



**ESSEX VIRTUAL SCHOOL**

Children Educated Out of Year Group: Virtual School Guidance

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*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

**Nelson Mandela**

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1. **Introduction and Welcome**

Welcome to Essex Virtual School. We very much hope you will find this Guide for professionals helpful and informative.

This Guide aims to clarify decisions made to educate children outside of their chronological Year Group.

We acknowledge the work of the Additional Needs Service of Herefordshire Local Authority.

This advice refers to children and young people who are educated out of their chronological year group:

* because they have repeated a year and will remain in a class below their chronological year group.
* because they have advanced or ‘jumped’ a year and will remain in a class above their chronological year group.

This guidance is intended for Virtual School staff, schools, social workers, and professionals working with Essex children in care.

The General Advice relates to Essex children in care attending mainstream schools and pupil referral units (PRUs).

The decision to place an Essex child in care outside their chronological year group requires discussion with an Essex Virtual School Advisor Inclusion Officer. A change of year group cannot be made without the agreement of the Headteacher Essex Virtual School.

This guidance relates to individual children’s placement with a class of a different age group. It does not apply to vertically grouped/mixed-age classes, where the child/young person is part of an age-matched peer group within the class.

This guidance is in line with that provided by the Department for Education.

John Edgar

**Headteacher Essex Virtual School**

**2. General Advice**

**As a general rule children and young people should be educated with their chronological year group, and to educate them out of year group is potentially harmful to their well-being and educational success.**

**Repeating a Year: how effective is it?**

The following evidence is provided by the Educational Endowment Fund (see references), and suggests that in most cases, repeating a year is harmful to a child’s/young person’s chances of academic success.

In addition, studies consistently show greater negative effects for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, indicating that the practice is likely to increase educational inequality.

Repeating a year is likely to lead to greater negative effects when used in the early years of primary school, for children from ethnic minorities, or for children who are relatively young in their year group (often referred to as 'Summer born' pupils).

Children and young people who repeat a year make an average of four months’ less academic progress over the course of a year than pupils who ‘move on’ with their peers.

In addition, studies suggest that those who repeat a year are unlikely to catch up with peers of a similar level even after completing an additional year’s schooling.

Research indicates that young people who repeat a year are more likely to ‘drop out’ of school prior to completion (Year 11).

Although the overall impact of this practice is negative, there are studies that suggest that in **some cases** a student can benefit, particularly in the short term.

However, it does not appear to be easy to identify who will benefit, and **on balance the evidence suggests that repeating a year is a significant risk**.

Negative effects are rare for educational interventions, and so the finding that those who repeat a year make less progress is unusual and striking. The research suggests that children who start school a year late tend to show the same difficulties that they had in the first place, and those who have been held back a year often feel anxious about their status with peers, they tend to see it as a negative and confusing experience.

Over time, many children and young people who remain in a younger class show poorer emotional health and some report being bullied because of the decision. This presents a serious risk where there is experience of early childhood trauma and attachment difficulties.

Problems with attention are not improved by having child/young person repeat a year. There is a statutory responsibility to personalise the curriculum and make reasonable adjustments for children in care and those with an EHCP. Schools can use their SEND budget and PP+ to support such personalisation within the child’s chronological age group.

The decision to educate out of year group should be considered in relation to several other potential difficulties:

* As he or she matures the child will become aware that the rest of the class are of a different age, potentially causing emotional distress.
* Reaching puberty at a different time from their classmates could be confusing.
* Other local authorities are not bound by these decisions. Therefore, a child in care held back in primary education who moves out of Essex, may find themselves being forced to transition to Year 8 not Year 7.
* The young person is eligible to leave secondary school at the end of the June in the year when they reach their 16th birthday, and therefore may leave without completing external examinations.
* Other interventions may be more appropriate in the long-term: placement outside the chronological year group should at best be seen as a short-term corrective measure and will rarely address long-standing difficulties and could be delaying the deployment of more appropriate provision. For example, intensive tutoring, and assigning higher levels of special needs support are both likely to be more effective.

