

# Primary School Admissions Review (Rising 4s) November 2022

## School Organisation and Admissions



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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 In 2018/19 the Education & Children Scrutiny Committee completed a Task & Finish Review of the current provision for early years education, childcare and play opportunities.
- 1.2 One of the conclusions identified in the report was that that the Authority's *'Rising 4s' policy is markedly different to other neighbouring local authorities'* and that the *'Council undertake a formal review of its current admissions policy for full time education for 4-year-olds (the rising 4s policy).'*
- 1.3 The Education and Children Department's response to the Coronavirus Pandemic has significantly delayed Officers ability to further explore the conclusion and recommendation identified in the task and finish review.
- 1.4 However, the recovery of services now means that a focus can be brought to exploring the conclusion and recommendation in detail.

## 2 Purpose

- 2.1 This document:
  - Describes the current arrangements for nursery and full-time admissions to primary schools in Carmarthenshire.
  - Considers these arrangements in relation to other Authorities in Wales.
  - Identifies current challenges of the existing primary school admission arrangements.
  - Makes recommendations to take the issue forward.

## 3 Background

- 3.1 In 1997 the Director of Education in the newly formed Carmarthenshire County Council introduced what has become known as the 'Rising 4's Policy' as a way of reducing the number surplus places in Carmarthenshire's Primary Schools.
- 3.2 The policy change allowed learners full time admission to primary schools a term early in the school term of their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday rather than the term after their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday as was previously.
- 3.3 This arrangement applied to primary schools with age ranges 3-11 years and 4-11 years. This policy also applied to the infant schools that were in existence at that time with the 3-7 years age range.
- 3.4 Education is compulsory in Wales from the school term following the child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- 3.5 *Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998* and amended by *Section 40 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006* introduced the requirement for the Welsh Ministers to issue a Code in respect of the discharge of admissions functions. In particular, the Code also sought to safeguard the interests of parents, children and young people by ensuring that school admissions are administered in the fairest and most equitable way possible.
- 3.6 The most recent *School Admissions Code* was issued in 2013 and is intended to clarify the process for everyone with an interest in school admissions and school admission appeals, help admission authorities to fulfil their duties correctly and improve working practices.
- 3.7 Following the introduction of the School Admissions Code, Carmarthenshire has retained the policy introduced in 1997 of admitting pupils on a full-time basis the term of their fourth birthday.

## 4 Current Full-Time Primary Admission Arrangements (3-11 and 4-11 Schools)

- 4.1 Carmarthenshire is the Admissions Authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and the schools themselves are the Admissions Authority for Voluntary Aided and Roman Catholic schools.
- 4.2 Carmarthenshire's policy for the admission of children to 3-11 and 4-11 primary schools is that children are admitted on a full-time basis as follows:
- In September for those who have their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday during 1st September to 31st December;
  - In January for those who have their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday during 1st January to 31st March;
  - In April for those who have their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday during 1st April to 31st August.
- 4.3 Under this policy the number of full-time children attending a school at the reception stage is likely to be higher than would otherwise be the case for a normal reception year group. In any academic year, a school will have on its roll at the start of the year in September a cohort of children who have already achieved their fourth birthday– the reception year pupils– and additional children who are admitted to the school at the start of the term in which they achieve their fourth birthday (in September, January or April)– these are the children referred to as the “rising 4s”.
- 4.4 The practical effect of this policy is to create a “bubble” in the form of a comparatively large year group of four-year-olds at the “bottom” of the school. The position becomes regularised as children progress to Year 1 as only children who have achieved their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday can leave the reception year and enter Year 1. Young children, upon full time admission to school, will spend between four and six terms in the reception year.
- 4.5 Further detail on the form and implications of the “rising 4s” policy in the context of the Council's formal Admissions Policy is given in Appendix 1.

