

General advice for mainstream schools to support decision making when considering teaching pupils outside their natural cohort

Draft document prepared for CPG 08/03/2017- consultation.
Authors - Poppy Chandler, Julia Dean, Carol Sneddon.

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1) Context

Some pupils are taught out of their natural cohort for a variety of reasons in Shropshire. We realise there are always exceptional circumstances and each case should be considered on a case by case basis. A person centred approach should be used when making decisions to ensure the pupil's and parent's voice is heard.

This is local guidance to support head teachers, parents and governors to make effective decisions that will support improved outcomes for pupils in the following circumstances:-

- Complex medical conditions that have impacted on the pupil's access to education.
- Other circumstances, such as multiple changes in placements or travel that have impacted on the pupil's access to education.
- Pupils who have experienced trauma e.g. refugees.
- Pupils with special educational needs.
- Children/young people in care or on the edge of care.

This guidance does not refer to pupils whose parents are deferring entry to Reception class because their child is summer born. Further legislation is expected for summer born deferrals and it is anticipated that such children will be permitted to remain with their adopted cohort throughout their education and on to secondary transfer. Other than summer born deferrals, requests to transfer to secondary school with a different cohort are discussed in Section 7.

Literature research indicates placing a child outside their chronological year group is not beneficial to the individual child.

The General Advice relates to all children in mainstream and special school.

NB If the child has an Education, Health and Care Plan, the decision to place a child outside their chronological year group lies with the Local Authority.

This guidance relates to individual pupil's placement within a class of a different age group. It also applies to mixed-age classes, where the pupil is part of an age-matched peer group. In these circumstances differentiation of the curriculum should be prioritised over aligning the pupil with the younger cohort.

The school's management information system should accurately reflect the cohort in which the pupil is taught.

2) General Advice

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

The evidence shows that placing pupils 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 pupil out of year:

- The school may not have space in another year group without breaching infant class-size regulations.
- Placing the pupil in another year group may deny some other child a place at that school.
- As he or she matures, the pupil may realise that the rest of the class are of a different age, causing adverse emotional impact.
- The pupil may begin puberty at a different time from their classmates, which could be confusing for him or her.
- The pupil 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.
- Other interventions may be more appropriate in the long-term: placement outside the chronological year group could simply be delaying that provision.
- The evidence suggests that placing pupils in a different year group rarely makes a positive difference and can have negative long-term effects.
- As UNESCO notes (see appendix) pupils have a right to be educated with their peers.

3) Specific Procedure for placement outside the pupil's chronological year group

General Principles

- a) Head Teachers should seek the views of any professionals involved (e.g. Educational Psychologist, Educational Welfare Officer, Social Worker) before coming to any decision.
- b) No such decision should be taken unless parents/carers give their informed consent to it.
- c) The decision to place a pupil 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.
- d) In all cases the decision must be in the long term interests of the pupil.

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) **Where a pupil has an EHCP, an interim review should be arranged to discuss any potential placement of that pupil outside their natural cohort. A SEND officer should be invited to attend the review.**
- 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 pupil 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 in consultation with an Educational Psychologist and 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 with an Educational Psychologist, 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. The review should be held in a timely manner taking account of time scales with regard to decision making relating to transition.

4) Ashton Checklist ¹

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.	

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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

5) Specific Procedure for starting school early

Shropshire Council does not facilitate pupils starting school prior to the September following their 4th Birthday.

6) Specific Procedure for transfer to Secondary school

Early Transfer

Very occasionally, pupils 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 pupil 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 pupil and to all involved in the pupil's education, that placement ahead of the chronological year group is not indicative that the pupil will transfer to secondary school before their chronological peers. In the majority of cases the expectation will be that the pupil will transfer to secondary school alongside their chronological peers. Parental requests for an early transfer to secondary should be requested by following the process outlined below.

Late Transfer

Very rarely, a pupil 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 pupils will transfer to secondary school (KS3) alongside their chronological peers and it would be highly unusual for an exception to be made to this. Primary Schools may, therefore, wish to strongly consider arrangements which enable pupils to spend the full year before secondary transfer working alongside their chronological peers in Year 6. Parental requests to delay transfer to secondary school should be requested by following the process outlined below.

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 pupils placed outside of the chronological primary year group will have joined their chronological peers by Year 6 (Y6) and will transfer to secondary school with these peers.
- If pupils are placed out of chronological year group, then this should be regularly 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 pupils can transition with their appropriate 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 is made.

