

## **RETNS Enrolment – Frequently Asked Questions**

The school's patron, Educate Together, recently ratified the revised enrolment policy, which can be accessed on the RETNS website at:

<http://retns.ie/pre-enrolment-in-retns/>

This document contains a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) together with answers. It is intended to assist parents/guardians who are considering applying to RETNS or who have already applied and wish to understand the impact of the revised enrolment policy. Please note that the answers are provided only as a helpful guide. All decisions with respect to enrolment will be taken strictly according to the policy. Parents/guardians are advised to read the policy in addition to this guide.

This is intended to be a “rolling” document that will be updated as required. Parents/guardians are welcome to submit observations and suggestions that might help to improve the scope and content of the FAQs document.

### **How do I apply for a place at RETNS?**

You need to complete and submit a pre-enrolment form. This is done via the school's website ([www.retns.ie](http://www.retns.ie)). Your application will be acknowledged automatically within 7 days. If you do not receive an automated response within 7 days, please contact the school urgently.

### **When should I pre-enrol my child?**

Children can be pre-enrolled only on or after their 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday. RETNS does not accept and will not process applications submitted for children under the age of 2. RETNS is greatly oversubscribed and parents/guardians are advised to pre-enrol your child as soon as possible following their 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday. The earlier you enrol your child, the greater the likelihood that he or she will obtain a place.

### **Why can I not apply before my child's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday?**

The requirement to be at least 2 years of age was introduced following a previous review of the RETNS enrolment policy in 2011 to reduce the significant administrative burden involved in maintaining extensive pre-enrolment lists, which have lengthened considerably in recent years, but also to provide newcomers to the area and adopted/long-term fostered children with an opportunity to apply to attend RETNS. Please note that this requirement does not

affect the relative placement of children on pre-enrolment lists, since birth dates do not change from year to year.

### **Is there a fee for applying to RETNS?**

No. Application is free of charge.

### **Which school year should I apply for?**

Two factors determine whether your child is eligible for a given school year. First, they must be at least 4 years of age on or before 31 March of the year of admission to junior infants. For example, if you are applying for entry in 2019, your child must have had their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday by 31 March 2019. Second, they must be under 6 years of age on 1 September of the year of admission.

### **Why does my child have to be at least 4 years of age by 31 March of the admission year?**

This requirement was introduced following a previous review of the RETNS enrolment policy in 2011. The change was actively sought by parents/guardians and supported by the professional experience of the teaching staff. The policy change was designed to reduce wide age ranges in classes and to enhance the active learning and educational outcomes of all children.

### **What criteria are used to decide which children are offered a place in junior infants?**

For school years 2016, 2017 and 2018 places will be offered on a strictly first come, first served basis, that is, the enrolment list will be based only on the date and time at which families submitted a valid application, with those who submitted their application earlier being placed higher up the list. For the 2019 school year, children whose applications were submitted before 5 May 2016 will be placed on the enrolment list entirely on a first come, first served basis. Children who applied later but who have an older sibling already attending RETNS will not be placed above them on the enrolment list.

For children whose applications were submitted after 5 May 2016, those who have an older sibling already attending RETNS will be placed above those who do not, provided (a) a valid application was made within 14 days of the child's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday and (b) the child's older sibling will still be attending RETNS when the child starts junior infants. For the school year 2020 and thereafter, children who have an older sibling already attending RETNS will be placed above all those who do not, again provided (a) a valid application was made within

14 days of the child's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday and (b) the child's older sibling will still be attending RETNS when the child starts junior infants.

***Please take particular note of the restrictions on the application of the sibling preference regarding how soon after the child's second birthday he/she must be pre-enrolled and that the pre-enrolled child's sibling must still be a pupil at RETNS. These conditions will be strictly applied.***

### **If my child has a sibling already in the school, are they guaranteed a place?**

No. Regardless of the school year for which you apply, given the demand for places at RETNS, no child is guaranteed a place. You are advised to consider alternative plans to cover the possibility that you will be unsuccessful in obtaining a place. Demographic pressures and greatly increased interest among parents/guardians in the education model provided by Educate Together mean that pre-enrolment lists for RETNS have lengthened considerably in recent years and the school is very likely to remain heavily oversubscribed for the foreseeable future.

### **Will my child be pushed down the enrolment list if children who have siblings already attending RETNS apply after me?**

If you applied before 5 May 2016 then, no, your place on the pre-enrolment list will be decided only by the principle of first come, first served. If you applied after 5 May 2016, then children with siblings already attending RETNS will be placed above your child on the pre-enrolment list provided (a) they made a valid application within 14 days of the child's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday and (b) the child's older sibling will still be attending RETNS when the child starts junior infants.

