

Guidance for schools: Education of children outside of their normal age group

DfE guidance states that “in general, children should be educated in their normal age group, with the curriculum differentiated as appropriate, and that they should only be educated out of their normal age group in very limited circumstances.”

This view is backed up by the [Education Endowment Fund Repeating a Year research \(2018\)](#) which found that in the majority of cases repeating a year is harmful to a student’s chance of academic success.

A PDF version of this guide is available in the download section at the bottom of this page.

Admission to school (request for a child starting a new school)

The decision-maker, in the case of admission to school is the admission authority. This is the local authority for community schools, the governing body for foundation / voluntary aided schools and the academy’s trust for academies. The admission authority must also take account of the views of the headteacher of the school concerned.

The [School Admissions Code \(2014\)](#) states the following with regards to ‘admission of children outside of their normal age group’

“Admission authorities must make decisions on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child concerned.

This will include taking account of the parent’s views; information about the child’s academic, social and emotional development; where relevant, their medical history and the views of a medical professional; whether they have previously been educated out of their normal age group; and whether they may naturally have fallen into a lower age group if it were not for being born prematurely.

They must also take into account the views of the head teacher of the school concerned.”

When considering requests to be educated outside of a child’s normal year group at any other time than summer born for reception, the local authority advise parents that they need to provide professional evidence stating why it would be in the child’s best interest. Lack of vacancies or coming from a different education system abroad would not be considered sufficient grounds to agree a request.

The regulations do not allow for automatic progression from year 6 to year 7 for a child who has been taught outside of their chronological age group in primary school; this must be agreed by the relevant high school admission authority.

Children already on the school roll without an EHC plan

Once a child without an EHC plan has been admitted to a school, it is for the headteacher to decide how best to educate them. This may, on occasion, include deciding that a child should be educated in a year group other than the one indicated by their age. Such decisions should be based on sound educational reasons and in consultation with parents. The general principles are:

- The decision to place a child/young person outside their chronological year group lies with the Head Teacher.
- No such decision should be considered or taken unless parents/carers give their informed consent to it.
- In all cases the decision must be in the long-term interests of the child/young person.
- Headteachers should seek the views of any professionals involved before coming to any decision (e.g. medical, educational or social care professionals).

The DfE “do not currently anticipate that children and young people will need to repeat a school year as a consequence of the coronavirus outbreak”. Schools will be planning carefully to take the impact of the outbreak into account in their teaching and their support for children and should already be making best endeavours to support young people to catch up (as per national guidelines).

While children’s needs may have changed over the course of COVID, schools should in the vast majority of cases continue to meet the differentiated needs of their cohorts within their current year group.

Children with an EHC plan

Where the child has an EHC plan, requests by parents for their child to be educated outside their normal year group require the agreement of Ealing Council because the request involves a change to section F of the EHC plan dealing with SEN provision and has place planning and funding implications.

Where there is a request for a child to be educated out of year group, the educational setting should hold an annual review to fully consider the pros and cons of the request. Schools should be careful not to raise parental expectations that the decision will automatically be agreed. Each request will be considered by Ealing Council on the individual circumstances. While the decision will be informed by the views of the young person, parents and professionals, the decision is the responsibility of Ealing Council.

Where a child is educated out of year group, the appropriateness of arrangements must be considered at each annual review and / or change of placement, with a clear recommendation about whether to keep the child out of their usual year group or to return them to their chronological age group. Ealing Council will confirm the decision in writing after consideration of the annual review paperwork.

The general expectation is that, where children have been educated out of year group in a mainstream school, they will return to their normal age group on entry to a special school or additionally resourced provision.

Ashton Checklist

Any decision to consider whether a child (with or without an EHC plan) should be educated outside of their normal age group should consider the Ashton Checklist. The Ashton checklist was developed by Rebecca Ashton and Colleagues in Blackburn and is being increasingly used by other Local Authorities when considering placement outside a child’s chronological year group.

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.

Downloads

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[Ashton checklist when considering to place children outside their normal year group.docx \(docx\)](#)

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