Process

- Parents should submit a formal application for Early Transfer to Secondary School by the end of October, 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 October one year before the chronological transfer to secondary school would ordinarily take place.
- In support of the application the Local Authority may also require a report from a Local Authority Educational Psychologist (commissioned by the current school). The application should be accompanied by records of all past formal meetings to review the pupil's placement out of chronological year. If the pupil has medical or clinical psychological needs, then reports from such professionals in addition to the educational professionals' advice should be submitted.
- The authority would also request advice from the Headteacher of the Primary school and the views of the Headteacher(s) of the secondary school(s) to which the parents are seeking early or deferred admission for their pupil.
- Many schools are now an admission authority (e.g. academy schools) and would be the decision-makers for early or deferred transfer requests.
- Placement outside the pupil's chronological year group should be highly exceptional.

7) Children with an Education Health and Care Plan

If the pupil has an Education Health and Care Plan the decision to place a pupil outside their chronological year group lies with the Local Authority. In Shropshire this happens only very rarely. The Ashton Checklist is used to inform the decision-making process.

- In considering an EHCP the Authority may very occasionally advise that a pupil be placed out of their ordinary year-group.
- Before writing this into a plan 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 pupil 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.

8) The Evidence Base

Evidence from a recent Literature Review by Trainee Educational Psychologist September 2016 gives clarity in terms of the evidence. The UNESCO document also provides an evidence base.

‘Back-classed!’

Amalia Dirnu Trainee EP, Literature Review Sep 2016

Despite Parliament having discussed the idea of back classing in the past, this proposal has not been taken up in the UK (Gardiner and Thompson, 2012). Also, current legislation covering this issue does not specify a requirement that a child needs to automatically move a year, every year, and it does not describe how schools should be organised. Nevertheless, the legislation highlights the need for education that is appropriate for a pupil’s age, ability and aptitude. As a result, the curriculum is organised in a way which accommodates different abilities and performance. Within a year group, children receive differentiated teaching to meet pupils’ needs, being held back a year only in exceptional circumstances (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2011).

Explicative note on terminology

In the UK the process of holding a child back a year is referred to by local authorities as ‘back-classing’. Nevertheless, since there is little research in the UK, if any, on this topic, within the present document the following terms and expressions used across the world may also be used.

‘holding back a year’

‘being put back a year’

‘children out of year’

‘repeating a year/ grade’

‘repeating school’

‘back-classing’

‘grade repetition’

‘grade retention’

‘education outside the
year group’

Also, since the research data found is mainly from the USA, the terms ‘year’ and ‘grade’ refer to the American system where typically a Year 2 pupil in the UK would be in grade 1 in the USA, and UK year 1 would be in kindergarten in the USA.

Incidence of back classing

USA and Australia: between 5 and 15% (Martin, 2011).

For European countries, including the UK, the rate of pupils back-classed in primary education can be found in Appendix 1, Figure 2.6.

Who makes the decision for back classing in the UK?

Since back-classing rarely happens in the UK there isn’t an agreed set process, the criteria for this is locally agreed. Some local authorities have developed set procedures about back-classing. This is the case, for instance, for West Sussex. According to the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (European Union, 2011) the decision to retain children in the first grade in the UK lies with the head teacher, a decision which occasionally may be taken in collaboration with other parties.

Useful statistics: 67% of the British public support introducing a system of holding back children a year if they don’t make sufficient progress, whilst 21% oppose this idea. Among the parents of school-age children, 61% support holding children back if necessary whilst 27 oppose this (Gardiner and Thompson, 2012)

Findings of research on outcomes or grade retention²

1. Achievement

Some positive short term effect (Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber, 2003; Anderson, Jimerson and Whiple, 2005; Gleason, Knok and Hughs, 2007; Korweit, 1999; Peterson, DeGracie and Ayabe, 1987; Pierson and Connel, 1992). However, some research suggests that this positive effect diminishes over the years (Hong and Yu, 2008; Wu, West and Hughes, 2008; Jimerson et al., 1997; Mantzicopoulos and Morrison, 1992; Rust and Wallace, 1993);

Negative effects (Hong and Raudenbaum, 2005; Jimerson and Ferguson, 2007; Pagani et al., 2001; Reynolds, 1992; McCombs-Tomas et al., 1992; Pierson and Connell, 1992);

Children retained in kindergarten become further behind – a study with over 20000 children (Hong and Raudenbush, 2005)

No significant difference between those pupils that are retained and those that struggled to the same degree but were promoted (Wu, W. et al. 2008; Ferguson, 1991; Johnson, Merrell and Stover, 1990; Phelps et al. 1992; Coffield and Blommers, 1956).