### **Why was the RETNS enrolment policy changed?**

A review of the RETNS enrolment policy, which has always been based on the traditional Educate Together model of first come, first served, began in late 2015 and was completed in March 2016. The review was undertaken by a group representing the whole school community. Designed to be democratic and inclusive, it involved a detailed and collaborative consultation process, including a survey of the views of the school community. The group made a number of recommendations in its final report, including the introduction of a sibling preference. On receiving the report, the Board of Management recognised and accepted the strong views expressed in favour of a sibling preference by the school community. It was therefore decided to provide for a sibling preference in the RETNS enrolment policy. The sibling preference contains a number of conditions which ensures there is a greater possibility that sibling(s) will gain places in the school but also ensures that

newcomers to the area/first born/single children have an opportunity to apply to attend RETNS and secure places.

Most Educate Together national schools maintain a first come, first served enrolment policy. While many new ET national schools are incorporating sibling preferences, RETNS is an early adopter of such a policy among long-established Educate Together national schools.

### **Why does the sibling preference apply only to applications made after 5 May 2016?**

It was stated and understood throughout the review process that the implementation date would be the 2019 school year at the earliest. The logic of this position is that all applications will be dealt with fairly and equitably under the enrolment policy in place at the time the application was made. All parents/guardians have a legitimate expectation that their applications will be dealt with strictly in accordance with the policy in place at the time their applications were made.

The possibility of introducing a sibling preference earlier than this date was considered by the Board of Management, which took the view that the school is required legally and ethically to honour its commitments to those on existing pre-enrolment lists. Hence, applications will be processed according to the policy that all parents/guardians confirmed at the time of application that they had read and understood. Other comparable and long-established Educate Together national schools have also introduced sibling policies in this way.

### **Are long-term fostered and adopted children counted as siblings?**

Yes.

### **Is the sibling preference relevant for applications to classes above junior infants?**

No. The sibling preference will apply to the junior infant class intake only.

### **Why might my child not get a place at RETNS?**

RETNS is a greatly oversubscribed school which receives hundreds of applications for every school year. It is a single stream school, that is, it has only one class per year, and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, this means that the large majority of children who pre-enrol for RETNS do not obtain places. You are advised to consider alternative plans to cover the possibility that you will be unsuccessful in obtaining a place.

### **Can I appeal if my child does not get a place at RETNS?**

Yes. The option to take a Section 29 appeal to the Department of Education and Skills is available to all families who are unhappy about a decision not to enrol a child. The steps in the appeal process and application forms are set out by the Department of Education and Skills at <http://www.education.ie/en/Advanced-Search/?q=section%2029%20appeals>

As a result of a court judgment, appeals boards cannot make any findings as to the merit or contents of a school's enrolment policy. Appeals are considered only on the basis of whether a school implemented and adhered to its stated enrolment policy. Previous appeal boards noted the following:

“The Board of Management of Rathfarnham Educate Together National School adhered to the Enrolment Procedure as set out in its published Enrolment Policy and applied the Enrolment Criteria correctly. The Board of Management of Rathfarnham Educate Together National School allocated places strictly in date-of-application order.”

### **Can the class size be increased to accommodate siblings who are not initially offered a place?**

No. Class sizes are determined on the basis of Department of Education and Skills guidance and will not be exceeded even if this results in some siblings not gaining places in a junior infant class.

### **Is there a limit to the number of applications RETNS accepts for a given school year?**

Yes. Under the revised enrolment policy, the number of applications on pre-enrolment lists for each school year is being capped at 250. This is designed to reduce the administrative burden of maintaining enrolment lists and to make sure that families who have no realistic possibility of obtaining a place are not misled.

### **Does where my family lives matter?**

No. RETNS does not have a “catchment area” and will not take your residential location into account when offering places.

### **When will I know whether my child has a place?**

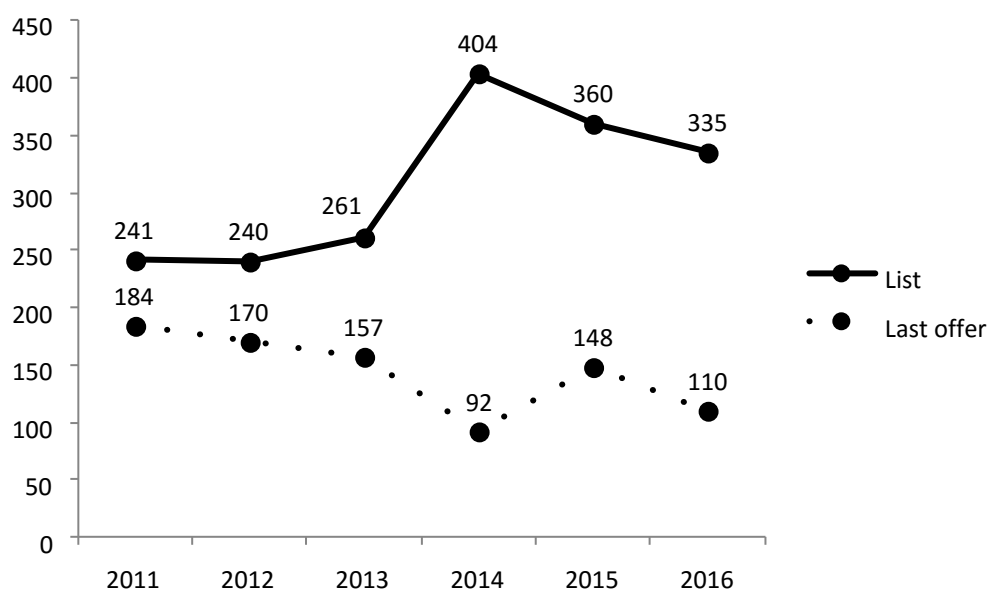
Letters of offer are sent out early in the second term of the school year prior to admission. The date of the issuing of these letters will be kept under review.

