

General Advice for mainstream schools and pupil referral units on the placement of children outside their chronological year group & Specific Procedures to be followed before making such a placement

This document contains guidance about children starting primary school before or after the year in which they would normally do so. It contains guidance about holding back children so that they start secondary school a year later than they would normally. It also relates to transferring children to secondary school earlier than they would normally.

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1) Background

This General Advice and Statement of Specific Procedures was formulated at the request of the Director of Children's Services in February 2008. The DCSF offers schools and Local Authorities a range of advice and guidance but does not offer specific guidance or general advice with regard to placing children out of year.¹ There is a clear need for the Local Authority to offer advice and guidance in this area.

2) Scope

The General Advice relates to all children in mainstream school.

The Specific Procedures relate to non-statemented children in Herefordshire mainstream schools and PRUs. (If the child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs the decision to place a child outside their chronological year group lies with the Local Authority).

This guidance relates to individual children's placement with a class of a different age group. It does not apply to mixed-age classes, where the child is part of an age-matched peer group within the class.

¹ This was confirmed by phone with the DCSF 15/2/08

3) General Advice

Schools are advised that children should be educated with their chronological year group as a general rule.

The evidence (see Further Reading) shows that placing children with classes of younger children, at best makes no difference to their long-term outcomes and at worst can lead to poorer emotional health, leaving school early, lower attainments and poorer employment prospects.

This General Advice is offered against the background of potential difficulties, which are associated with placing a child out of year:

- The school may not have space in another year group without breaching infant class-size regulations.
- Placing the child in another year group may deny some other child a place at that school.
- As he or she matures the child may realise that the rest of the class are of a different age, causing adverse emotional impact.
- The child may begin puberty at a different time from their classmates, which could be confusing for him or her.
- The child is eligible to leave school at 16, and, therefore, if he or she has been held back a year, may leave without completing external examinations.
- The child must receive education until the age of 16 and if he or she has been accelerated a year, they may have completed the Key Stage 4 curriculum before then.
- Other interventions may be more appropriate in the long-term: placement outside the chronological year group could simply be delaying that provision.
- The evidence (see Appendix) suggests that placing students in a different year group rarely makes a positive difference and can have negative long-term effects.
- As UNESCO ¹³ notes, children have a right to be educated with their peers.

4) Specific Procedure for placement outside the child's chronological year group

Placement outside the child's chronological year group should be highly exceptional. However exceptional circumstances may, very occasionally, occur in which the school decides to consider such a placement.

General Principles

- a) The decision to place a child outside their chronological year group, in most cases, lies with the school governing body. However, that body will generally act on the advice of the Head Teacher.
- b) No such decision should be taken unless parents/carers give their informed consent to it.
- c) In all cases the decision must be in the long term interests of the child.
- d) Head Teachers should seek the views of any professionals involved (e.g. Educational Psychologist, Educational Welfare Officer, Social Worker) before coming to any decision.

Process

- i) The decision-making Ashton Checklist should be used. If all criteria are not satisfied then out of year placement should not take place.
- ii) If all the criteria on the Ashton Checklist are satisfied then this is NOT indicative that out of year placement is in the best interests of the child. The decision has to be made in relation to a wider range of factors
- iii) **Any placement of a child outside their chronological year group should be discussed with the *Area Team Manager* at an early stage in the decision making process.**
- iv) It is in everyone's interest that the decision-making process is clearly recorded and appropriate records kept. It is important that there is clear recorded evidence that parents/carers have given informed consent to any placement of a child outside their chronological year group. It is also important to ensure that there is clear recorded evidence that parents/carers understand that the decision has been made by the school and not the Local Authority.
- v) Schools should be careful not to make or imply promises about future provision from either another school or from the Local Authority
- vi) The placement should be considered annually, and a collective, recorded decision made about whether to keep the child out of their usual year group or to place them back with their age-matched peers.