The gap for retained students widens when compared to younger peers in their new grade (Temple, Reynolds and Ou, 2004).

² **Note:** Most studies looking at retention involve pupils that were held behind in preschool or up to grade 3.

A meta-analysis of 20 studies conducted by Jimerson (2001) looking at the efficacy of back-classing containing 175 analyses on academic achievement outcomes concluded that:

48% of the analyses showed no differences in academic achievement;

47% favoured matched-promoted students;

5% favoured academically pupils held back a year. However, the gains were not maintained over time.

Main conclusion: Retention does not serve to improve academic achievement.

English skills

If retained in Yr 3, two years later, no evidence found that back classing led to greater achievement. And, if retained in Yr 6 for a year, there was indication that retention was associated with subsequent learning gains that were 31% lower than those of comparable students who were not retained (Roderick and Nagaoka, 2005).

Reading achievement worsened over the 10th and 12th grade (Griffith, Loyd, Lane and Tankerslay 2010)

Being retained – no effect (Wu, West and Hughes. 2008)

Math skills

After being retained – math skills growth lower than peers (Wu, West and Hughes 2008).

Temporary advantage in maths achievement, this later disappears when faced with new material (Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland and Sroufe, 1997).

2. Social and emotional wellbeing

Self-esteem, emotional functioning and peer relationships decline for those that are held back (Jimerson, Anderson and Whipple, 2002). Decrease in socioemotional health (Hagborg, Masella, Palladino and Shepardson, 1991; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland and Soufre, 1997; Jimerson and Ferguson, 2007; Meisels and Liaw, 1993).

Holding back leads to decreased peer-rated sad/ withdrawal behaviours (Wu, Huges and West, 2010). But the same authors note: ‘these two studies [this one and another one completed by Hing and Yu, 2008] suggest that retention in kindergarten and first grade do not harm students’ psychosocial adjustment, at least through Grade 4’.

Peer liking/ acceptance enjoyed by pupils that have been retained in Yr 1, during Yr 1 did was not maintained in later years (Wu, Huges and West, 2010).

No association between back-classing and socioemotional health (Gottfredson, Fink and Graham, 1994; McCoy and Reynolds, 1999; Pierson and Connell, 1992; Reynolds, 1992).

No association between self-esteem and peer relationships (Martin, 2011).

A meta-analysis of 16 studies conducted by Jimerson (2001) looking more closely at the socioemotional outcomes containing 148 analyses on academic achievement outcomes concluded that:

86% of the analyses showed no differences in academic achievement;

8.78% favoured matched-promoted students;

5.4% favoured academically pupils held back a year. However, the gains were not maintained over time.

Behaviour regulation

Retention may lead to an increase in aggression and oppositional behaviour (Pagani et. al, 2001; Pianta, Tietbohl and Bennett, 1997)

If retained in an early grade pupils' behaviour tends to be exacerbated by grade 6 [USA] whereas those who are promoted but who have experienced similar problems remain stable (Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland and Sroufe, 1997).

Majority of studies indicate that holding a child back a year has no effect on behaviour (Wu, Huges and West, 2010; Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber, 1994; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland and Sroufe, 1997; Mantzicopoulos and Morrison, 1992; McCombs Thomas et. Al, 1992; McCoy and Reynolds, 1999).

Some suggest that it leads to a decrease in externalising behaviours (Gottfredson, Fink and Graham, 1994). And decrease of teacher-rated hyperactivity (Wu, Huges and West, 2010).

Some positive short term effect (Anderson, Jimerson and Whiple, 2005; Gleason, Knok ang Hughs, 2007; Korweit, 1999; Peterson, DeGracie and Ayabe, 1987; Pierson and Connel, 1992). However, some research suggests that this positive effect diminishes over the years (Hong and Yu, 2008; Wu, West and Hughes, 2008).

3. School behaviour

School disengagement and absenteeism rises for those retained (Jimerson, Anderson and Whipple, 2002).

Retained students experience lower levels of academic motivation and school engagement (Martin, 2009). A follow up study indicated that grade retention had a significant negative effect on academic self-concept and homework completion; and a significant positive predictor of maladaptive motivation and weeks absent from school (Martin, 2011).

But according to teacher-rated behaviour engagement increases in the short term, an effect retained long term (Wu, Huges and West, 2010).

Retention had a positive effect on school belonging in the short term, but this did not last (Wu, Huges and West, 2010).