**3. Specific procedure for placement outside a chronological year group.**

Placement outside the child’s chronological year group should be highly exceptional. However, exceptional circumstances may occur very occasionally in which it is decided to consider such a placement.

**General Principles**

a) The decision to place a child/young person in care outside their chronological year group lies with the Headteacher Virtual School. However, they will generally act on the advice of the Designated Teacher, social worker, carer, and Virtual School Advisor/Inclusion Officer.

1. The views of the child or young person must be considered.
2. No such decision should be considered or taken unless parents (Section 20) or social workers (Full Care Order) give their informed consent to it.
3. In all cases the decision must be in the long-term interests of the child/young person.
4. The Headteacher Virtual School will seek the views of any professionals involved before coming to any decision (e.g. medical, educational or social care professionals).

**Process**

1. The decision-making Ashton Checklist (see below) should be used. If all criteria are not satisfied, then out of year placement should not take place.
2. 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 must be made in relation to a wider range of factors.
3. It is in everyone’s interest that the decision-making process is clearly recorded as part of the Personal Education Plan. It is important that there is clear recorded evidence that parents/social workers have given informed consent to any placement of a child outside their chronological year group. It is also important to ensure that there is clear recorded evidence that parents/social workers understand that the decision has been agreed by the school and the Headteacher Virtual School.
4. It should be clear not to make or imply promises about future provision from either another school or from the Local Authority.
5. The placement should be reviewed termly as in the PEP meeting, and a collective, recorded decision made in the PEP about whether to keep the child/young person out of their usual year group or to return them to their age-matched peers.
6. Careful thought is to be given to children out of year group before secondary transfer. Indeed, the expectation is that most children placed outside of their primary year group will have re-joined their chronological peers by Year 6 and will transfer to secondary school within their chronological age group.
7. Where this is not the case, and social workers and primary school agree, the social worker should submit a formal application for early or late transfer through the appropriate Admissions Authority by the end of September, one year before the requested transfer is to take place. The Admissions Team will also require a letter from the primary school indicating their consent for the proposal, and evidence that any professionals working with the child support the application. The application should be accompanied by records of past PEP meetings to review the child’s placement out of chronological year. Finally, there should also be evidence that the chosen secondary schools are also in agreement with the proposal (this agreement is not a guarantee of a place however).
8. The document produced by the Department of Education (2014) entitled ‘Advice on the Admission of Summer Born Children’ indicates that: ‘In some cases it may be appropriate for a child who has been admitted out of their normal age group to be returned to their normal age group, but in others it will not. Any decision should be made by the Virtual School in consultation with the social worker, carer and school’ (p.9).
9. The same document also indicates that schools are funded by the number of children that they have on roll and not by their age, and thus funding for repeating a year is available. The same process applies to children who have been ‘advanced’ ahead of their age group (the decision should be reviewed termly in the PEP meeting and Virtual School, social workers, parents/carers, and any involved professionals should agree about whether to maintain the student in their advanced year group).

**Ashton Checklist \***

All these criteria should be satisfied before placing a child outside their chronological year group: Child/ YP\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Today’s Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Checklist filled in by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(DT)

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| 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 personalised provision/reasonable adjustments in the class to which the child should normally transfer. |  |
| 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, placement change out of Authority etc. |  |
| There has been a discussion with parents/social worker/Virtual School 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 specific 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 Local Authorities who report that it is extremely useful. It has been adapted to address the specific needs of Essex Children in Care. 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

**4) Children and young people in care with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP).**

If the child/young person has an EHCP, the decision to place them out of year group will require the involvement and support of the SEND IP.

The Ashton Checklist should be used to inform the decision-making process:

* When writing or amending an EHCP, the Virtual School will only very rarely support a child being placed out of their chronological year-group and this will require full discussion as detailed above.
* The views of the child/young person will also need be considered.
* Ordinarily any request to move a child/young person out of their chronological year group should be fully discussed at the Annual Review/PEP Meeting for that child/young person and the support of the Headteacher Virtual School following such discussions is required.
* In making this decision the Headteacher Virtual School will also seek the views of any professionals working with the child/young person.
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