## 5 Early Years Admission Arrangements

- 5.1 Early Years education is non-statutory provision available to 3-year-olds and an application for admission to provision within a school, i.e. for categories (i) and (ii) below, will have to be made to the Admissions Authority.
- 5.2 The Admissions Authority is Carmarthenshire for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and the schools themselves for Voluntary Aided and Roman Catholic schools.
- 5.3 All 3-year-olds are entitled to 10 hours per week free placement, at a registered setting, from the term following their third birthday.
- 5.4 Carmarthenshire currently operates a mixed economy for early years/nursery education whereby there are various forms of provision:-
- i. Nursery School- Ammanford Nursery School is the only nursery school in the County.
  - ii. Nursery classes in 3-11 Primary Schools
  - iii. Provision by the non-maintained sector such as Wales Pre-school Providers Association (WPPA), Mudiad Meithrin (MM) and private providers. Wherever practical the Authority allows non-maintained providers to use school premises.

5.5 Children will normally be admitted to Early Years/nursery provision in schools where it is available on a part-time basis at the beginning of the term following their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday as follows:

<b>Child's 3rd Birthday</b>	<b>Admission Term</b>
1 September - 31 December	Spring Term
1 January - 31 March	Summer Term
1 April - 31 August	Autumn Term

5.6 It is important to note that a child admitted to a nursery at a school is not guaranteed a full-time place at that school.

5.7 The mixed economy arrangement for early years/nursery education in Carmarthenshire is as a result of there being only 41 schools in the Authority that have the age range 3-11 and therefore have nursery provision.

## **6 Comparison with other Local Authorities in Wales**

6.1 In order to gain a better understanding of the conclusion identified in the Task and Finish report that Carmarthenshire's *'Rising 4s' policy is markedly different to other neighbouring local authorities'*, research was undertaken on the admissions policies of all other Authorities in Wales. The results of the research are shown in Appendix 2.

6.2 The results of the research can be summarised as follows:

- Carmarthenshire is the only Authority in Wales that admits pupils full time in the term of their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- 18 of the 22 Authorities in Wales admit pupils full time the September after their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday. This is also described as the start of the academic year in which the pupil turns 5 years of age.
- 18 of the 22 Authorities in Wales admit pupils to nursery classes in 3-11 schools the term after their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday.
- 4 of the 22 Authorities in Wales admit pupils to nursery classes in the September after the pupil has turned 3 years of age.

## **7 Admission Numbers**

7.1 Every school has an Admission Number (AN) which specifies and limits the number of pupils who can be admitted to each year group in the school.

7.2 The AN for each school has been set by using the capacity formula determined by the Welsh Government. The calculation is based on national guidelines (*Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales Circular 021/2011*) and relates to the physical area of the school buildings, the type of facilities at the school, the age range and number of year groups in the school. As the AN is based on the school's capacity to provide appropriate accommodation and facilities for pupils it should not be exceeded.

7.3 The AN applies to the age group into which the pupils are admitted into the school and places a limit on the number of pupils that can be admitted. In the normal year of entry, the Admissions Authority must admit pupils until the AN is reached.

- 7.4 Should the number of applications received for admission to a school exceed the AN then the Authority will prioritise the applications it has received in accordance with an over subscription criterion.
- 7.5 In such circumstances, parents may not be successful in gaining a place for their child at their preferred school. School governors and the LA must always keep the AN under review.

## 8 Current Challenges

### **Accommodation and School Capacity**

- 8.1 In the schools in Carmarthenshire that have significant numbers of spare places the 'rising 4s' policy can be managed without difficulty but in some schools where there is not a significant numbers of spare places it can give rise to space pressures.
- 8.2 The effect of the "rising 4s" policy is that in the third term of each academic year primary schools will have the equivalent of two year groups of four year old children at the reception stage.
- 8.3 An increased pressure on space is already being experienced at many schools and the position is being monitored closely. Where schools have a nursery, the pressures can often be significantly reduced as Headteachers have greater flexibility in structuring classes.
- 8.4 The termly admission or part time pupils and 'rising 4s' can increase pressure on limited space particularly in schools where the Admission Number is achieved or exceeded. It is possible that additional accommodation will need to be provided at several schools.
- 8.5 The maximum number of pupils permitted in an infant class in Wales is 30. The 'rising 4s' (N2 cohort of pupils) take up full time Infant class size spaces.
- 8.6 Under the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (SCfL) (Formerly 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Colleges Programme) space and cost standards for 4-11 Schools provides for 7-year groups. The 'rising 4s' policy in Carmarthenshire means that there are 8 year groups in a 4-11 school. This means that the Authority is required either to fund the additional space in new schools or that the overall capacity of the school is reduced.
- 8.7 Under the 21<sup>st</sup> SCfL Programme space and cost standards for 3-11 Schools are built for 7-year groups plus part time nursery pupils. The 'rising 4s' policy in Carmarthenshire means that there are 8 year groups plus nursery in a 3-11 school. Again, this means that the Authority is required either to fund the additional space in new schools or that the overall capacity of the school is reduced.
- 8.8 The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the importance of space in all schools. This is placing further pressure on existing accommodation in schools.

