

West Sussex County Council

Admission of children outside their normal age group

1. Background

- 1.1. The School Admissions Code (December 2014) is statutory guidance that applies to all admissions to all maintained schools in England and can be found on the DfE website.
- 1.2. The non-statutory advice from the Department for Education (DfE) (dated December 2014) on the admission of summer born children can be found on the DfE website.
- 1.3. This process does not cover pupils who have an Education, Health and Care Plan. Consideration of admission outside their normal age group for these pupils needs to be made by the Special Educational Needs Assessment Team.
- 1.4. The School Admissions Code states:

“Parents may seek a place for their child outside of their normal age group, admission authorities must make clear in their admission arrangements the process for requesting admission out of the normal age group.”
- 1.5. For the purposes of this document the following descriptions are used:
 - a. A **‘delayed admission’** describes when a child starts school having reached statutory school age and starts outside of their chronological year group.
 - b. A **‘back-classing’** arrangement describes when a child who has already been in receipt of education repeats an academic year and is therefore educated outside of their chronological year group. This will include where a child has had a ‘delayed admission’ and are now transferring to junior or secondary school.
 - c. An **‘acceleration’** arrangement describes when a child who has already been in receipt of education advances an academic year and is therefore educated outside of their chronological year group. It would be rare for a pupil to have an acceleration arrangement from the September following their fourth birthday but consideration will be made under the acceleration arrangement.
 - d. A **‘deferred admission’** describes when a pupil has a school place in line with their normal age group in the September following their fourth birthday but only attends on reaching statutory school age and prior to the end of the academic year. A parent’s decision to defer the admission of their child should be done following discussion with the school.
- 1.6. Admission authorities must provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. Under these arrangements:

- a. the child is entitled to a full-time place in the September following their fourth birthday;
 - b. the child's parents can defer the date their child is admitted to the school until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age and not beyond the beginning of the final term of the school year for which it was made; and
 - c. where the parents wish, children may attend part-time until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age.
- 1.7. The parents of a summer born child (all children born from 1 April to 31 August) may choose not to send the 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. This is described as a delayed admission.
- 1.8. Should a parent of a summer born child wish to only apply for a school place in the normal age group when the child reaches statutory school age then an in-year application should be made and further details on this can be found on the website.
- 1.9. Decisions on delayed admissions, back-classing or acceleration arrangements will be taken by West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) where it is the admission authority for the school. Admission authorities for other schools will have their own arrangements to consider these requests.
- 1.10. The decisions will be made in line with the non-statutory advice from the DfE.

2. Further Guidance to Parents

- 2.1. It is expected that the majority of children will be educated within their chronological year group.
- 2.2. Most parents are happy for their child to start school in the September following their fourth birthday.
- 2.3. Pupils will usually be placed with their own age group and be educated for the majority of their time with their peer group. The differentiated curriculum usually addresses any particular issues.
- 2.4. The admission authority will make its decision in accordance with the Schools Admission Code and the advice of the headteacher. Consideration will be given to any specific medical or educational needs of your child.
- 2.5. Teachers are skilled at differentiating the curriculum to meet a diverse range of needs. Before deciding to delay their child's entry to school, we would recommend that parents visit the schools they are thinking of applying for. The teachers will be able to explain the provision on offer to children in the reception class, how it is tailored to meet the needs of the youngest pupils and how the needs of these pupils will continue to be met as they move up through the school. They may also be

able to allay any concerns the parent may have about their child's readiness for school.

- 2.6. It is also important to note that, whether they attend a primary school or an early years setting during the academic year following their fourth birthday, children will receive the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum which is largely based around learning through play.
- 2.7. One admission authority cannot be required to honour a decision made by another admission authority on admission out of the normal age group.
- 2.8. Once a child has been admitted to a school it is for the headteacher to decide how best to educate them. In some cases it may be appropriate for a child who has been admitted out of their normal age group to be moved to their normal age group (acceleration), but in others it will not. Any consideration to move a child to a different age group should be based on sound educational reasons and made by the headteacher in consultation with the parents.
- 2.9. 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.
- 2.10. If a child is educated outside their normal age group (i.e. is in year 10 when this date is reached) 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. Whilst the government has changed the law so that all young people will be required to continue in education or training until their 18th birthday the date on which they cease to be of compulsory school age has remained unchanged.
- 2.11. 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. However, they may make a complaint about an admission authority's decision not to admit their child outside their normal age group. They may also make such a complaint if they have not made, or do not yet know the outcome of, their formal application for a school place. All schools have a duty to consider complaints about the school and must have a published complaints procedure in place. Local authorities will also have a complaints procedure. 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 Ombudsman.

