

Student Placement Guidelines

Frequently Asked Questions (Parents)

Section 1 – Scope and Overview

What is the scope of these guidelines?

These guidelines apply to students from Pre-KG (FS1) through Grade 9 (Year 10) across all Dubai private schools and early childhood centres (ECCs).

They stop at Grade 9 because Grades 10–12 are formal qualification years (IGCSE, IB, AP, A-Level, and MoE curricula), during which placement and promotion decisions are governed by external examination boards and Ministry of Education (MoE) regulations.

Any placement or progression decision beyond Grade 9 (Year 10) must be approved by KHDA in line with the Ministry of Education's policies and the relevant curriculum's qualification rules.

They are governed by:

- [Ministerial Resolution No. 24 of 2021 \(Age Requirements\)](#)
- [MOE amendment - Admission Age Guide for KG and Grade 1 Students December 2025](#)
- [Executive Council Resolution No. \(2\) of 2017 – Regulating Private Schools in Dubai –](#)
- [Federal Law No. 3 of 2016 \(Child Rights – Wadeema's Law\)](#)
- [Federal Law No. 29 of 2006 \(Rights of People of Determination, amended 2009\)](#)

For example, a Grade 11 student in a British curriculum school is struggling to meet AS-Level requirements, and the school recommends repeating Grade 11. The school must submit the request to KHDA for authorisation, ensuring it also meets the Ministry of Education's progression and equivalency criteria and the exam board's regulations. KHDA will review the case and issue approval once compliance with both the MoE and the awarding body's requirements is confirmed.

Section 2 – Standard Grade Placement

How is my child's grade/year group decided?

Your child's age is the main factor, in line with [*Ministerial Resolution No. 24 of 2021 \(Age Requirements\)*](#) on Student Registration Controls.

- For Pre-KG through KG2 (FS1 to Year 1): age is the primary and overriding placement rule.
- For Grade 1 (Year 2) and above: the transfer certificate (TC) is the primary placement reference. Where the TC grade and the UAE age–grade chart differ, the school must notify KHDA before confirming placement. The answer below reflects the previous policy and should be read in light of this change.

KHDA follows the official UAE age cut-off dates:

- December 31 – for schools that start the academic year in September
- March 31 – for schools that start the academic year in April

Children who have not reached the required age by these dates cannot be placed in the corresponding grade or year group, even if they are close to the cut-off or have studied that level elsewhere. **This rule applies to all private schools in Dubai** and ensures fairness, readiness, and consistency across curricula.

For example, if a child turns six on January 1 in a September-start school, they will join KG2 (Year 1), not Grade 1 (Year 2).

Do nurseries and early childhood centres follow these rules too?

Yes, all ECCs and nurseries must follow Dubai's official age–grade chart from Pre-KG (FS1) onwards. Skipping or repeating any year in a nursery or ECC setting is not permitted without KHDA approval.

An additional one-time transitional arrangement applies to certain children starting school for the first time in 2026–27 (see below).

What if my child is new to Dubai and has never gone to school before?

Children moving from countries where formal schooling begins later (such as Finland, where it starts at age 7) can begin directly in Grade 1 (Year 2) if they meet the UAE's official age-entry requirements.

KHDA understands that children in this situation may not yet read, write, or follow classroom routines at the same level as their classmates. Schools must therefore help your child catch up through:

- Targeted in-class support and differentiated teaching
- Beginner-level literacy and numeracy activities
- A short-term individual learning plan (ILP) focusing on confidence, language, and social adjustment
- Additional help to catch up during the first term

These supports help your child settle into learning at the right pace without needing a grade adjustment or exceptional placement.

For example, a seven-year-old moving from Finland joins Grade 1 (Year 2) in Dubai. The school provides phonics lessons, reading practice, and extra attention to help the child adjust successfully.

What is changing in 2026–27 regarding the age cut-off?

