

**Students Out of Chronological
Year Group Policy**

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	DATE ()

1. Other relevant policies and documents

- Admissions Policy (SET Beccles School)
- Admissions Policy (SET Ixworth School)
- Admissions Policy (SET Saxmundham School)
- Complaints Policy

2. Explanation of terms used in the policy

'Trust' = Seckford Education Trust

'School(s)' = schools within the Trust

3. Policy statement

This document outlines the policy for determining decisions on placing students out of their chronological year group in the Trust's Schools. This policy covers the Trust and all its Schools and as such there is no need for each School to have its own policy.

The relevant aspects of the law about education and student's age may be loosely summarised as follows:

- Students must attend school (or receive education other than at school or 'EOTAS') from the start of the term following fifth birthday until around June in their sixteenth year;
- Schools must assess the attainment of students at the end of delivering the full key stage requirements;
- Children's Services Authorities (CSAs) have to provide schools that are suitable for the age, ability and aptitude of students;
- Students are entitled to a broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated curriculum.

Within this framework, there are no legal requirements about how any school should be organised. Nor is there a requirement that students should progress to a new age-related group each year: that this generally happens is custom and practice. There are alternative arrangements, and vertical grouping is one example. The DfE does not take a position on age-related grouping.

Nationally, about 0.3% of Y1 to Y10 students are out of the correct NC Year for their chronological age (DfES data, 2005/6). Parents / carers may feel they have good reasons for asking to have their children placed out of their proper NC Year; but the decision may have serious and unintended consequences for the student, the family and the school. This policy outlines the background and relevant considerations to take into account when looking at this practice. The policy also outlines how a decision should be made. Any decision will be made by the Headteacher of the school, in consultation with the parent(s) / carer(s) of a child who wishes him / her to be placed out of NC Year.

4. Considerations and background

4.1 Evidence of the effectiveness of the practice

There seems to be no systemic UK research on the effectiveness of having students out of their chronological year. Most of the available research evidence comes from USA, Canada and New Zealand, and concerns students who are 'retained' in a grade lower than normal for their chronological age. The extracts in this section illustrate the general findings.

There is little evidence of benefit from retaining students in a class with a lower age group. There is some evidence of short-term improvements in achievement, but this then declines to below that of non-retained peers. Long-term effects include increased 'drop-out rates' and poorer academic achievement, poorer self-esteem, and lower rates of school attendance, as compared with non-retained peers.

The evidence indicates that students who are 'over age' for their grade show significant disengagement from Grade 7 onwards.

"Although this and similar studies indicate that students either show declines in achievement or perform no better after repeating a grade than continuously promoted students, the conclusion that no students improve is, nevertheless, incorrect. The problem is there is no fool proof way to predict which students are likely to benefit from the practice...." Westbury (1994), "The Effect of Elementary Grade Retention on subsequent school achievement and ability". Canadian Journal of Education Vol 19, No. 3, pp 241-250)

Overall, the evidence on students who are placed in a younger year group shows the following:

- Students held back a year continue to struggle academically;
- Some students who are held back a year show a temporary increase in attainment, but this increase disappears when they do move up a class or within 3 years;
- Students who started school a year late tended to show the same problems as they had in the first place;
- Students who have been held back a year often feel anxious about their status with their peers. They tend to see it as a negative and confusing experience;
- As they move up through school, students who continue to work in a younger class show poorer emotional health and many have reported being bullied because they are not with their age-matched peers;
- Problems with attention were not improved by having the student repeat a year;
- No difference in self-concept or classroom behaviour was seen between students who repeated a year and those who moved up;
- Employment chances are negatively affected by repeating a year at school, especially for people from ethnic minorities.

The evidence above shows that placing students with classes of younger students 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.

No research evidence has yet been found which identifies any groups or circumstances in which it is helpful to place the student outside their normal year group.

However, common sense suggests that there may be some very exceptional situations in which it could be considered as an intervention. For example:

- Students who have missed a lot of school through illness, being abroad or non-attendance;
- Students recently arrived into the UK and need time to adjust to school life here;
- Students with summer birthdays who were born very prematurely and, if born at full term, would have started school with the year group below;
- Students who were born in either August or September who may be more than capable of coping with a move upwards.

The evidence relating to students who have been placed with an older class is very thin. In the absence of specific evidence for this group, it is helpful to consider the issues raised from research about students held back a year, as many of these themes can be applied to students accelerated up a year.