## Does RETNS provide information on my child's place on the pre-enrolment list?

There is considerable fluctuation on pre-enrolment lists so it is only possible to provide indicative numbers. This information does not guarantee that a number will remain the same or constitute a guaranteed offer of a place. The offer of places is made strictly in accordance with the enrolment policy. Information on the pre-enrolment number for your child can be provided on request to the school's enrolment officer.

## Can the school indicate the numbers reached on previous pre-enrolment lists?

Yes. The chart below shows the numbers on RETNS pre-enrolment lists for each year since 2011 and the number reached in each of those years, i.e. the lowest position on the list at which a child was offered a place. The increase in demand for places at RETNS and the increased likelihood that places are accepted are both evident.



## If my child is offered a place, how long do I have to decide whether to accept it?

You must respond in writing (e-mail is fine) to accept an offered place within 10 days. Failure to respond within 10 days will result in the place being forfeited.

## If my child is offered a place, can I defer the place to the following year?

Yes, if your child has been offered a place and you wish to defer to the following year's junior infant class (for example, if you feel your child is too young to start school) you may do so provided your child will be under 6 years of age on 1 September of the following year.

However, deferral of a place does not guarantee a place the following year, as offers will again be made according to position on the pre-enrolment list as dictated by the enrolment policy. Your position on the pre-enrolment list will be decided according to the original date on which you pre-enrolled.

### **If my child is not initially offered a place, what options are open to me?**

If a place is not available, the school will contact you to ask whether you wish your child to remain on the pre-enrolment list in case a place comes up and whether you wish your child to be transferred to the pre-enrolment list for the following year's junior infant class, provided your child will be under the age of 6 on 1 September of that year. You must respond in writing (e-mail is fine) within 10 days. It is only possible to transfer to the pre-enrolment list for junior infants the following year, not for senior infants or other classes.

If you opt to remain on the waiting list, please note that due to fluctuation on lists and late withdrawals, it is possible that places may become available in the junior infant class at a very late stage – even up to the week before school starts. The number of such places is unpredictable, but in many previous years some parents/guardians have decided at almost the last minute not to take up a place offered earlier in the year. Any places that do come up are always offered in accordance with position on the pre-enrolment list.

Where places do become available at a very late stage, offers may be made to those next on the pre-enrolment list via a telephone call, which will be logged. Parents/guardians are asked to confirm in writing (e-mail is fine) if they do or do not wish to take the place. This is to enable the place to be offered to the next person on the list if necessary and for record keeping purposes.

### **What should I do if I accept a place and discover later that I do not need it?**

Please inform RETNS in writing as quickly as possible (e-mail is fine) so that we can offer the place to another child. There are lengthy waiting lists with many parents/guardians willing to accept places even at very late stages.

### **Is it possible to apply for a place in a class above junior infants?**

Yes. There is a separate form on the website for applications to classes above junior infants. These are dealt with on a first come, first served basis as and when spaces arise.

### **How many times has the enrolment policy been reviewed?**

The enrolment policy has undergone two major reviews in recent years.

In 2010-11, following wide ranging consultation with the school community, two changes were made to the policy regarding the earliest date on which a child could be added to the pre-enrolment list – their second birthday – and that a child must have reached age 4 on or before 31 March of the year in which he or she starts school. No other substantial changes were made and the board's decision was unanimous. It was agreed to undertake a full review of the policy in 2015.

At the end of 2015, a very extensive review process was undertaken which involved the establishment of an enrolment policy review group comprising representatives of parents/guardians, the teaching staff and the Board of Management. A detailed survey was also undertaken and based on the review group's discussions and the survey findings a number of recommendations were made to the Board of Management, including the introduction of a sibling preference.

Having discussed the group's report in detail, the Board of Management decided that, on balance, RETNS should introduce such a preference and it will come into effect in 2019 and full effect in 2020. Details on the transitional arrangements and how the sibling preference will be applied are as set out in the revised enrolment policy.

### **When will the enrolment policy be reviewed again?**

The Board of Management will keep the enrolment policy under review annually and may make minor alterations to it – for example, to clarify ambiguity – as required. Any significant policy changes will be notified to the school community with consultation undertaken if necessary. A further full review of the enrolment policy will take place in 2020.

### **Can I make suggestions on items for inclusion in this FAQs document?**

The Board of Management is always interested in the views of the school community on all aspects of the school's operation. Given the importance of the enrolment policy and interest in this area among parents/guardians, this FAQs document will be considered a "dynamic" or "rolling" document which can be updated as required.



**Date of last amendment: 25 October 2016**