

Admission to schools out of the normal age group

Guidance for schools, parents and local authority staff

February 2015

Occasionally early years settings, schools, parents or other professionals suggest either delaying the age at which a child starts school by a year or repeating a school year. Less frequently schools or parents may wish to accelerate a pupil into an older year group and this might mean transferring to secondary school early.

Admission authorities must make clear in their admission arrangements the process for requesting admission out of the normal age group.

There are a number of implications when seeking delayed entry, repeating the year or acceleration into the year above and these are not always apparent at the time. This document explores these issues and suggests a procedure to be followed when considering placing a pupil out of the chronological age group.

The legal position

This is described in the School Admissions Code 2014 and is further clarified by the Department for Education *Advice on the admission of summer born children* (December 2014). In brief

- There is no legal barrier to educating children out of their year group
- There should be no blanket policy applied
- Each case should be considered on its own merits
- All state funded schools must comply with the School Admissions Code

Admission of children outside their normal age group

Parents may seek a place for their child outside of their normal age group, for example, if the child is gifted and talented or has experienced problems such as ill health. In addition, the parents of a summer born child (born from 1 April to 31 August) may choose not to send that child to school until the September following their fifth birthday and may request that they are admitted out of their normal age group – to reception rather than year 1.

School Admission Code 2.17

Delaying school entry by a year should not be confused with **deferring** the start date of the Reception year. The School Admissions Code states that parents can request that the date their child is admitted to school is **deferred** until later in the academic year or until the term in which the child reaches compulsory school age, and that parents can request that their child takes up the place part-time until the child reaches compulsory school age.

Also many small schools teach pupils in mixed-age classes. Provided that the pupil moves onto secondary school with their same-aged peers then this is an internal issue for the school, parents and governors.

Who makes the decision about educating out of year group?

It is the school admissions authority which makes the decision.

- For community and voluntary controlled schools this is the local authority.
- For foundation and voluntary aided schools this is the governing body.
- For academies and free schools this is the academy trust.

If a child has a statement of special educational needs / Education and Health Care Plan then this would need to be reflected in his or her statement/plan as part of the provision and Wiltshire SEN Panel would therefore make the decision.

Requests and appeals would therefore need to be considered by these admission authorities.

How is the decision made?

Admissions authorities will need to make clear their own arrangements for considering requests and appeals. They must make decisions on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child. In doing so they must take into account

- 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;
- whether they may naturally have fallen into a lower age group if it were not for being born prematurely
- the views of the head teacher of the school

If the child is not in school parents will need to identify the school to which they are seeking delayed admission.

The school, current early years setting if applicable and parents need to carefully discuss and record the expected benefits of out of year group education in the light of the considerations below. It will be useful to include other relevant professionals such as an educational psychologist or early years inclusion officer in this discussion.

The application process

If a parent wishes to apply for a delayed entry to a Wiltshire School, they must formally submit their application to the Local Authority. The application should be submitted, for example in the case of request for delayed entry into reception, by the 15 January of the year in which the child would normally be admitted to the school. Applications received after this date would be considered as late applications.

If parents are applying for a Voluntary Controlled or Community school, they will also need to make a written request at the time of application to the Local Authority's admissions co-ordinator, providing reasons for the request along with any supporting documentation they wish to include.

If parents wish to apply for delayed entry to a Voluntary Aided, Foundation school or an Academy, then following the submission of the formal application to the Local Authority, the parent should contact the governing body of the school concerned to discuss their request.

Once a decision has been made, it is the responsibility of the individual admissions authority to communicate this to the parents. If the school is its own admission authority they must also inform the LA of its decision.

If a delayed entry is agreed then the parent must re-apply for a place in reception the following academic year alongside all other children applying for main round entry. All applications where a delayed entry request has been agreed will be considered alongside all other applicants applying for the specific year and in line with the schools over-subscription criteria. There is no guarantee of a school place.

If the request is refused, then the parent has the option to proceed with the current application and if a place is offered, defer entry until later in the academic year, or alternatively request that the application is withdrawn and then reapply for a place in the next academic year for a place in year one.

When informing a parent of their decision on the year group the child should be admitted to, the admission authority **must** set out clearly the reasons for their decision. Parents have a statutory right to appeal against the refusal of a place at a school for which they have applied. This right does not apply if they are offered a place at the school but it is not in their preferred age group.

Children already outside their chronological year group

The placement should be considered annually, or if there is a major change in circumstances and a collective decision made about whether it is still in the child's best interests to remain out of their usual year group or whether to place them with their age-matched peers.

For pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs, the annual reviews should be held according to their chronological age. For example, a phase transfer review should be held in Year 4 if the pupil has been held back a year. At the reviews consideration should be given to the continuing appropriateness of out of year education.

It will be essential to liaise with possible secondary schools as soon as these have been identified. It will be a matter for their admissions authorities to continue or refuse out of year education bearing in mind what is in the best interests of the pupil.

Reasons for considering educating out of year group

Whilst there are no legal barriers to out of year education in every case there will need to be very cogent reasons proposed why out of year education is in the best interests of the child and such considerations should not be taken lightly.

Consideration of repeating a year or delaying school entry is often made for a number of reasons, often interlinked. Parents or professionals may for example have concerns because children

- Have been born prematurely and be summer-born
- Have special educational needs or developmental delay
- Are physically or emotionally immature
- Have low self-esteem and lack confidence

- Have missed curriculum time through illness or having moved in from abroad
- Are not yet fluent in English

In the case of accelerating a pupil to an older year group the pupil may for example be working well above the National Curriculum levels of other pupils in the year group and their needs cannot be met within the school's programme of enrichment activities.

Issues to consider

There are a number of issues to reflect upon before reaching a decision about educating out of chronological year group. The fundamental approach to supporting pupils must be based upon careful assessment of and recognition of individual needs and differentiated support. This applies to all areas of development. There is no current research which suggests that simply repeating the year or delaying entry will in any way resolve issues which need to be addressed by an individualised approach.

It is important not just to consider the current situation but to project into the future. For example, a child with poor speech and language needs may make great progress in the first few years of education and may later wonder why he or she has been kept back. Sources of support may be lost when friends in the community transfer to secondary school.

Also it is essential to consider what provision will be in place in the interim period. Will there be high quality preschool provision if the child has delayed entry into reception? In what way will school provision be different if repeating a year? Unless the pupil has been away from school for a lengthy period of time simply having another go is unlikely to be of any benefit and could be detrimental.

Additional considerations

There are a number of additional issues to consider before suggesting out of year education.

- 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 emotional impact.
- If the child continues to struggle either academically or emotionally then he or she might feel even more self-critical as they are now one of the older pupils.
- The child may begin puberty at a different time from their classmates, which could be confusing for him or her.
- Other interventions may be more appropriate in the long-term; placement outside the chronological year group could simply be delaying that provision.
- Children learn a great deal from their peers, and receive social, emotional and academic support from each other.
- What will be the impact on the pupils in the younger class? Will this further disadvantage the youngest pupils in this group?
- What happens if the child moves to another local authority or school? Will the new school find the arrangement acceptable? This consideration also applies to transition to secondary schools.
- Particularly in the case of older children their views need to be sought and carefully considered.

Links

Advice on the admission of summer born children: For local authorities, school admission authorities and parents (Department for Education, 2014)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-born-children-school-admission>

School Admissions Code (Department for Education, December 2014)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2>

Reviewed on

By Admissions Forum

Next Review: Admissions Forum

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