From the 2026–27 academic year, Dubai private schools and early childhood centres will follow the Ministry of Education's updated age cut-off. The 2026–27 academic year will be a transitional year.

Who does this affect?

The updated rule applies only to children who are registering in the KHDA system for the first time in 2026–27.

It does not affect:

- Children already enrolled in a Dubai school or nursery
- Children transferring within Dubai

One-time flexibility for children born between September 1 and December 31, 2022

If your child:

- Is not currently enrolled in any school or nursery, and
- Was born between September 1 and December 31, 2022,

you and the school may decide whether FS1 or FS2 (or the equivalent year group) is the most suitable starting point during the 2026–27 academic year.

In UK curriculum schools only, limited flexibility may apply for entry into FS1 where readiness is formally assessed and documented. This does not apply to other year groups.

If the school and parents do not agree on readiness, the school's professional judgement will apply, subject to KHDA review if formally requested.

Once your child is enrolled in a year group, they will continue their education through normal age progression and will not move up or down later unless approved through KHDA's formal exceptional placement process.

From the 2027–28 academic year onward, all new registrations will follow the revised age cut-off strictly, with no cohort-based flexibility.

What if my child was placed in a lower grade before moving to Dubai or started school late?

KHDA reviews each case carefully to ensure your child is in a grade that supports both their wellbeing and academic progress.

For Pre-KG through KG2 (FS1 to Year 1): your child will be placed by age, regardless of previous placement.

For Grade 1 (Year 2) and above: your child will be placed in the grade shown on their transfer certificate (TC).

Where the TC shows a lower grade than the UAE age–grade chart, the school uses the TC and notifies KHDA if there is a significant discrepancy.

If your child was previously demoted or started school later than their peers, they will usually be placed in their correct age-appropriate grade or year, with the school providing the appropriate support, in line with the age–grade chart (Appendix 1). If recent assessments show your child cannot yet access learning at that level, the school may apply for an exceptional placement with KHDA, submitting full evidence and support history.

For example, a child who completed Grade 1 abroad at age eight will normally be placed in Grade 3 (Year 4) in Dubai. If specialist reports and a current Individual Education Plan (IEP) shows developmental delays, the school may apply for an exceptional placement in Grade 2 (Year 3) instead.

What if my child is ahead of their age group because of schooling abroad?

For Grade 1 (Year 2) and above: your child will be placed in the grade shown on the transfer certificate (TC), even if this is above their age on the UAE chart. Where the TC is more than one year above the age–grade chart, the school must notify KHDA before confirming placement.

For Pre-KG through KG2 (FS1 to Year 1): age applies only, regardless of prior schooling.

If your child has completed higher-level learning and demonstrates readiness, the school can apply for KHDA approval for an exceptional placement above age level.

For example, if a six-year-old has completed Grade 2 (Year 3) abroad, KHDA will review the documentation and decide whether Grade 2 or Grade 3 (Year 4) is the most suitable placement, taking into account both learning and emotional readiness.

How are mid-year transfers handled?

The same age–grade rules apply. If your child joins mid-year or if documents are delayed, the school will place them by age and create a temporary support plan until full records are received.

For Grade 1 (Year 2) and above: mid-year transfers are placed by TC grade. Where the TC and the age–grade chart diverge, KHDA must be notified before placement is confirmed.

For Pre-KG through KG2 (FS1 to Year 1): the age–grade chart applies. If documents are delayed, the school places students by age and creates a temporary support plan.

Any mid-year grade or year-group change requires KHDA approval through the school.

Section 3 – Support, Learning Needs, and Demotion

Does my child have to repeat a year if they are struggling?

Usually, no. Children in Dubai are expected to progress with their age group.

A child will only be allowed to have an exceptional placement (sometimes called a grade adjustment) if all four of the following are true:

1. Your school has provided sustained, high-quality support with documented evidence
2. Professional assessment confirms your child has significant developmental delay

3. Your child cannot access learning or faces risk of harm despite this support

4. KHDA has formally approved the exceptional placement in writing

All four conditions must be met. You have the right to see evidence and participate in this decision.