### **Inconsistency with other Authorities**

- 8.9 Carmarthenshire are offering full time places for pupils a term earlier than all neighbouring Authorities and up to a whole year earlier than 18 other authorities in Wales.
- 8.10 This provides inconsistency across the region and does not align with the Admissions Code that seeks to ensure that *'admissions are administered in the fairest and most equitable way possible'*.
- 8.11 In addition, pupils are currently admitted full time places over 3 termly intakes September, January and April). This arrangement is also different to many other Authorities in Wales.

### **Nursery / Early years**

- 8.12 There is evidence to suggest that Governing Bodies and communities believe the mixed economy arrangement in Carmarthenshire, whereby some schools have the age range 3-11 whilst others are 4-11, is unfair.
- 8.13 In some areas, even where there are 4-11 schools and provision is available by the non-maintained sector either on the school premises or in the locality, this is not seen as equitable to the provision offered by 3-11 schools.
- 8.14 To extend the age range of a primary school from 4-11 to 3-11 is a significant change to the status of a school and under the School Organisation Code 2018 would require a full statutory consultation process.
- 8.15 The Authority has received numerous requests from 4-11 schools to become 3-11 and these requests have been noted but not actioned pending the conclusion of the early years review.

### **Funding**

- 8.16 In Carmarthenshire non-statutory age pupils receive a full-time education in a school when funding is available to provide this provision in alternative settings.
- 8.17 At a time when Education revenue expenditure is under extreme pressure, the funding of non-statutory full-time pupils at such an early age could be reprioritised to other statutory functions.
- 8.18 At present, many registered childcare providers lose full time 3-year-old children and potential funding to 3-11 schools, who offer part time Foundation Phase early years education.
- 8.19 Funding for schools is based on January pupil figures each year. This means that not all of the three termly intakes of pupils are funded at that time. One intake in September for Reception and Nursery pupils would make it easier for schools to manage a full cohort throughout the year providing more funding certainty.
- 8.20 There is an opportunity to explore altering the full-time admission of pupils, creating more 3-11 schools to offer part time nursery provision in their locality, provide more business opportunities to the non-maintained sector to provide early years provision/wrap around care and make budget efficiencies. This would require detailed financial modelling as recommended by the task and finish report.

### **Admissions Process**

- 8.21 Accommodation pressures currently being experienced by some schools as a result of the 'rising 4s' policy reduces the flexibility of the availability of places at the entry to school stage, with the consequence that expressions of parental preference are becoming more difficult to accommodate.
- 8.22 The Authority is already experiencing an increasing number of appeals from parents whose expressions of preference for a school has not been able to be accommodated.

## **9 Conclusion**

- 9.1 Current full time admission arrangements (rising 4s policy) can place significant accommodation pressures in primary schools.
- 9.2 The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the importance of space in all schools and places more pressure on accommodation.
- 9.3 The 'rising 4s' policy presents a significant challenge for the development, design and funding of new primary school buildings.

- 9.4 Carmarthenshire is the only Authority in Wales with a 'rising 4s' policy which is inconsistent with neighbouring Authorities.
- 9.5 The mixed economy early years/nursery arrangements are perceived as unfair by Governing Bodies and communities.
- 9.6 There is an opportunity to review the current early years, nursery and admission arrangements in detail and develop options that benefit schools and parents.
- 9.7 The development of options and modelling of alternative primary admission arrangements may present opportunities for efficiency savings.
- 9.8 There is an opportunity to streamline the admissions process to make primary admission arrangements easier to administer and provide more equity across the Authority.