Retention had a positive effect on children's perceived academic competence in Year 4, if retained in Yr1/ higher academic efficacy (Wu, Huges and West, 2010).

4. Dropout rates

High dropout rate for children who have been held back a year (Vitaro, Boulerice and McDuff, 2001; Reynolds, 1992; Alexander, Entwisle and Danber, 2003).

Grade retention – the strongest predictor for dropping out of school (Janosz, LeBlanck, Boulerin and Trembaley, 1997; Rumberger, 1995).

Research is 'virtually unanimous' that children back classed are found at a substantially higher risk of dropping out in comparison to the non-retained pupils (Penfield, 2010).

Retention associated with dropout rates between 14 and 29 percentage points – study with multiple samples ranging between 10000 and 40000 pupils, from different geographical regions in the USA (Grissom and Shepard, 1989).

The odds of dropout were approximately four times higher for students who had been retained than for comparable non-retained students (Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber, 2003).

Retained students had a 50% higher chance of dropout by age 19 than students of a matched comparison group that were never retained (Jimerson, 1999).

Being retained one time more than doubled a student's likelihood of dropping out and being held back twice, tripled the odds of dropout (Roderick, 1994; Rumberger, 1995).

Main conclusion: Retention does lead to a higher school dropout rate.

A review study of the research literature

In 2009, Allan, Chen, Willson and Hughes carried out a review of the research literature found in USA by critically evaluating the quality of the research available on grade retention. The most relevant conclusions to the issue presently addressed are summarised below:

- Studies with poor design showed indicated more significant negative effects of grade retention. Studies with good methodological design indicated that there were no significant effects of grade retention on the respective pupils. What this means is that one cannot reliably say that the negative effects were due to the child having repeated a year. Therefore, in their words, 'it is important to note that [...] these results provide little support for proponents of grade retention'.
- Over the years, the effects become more negative.
- The idea that retained children experience a short-term boost to their achievement, relative to their younger, same-age classmates, an advantage which is lost over the ensuing years, is reinforced. ['The experience of failure, followed by success the following year, followed by a downward trajectory over the ensuing years may negatively affect children's academic

self-efficacy and academic control beliefs (Gleason, Kwok and Hughes, 2007) leading to school disengagement and early school leaving (Alexander et al., 2003)'].

- There was no evidence found that holding back a year in early years is more beneficial with respect to achievement outcomes.
- The children repeating a year most often do not receive further educational support, back-classing being considered the intervention, which leads to a repeat of the prior years' experience (Picklo and Christenson, 2005). This conclusion is also supported by research carried out by Schnurr, Kundert and Nickerson, 2009, and Peterson and Hughes, 2011).
- Also very important is the study looking at the level of educational support offered to pupils before and after being held back a year which found that those pupils that were retained receive less help during their pre-retention year, and that this did not increase in the repeat year.
- In comparison to children that were held back a year, low-achieving but promoted children was comparable to the control group (same age peers) on all employment outcomes at the age of 20 (Jimerson, 1999).

Other relevant research findings:

- Keeping a child behind in Year 1 effects are similar to keeping them in later years (Silbergilt, Jimerson, Burns and Appleton, 2006), other research indicate worse effects if retained in Yr1 (Pagani et al., 2001).
- Retention less beneficial for older children (Wu, W. et al. 2008).
- If children are reported by parent, peer or teacher of conduct problems then less of a positive effect of retention (Wu, W. et al. 2008). If children are retained because of their weak social and behaviour skills then retention does not help with this (Leckrone and Griffith, 2006).
- Where there are positive relationships between teachers and children, and the child is resilient, then positive effects of retention are observed (Wu, W. et al. 2008).
- Family cohesion, peer support, adult support are helpful for reducing the risk of dropping out for male adolescents (Lagana, 2004).
- Expensive to keep a child behind (Wu, W. et al, 2008, and many more)

Child's view

- I. 'Young children view retention as punishment'; children 'experience feelings of fear, anger and sadness when not promoted'; 'the teacher and the school do not consider the student to be capable' (Byrnes and Yamamoto, 1986).
- II. In the same study, Byrnes and Yamamoto (1986), children were asked to rate 20 most stressful life events which included items such as: losing a parent, going to the dentist, and getting a bad report card. Pupils in grade 6 placed retention on the third place with losing a parent and going blind being worse. In 2005, Anderson, Jimerson and Whipple replicated the study and found that pupils now in year 6 rated being held back a year as the most stressful life event.

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Appendix 2

Ashton Checklist³

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
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