Ashton Checklist²

All these criteria should be satisfied before placing a child outside their chronological year group:

Child/ YP _____ Today's Date _____

Checklist filled in by _____

School, parents, child and involved professionals all feel that this placement would substantially increase the probability of the child's successful inclusion in mainstream school.	
This decision is not being made in order to delay other interventions, such as placement into a different school.	
This decision is not being made due to difficulties in making appropriately differentiated provision in the class to which the child should normally transfer.	
The placement would not breach infant class size regulations.	
Consideration has been given to the rights of other children who might otherwise take that place.	
Consideration has been given to the long-term emotional and social impact of this placement.	
Consideration has been given to the likely future placements for the child, e.g. returning to their own year group or remaining with the new year group.	
There has been a discussion with parents about likely future issues, e.g. leaving school without completing Key Stage 4.	
All involved feel that the child will be able to learn more from the children in the proposed year group than by being around children of their own age group.	
The child will have a peer group in their new class, which is likely to continue to be somewhere that the child can 'fit in' as the cohort matures.	
The plan for the child includes interventions to address their particular needs, in addition to placement with a different year group.	

About this Checklist Rebecca Ashton and Colleagues in Blackburn evolved this checklist. It is being increasingly used by other Local Authorities who report that it is extremely useful. It comes with a warning. Ticking all the boxes is NOT an indication that a child should be placed out of year. It is merely an indication that such a course should be considered.

Placement outside the child's chronological year group should be highly exceptional

² ©Blackburn with Darwen MBC

6) Specific Procedure for starting school early

General Principles

- Starting school early will only be supported in exceptional circumstances
- Starting school early will only be supported if
 - It is in the best interests of the child
 - It is not detrimental to the interests of the other children in the class/group, other children in the school, or other children applying for places at the school.
- Placement outside the child's chronological year group should be highly exceptional.

Process

- Parents submit a formal application for a place in the Reception class of the relevant school starting in the relevant September.
- In support of the application the Local Authority will also require a report from at least one educational professional (e.g. educational psychologist/pre-school specialist support teacher). If the child has medical or clinical psychological needs then it may be useful to submit reports from such professionals in addition to the educational professionals' advice.
- The authority would also request advice from the Headteacher of the school at which the parents are seeking admission for their child.
- The application would then be considered by the Director of Children's Services.
- Placement outside the child's chronological year group should be highly exceptional.

7) Specific Procedure for transfer to Secondary school

Early Transfer

Very occasionally, children may transfer to secondary school (KS3) ahead of the age at which this would ordinarily occur. This early transfer would only be supported in exceptional circumstances. Very rarely, a child may be placed outside their chronological year group in Upper Primary (KS2), and this arrangement should be reviewed on a yearly basis. The school should make clear to the parents/carers, to the child and to all involved in the child's education, that placement ahead of the chronological year group is not indicative that the child will transfer to secondary school before their chronological peers. In the majority of cases the expectation will be that the child will transfer to secondary school alongside their chronological peers.

Late Transfer

Very rarely, a child may be placed in a year below their chronological year group in Upper Primary (KS2), and this arrangement should be reviewed on a yearly basis. The Authority's expectation is that children will transfer to secondary school (KS3) alongside their chronological peers and it would be highly unusual for an exception to be made to this. Some children have experienced difficulties in the past with transfer from a Year 5 (Y5) directly to Year 7 (Y7) in secondary school. Primary Schools may, therefore, wish to strongly consider arrangements which enable children to spend the full year before secondary transfer working alongside their chronological peers in Year 6.

Early and Delayed Transfer: General Principles

- Early and Delayed Transfer will only be supported if it is in the best interests of the child
- Secondary transfer outside of the chronological year is an exceptional arrangement and will only be supported in very exceptional circumstances
- Placement in primary school outside of the chronological year group is not indicative that exceptional arrangements for transfer will be made. Indeed the expectation is that most children placed outside of the chronological primary year group will have rejoined their chronological peers by Year 6 (Y6) and will transfer to secondary school with these peers.
- If children are placed out of chronological year group, then this should be regularly reviewed frequently, and formally reviewed at least yearly. At this formal review parents/carers should be reminded of these general principles. Forward planning will need to occur so that children complete their primary schooling alongside their Year 6 chronological peers
- If it is possible that application for Delayed or Early transfer might be made, it would be good practice for the primary school to seek and collate professional advice in the term before the application might be made.

