

Guidance on being educated out-with the peer group including deferred and early entry to school

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Introduction

This guidance relates to individual children who are placed within a class of a different age group. It does not apply to mixed age (composite) classes, where the child is part of an age-matched peer group within the class.

This document sets out the council's position in relation to additional years, often referred to as deferral, retention, being held back or having an advantage year; and advanced years, in the early years this is often referred to early entry to school.

This is a complex area and can be contentious, with varying views, however across a number of studies, it has been found that there is no significant difference in long term academic outcomes between children who are educated alongside their age peers and those who have been advanced or retained by a year (Bonvin, Bless & Scheupbach, 2008; Ehmke, Dreschel & Cartensen, 2010; Lamote, Pinxten, Noorgate & Damme, 2014). This finding has been replicated at both an early school level and a secondary school level.

There is an agreed process for parents and staff to follow if it is being considered that a pupil be educated out-with their peer group and this guidance provides details of the process agreed by Highland Council.

Guiding Principles

These guidelines are rooted in a philosophical framework which recognises that:-

- As a general rule, children should be educated with their year group.
- Parents are the primary educators of their children and work in partnership with early years and school staff to support their children and young people throughout their educational experience.
- Children have a right to an education that is focused on the development of their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (UNCRC article 29).
- Early years establishments and schools should provide the right help to the right child at the right time and provide an adapted and differentiated curriculum to meet the needs of children and young people with any additional support needs.

Decisions made that relate to children and young people should be based on information specific to those children and young people and also based on best practice.

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Issues to consider for any child educated outside their chronological year group

This guidance relates to individual children who are placed within a class of a different age group. It does not apply to mixed age (composite) classes, where the child is part of an age-matched peer group within the class.

Requests for children to have a 'repeat year' or to advance a year once they start school, can happen at any stage. The same general rule applies in all cases - **children should be educated with their chronological year group**. However, it is helpful to consider the following before any final decisions are made following a request from a parent/carer.

- has the child recently moved to Scotland and been educated in a particular stage already eg a child from an armed forces family who had already transferred to S1 in England but may be the same age as P7 pupils in Highland. Evidence suggests that changing schools can negatively impact on academic attainment and it may be that having time in primary rather than moving into an S1 class mid-way through a session could settle a pupil emotionally and make this transition more successful for them academically, in the longer run;
- is the child particularly able and mature and only misses the age 'cut off' by a few days;
- if the child already has had an advanced year or been accelerated into an older peer group and this request is to move them again, back with their age peers, will this cause further confusion and disruption for the child;
- what level of differentiation and accommodation can be made to meet the child's developmental needs within their peer group;
- as they mature the child may realise that the rest of the class are of a different age, causing an emotional impact;
- the child may begin puberty at a different time from their classmates, which could be confusing for them;
- if the request is for an additional year with a younger age group, the child will be eligible to leave school at 16, and if they have had an additional year, may leave without completing their education, or gaining qualifications;
- other interventions may be more appropriate in the long-term and assuming an additional year will help the child develop, may delay these interventions;
- the needs of a child with significant additional support needs are unlikely to change substantially in 12 months;
- children learn a great deal from their peers, and receive social, emotional, and academic support from each other;
- the evidence (see Appendix 1) suggests that placing students in a different year group rarely makes a positive difference and can lead to negative long-term effects;
- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires local authorities and parents to ensure that children are educated in a way that develops their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. (article 29)

These statements are not conditions to be met, or a checklist for parents and practitioners, but issues that may be helpful to consider in the overall discussion when a request is made.

Deferring a Child's Entry to School

Under current legislation, parents of children aged 4 years old at the start of the school session in August (i.e. those with their 5th birthday on or after the first day of term in August and up to the end of February the following year) have the option to request a deferral about enrolling their child for primary school. These children can start school before they are 5 or can defer their start until the following August.

Most parents choose to send their child to school as soon as they are eligible to start. The following information explains what a parent or carer should do if they do NOT wish to send their child to school as soon as they are eligible.

Reasons for Deferral

If parents/carers have any concerns or wish to discuss their child's entry to school, staff will always be happy to help better understand their child's progress and needs and to support them in considering the issues pertinent to their child. Parents may be concerned that their child is not socially or academically able to cope with the demands of school and formal education and it may be helpful for them to visit the P1 class and/or to discuss aspects of the early level curriculum with the Head Teacher.

Different processes apply according to the reasons why a parent may make a request for their child to defer and also according to when the child has their birthday.

In all instances parents and carers should be encouraged to discuss this first with the Head Teacher or Manager of the early learning and childcare (ELC) setting the child attends, which may also include a child minder.

