



EMTAS Guidance on the admission outside of the normal age group of learners of English as an Additional Language (EAL)

‘Admission outside of the normal age group’ is sometimes termed ‘acceleration’, ‘deceleration’ or ‘back-yearing’. This guidance focuses on deceleration, and this is the term used throughout. Deceleration is the decision to educate a child in a cohort below that of their chronological peers.

Studies that focus on deceleration cite negative impact on long-term achievement, self-esteem and risks of dropping out of school early with the Education Endowment Foundation noting “negative impact for very high cost based on extensive evidence” (EEF 2021).

The intended audience of this Position Statement includes Parents/Carers, Senior Management in schools, Inclusion Managers, SENDCos, EAL Co-ordinators, Governors, Admissions, Virtual School.

Framing expectations

There is a range of factors which can affect the rate at which multilingual learners will catch up with their peers including:

- age on entering UK educational system
- previous educational background
- level of literacy in first language (L1)
- the degree to which pupils are educationally supported at home
- quality of school provision
- wider cognitive ability/presence of an additional Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND)
- impact of trauma

Typically, multilingual learners have spikey profiles of achievement, performing better in some subjects than others with variation also evident in their use of English in different curriculum subjects. Establishing a baseline and tracking progress in a pupil’s acquisition of English should be done using an EAL-specific scale such as the [EAL Assessment Framework](#) developed by the Bell Foundation.



Learning EAL is not in itself a reason for pupils failing to make progress at an acceptable rate and there should be the expectation that these pupils must make more than average rates of progress if they are ever to catch up with their peers, unless there are additional SENDs.

When a multilingual learner fails to make satisfactory progress or plateaus in their learning it is essential to first consider whether the teaching and learning environment is meeting their needs as a learner of English as an additional language. It may also be relevant to investigate external factors, for example their home circumstances or tensions that may exist within the local community. Whatever the reasons for lack of progress, decelerating multilingual learners is unlikely to be successful as the root cause(s) of the problem will not have been addressed.

Multilingual learners with an additional SEND

The definitive identification of SEND in multilingual pupils can be problematic, though indisputably some children and young people do have both sets of needs. Decelerating pupils with both sets of needs is not regarded as good practice. The situation for these learners is more complicated in terms of expectations about rates of progress. However, mirroring advice for multilingual learners, the local authority has a clear position on decelerating pupils with a SEND:

'Special educational needs cannot, alone, be justification for deceleration/acceleration...deceleration will not have the effect of providing an environment where the child's special needs will be any less.' HCC, 2017.

Effective practice and provision require that schools cater for both sets of needs, which involves understanding and effectively implementing a different set of pedagogies for each.

Cultural considerations

A number of potential barriers may be identified, for example staff misconceptions around different cultural attitudes towards parenting, parents' experiences of different education systems and their ability to communicate in English. In some cases, families 'originate from cultures where parents are not expected to take an active role in child education' and conversely there are situations 'where parents put complete trust in the school and rarely question its authority and the decisions it makes' (Katz, La Placa & Hunter 2007).



Parents/carers from BME backgrounds may be disproportionately vulnerable to fully understanding complex decisions taken by schools and other educational providers around practice and provision for their children. Parents may proactively request deceleration for their child, often because the family has lived in a country where deceleration is a relatively common occurrence. They may also be concerned about their child not having 'good enough' English to be able to achieve end of Key Stage standards. Parents may not appreciate the longer term impacts of deceleration in the UK system, nor that promotion to the next year group is automatic.

Whilst schools must give requests for deceleration due consideration, they should bear in mind its overwhelming drawbacks. In consultation with Education and Inclusion Advisors and EMTAS EAL Specialists, it should be the Head Teacher's final decision, not the parents'.

Good practice for multilingual learners and the potential negative effects of deceleration

Social issues and self-esteem

The local authority has a clear position on deceleration:

'Deceleration is not recommended for pupils for whom English is an additional language and has been found to impact negatively on pupils' self-esteem' HCC, 2017.

Multilingual learners may already be at risk of marginalisation; making friendships can be disproportionately hard for them because of linguistic and cultural barriers. Furthermore, they will be aware that they have been placed with learners younger than themselves. They may also be subject to subtle and/or overt bullying by peers who may express a view that the child is repeating the year because they failed first time round.

Decelerating children later, after they have already settled into one year group, is even more problematic as it may mean that they lose existing friends and have to make new ones.

In addition, peers who are significantly younger than a decelerated multilingual learner will be less equipped to provide effective support eg

- modelling use of spoken English in different contexts
- using first language (L1) as a tool for learning
- having less life experience and therefore a reduced set of life skills to draw upon



- knowing how to provide appropriate social and emotional support.

The learning environment

When a child is educated with peers who are substantially younger, it becomes more problematic to provide a suitable learning environment. Examples include

- ensuring that the curriculum challenge meets the cognitive and academic potential of the child
- avoiding repetition of curricula for those who are asked to repeat a year
- creating suitable opportunities for peers to model age-appropriate oral language (both English and L1)
- providing learning materials that are age-appropriate.

Transition between educational settings

Schools and parents should be aware that deceleration may not be automatically transferred when a child moves from one school setting to another. For example, when a child starts at secondary school any decision to decelerate that was taken in primary phase may be reviewed and the new school may decide to place the child back into their correct chronological year group, ie Year 8. This may result in the child missing the whole of Year 7.

At the point of transition to 16-19 education (eg sixth form or FE college), there may be funding challenges if the child is older than the rest of the cohort. For example, post-16 providers funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) may receive less funding for a student who is over the age of 19 when they undertake a programme of study. See [Funding education for 16 to 19 year olds - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/esfa-funding-for-16-to-19-year-olds) (www.gov.uk)

Recommendations

Schools should

- fully engage with parents/carers, preferably through a face-to-face meeting
- consider if interpreter support is needed for parents/carers in meetings about deceleration
- ensure that the disadvantages of deceleration are effectively communicated
- automatically involve secondary aged multilingual learners in decisions around deceleration and think carefully about seeking the views of older primary aged pupils



- be confident that whilst parents/carers have the right to disagree with the school's decision and the right to have their views heard, any decision to decelerate must be made in the best interests of the child.

Involving EAL specialists

It is recommended that schools involve EAL specialists before any final decision is taken, even if the principle reason for decelerating a child is not because the child is a learner of EAL. Hampshire Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) employs interpreters and Specialist Teacher Advisors who are available to facilitate parent conferencing and offer advice about pedagogy, practice and provision for multilingual learners.

EMTAS Specialist Teacher Advisor Team December 2025

Supporting Literature and links

Bell Foundation (2016). [EAL Assessment Framework](#).

[Education and Endowment Fund Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#) (2021), *Repeating a Year*.

Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), [Funding education for 16 to 19 year olds - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

HCC (2017). *The placement of children outside their chronological year group*.
<https://documents.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/HIAS/placementofchildrenoutsidetheirchronologicalyeargroup.pdf>.

Katz, I., La Placa, V., & Hunter, S. (2007). *Barriers to inclusion and successful engagement of parents in mainstream services*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.