4.2 Common justifications

The justification for placing students in a year group other than their chronological age group is commonly one of the following:

1. the student has exceptional intellectual skills, is isolated as a learner in their present peer group, and presents major difficulties for teachers in terms of providing appropriate curriculum extension;
2. the student has exceptionally delayed intellectual skills, cannot productively engage in group learning tasks, and presents teachers with major difficulties in curriculum differentiation;
3. often in association with the point above, the student is very delayed emotionally, cannot make adequate relationships with their peer group, and is at risk of isolation and possible bullying;
4. the student has missed a substantial part of a year through illness or for other reasons;
5. the student's physical condition or frailty seems to require a less risky environment than that found in classes for their actual age group.

These reasons are frequently linked with strong parental / carer preferences for their child to be placed in an alternative year group.

Reasons 2 and 3 above become particularly significant at the point of phase transfer (nursery to KS1, KS1 to KS2, KS2 to KS3). At these times, schools and parents / carers become anxious that the demands of the next phase will be too onerous for the student to cope with.

But regardless of whether students stay in groups below the correct NC Year, or move ahead of their correct NC Year, being 'out of year' has implications for the student, the school, the family and the CSA. These are considered in the next sections.

4.3 Implications for students

Placement in an older age group

Students placed in a year group ahead of their chronological age may well experience more

stimulation or feel less frustrated in areas where they excel than they would have in their chronological group. On the other hand, they may also face challenges in areas where their strengths and personal resources may be less advanced. In particular, social life in school may be difficult for students whose physical, social and emotional maturity does not match their exceptional intellectual maturity. The emotional consequences of this may be considerable, particularly during adolescence.

However, where students' overall maturity is broadly in line with intellectual maturity, placement a year ahead of chronological age can benefit them. However, it is also the case that an enriched curriculum within the same chronological age group may have similar results and fewer risks.

Once students have transferred to a higher NC Year group, reversing the change is difficult, as it will involve repeating an NC Year. It is therefore important to consider the consequences of a move on important educational milestones that the student will now reach a year or more ahead of the usual age: transfer to the next phase, SATs, GCSEs, and school leaving. It is worth noting that students cannot finish their education at 15 years, and may therefore have to transfer early to a sixth form college or FE college.

The Headteacher, parents / carers and students should meet to discuss the implications of a move an older age group fully, perhaps with the help of relevant outside agencies (where the Headteacher believes it is relevant to do so).

Placement in a younger age group

There are similar considerations that apply to students kept down one or more years as in those who are moved upwards, though in the opposite direction. A student's strengths and resources are seldom limited uniformly in all areas, and an ambience of generally lower expectations may be a problem. The development of physical, emotional and social skills is especially at risk.

Caution should be exercised about retaining summer-born students in a lower NC Year. These students may have lower attainments and social skills than others in their NC Year simply because they have had less time for teaching and learning. Schools should properly address this within the student's ordinary class, through normal differentiation of the curriculum.

Again, once students are out of the correct NC Year, the change is hard to reverse, and 'leapfrogging' back to the correct NC Year may present them with a difficult and unpleasant experience. If they continue their education in a lower NC Year, they will reach important educational milestones a year late; and in particular, they will be eligible to leave school before they have completed their GCSEs. And if they skip a year, or stay in a lower NC Year and complete their education at the normal school leaving age, they will likely entirely miss the programme of work for a full year of study.

Other considerations

There are a number of other factors to be taken into account with regard to the practice of moving students out of their chronological year group:

- In terms of admissions, moving students out of their chronological year group may mean that a student in that year group does not get a place, particularly if the school is full;

- Placing students with statements out of their NC year may have additional costs. If, having 'repeated' an NC Year earlier in school, students with statements stay on an extra year to complete their education, they will need an additional year of funding for their stated provision;
- There are also implications for students with a statement of SEN who move to an NC Year ahead of their chronological age, and then transfer from school to college a year early. The statutory responsibility for students with a statement of SEN does not end until they are 19 years of age, but the statement lapses if a student attends college before the age of 19. Such students may need special arrangements to attend a sixth form or college of Further Education;
- Access to the curriculum in a school can be affected. It is better practice to differentiate, extend or enrich appropriately.

5. Our practice

As shown in section 4, moving students out of NC Year has many potentially undesirable consequences for students and schools. The Trust believes therefore that this must be an action of last resort.

It is the policy of the Trust that our Schools will always try to address a student's needs through a more personalised curriculum, through inclusive practice or through suitable accommodations in classes, subjects or year groups if they present the student with obstacles to learning.