Requests to Defer Entry to P1

The only compelling reason to defer is if there is general agreement that the 12 months will allow the child to develop to a point where they will be able to more independently access the curriculum alongside their stage peers.

No research evidence consistently identifies any groups or circumstances in which it is helpful to place a child outside their normal year group. However, common sense suggests that there may be some exceptional situations in which deferred entry could be considered an intervention. For example:

- the child may have temporary additional support needs affecting their development,
- the child has only recently arrived into the UK and has not experienced ELC at the same level as their peers and needs time to adjust to nursery/school life,
- the child may have missed a lot of ELC through illness
- the child has a summer birthday and was born very prematurely.

For children with significant additional support needs, deferred entry may be considered as an intervention if it is agreed by the child's parents and the core team around the child that this would be in their best interests. However, it should be noted that in most situations the child will continue

to have significant needs, even with an additional ELC year and so it is most often better to assess the needs of the child and agree an appropriate support package for school rather than deferring school entry.

Where the child's school entry is to be deferred due to their additional support needs, it is good practice to note why the ELC setting is the best place to meet the child's needs on the Child's Plan, with clear targets to be worked on within this additional year. For those children whose school entry is significantly deferred i.e. those for whom deferral will make them 6 years old prior to the first day of term on the following year, a request for assistance and advice must be made to the Educational Psychology Service, to ensure that an Educational Psychologist can add to the assessment process and can be consulted on the decision to defer, with involvement requested in good time.

By the time they reach the age of 4 or 5 years old, there are already differences in each child's development, learning, and levels of independence. Parents and carers may be considering a request to defer their child's entry to school simply because they feel that their child is not yet ready to enter Primary 1. In such circumstances it may be helpful to consider the general development of the child using a very broad range of criteria. Assessment at this stage should be completed by ELC staff, who are asked to ensure the child's assessment record is backed by evidence that shows the areas of immaturity and development. This assessment process may include information and assessments completed by other professionals working with the child, to provide a wider context upon which the final decision can be made. Developmental overviews used in settings are also key to reaching the correct decision.

If parents/ carers are concerned about whether or not their child is ready for school, they should speak directly to the staff who care for their child and/or to the Head Teacher or Manager of the ELC setting their child attends. This initial discussion can take place at any stage in the child's pre-school year. At that and/or subsequent meetings, discussion should focus on the child's progress in their pre-school education, with a particular emphasis on the child's:

- approach and attitude to learning
- ability to communicate their own needs, feelings and ideas
- levels of independence and self help
- emotional and personal development, including self-confidence and esteem
- their relationships and friendships with other children and adults
- additional support needs

Discussions should include:

- the opinion of the child, parents, school and other staff involved about whether it is right for the child and their family
- making sure parents understand any likely future issues
- checking that the child will integrate effectively into the new group
- making sure that any other services the child needs are also involved
- making sure there is a plan for what happens after that year
- checking that the decision is being made for the child's benefit and with cognisance of their right to be educated with their peers.

Requests relating to January - February birth dates

Parents of children with birthdays close to the end of the February cut-off date for school entry, are sometimes concerned about whether their child is ready to start school.

If their child's birthday falls within **January or February** and they wish to defer entry to primary school, their child is **entitled to an additional year** of provision within an ELC setting. Continued funding is available to support this entitlement.

Parents/carers should speak directly to the Head Teacher or Manager of the ELC setting their child attends. They should be asked to complete an enrolment form for an ELC place for the following session. These children will be automatically **prioritised** for a continued place.

Requests relating to August (after the start of term) - December birth dates

If the child's birthday falls between **the first day of term in August and 31st December**, the child will have the same entitlement as children whose birthday falls within January and February and receive funding for an additional year of ELC. Parents/carers should speak directly to the Head Teacher or the Manager of the ELC setting their child attends to discuss deferred entry.

In all cases parents/ carers should be advised to also consider enrolling their child for a Primary One place should they decide nearer to the start of term, that they do wish their child to start school in August.

Decisions about deferral are best made as part of the ongoing profiling of a child and the dialogue with the parents which should take place in the ELC setting their child attends. The information gathered about the child within their ELC profile should form a sound basis for the discussion with their family to inform a decision. If Parent/Guardian decides on a deferred year, the cost of an additional year will be met by the Council.

Even if a parent/carer has chosen to defer entry to school they can change their mind and decide to send their child to school right up until the start of term in August. However, if they do decide to defer their child's entry they must let the school know that they will not require the Primary 1 place.

Early Entry into School

Arrangements for entry to primary schools in Highland are on a once a year basis - at the start of the new session in August each year. Only children whose fifth birthday falls between 1st March of that year and the last day of February of the following year will automatically be admitted to school. It is however in exceptional cases, parents/carers may wish to make a request for early entry to primary school for a child whose fifth birthday falls after the 28th February the following year.

