

Dear Head Teacher,

RE: Classroom placement decisions for multiple birth children in primary school

Twins Trust is the largest charity of its kind in the world with over 19,000 family members and 200 local groups across the UK. We were set up over 40 years ago and have spent considerable time and resources into reviewing best practice for multiple birth children starting primary school.

As part of our work, we supported the Hackney Learning Trust to produce guidance for schools to help them and their families to determine how to make classroom placement decisions for twins, triplets or more which can be found on our website.

You will be able to see that all the research that has been conducted, and best practice, strongly suggests that these decisions should be taken on a case by case basis depending on the individual needs of the children. **There should not be a blanket policy recommending separation or keeping the children together in the same class.** The research conducted in the UK and internationally suggests that this can have a detrimental impact on their experience and development.

While there is no legislation governing this matter, the Government's position was confirmed in a debate in Parliament (Hansard reference: 6 Jan 2010 : Column 140WH) that they expect parents of twins, triplets or more to be consulted on this decision:

The Minister for Schools and Learners (Mr.Vernon Coaker) said, "I would like to address the Hon. Gentleman's important point about respecting parents' wishes on what class their children should be placed in. Wherever possible, schools should take into account parents' wishes about where children should be placed, and certainly the expectation is that good practice would demand that the school consults the parents on the placement of their children. I do not know whether every parent of every twin would want their children placed in the same class, but certainly the important point the Hon. Gentleman made was about consultation with parents, which is absolutely right and would be good practice in most schools."

He added, "I agree with the Hon. Gentleman that the rights of the parents and the expression of their wishes should be paramount. In the vast majority of cases where schools have consulted with parents who wish their children to be together, they have been placed together, and I am saying that that would be my hope and expectation. The issue for us is that framing that in legislation is difficult. However, reading into the record the fact that that is our expectation and certainly an example of good practice, which one would expect a good school to follow, means that schools will be expected to consult with parents about what they think is appropriate for their children. That would be expected to happen as a matter of course on a range of issues, and clearly it should also happen for an issue as important as which class their sons or daughters are in."

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The Government's approach has been consistently applied. The first complaint to the Department of Education by a parent who disagreed with a school's blanket policy to separate twins resulted in the following ruling (Macdonald v John Ray Infants school, September 2014):

"We will be writing to the school to make it clear that they must not have a blanket policy in relation to the separation of twins and that any written policy they have must ensure that the individual circumstances of each case are taken into account."

We expect further complaints of this nature to result in the same outcome.

To conclude, if you have a blanket policy in place then we would urge you to update it to reflect best practice. There is more information available on our website and if you have any questions then please do come back to us.

Yours faithfully,

Shauna Leven

Chief Executive Officer

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