If the student has additional needs that the school is trying to meet through an IEP, PEP or PSP, the school, parents / carers and student should review these plans with the Inclusion Leader and with the help of outside agencies (if relevant), to seek solutions that will not entail a change of NC Year. The Trust and its Schools will also consider what additional resources would help maintain pupils in their correct NC Year.

It is our belief that every child has the right to be educated with his or her peers. The student's school is responsible for addressing the student's individual needs through a personalised and inclusive curriculum that has been appropriately differentiated, extended and / or enriched. As a rule, any proposal to move a student to a different NC Year must detail the specific additional arrangements the school will make that it could not put in place in the student's correct NC Year group, before it will be agreed by the Headteacher.

This practice will only be considered in very exceptional circumstances and will be a decision that is taken by the Headteacher only, though in consultation with the parents / carers, student and relevant outside agencies. In arriving at a decision, the Headteacher should be satisfied that:

- the student's physical maturity is not significantly discrepant from that of students in the NC Year they will join;
- the student's current emotional development and social skills are appropriate to the group they will join;
- after full discussion of all the implications, the parents / carers agree to and support the move;
- after full discussion of all the implications at a level the student is able to understand the student agrees to and supports the move;

- there are plans with clear objectives and time scales to manage phase transfers and examinations if appropriate.

In addition:

- for a student to move up a year, the Headteacher must be satisfied that the student demonstrates exceptional intellectual skills and achievement in all subject areas;
- for a student to stay down a year, the student's educational skills across most subject areas should be far below the level usual in their correct NC Year, and there will be evidence that the school's reasonable accommodations and appropriate attempts to personalise the curriculum will be or have been proved to be unsuccessful;
- any student being considered for a move downwards should be the subject of a statement of SEN, and should have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that specifically includes work on what is needed for them to return to their correct NC Year. The most recent review meeting, attended by parents / carers and student, should include an endorsement of any proposal to move the student out of chronological age group.

If a student is to move down a year, the following must be considered in the planning:

- students will not remain below their correct NC Year indefinitely. They will return to their correct NC Year as quickly as is possible, and normally by the end of the Key Stage. Only in exceptional circumstances will students remain below their correct NC Year for longer;
- while a student is out of year, the curriculum will need to be radically different in targets, delivery and support to enable more rapid progress in those areas critical to successful return to the correct year group. The purpose will be to ensure that the child makes rapid progress and that that progress can be maintained even after the period of placement out of year.

Before the move the Headteacher of the School in which the student will go down or up a year will work in consultation with parents / carers and outside professionals should formulate a clear curriculum plan. This should include plans for the following:

- What will happen if the child makes exceptional progress (i.e. they decrease the "gap" between them and their age peers)?
- What will happen if the make average progress (i.e. the gap between them and their age peers remains the same)?
- What happens if they continue to make slow or slower progress (i.e. they fall behind their classmates in the lower NC Year)?
- What needs to happen when the child transfers to another school at phase transfer? (The plan should take account of the policy of the receiving school);
- What will happen at school-leaving age (if appropriate)?
- How, and by whom, will provision and progress be monitored and reviewed?

After making any decision on moving a child out of their chronological year group, the Headteacher will write to the parent(s) / carer(s) with a full justification for the decision.

If parents / carers have requested that their child is placed outside the chronological year group (either when applying to a new school or within the School already being attended) and this is refused by the Headteacher, parents / carers have the statutory right under section 2.17 of the School Admissions Code to make an appeal. If parents/carers wish to lodge an appeal, they should read the guidance and complete the relevant appeal form available on the Suffolk County Council website: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families->

and-learning/schools/applying-for-a-school-place/education-admission-appeals-and-permanent-exclusion-reviews/. The completed, signed form should then be forwarded to: Education Appeals, Customer Rights, PO Box 579, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 2BX (Tel 01473 264219 or 01473 264218).

6. Complaints

Any complaints about this policy from outside the Trust should be made in accordance with the Trust's Complaints Policy. Any other complaints should be brought to the attention of the Headteacher of the relevant School in the first instance.

Complaints that are in the public interest and relate to suspected malpractice may be appropriate to raise under the Trust's Whistleblowing Policy.

7. Compliance and performance monitoring

The Trust Board will review this policy every two years and ensure that practice across all schools is in line with this policy. Any review will take into account the most up-to-date and relevant research evidence.

The Trust has identified a range of Assurance Methodologies as tools by which compliance with policies can be tested. Those most relevant to this policy include:

- External Audit
- Internal Review Processes