## 10 Implications of Change

- 10.1 It is important to highlight that there are significant implications to consider should any substantial changes be made to the current primary school admissions arrangements:

### **Parental Perception**

It is likely that the removal of the rising 4s policy would be unpopular with parents. Taking away the ability for pupils to start a full time a term earlier even if it is replaced by increased wrap around care may be seen as a reduction in provision.

### **Equity of Provision**

Should a detailed review conclude that there is an opportunity to change primary admission arrangements and make all Carmarthenshire primary schools 3-11, this would provide equity of provision across the Authority. A detailed and robust Equality Impact Assessment would be required so as not to inadvertently disadvantage communities.

### **Redistribution of Funding**

Removing the 'rising 4s' policy would mean a redistribution of funding allocated to schools based on the number of full time and part time pupils gaining admission. Significant changes to primary school budgets as a result could have significant impact on employment in individual schools.

### **Consultation**

Any changes to admission arrangements must be consulted upon in the annual admissions consultation round which takes place January to April every year for the academic year following the next one. e.g., Consultation for September 2024 will take place in January to April 2023.

To make all Carmarthenshire schools 3-11 would require undertaking a full statutory consultation process (under the School Organisation Code) for 54 schools. This would have significant resource implications to implement.

### **Accommodation**

Without knowing the actual shift in pupils as a result of a removal of the 'rising 4s' policy there may be areas or schools where the numbers of surplus places increase significantly as more space is freed up. However, it would make the design of new schools more straightforward and cost effective.

## 11 Recommendation

- 11.1 It is recommended that Carmarthenshire as the Admissions Authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled primary schools:



- Consults on a change to the full-time admission arrangements of learners from the term of their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday to the term after their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday during the annual admissions consultation exercise in January 2023, for potential implementation in September 2024.
- Undertakes a detailed assessment on the impact of the change in policy on each school and bring forward a recommendation for each setting.
- Reports back on the results of the consultation.
- Engages with Voluntary Aided and Roman Catholic primary schools on the consultation and proposed change of policy.

## Appendix 1 - FRAMEWORK FOR ADMISSIONS TO PRIMARY SCHOOLS

	PRE - RECEPTION			RECEPTION YEAR			YEAR 1		
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Autumn Term	N2A			R + N2A			Yr 1		
Spring Term		N2B			R + N2A + N2B			Yr 1	
Summer Term			N2C			R + N2A + N2B + N2C			Yr 1

Only children who have achieved the age of 5 years before 1<sup>st</sup> September proceed to Year 1



### Key:

- Pre – Reception (known as N2) pupils are those to be admitted to full-time school education at the start of the term during which they achieve their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday – the “Rising 4s”. Entry, therefore, takes place at the start of each term and is designated as **N2A**, **N2B** and **N2C** to acknowledge that the number entering each term is likely to be different.
- **R**eception Year pupils are those who have achieved their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday before the 1<sup>st</sup> September.
- **Yr 1** pupils are those who have achieved their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday before the 1<sup>st</sup> September.

