 14% of their primary education, almost three times greater than the 5% in your policy – why is this amount of missed education in the children's best interests?

As stated above, we would welcome further engagement from the committee regarding the question raised in this letter and in our previous one (dated 30th April). If we have reached the end of communication on this matter, we will await the outcome of the complaint process before escalating further if necessary.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Ruth Cumming



Mr Tom Cumming