My child has weak grades or missed school years. Can they be placed in a lower grade?

No, not for these reasons alone. Low grades, late entry, or gaps in schooling are not valid reasons for a grade adjustment or exceptional placement.

Schools must provide targeted support, which may include:

- Screening to identify learning needs
- Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- Specialist assessments or therapy referrals
- English as an Additional Language (EAL) or small-group teaching

Demotion is only considered after these steps are documented and reviewed by KHDA. Parents should expect the school to keep them informed through written learning plans and progress reviews before any placement change is considered.

What happens if my child has learning needs or receives therapy?

Schools must provide inclusive support for all students. Any request for placement change must include full documentation; therapy reports, assessments, and school support records. KHDA reviews these cases to ensure that decisions are consistent and fair across all schools.

Can my child be placed in a lower grade because they don't speak English?

No, English support must be provided through EAL or additional learning sessions within the same grade/year group, not by moving your child down a grade.

Section 4 – Special Cases (Maturity and Giftedness)

Can children be held back in nursery or FS years for maturity reasons?

No, holding a child back for “maturity” alone is not allowed. Placement changes require documented evidence of a developmental need reviewed by KHDA. This remains the general rule, except for the limited one-time transitional flexibility applicable to eligible children starting in 2026–27.

Can my child skip a grade if they are gifted?

Not usually. Gifted students should receive enrichment and advanced learning within their age group. Grade skipping requires KHDA approval and a full evidence review confirming readiness across academic, emotional, and social domains.

What is a Non-Admission Notification (NON) form?

If your child is refused admission due to inclusion needs or class capacity after submitting all documents, the school must send a NON form to KHDA. This ensures transparency and allows KHDA to monitor inclusion practices fairly. Parents do not need to complete this form; it is submitted by the school to KHDA.

Q: My child missed a term of school . Their Transfer Certificate shows Year 4 as incomplete. What happens when they re-enrol?

When a child returns to school, whether to the same school or a different one, with an incomplete Transfer Certificate (TC) for Year 4, the school cannot simply place them into Year 5 without first checking whether they are ready to access that year group's curriculum.

The school is required to carry out an assessment to establish what your child knows and can do, and whether any gaps from the missed term are likely to affect their ability to access Year 5 learning. This assessment should be prompt and should not delay your child's return to school unnecessarily.

There are two possible outcomes:

- The assessment shows your child can access Year 5: The school enrolls them into Year 5 with appropriate support in place for any gaps identified.
- The assessment shows your child cannot yet access Year 5: The school must gather strong evidence, including the assessment findings, details of what was missed, and any specialist or professional information available and submit a formal exceptional placement request to KHDA. KHDA will review the evidence and make the placement decision. Parental agreement is required as part of this process.

An incomplete TC alone is not sufficient grounds to hold your child back. The school must demonstrate, through evidence, that repeating the year group is in your child's best educational interest. If you have concerns about how the school is handling this, you can contact KHDA directly.

Section 5 – Process and Parental Role

What role do parents play in placement decisions?

Parents are essential partners.

You should:

- Share all reports and assessments (medical, therapy, school records)
- Meet with the school to discuss placement decisions
- Provide written consent before the school sends any placement request to KHDA
- Support your child at home if a placement change is approved

Who makes the final decision in special cases?

KHDA reviews all evidence and issues a written decision to schools. Schools must then communicate the outcome to parents.

What evidence does KHDA need to see to approve a placement change?

KHDA expects:

- Assessment results from the school and specialists
- Evidence of sustained support (such as IEPs, ILPs, therapy reports)
- A risk assessment explaining why staying in the current grade would cause harm
- A detailed transition plan for the child's wellbeing and learning

What support can I expect if my child changes grades?

If KHDA approves a grade/year change, the school must:

- Create a structured transition plan (covering academic, emotional, and social support)
- Review progress with you at four weeks, eight weeks, and at the end of the term
- Adjust plans as needed and record progress

You can request written copies of the review notes and updates to your child's learning plan from the school.