## Appendix 2 – Local Authority School Admission Arrangements in Wales 2021

1. Wording taken directly from Local Authority websites/Parent information documents:

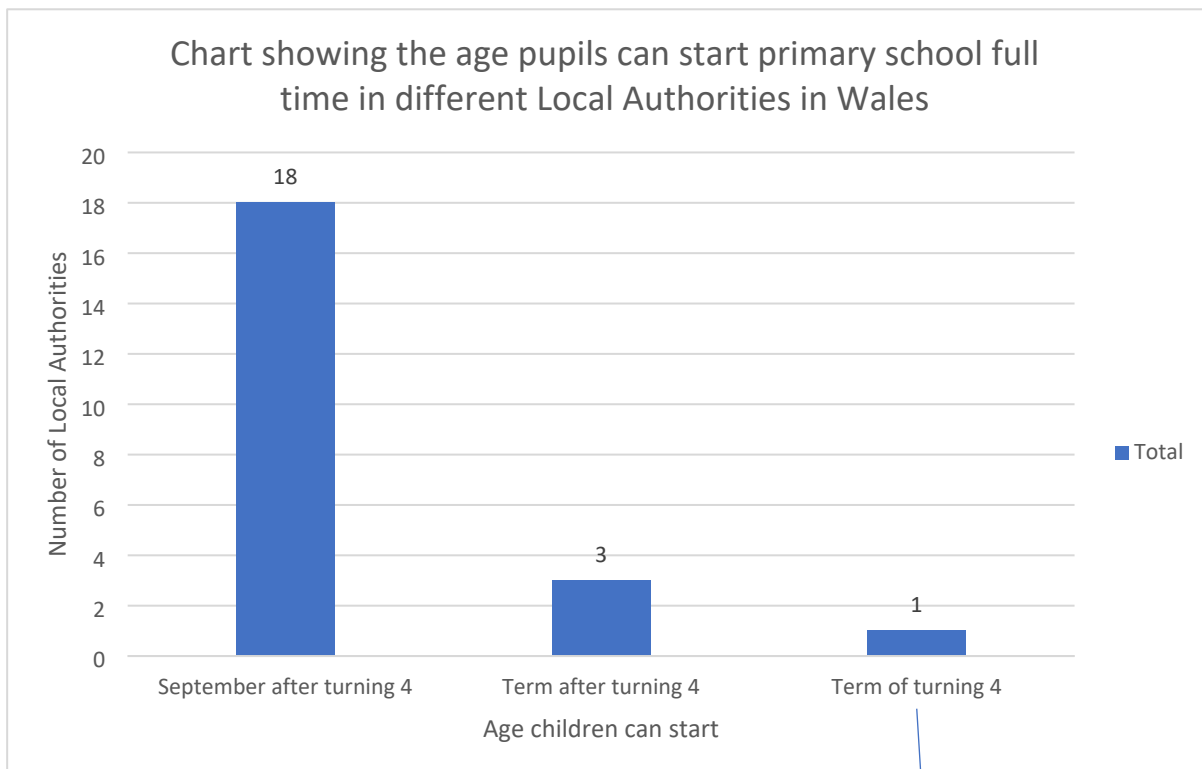
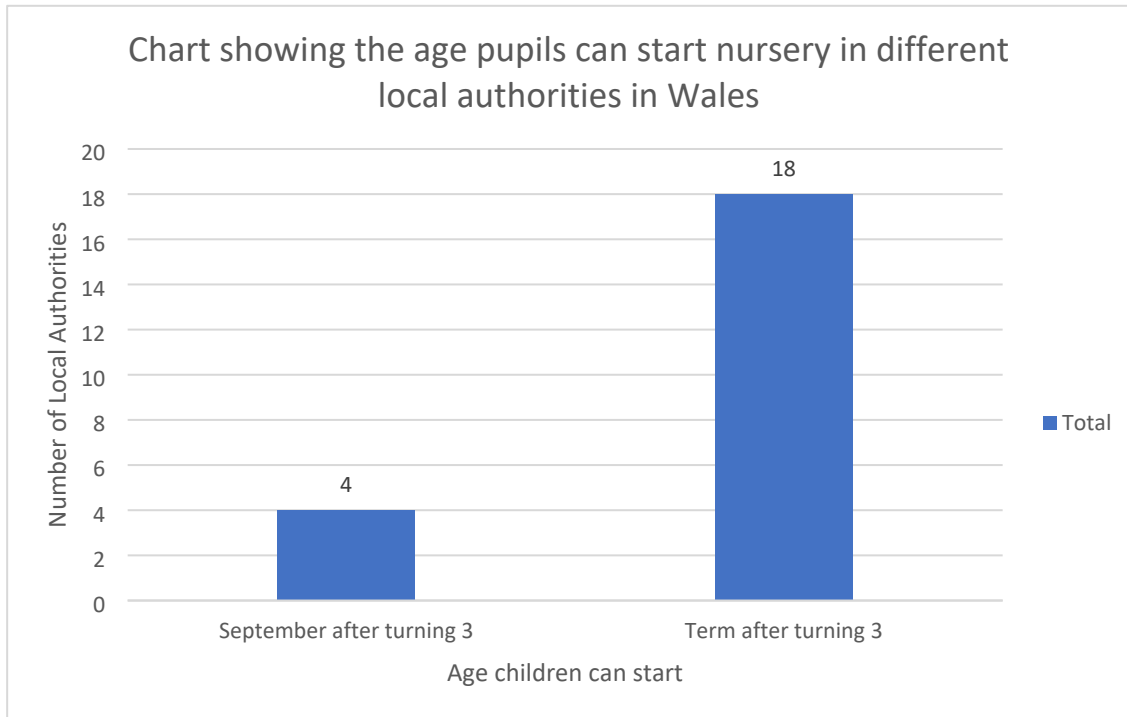
<b>Authority</b>	<b>Nursery – Part Time</b>	<b>Primary - Full Time</b>
Carmarthenshire	Where it is available at the beginning of the term following their third birthday	The term of their fourth birthday.
Neath Port Talbot	Depending on places being available, after his/her third birthday.	Beginning of the school year in which they are 5 years of age.
Pembrokeshire	First term after their third birthday	First term after their fourth birthday.
Ceredigion	Where it is available at the beginning of the term following their third birthday	At the beginning of the term following his/her 4th birthday.
Blaenau Gwent	Start of the term following their 3rd birthday	Start of the school year in which their 5th birthday falls
Bridgend	Three-year-olds from the term following their third birthday	Children eligible for a full-time nursery place are those who will attain the age of four in the academic year. Children are normally admitted to Reception classes in the September following their fourth birthday.
Caerphilly	September following their third birthday.	To start school full time at the beginning of the school year (September) in which they become five.
Cardiff	Start of the term following their third (3rd) birthday	Children are admitted into Reception in the September following their fourth (4th) birthday.
Conwy	Beginning of the term following a child's 3rd birthday	A full-time school place will be available for children from the beginning of the school year when the child has achieved his/her 4th birthday.
Denbighshire	September following their 3rd birthday	September following the child's 4th birthday