Process

- Parents should submit a formal application for Early Transfer to Secondary School by the end of September, one year before the requested transfer might take place.
- Parents should submit a formal application for Delayed Transfer to Secondary School by the end of September, one year before the chronological transfer to secondary school would ordinarily take place.
- In support of the application the Local Authority will also require a report from at least one educational professional (e.g. Educational Psychologist). The application should be accompanied by records of all past formal meetings to review the child's placement out of chronological year. If the child has medical or clinical psychological needs, then it may be useful to submit reports from such professionals in addition to the educational professionals' advice.
- The authority would also request advice from the Headteacher of the Primary school and
 - (for Early Transfers) advice from the Headteacher(s) of the secondary school(s) to which the parents are seeking admission for their child.
 - (for Delayed Transfers) advice from one or more Headteachers of local secondary schools
- The application would then be considered by the Director of Children's Services.
- Placement outside the child's chronological year group should be highly exceptional.

8) Children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN)

If the child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs the decision to place a child outside their chronological year group lies with the Local Authority. In Herefordshire this happens only very rarely. The Ashton Checklist is used to inform the decision-making process.

- In considering a Statement of SEN the Authority may very occasionally advise that a child be placed out of their ordinary year-group.
- Before writing this into a Statement there will be full discussions with parents/carers.

- The views of the child/young person will be taken into account

Statements of SEN are reviewed annually

- Ordinarily any request to move a child out of their ordinary year-group should be fully discussed at the Annual Review Meeting
- However the responsibility for the decision to make such a placement or not rests with the Local Authority.
- In making this decision the Local Authority may wish to seek the views of an Educational Psychologist.

9) The evidence base

This document is based on a review of available evidence undertaken by colleagues in Blackburn EPS in 2006. It was supplemented by searches of 3 principal on-line databases in February 2008. Only peer-reviewed papers were sought.

There is not extensive available evidence regarding outcomes for children who are held back or promoted a year at school. The research base comes largely from the USA and Canada, where “grade retention” is used widely as a matter of course. The English system has both Years (Y1, Y2 etc) and National Curriculum Levels (NC1, NC2 etc). The differentiated curriculum can therefore be delivered at a specific level to individuals any Year. Herefordshire have actively promoted the use of Curriculum Differentiation using materials such as B-Squared. In the English system (where National Curriculum level is independent of Year) there is even less rationale for holding back than there is in a Grade system (where curriculum level is associated with Grade).

The evidence on children who are placed in a younger year group shows the following:

- Children held back a year continue to struggle academically.¹⁰
- Some children who are held back a year show a temporary increase in attainment, but this increase disappears when they do move up a class^{8, 10} or within 3 years.¹¹
- Children in schools with a policy of moving them up with their peers learned more in terms of reading and maths than those who were in schools where some children repeated a year.⁷
- Looking at developmentally delayed children, those who moved up with their peers did about the same as those who repeated a year, in terms of achievement and teacher ratings.⁵
- Children who started school a year late tended to show the same problems as they had in the first place.⁶
- Children who have been held back a year often feel anxious about their status with their peers. They tend to see it as a negative and confusing experience.¹
- As they move up through school, children who continue to work in a younger class show poorer emotional health⁸ and many report being bullied because they are not with their age-matched peers.³
- Problems with attention were not improved by having the child repeat a year.⁹
- Even with “remedial teaching”, no difference in self-concept or classroom behaviour was seen between students who repeated a year and those who moved up.²
- Employment chances are negatively affected by repeating a year at school,¹⁴ especially for people from ethnic minorities.⁴

Comments from the literature include:

- “Grade retention was ineffective for improving achievement and ability.”¹³
- “It is rare in educational research to find so many studies with a similar conclusion: retention is not a successful intervention to assist students either academically or personally.”¹⁴
- “While delayed entry and readiness classes may not hurt children in the short run, there is no evidence of a positive effect on either long-term school achievement or adjustment. Furthermore, by adolescence, these early retention practices are predictive of numerous health and emotional risk factors, and associated deleterious outcomes.”¹⁵

No published papers could be found which show positive outcomes following a repeated year at school, or which evaluated the effects of placing a child with an older year group.

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