

Guidance and Procedures for Placing Pupils with Special Educational Needs Out of Chronological Age Group

Introduction

Placing pupils out of their chronological age group is occasionally practised and can lead to confusion and difficulties around respective responsibilities and funding. As responsibility for addressing special educational needs lies with the school through an appropriately differentiated curriculum, this should happen only in exceptional cases after careful consideration of the evidence. This applies to children and young people of all ages, including those transferring into school from an Early Years setting.

Rationale

The purpose of this guidance is to clarify practice in respect of pupils being educated in a group different from that of their chronological age. Phase transfer highlights particular difficulties where a receiving school may insist upon a pupil being placed in their correct year group and whilst decisions are made for significant reasons at the time there can be an impact on the pupil's educational and social life. Sometimes the fact that the decision has been made has significant impact on the pupil, their family, the host and future school. Expectations of good practice are based upon a child's entitlement to be educated alongside their age equivalent peers.

Aims

To ensure that decisions to place pupils outside their chronological age group have a clear rationale based on the following:

- i) The pupil has exceptionally delayed intellectual skills and cannot productively engage in group learning tasks and presents teachers with major difficulties in curriculum differentiation.
- ii) Often in association with i) the pupil is very delayed emotionally and cannot make adequate relationships with their peer group, is at risk of isolation and possible bullying.
- iii) A pupil may have missed a substantial part of a year through illness or other reasons.
- iv) Reasons associated with a child's physical condition, physical frailty which appears to justify a 'less robust' environment than that found in the same age group.
- v) These reasons may be frequently linked with strong parental preferences for their child to be placed in an alternative year group.

i) and ii) of the above reasons are particularly significant at the point of phase transfer where the demands of the next phase are perceived to be too onerous for the pupil to cope with.

Whenever such a change in year group occurs there are implications for the pupil, the school, the family and the LA.

Implications

Pupils are seldom uniformly delayed in their intellectual development. If a pupil is kept down and a reduced set of general expectations are in place, then areas of strength are at risk of not receiving appropriate stimulation. Similarly, physical, emotional and social expectations are likely to be inappropriate.

Summer born children and young people present other challenges which could be that this group tend to show lower levels of achievement and maturity, this should be addressed within the class group through normal differentiation of the curriculum.

Phase transfers, SATs, GCSEs and school leaving status are achieved a year or more late. The consequences of 'making up' a year are invariably very negative for the pupil. Furthermore, they miss a statutory right; a national curriculum year programme of work.

Decisions to keep a pupil in a younger age group must be fully discussed within school, including parents/carers, the pupil and other agencies. Where consideration is being given to moving a pupil out of their chronological age group written advice should be sought from all agencies involved with the pupil. There should be an assessment by an educational psychologist and any other agencies involved. The circumstances relating to the request should address the factors outlined in this document, with appropriate information and evidence for the request to be given due consideration.

Implications for the School / LA

Making the decision to move a pupil out of year has implications for admissions when the next year is oversubscribed. This can make it difficult for a school to plan pupil numbers for the following year. Pupil class size legislation says at KS1 no class containing 5, 6 or 7 year olds may contain more than 30 pupils with one teacher. One pupil over 30 will necessitate the employment of an additional teacher.

The exceptions to this requirement are:

- Children and young people attending mainstream lessons who are on the roll of a special school.
- A child admitted to a class outside of the normal transfer / admission round and who has a statement of SEN naming that school. (This can be counted as an exception for the remainder of that academic year only, in order to allow the head teacher time to plan future provision).

Pupils placed out of chronological age are not regarded as exceptions. Pupils so placed may cause additional costs for the school in respect of additional teaching staff. They may also 'block' places for pupils due to be admitted and for whom placement may be appropriate or necessary. Uncertainties may create difficulties for 'receiving' schools at the end of key stages.

In schools where there is a practice of moving children and young people out of age for a year or more, staff should be alert to the fact that this may reflect issues in the school around curriculum differentiation and SEN provision.

Guidelines

1. It should only be in exceptional circumstances that a pupil moves out of their chronological age group. In no instance should this be more than a single NC year. In the case of vertically grouped classes this will apply to the age range of the class rather than a single chronological age.

2. For a pupil to stay down a year, it is likely they would be the subject of a Statement of SEN/EHCP. The most recent review meeting should endorse any decision to move a pupil out of chronological age group.

Schools and involved professionals should satisfy themselves that the following apply:

- The pupil shows significant delay in intellectual development / educational skills across the subject areas, to an extent that curriculum differentiation is not reasonable.
- The pupil's physical maturity does not place them in a position of being developmentally different from their peer group.
- The pupil shows an equivalent delay in emotional development and social skills appropriate for a younger peer group.
- There is full parental support and agreement.
- There is pupil support and agreement following explanation and counselling at a level the pupil is able to understand.
- There are clear objectives and time scales to the change with plans in place to manage phase transfers and examinations if appropriate.

3. The pupil should not be expected to remain out of chronological age indefinitely. Any move out of the chronological age is expected to be managed within a key stage or school phase, i.e. at the **end** of a key stage, or before the pupil is due to transfer phase, the pupil should be placed within their chronological age group.