

Children Educated Out of Year Group: Advice for Educational Settings.

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1) Background

The current advice was formulated in 2008 and revised in 2018 by staff in the Additional Needs Service of Herefordshire Council.

2) Definition

This advice provided in this document refers to children and young people (CYP) who are educated out of their chronological year group:

- because they have repeated a year and will remain in a class below their chronological year group
- because they have advanced or 'jumped' a year, and will remain in a class above their chronological year group.

3) Scope

The General Advice relates to all children in mainstream schools.

The Specific Procedures relate to children in Herefordshire mainstream schools and pupil referral units (PRUs). If the child has an Education and Health Care Plan the decision to place a child outside their chronological year group requires discussion with, and the agreement of the Local Authority.

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

4) General Advice

Schools are advised, as a general rule that children should be educated with their chronological year group, and to educate them out of year group is harmful to their well-being and educational success.

Repeating a Year: how effective is it?

The following evidence is provided by the Educational Endowment Fund (see references), and suggests that in the majority of cases, repeating a year is harmful to a student's chances of academic success. In addition, studies consistently show greater negative effects for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, indicating that the practice is likely to increase educational inequality. Repeating a year is likely to lead to greater negative effects when used in the early years of primary school, for students from

ethnic minorities, or for pupils who are relatively young in their year group (often referred to as 'Summer born' pupils).

Pupils who repeat a year make an average of four months' less academic progress over the course of a year than pupils who 'move on'. In addition, studies suggest that students who repeat a year are unlikely to catch up with peers of a similar level even after completing an additional year's schooling. Research indicates that students who repeat a year are more likely to 'drop out' of school prior to completion.

Although the overall impact of this practice is negative, there are studies that suggest that in some cases a student can benefit, particularly in the short term. However, it does not appear to be easy to identify which pupils will benefit, and **on balance the evidence suggests that repeating a year is a significant risk**. Negative effects are rare for educational interventions, and so the finding that pupils who repeat a year make less progress is unusual and striking.

The research suggests that children who start school a year late tend to show the same difficulties that they had in the first place, and those who have been held back a year often feel anxious about their status with peers. They tend to see it as a negative and confusing experience. Over time, many children who remain in a younger class show poorer emotional health and some report being bullied because of the decision. Problems with attention are not improved by having child/young person repeat a year.

The English system allows a differentiated curriculum that can be delivered at a specific level to individuals in any year group. Schools can use their notional budget for special educational needs to support such differentiation within the child's chronological age group.

The decision to educate a student out of year group should be considered in relation to a number of other potential difficulties:

- The school may not have space in another year group without breaching class-size regulations.
- Placing the child in another year group may deny some other child/young person a place at that school.
- As he or she matures the child will become aware that the rest of the class are of a different age, potentially causing emotional distress.
- The child may begin puberty at a different time from their classmates, which could be confusing for him or her.
- The child/young person is eligible to leave school at 16, and therefore may leave without completing external examinations.
- Other interventions may be more appropriate in the long-term: placement outside the chronological year group should at best be seen as a short-term corrective measure and will rarely address long-standing difficulties, and could be delaying the deployment of more appropriate provision. For example, intensive tutoring, and assigning higher levels of special needs support are both likely to be more effective.

5) 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 occur very occasionally in which the school decides to consider such a placement.

General Principles

- a) The decision to place a child/young person outside their chronological year group 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 considered or 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/young person.
- d) Head Teachers should seek the views of any professionals involved before coming to any decision (e.g. medical, educational or social care professionals).

Process

- i) The decision-making Ashton Checklist (see below) 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) 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.
- iv) Schools should be careful not to make or imply promises about future provision from either another school or from the Local Authority.
- v) The placement should be considered annually, and a collective, recorded decision made about whether to keep the child/young person out of their usual year group or to return them to their age-matched peers.
- vi) Careful thought is to be given to children out of year group before secondary transfer. Indeed the expectation is that most children placed outside of their primary year group will have re-joined their chronological peers by Year 6 and will transfer to secondary school within their chronological age group¹.
- vii) Where this is not the case, and parents and primary school agree, the parents should submit a formal application for early or late transfer to the Council's School Admissions Team by the end of September, one year before the requested transfer is to take place. The Admissions Team will also require a letter from the primary school indicating their consent for the proposal, and evidence that any professionals working with the child support the application. The application should be accompanied by records of past formal meetings to review the child's placement out of chronological year. Finally, there should also be evidence that the chosen

¹ The 2014 Guidance on Summer born children (see link in references) states the following two principles relevant to the issue of children transferring to secondary school out of their age group: A) Once a child has been admitted to a school it is for the headteacher to decide how best to educate them. In some cases it may be appropriate for a child who has been admitted out of their normal age group to be moved to their normal age group, but in others it will not. Any decision to move a child to a different age group should be based on sound educational reasons and made by the headteacher in consultation with the parents.

B) Where a child has been educated out of their normal age group, the parent may again request admission out of the normal age group when they transfer to junior or secondary school. It will be for the admission authority of that school to decide whether to admit the child out of their normal age group. They must make a decision on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the child's best interests, and will need to bear in mind the age group the child has been educated in up to that point.

- secondary schools are also in agreement with the proposal (this agreement is not a guarantee of a place however).
- viii) The document produced by the Department of Education (2014) entitled Advice on the Admission of Summer Born Children indicates that: 'In some cases it may be appropriate for a child who has been admitted out of their normal age group to be returned to their normal age group, but in others it will not. Any decision should be made by the headteacher in consultation with parents' (p.9).
 - ix) The same document also indicates that schools are funded by the number of children that they have on roll and not by their age, and thus funding for repeating a year is available although the LA may weight this funding by age.
 - x) The same process applies to children who have been 'advanced' ahead of their age group (the decision should be reviewed annually and parents and any involved professionals should be in agreement about whether to maintain the student in their advanced year group).

Ashton Checklist *

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

6) Children and young people with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP).

If the child/young person has an EHCP, the decision to place them out of year group will require the involvement and support of staff in the Additional Needs Service of the Local Authority. In Herefordshire this happens only very rarely. The Ashton Checklist should be used to inform the decision-making process.

- When writing or amending an EHCP, the Authority will only very rarely support a child being placed out of their chronological year-group and this will require full discussion with parents/carers.
- The views of the child/young person will also need to be taken into account.
- Ordinarily any request to move a child/young person out of their chronological year group should be fully discussed at the Annual Review Meeting for that child/young person and the support of the Local Authority following such discussions remains essential.
- In making this decision the Local Authority will also seek the views of any professionals working with the child/young person.

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Thanks to:

Birmingham City, Telford, Derby City, Salford, South Gloucestershire and Dudley Local Authorities, for providing their policies as examples. Special Thanks to Rebecca Ashton EP and colleagues in Blackburn with Darwin.

Reviewed and Updated 7.9.18