



Advice on The Admission of Children Outside Their Normal Age Group

Requests for children to be educated out of their normal age cohort usually arise in two forms:

A request for a Summer Born Child to start school in Reception after their fifth birthday, or

A request from a school or a parent to educate a child already in a school in another year group, either because they need to be advanced a year or to repeat a year based on their needs.

1. Terms and definitions

The terms and definitions applied in this document are as follows:

Deferred entry: This is when a Reception age child enters school in their normal cohort, but the parent informs the school their child will start later in the year than September, but by the beginning of the summer term at the latest.

Children can also attend part time if the parents wish until later in the school year, but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age. Entry cannot be deferred beyond compulsory school age or to a later school year.

Back-classing: This is when a pupil remains in a particular year group and repeats the year, or when a Summer Born Child starts school the September of the academic year after their fifth birthday rather than their fourth birthday.

For many children, **Back-classing will be a temporary arrangement and the school's aim will be to 'recover' the child to their usual year group, particularly in preparation for secondary transfer.**

Acceleration: This is when a pupil progresses to a higher year group and completes their education in advance of the cohort of similar aged pupils.

2. Summer Born Children

The School Admissions Code 2021 requires school admission authorities to provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. However, a child is not required to start school until they have reached compulsory school age following their fifth birthday. For Summer Born Children this is almost a full year after the point in which they could be admitted.

The majority of Summer Born Children start school in the September or defer entry until the spring following their fourth birthday, either part or full time (the decision rests with the parent, but the school can recommend what they consider best for young children), alongside their age cohort.

There are some parents who feel their child is not ready to start school in the September following their fourth birthday, and express a desire for their child not to start school until the term following their fifth birthday. They may request that their child is admitted outside of their normal age group to Reception rather than Year 1.

Parents **are required to make an application for their child's normal age group** at the usual time and by the deadline, and should also submit a request to the relevant admission authority for admission out of the normal age group at the same time. Full details are set out in the current Admission Arrangements.

We strongly advise you to read carefully the DfE Summer Born Children Starting School: Advice for parents September 2020:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/921255/Guidance_for_parents_September_2020.pdf.

The DfE issued non- statutory Advice on the Admission of Summer Born Children in December 2014. This explains:

Key points:

- *School admission authorities are required to provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday, but flexibilities exist for children whose parents do not feel they are ready to begin school before they reach compulsory school age.*
- *Where a parent requests their child is admitted out of their normal age group, the school admission authority is responsible for making the decision on which year group a child should be admitted to. They are required to make a decision on the basis of the circumstances of the case and in the best interests of the child concerned.*
- *There is no statutory barrier to children being admitted outside their normal age group, but parents do not have the right to insist that their child is admitted to a particular age group*

The advice notes that:

Parental requests for Summer Born Children to be admitted to reception rather than year one at the age of five are different from any other parental request for admission out of the normal age group, as it is only in these circumstances that the child is being admitted to school for the first time.

*The parents of Summer Born Children must be able to make a decision about whether their child is ready to go to school before compulsory school age confident that, if they decide not to send them to school until age five, the decision about the year group they should be admitted to at **that point will be made in the child's best interests.***

This will require the admission authority to take account of the child's individual needs and abilities and to consider whether these can best be met in Reception or Year 1. It will also involve taking account of the potential impact on the child of being admitted to Year 1 without first having completed the Reception year. The views of the Head teacher will be an important part of this consideration.

*It is reasonable for admission authorities to expect parents to provide them with information in support of their request – since without it they are unlikely to be able to make a decision on the basis of the circumstances of the case. This should demonstrate why it would be **in the child's** interests to be admitted to reception rather than year one.*

*In some cases, parents may have professional evidence that it would be appropriate for them to submit, for example, when a child receives support from a speech and language therapist. However, there should be no expectation that parents will obtain professional evidence that they do not already have. Admission authorities must still consider requests that are not accompanied by professional evidence. In such cases the supporting **information might simply be the parent's** statement as to why they have made their request.*

This was further updated on 27 May 2021:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-born-children-school-admission/admission-of-summer-born-children-advice-for-local-authorities-and-school-admission-authorities>.

Application process for Summer Born Children:

In order for parents to know the outcome of their request for admission out of the normal age group in time to make an informed decision about whether their child will start school before compulsory school age:

Parents must make an application for their child's normal age group at the usual time to start school in Reception.

Parents must also submit a request form for admission out of the normal age group at the same time. Redbridge admission authority must ensure that the parent receives the response to their request before Primary National Offer Day.

One admission authority cannot be required to honour a decision made by another admission authority on admission out of the normal age group. Parents, therefore, should consider whether to request admission out of the normal year group at all their preference schools, rather than just their first preference school.

If the request is agreed:

The application for the normal age group may be withdrawn before a place is offered.

Parents must make a new application as part of the main admissions round the following year.