3. Delayed Admission Request

- 3.1. To consider a 'delayed' admission parents the DfE states it is reasonable for admission authorities to expect parents to provide them with information in support of their request as it unlikely to be able to make a decision on the circumstances of the request without it. If parents have professional evidence then it is appropriate to submit this but there is no expectation that parents obtain professional evidence that they do not already have.
- 3.2. To support the decision making process WSCC requests that parents complete a Delayed Admission Request Pro-forma. The pro-forma can be found on the website.
- 3.3. Working on behalf of the Director of Education and Skills, the Pupil Admission Manager will consider all requests for delayed admission, back classing and acceleration. The views of the Headteacher of the schools named on the application form will be sought as part of the decision making process. The manager will consult with other professionals, such as the Principal Educational Psychologist, as necessary.
- 3.4. In line with the DfE's advice on the admission of summer born children, parents are strongly advised to make an application for their child's normal age group at the usual time and submit a request for delayed admission to school.
- 3.5. Where a parent's request for a delayed admission for their child has been agreed and, as a consequence of that decision, the child will be admitted to a relevant age group (i.e. the age group to which pupils are normally admitted to the school) WSCC will process the application as part of the main admissions round, unless the parental request is made too late for this to be possible, and on the basis of their determined admission arrangements only, including the application of oversubscription criteria where applicable.
- 3.6. 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.

4. Back-Classing

- 4.1. To support the decision making process WSCC requests that headteachers, in conjunction with parents, complete a Back-classing Request Pro-forma. The pro-forma can be found on the website.
- 4.2. Schools seek to 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.
- 4.3. 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.

- 4.4. If it is apparent that the pupil is not making appropriate progress, or is experiencing learning difficulties, 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. It is expected that special educational needs will be addressed by providing additional support from within the school with the assistance of external support agencies, without the need for back-classing.
- 4.5. To hold back a pupil for a further year, whilst his/her former classmates move on, may have significant implications for the child which could have a detrimental effect on his/her overall progress.
- 4.6. The full implications of any proposals must be considered 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.
- 4.7. Where the pupil's progress is being affected by factors outside the school, such as difficult home circumstances, parents /school should seek support from external agencies.
- 4.8. Before a decision is reached, it is essential that the full implications of possible back-classing have been taken into account. In order that all relevant information may be considered, the headteacher of the current school/parent ought to seek the views, as appropriate, of the following:
 - a. SEN Coordinator for the school
 - b. Teaching staff
 - c. Educational Psychologist
 - d. Parents (if instigated by the school this must be in agreement with the parent)
 - e. Pupil
 - f. Pupil Admissions Manager
 - g. Others, as appropriate
- 4.9. If a decision is made to back-class the child, the child's name will be placed on the Local Authority's register. Schools/Parents should review this decision on an annual basis.

5. Acceleration

- 5.1. To support the decision making process WSCC requests that headteachers, in conjunction with parents, complete an Acceleration Request Pro-forma. The pro-forma can be found on the website.
- 5.2. The Local Authority's guidance on very able pupils advises schools on how to meet the needs of those who show exceptional ability in one or

more areas of the curriculum. The usual 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.

- 5.3. 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.
- 5.4. 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 possible acceleration have been taken into account. In order that all relevant information may be considered, the headteacher/parent ought to seek the views, as appropriate, of the following:
 - a. SEN Coordinator / Able Pupil Coordinator for the school
 - b. Teaching staff
 - c. Educational Psychologist
 - d. Pupil
 - e. Parent (If this is being instigated by the school the parent must be in agreement before the start of the process)
 - f. Pupil Admissions Manager
 - g. Others, as appropriate
- 5.5. If a decision is made to accelerate the child, the child's name will be placed on the Local Authority's register. Schools/Parents should review this decision on an annual basis.