

Children and Schools Directorate



Educating young people out of their Chronological Age Group in Pembrokeshire

Guide to Good Practice – January 2016

Guidance for ALNCOs, school staff and parents/carers.

Purpose

When supporting children and young people in Pembrokeshire, school staff/ALNCOs, governing bodies and admissions services may be faced with considering whether to support a young person by educating them in a year group different from that of their chronological age. Underlying factors for considering such a decision vary but could be because of:

- a particular additional learning need
- a summer or premature birth date
- a child returning to education following a significant period of absence
- a child recently arrived in the UK
- a parent/carer suggestion.

Most Local Authorities have related policies or guidance relating to this subject. Research into common practices within other Authorities has highlighted that:

- Children's and young people's **voices are typically under-represented** in decision making
- There is a **lack of clarity** as to why young people are being placed out of year group
- There is a **lack of consistent practice** nationally (thus, if a family moves between local authorities there is no guarantee that existing arrangements will be

accommodated which results in further transitions for the young person in question)

- There is a **limited empirical evidence base** in relation to positive outcomes
- Parents, schools and professionals are unclear of the **long term implications** of funding and continuation of support, e.g. a young person is eligible to leave school when they reach the age of 16 years, irrespective of what year group they attend
- There are **inconsistencies in reviewing the decision** throughout a young person's school career.

(Babcock LDP, 2013)

The intention of this policy is to address the critique above, thereby enabling young people, their families and professionals to contemplate the decision to educate out of chronological age group and plan appropriately. This document supports and guides those residing or working within Pembrokeshire and culminates in a guide to good practice which should be adhered to if making such a request to the Local Authority:

- **Context** – existing thoughts
 - **Aide Memoire** – what needs to be considered
 - **Guide to Good Practice** – the process to follow
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Context

In all our endeavours, Pembrokeshire Local Authority seeks to promote a person centred approach when working with young people and supports the accomplishment of recommendations made in the Donaldson report, Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales (2015), namely that all young people educated in Pembrokeshire will be:

- “ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.” (Donaldson, 2015, Pg106)

There is no statutory duty to agree to any request to educate a young person in a year group different from that of their chronological age, nor is there a statutory barrier to prevent such agreement. Pembrokeshire Local Authority and its educational settings will strive to consider all appropriate requests to educate a young person out of their chronological age group. Local Authorities vary in their approach to this issue but in every case it is the responsibility of all participating parties to gather evidence

and consider the best interests of the young person in question.

When contemplating the decision to educate outside a chronological age group there is an expectation that this will be one of a range of support strategies considered, investigated and reported upon to Pembrokeshire Local Authority. Whilst many of the factors taken into consideration will be bespoke it will also be pertinent to consistently consider the long term implications for the individual and bodies of research on the subject, thereby permitting a holistic discussion to be held with family members and the young person themselves, age and stage of development permitting. Key considerations include:

- Research tells us that young people who have been educated in younger age groups **continue to experience academic difficulties** and even when any initial gains are noted, these are found to diminish as the young person moves up through the school and is presented with new learning opportunities (Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland & Sroufe, 1997)
 - **No general academic improvement is noted** for developmentally immature young people when placed out of year group (Hattie, 2009)
 - Young people “held back” show **poorer emotional health and poorer social adjustment** than low achieving peers not held back (Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland & Sroufe, 1997)
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- Young people educated out of their year group report experiencing more bullying than their peers (Clatworthy, 2005)
 - Young people who exhibit intellectual/developmental strengths may not be globally ahead of age expectations and may find components of an older curriculum difficult and challenging to manage. It is sometimes the case that social, emotional and/or physical development presents a mismatch with areas of maturity which places the individual in a situation where they are potentially unable to meet the demands made of them in these areas. These factors can impact, understandably, upon levels of self-esteem, particularly during adolescence. Given such factors it is reasonable to consider whether needs can be equally supported by an enriched curriculum with reasonable adjustments made whilst remaining within the appropriate year group
 - Conversely, young people exhibiting areas of intellectual/developmental delay might not receive appropriate challenge and stimulation by being placed within a year group below their chronological age. Areas of relative strength may be at risk of not receiving appropriate attention whilst general expectations from staff and others may also be influenced. Impact upon the self esteem of the young person also needs careful consideration.
 - In those circumstances where a decision has been made to educate a young person within an older age group then one must consider the long term implications. It will be difficult to reverse such a decision if the situation changes as this will entail the repeat of a curriculum year
 - Maintaining the placement must be regularly monitored by the school setting and re-considered at the point of every transition to a new national curriculum key stage dictating that there is no guarantee that this arrangement will continue throughout the young person's education. This can introduce several periods of significant transition for the young person, all of which are capable of significantly impacting upon their educational progress and self esteem
 - Where a young person is educated ahead of their chronological age group it must be recognised that they will reach significant points in their education ahead of time e.g. SATs, GCSEs, school leaving age, transfer to college etcetera. This may also have implications for the funding that educational settings receive as funding is often determined by age and will not automatically follow the individual
 - Local Authorities vary in their policies and approach to this strategy. It must be recognised that some Local Authorities choose not to contemplate educating a young person in any setting other than their chronological age group. Therefore, if a young person moves home or educational setting one must not assume that any existing arrangements will be honoured.
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Aide Memoire

