

Age group eligibility – change from September 2026

From the 2026-27 academic year, IAPS will be updating its approach to age group eligibility for competitions to better reflect pupils' school experiences.

Update to age group eligibility criteria

Where National Governing Body (NGB) rules allow, pupils may compete in the school year group they are enrolled in, rather than strictly by date of birth.

Where a NGB has specific age regulations, these will always take precedence, and IAPS will follow those rules in full. This means that where NGB rules do not permit pupils to play outside of their chronological age group, the year group eligibility provision will not apply.

This applies only where NGB rules permit, and all of the following conditions are met:

- A pupil has been held back by one year for educational or pastoral reasons
- A maximum of one year outside of chronological age is permitted
- The pupil is formally enrolled in that year group at their school

Key clarification and rationale

This rule is not intended to restrict pupils from playing up an age group where selected on merit. Rather, it ensures that pupils who are educated in a year group one year below their chronological age are able to compete alongside their peers, while preventing selection into younger age groups for performance advantage.

This approach recognises that some pupils are placed in a different year group for valid educational or pastoral reasons. By aligning competition eligibility with school year groups, our aim is to support pupil wellbeing, inclusion and positive peer experiences, while maintaining consistency with governing body requirements where these apply.

Questions you might have

Can a pupil play down an age group?

Yes, only if they are enrolled in that year group and are no more than one year behind their chronological age for educational or pastoral reasons.

Can a pupil play up an age group?

Yes. This guidance does not restrict pupils from playing up where selected on merit and where NGB guidance allows for this.

What if a pupil has been held back more than one year?

The rule allows pupils who have been held back by one year group to compete within their current enrolled year group. Pupils who have been held back by more than one year are not eligible under this provision.

What if the sport's governing body has its own age rules?

NGB age rules always take precedence and must be followed.

What evidence may be required?

Schools confirm on entry that they have applied this rule. They should be able to verify the pupil's official year group if required.

When does this come into effect?

From the start of the 2026-27 academic year.