How long does KHDA take to decide?

Once the school submits all required documents, KHDA aims to issue a decision within 10 working days.

To avoid delays, schools must share all relevant records (assessments, IEPs, specialist reports) at the time of submission. If additional documents are requested, the review period may be extended.

Section 6 – Appeals and Fairness

Can parents appeal a KHDA decision?

Yes, but:

- Appeals are only accepted if new evidence, such as a recent medical or educational report, is provided in writing within 30 calendar days of the decision.
- Appeals must be submitted through your child's school, not directly by parents.
- An independent KHDA panel (separate from the original reviewers) will assess the appeal and issue a final decision.

How does KHDA ensure this process is fair?

The system protects your child's wellbeing and right to education by:

- Using one clear age–grade chart for all schools
- Reviewing cases with qualified specialists

- Making decisions based on documented evidence
- Holding schools accountable for providing adequate support before requesting grade changes

KHDA's goal is to ensure every decision prioritises the child's wellbeing, access to learning, and fairness across all schools in Dubai.

Appendix 1 - Comparative Age and Curriculum Equivalence Table

Comparative Age and Curriculum Equivalence Table									
		Students joining schools that start the academic year in September should be the appropriate age by December 31					Students joining schools that start the academic year in April should be the appropriate age by March 31	Students joining schools that start the academic year in January should be the appropriate age by December 31	
Age	England and Wales (UK) 13-year system	UAE MOE	International Baccalaureate (IB)	USA 13-year system (K-12)	Russia	Philippines	India/Pakistan	Australia	South Africa
3	FS1	Pre-KG	PYP Early Years (Pre-K)	Pre-K	Младшая группа KG	KG1	KG1	Pre-school	Pre-school
4	FS2 Reception	KG1	PYP Early Years	KG1	Средняя группа KG	KG2	KG2	Pre-school	Pre-school
5	Year 1	KG 2	PYP Early Years	KG2	Старшая группа KG	Grade 1	Grade 1	Prep	Gr 0 / Rec
6	Year 2	Grade 1	PYP Year 1	Grade 1	Подготовительная группа Pre-school	Grade 2	Grade 2	Year 1	Grade 1
7	Year 3	Grade 2	PYP Year 2	Grade 2	1 Class	Grade 3	Grade 3	Year 2	Grade 2
8	Year 4	Grade 3	PYP Year 3	Grade 3	2 Class	Grade 4	Grade 4	Year 3	Grade 3
9	Year 5	Grade 4	PYP Year 4	Grade 4	3 Class	Grade 5	Grade 5	Year 4	Grade 4
10	Year 6	Grade 5	PYP Year 5	Grade 5	4 Class	Grade 6	Grade 6	Year 5	Grade 5
11	Year 7	Grade 6	MYP Year 1	Grade 6	5 Class	Grade 7	Grade 7	Year 6	Grade 6
12	Year 8	Grade 7	MYP Year 2	Grade 7	6 Class	Grade 8	Grade 8	Year 7	Grade 7
13	Year 9	Grade 8	MYP Year 3	Grade 8	7 Class	Grade 9	Grade 9	Year 8	Grade 8
14	Year 10	Grade 9	MYP Year 4	Grade 9 (Freshman)	8 Class	Grade 10	Grade 10	Year 9	Grade 9
15	Year 11	Grade 10	MYP Year 5	Grade 10 (Sophomore)	9 Class	Grade 11	Grade 11	Year 10	Grade 10
16	Year 12	Grade 11	DP Year 1 (Grade 11)	Grade 11 (Junior)	10 Class	Grade 12	Grade 12	Year 11	Grade 11
17	Year 13	Grade 12	DP Year 2 (Grade 12)	Grade 12 (Senior)	11 Class	— (Post sec.)	Post-Grade 12	Year 12	Grade 12