



tabled to /  
Hon. D. Parkinson MLC  
19/11/08.

**Response to Petition Number 1 of 2008**

**The petition of the undersigned citizens of Tasmania:**

**Draws the attention of the house;**

**That your petitioners are very concerned that children in Tasmania must be enrolled in fulltime school in the calendar year in which they turn six years of age which, in the case of boys particularly, is an age when they often are not ready for school. This view is supported by teachers and research which indicates-**

- **Children develop their abilities at very different rates and the calendar is a poor guide to school readiness.**
- **Girls develop speaking, reading and writing skills six to twelve months ahead of most boys.**
- **Younger boys, especially those born late in the year, often struggle in the school system, particularly when they cannot keep up with the required level of learning. Starting school too young has been found to have a lifelong negative effect.**
- **Some other Australian States have a 'flexible age bracket' when a child must start full time school to allow parents greater input into when their children are ready to start school.**
- **Leading child psychologists including boy's education specialists Steve Biddulph, and Dr Rex Stoessiger, suggest that many boys benefit from waiting a year longer before beginning school so they can approach learning with more maturity and enjoy greater success.**

**Your petitioners request the House to:**

**Use the parliamentary process to address this matter and engage the Government with a view to having the existing law relaxed so as to allow a period of flexibility where parents can decide.**

**Response:**

The Minister acknowledges that there are some circumstances where delaying entry into full time school, Prep, may be beneficial to a child. These include where a child has special educational needs or where a child presents as 'very young' or has delayed development. A process which allows parents to have a say about the age at which their child enters full-time school is currently in place.

The formal process is defined under section 5 of the *Education Act 1994* and a parent of a child may write to the Secretary seeking to delayed entry into full-time school. The Secretary may grant this request if satisfied that it is in the best interest of the child's education. Parents will receive confirmation from the Secretary, or an authorised delegate, which confirms that delayed entry into full-time school has been approved.

The Tasmanian legislation is flexible as it does not specify the period for which a child can have delayed entry and, therefore, the interests of each child are dealt with on an individual basis. The Tasmanian legislation does not require Ministerial agreement as it does in at least four other states (NSW, Vic, SA and NT) and, therefore, the process can be less formal and occur more quickly.

In Tasmania parents often speak with school staff or are referred to staff in the Early Years area of the Department, who will advise and support them through the process.

If a parent seeks to delay their child's entry into full-time school it is hoped that the child will enter Kindergarten in the year that they would normally have entered Prep. Parents are encouraged to talk to the school Principal and to get to know the early childhood staff in the school. Parents are a child's first and most important teacher. Positive communication and a partnership between the home and school create the best environment in which children can learn and grow.

Work is underway to ensure that Principals and staff are aware of, and understand the options available under section 5. The admissions policy page on the Department's website is also currently being updated to make the delay option more explicit for parents. The Government is satisfied that sufficient flexibility, and an appropriate process, is available to parents currently under the *Education Act 1994*.