If parents/carers are concerned about whether or not their child should enter school early, they should speak directly to the staff who care for their child and/or to the Head Teacher or Manager of the ELC setting the child attends. At that and/or subsequent meetings, discussion should focus on the child's progress in their early level education.

Discussions should include:

- the opinion of the child, parents, school and other staff involved about whether it is right for the child and their family
- making sure parents understand any likely future issues
- checking that the child will fit into the new class
- taking into account the long-term effects on the child
- making sure that any other services the child needs are also provided
- the effect on children who might otherwise get the place
- checking that the decision is being made for the child's benefit
- a child moving from a school setting in another country

Parents/carers should be aware of the following issues associated with early entry into primary school.

Physical development

Is the child physically mature enough to cope with a full-time programme of education?

School places physical demands on children for approximately five hours each day. If the child is not physically mature enough to deal with the school situation, problems may arise in relation to:

- concentration on a task
- mastering of basic learning skills
- acceptance by other children in relation to the demands of both classroom and playground activities

Emotional/social development

Is the child emotionally and socially mature enough to cope with a full-time programme of education?

As a consequence of early admission to school the child would be younger than the other pupils in the class. Difficulties may arise for the child in relation to:

- separating from parents and carers
- making friends with others within the class group
- play activities within the classroom and the playground
- behavioural problems due to lack of maturity

Cognitive development

Has the child developed sufficiently to cope with the learning demands in a school?

The child learns informally through play and through other individual, social and family experiences in the ELC period. Early entry to school may reduce the opportunities for such activities and experiences, which prepare them for the more formal learning situation.

Long-term implications

Have the parents/carers considered the long-term implications for the child throughout their career?

- the evidence (see Appendix 1) suggests that placing students in a different year group rarely makes a positive difference and can lead to negative long-term effects;
- it may emerge during P1 that the child is not ready to proceed to P2, because of difficulty in adjusting to the school learning environment;
- it may emerge during P7 that the child is not ready to proceed to S1 in secondary school;
- at the end of secondary education, the child may be too young or immature to successfully transition to work or higher education;
- as they mature the child may realise that the rest of the class are of a different age causing an emotional impact;
- the child may begin puberty at a different time from their classmates, which could be confusing for them;
- the child will not be eligible to leave school until their 16th birthday. Starting school early will mean that the child will not be eligible to leave after completing formal examinations in S4 and therefore may miss the start date for a college course generally available at the end of the summer term to S4 school leavers.

Early entry requests

A press advertisement will appear in the local press in the month prior to enrolment, advising parents and carers of the procedures for enrolling their child in primary school. Applications for early entry to primary school should also be made at this time to the Area Education Quality Improvement Manager (EQIM), in order to allow requests to be processed timeously.

Parents or carers do not have to give reasons for making an early entry request. It is however helpful to have this information and if there are more requests than places available, this information could be requested.

Due to the time required to complete an assessment of the child in relation to this request, it is essential that requests be made to the Area EQIM in good time, to allow the procedures to be followed and to ensure that should the request be granted, the child would be able to commence school at the start of the new session.

Parents/carers should complete an ELC enrolment form along with the written early entry request, to ensure that the child has an ELC place if the application for early entry is unsuccessful.

What happens next?

Arrangements will be made to meet with the parents and where necessary to see the child. There may be sufficient information from the early years setting the child has been attending, or the child may be able to be observed in this setting or at home, but in some circumstances, it may be necessary to assess the child more formally. Parents/carers will be informed of how information on their child will be gathered and the nature of any planned assessment.

The information will usually be gathered by the Early Years Education Support Officer (EYESO), who are specialists in ELC education. If the child attends an ELC establishment a report will be requested from the establishment. The purpose of the report will be to determine whether the child has reached the level of development which will allow them to settle happily into a primary one class.

Following this period of information gathering and assessment, a report will be sent from the EYESO to the Area EQIM, with a copy to the parents/carers. If it is decided that the request should be granted, parents/carers will receive a letter inviting them to enrol their child in primary school.

In considering requests for early entry the authority must take into account the normal constraints affecting the provision of education generally. Therefore, in determining any request, in addition to making an assessment of the child's suitability, the authority will require to consider whether additional resources, in terms of staff or adaptation of school buildings or facilities will require to be committed as a result of the early entry request.

If the authority decides to refuse the request, the parents/carers will be advised in writing. **There is no right of appeal against a refusal of an early entry request.**

Appendix 1 Research on the impact of education out-with the peer group and Appendix 2 References can be accessed at this link

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/12333/guidance_on_being_educated_outwith_the_peer_group_including_deferred_and_early_entry_to_school_research_and_references