If you are contemplating a request to educate a young person out of their chronological age group think about.....

- The individual additional learning needs of the young person in question – why are you considering educating this person out of their age group and what value will this add?
 - Contextual factors such as age, stage of development, school resources and future transitions – consider what may be gained and missed if the individual ‘leaves’ their appropriate age group. How would you review, monitor and plan for these to minimise any negative impact?
 - Are there any other ways in which areas of need can be supported? E.g. attending a booster group or social skills group with other children of differing ages at scheduled points within their week.
 - What does the young person in question think? – this will dictate significant changes for them so, whenever appropriate, the young person should be consulted and asked for their opinion and their views **MUST** be represented.
 - Have you undertaken a critical review of the academic research evidence for educating children out of year group – does this lend support to your particular situation? Update yourself on what national research reports on this course of action and decide whether educating out of year group really will provide you with the support you feel the young person needs. The field of research changes constantly so there might be recent publications which prove particularly informative for your individual case.
 - What decision making and review processes are you putting into place if the decision is made to educate out of year group and authorised by the Local Authority? Such a decision does need to be reviewed regularly and throughout the young person’s educational career to safeguard the young person in question.
 - Explore whether there are support agencies who can appropriately support your investigations. The roles of Educational Psychologists and Advisory Support Teachers should focus on the decision-making and review processes. If the young person in question has specific additional learning needs then can any agency offer you additional support to enhance the decision making process? Any such requests should be raised by the school ALNCO at the TAPPAS 1 meetings (Team Around the Pupil, Parent and Setting) held throughout all Pembrokeshire Schools. Similarly your Challenge Advisor will be able to support any considerations regarding the adaptation of existing school resources and systems.
 - Have you included all relevant individuals in your investigations and decision making processes and have you represented everyone’s views? Whether the young person in question is already on roll at a setting or about to enrol there is an expectation that the views of the parent/carer, young person (where appropriate), setting staff and appropriate support agency will be sought and represented.
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Guide to Good Practice: the process

The decision to educate a young person out of year group should be carefully discussed with a range of people as previously mentioned. These discussions should lead to clarity about the **purpose** of placing a young person out of year group and, if a request is made to the Local Authority, appropriate evidence of previous support and discussions needs to be provided. There is an expectation that any request submitted will be detailed, thorough and in adherence to this guidance document.

Authorisation to educate a young person out of their chronological year group should be sought from the Local Authority and is not an action that can be sanctioned by a member of school staff or colleague from a support agency.

Where possible, the young person's views should be gained and represented in the submitted documentation. Young people typically want to be involved in decisions about their education, including whether they will be educated out of their chronological year group. We adhere to the relevant articles outlined within the United Nations Convention on The Rights of The Child (UNCRC, 1989) which promotes the involvement and participation of young people in decision making processes.

Good practice dictates that the people involved in the decision making/investigative process should include: parent/carer; young person; Head Teacher/member of

senior management group; ALNCo; class teacher and other relevant professionals (this will be dependent upon the young person's areas of additional learning need or whether some issues remain systemic e.g. the involvement of the school's Challenge Advisor). Investigations and decision making processes need to occur over time in order to thoroughly consider the needs of the individual and to gather evidence relating to a range of support options.