If the request is refused:

The parent must decide whether to accept the offer of a place for the normal age group, or to refuse it and make an In-Year Admission application to Year 1 for the September **following their child's fifth birthday.**

3. Acceleration and Back-classing requests for children already in schools

Requests for education outside the normal cohort happen for a number of reasons and are covered in the School Admissions Code 2021 paragraphs 2.18 and 2.19, summarised below:

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

The School Admission Code 2021 requires admission authorities to make clear in their admission arrangements the process for requesting admission out of the normal year group.

Further Information about Back-Classing within a school

Sometimes schools believe a child would benefit greatly from repeating a year group. Before approaching the Local Authority, the school should discuss this fully with the parents, explaining their reasons and the implications before asking the parent to complete a form, to confirm their agreement. The Head will also need to complete a form setting out their professional reasons for suggesting back-classing. This should not be because a child has little English or special needs, as these are normally accommodated within the school. Schools can generally meet the individual needs of pupils by using a range of teaching strategies, calling on additional support and advice as appropriate from colleagues within the school and the external support services. The effective use of differentiated teaching programmes should ensure that back-classing only needs to be considered in very unusual **circumstances such as when a child’s education has been severely disrupted by a long-term absence through illness.**

However, if it is apparent that the pupil is not making appropriate progress, or has missed a substantial amount of schooling through ill-health, the school should implement a **programme of support. A full record of the child’s needs and the effectiveness of the action** taken to meet them should be kept. To hold back a pupil for a year, while their friends move on may have significant implications for the child which could have a detrimental effect on their progress. The full implications of any proposals must be considered and discussed with the parent before they are finalised, particularly as action taken for a child at primary school may well have consequences at the time of transfer to secondary school. It is also important to avoid, wherever possible, the situation arising whereby a pupil reaches statutory school leaving age and leaves school part way through a course of study with little to show for their endeavours.

Wherever possible, the aim should be to recover the child to their age cohort. This is particularly important for children attending a primary school, so they may transfer to Year 7 with their age cohort.

If the pupil's progress is being affected by factors outside the school, such as difficult home circumstances, back-classing is rarely appropriate and could create other problems, for example if a young person left school before completing their exams.

Before a decision is reached, it is essential that the full implications of back-classing have been taken into account. In order that all relevant information may be considered, the Head teacher of the current school and parent should set out the reasons clearly in the forms available from the Primary or Secondary Admissions Team Leaders.

Further Information about Acceleration

The needs of very able pupils can be met by most schools, as part of their approach for Gifted and Talented pupils. The normal approach is to extend and enrich the support for the pupil and to provide opportunities according to his/her individual strengths and areas for development. Many pupils may excel in one or two areas of the curriculum but few will demonstrate exceptional ability across a range sufficiently wide to justify acceleration. It may be considered appropriate for the pupil to join an older year group for specific activities, whilst remaining with his/her peers for the majority of the timetable. This can be equally effective for younger and older pupils.

Acceleration, therefore, is likely to be appropriate for only a very small number of pupils. Before a decision is reached, it is essential that the full implications of acceleration have been taken into account. In order that all relevant information may be considered, the Head and parent should, therefore, seek the views, as appropriate, of the following:

- Teaching staff
- Educational Psychologist
- The young person and
- The catchment secondary school (if relevant)

Heads and parents should complete the forms, available from the Primary or Secondary Admissions Team Leaders. Substantial evidence would be needed of the benefits to the child of acceleration to a higher year group, along with evidence about their maturity to cope in the older age cohort.

4. Transfer to Junior and Secondary school

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.

5. School leaving age

A child ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday of June in the school year they become 16. If a child is educated outside their normal age group (i.e. is in year 10 when this date is reached) the school will continue to receive funding for that child but the child

will no longer be of compulsory school age during the school year in which most children take their GCSE examinations and cannot, therefore, be obliged to attend.

6. Parental appeals and complaints

Parents who are refused a place at a school for which they have applied have the right of appeal to an independent admission appeal panel. As the purpose of the appeals process is to consider whether a child should be admitted to a particular school, parents do not have a right of appeal if they have been offered a place and it is not in the year group they would like.

If a parent is unhappy with the way a local authority or maintained school has handled their complaint, the parent may then refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

If they are unhappy with the way an academy has handled their complaint they may complain to the Education Funding Agency who will consider the complaint on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. More information is available on: www.gov.uk.

7. Pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Any child with an EHCP will be considered through the annual assessment process, which will consider how best to meet their needs. This is separate from the process set out in this paper.

August 2021

Reference documents:

- Advice on the admission of summer born children for local authorities, school admission authorities and parents December 2014
- The School Admissions Code 2014
- Local Government & Social Care Summer born admissions Guidance for practitioners December 2018
- DfE Summer Born Children Starting School: Advice for parents September 2020.