Flintshire	The term after his/her third birthday	The beginning of the school year if the child has achieved his/her 4th birthday
Gwynedd	Children who are 3 years old before 1 September	Children who are 4 years old before 1 September
Isle of Anglesey	Beginning of the term following the 3rd birthday	September following their 4th birthday
Merthyr Tydfil	Term after their third birthday	Beginning of the school year (September) in which they become five
Monmouthshire	Term following their third birthday	Start of the academic year in which he/she will turn 5 years old
Newport	September of the academic year in which they turn 4 years old. Once a September place has been allocated, children born between 1 September and 31 March may be offered part time nursery in the term following their third birthday if available.	September following their fourth birthday.
Powys	Term following the child's third birthday	Beginning of the Autumn Term following the fourth birthday
Rhondda Cynon Taf	The term following a child's third birthday	Term following a child's fourth birthday
Swansea	Term following their third birthday	Beginning of the school year in which they become five
Torfaen	Your child can start nursery at the start of the school year in which he/she will be 4 years old. Sometimes it is possible to start the term following their 3rd birthday if there is a place available.	Start Reception Class at the start of the school year, in which he/she will be 5 years old
Vale of Glamorgan	Term after third birthday	September following a child's fourth birthday
Wrexham	September following their 3rd birthday	September following their 4th birthday

## 2. Simplified Table

<b>LA</b>	<b>Nursery starting age</b>	<b>Primary starting age</b>
Carmarthenshire	Term after turning 3	Term of turning 4
Neath Port Talbot	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Pembrokeshire	Term after turning 3	Term after turning 4
Ceredigion	Term after turning 3	Term after turning 4
Blaenau Gwent	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Bridgend	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Caerphilly	September after turning 3	September after turning 4
Cardiff	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Conwy	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Denbighshire	September after turning 3	September after turning 4
Flintshire	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Gwynedd	September after turning 3	September after turning 4
Isle of Anglesey	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Merthyr Tydfil	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Monmouthshire	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Newport	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Powys	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Rhondda Cynon Taf	Term after turning 3	Term after turning 4
Swansea	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Torfaen	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Vale of Glamorgan	Term after turning 3	September after turning 4
Wrexham	September after turning 3	September after turning 4

3. Comparison charts:



Carmarthenshire is the only Authority to do this.