With due respect for the various documentation formats in existence across settings we have not introduced a specific pro-forma for completion and submission. The Local Authority will accept written requests from settings providing they provide evidence that adheres to the good practice outlined within this document.

The decision to educate a young person out of their chronological year group will generally be implemented as that person approaches the natural end/start of an academic year, thereby encompassing a transition period within a time of naturally occurring change for all. With this in mind, settings need to consider such requests with sufficient time to hold discussions, investigate a range of strategies and involve relevant professionals before making a request to the authority. Parents/carers and young people also require sufficient time to contemplate such a strategy as its consequences are deemed to be significant. It is therefore recommended that such discussions and gathering of evidence takes place over the course of an academic term (minimum).

Requests submitted to the Local Authority need to outline the range of support options considered and the underlying reasons why this option is believed to be the most appropriate and why other options have been discounted.

The support and advice received from relevant agencies/professional colleagues; including those views that disagree with the request should they exist, also need to be presented.

Arrangements for regular and long-term review of the decision also need to be outlined. All review arrangements need to incorporate how the young person's views will be sought at points of review, irrespective of age. Research suggests that the decision to educate a young person outside their year group is not consistently or frequently reviewed (Babcock LDP, 2013). Therefore, there is a need to ensure consistency and good practice across our county. Decisions should be formally reviewed on a regular basis and take into account factors such as:

- Social and emotional wellbeing and development
- Rate of academic progress
- Progress in relation to the original objectives as to why the young person is placed out of year
- Young people, parents / carers, teachers and other professionals (as appropriate) should be involved in this review process.

This review process could take part during the statutory annual review, for those who have a statement of special

educational need, or at the point in the academic term where the setting reviews Individual Education Plan (IEP) targets. It is useful to note that such a review can also be a specific piece of work commissioned from an Advisory Teacher or E.P. within Pembrokeshire (prioritised and commissioned by the school ALNCO at the TAPPAS 1 meeting).

Should the decision to authorise a request to educate a young person out of their chronological year group be given by the Local Authority, there is a duty of care placed upon the setting to provide documentation of an annual review of progress. This should specifically highlight whether or not the continuation of this strategy has been agreed and on what evidence.

Where such a request is made for a young person already in receipt of a statement of special educational need then such a request should be made via the annual review meeting with continued adherence to the need for thorough investigation and consideration of other support strategies, as outlined above. If this option is raised for initial discussion at the point of Annual Review then there is an expectation that a period of investigation will be entered into by the setting, should the option be unanimously considered, and a further review meeting arranged. It is not considered ethical to authorise any request that has simply been discussed at one point in time. Documentation from subsequent annual review meetings will be accepted as evidence of a yearly review by the Local Authority and

should be reported to the SEN Management Team based at County Hall, as is the standard procedure.

Where such a request is made by a parent/carer or professional on behalf of a young person who has not yet enrolled at a school in Pembrokeshire then the relevant setting must work in partnership with the parent/carer and young person (age permitting) to comply with the good practice guidance set out in this document. Any request that is made directly to the Local Authority that has not included the relevant setting will be guided back to the appropriate setting and compliance with this Guide to Good Practice reinforced.

Pembrokeshire Local Authority does not feel it is appropriate for young people to be placed out of year group in order to address resourcing issues. Responsibility for addressing individual additional learning needs remains with the setting and should be administered through an appropriately differentiated and enriched curriculum with reasonable adjustments made. Where this proves challenging then settings are expected to seek support from the range of agencies on offer across Pembrokeshire (e.g. Inclusion Support Services, Challenge Advisors, Special School Outreach Support Services) prior to considering whether to educate a young person out of their chronological age group and for their advice to be sought over time.

With the exception of those young people supported by a statement of special educational need, all documentation

submitted by a setting, in compliance with this Guide, should be forwarded to The Admissions Officer for Pembrokeshire, based at County Hall, Haverfordwest. The Admissions Officer will not be responsible for the authorisation of such requests but will collate documentation and present each case to officers within the Inclusion Service and Education Directorate for their consideration. Feedback will then be provided directly to the setting who will be responsible for supporting the parent/carer regarding any decisions made and required action.