



St Columba's
Catholic Primary School

God's Glory Always

Retention or Acceleration of Students: Policy and Procedures

This document builds on background information provided by Brisbane Catholic Education. In 2012, the school community committed to formally reviewing the school's repeating practices, resulting in a review of the literature and latest research, as well as focused discussion and consultation. This was led by members of the School Leadership and Student Learning Support Teams, whose members included:

Martin Wilkie (Principal)
Margo Carwardine (Assistant Principal)
Anne Ryan (Support Teacher, Inclusive Education)
Meg Grouhel (Support Teacher, Inclusive Education)
Susan Peatey (Class Teacher and Gifted and Talented Support Teacher)
Cecily Cairns (Guidance Counsellor)

In 2013 the School community expanded on the initial position, which focused on Retention of Students, to include policy and procedures for acceleration of students.

The school community is further thankful for the guidance and support received from Mark Quinn, Counsellor Supervisor, Brisbane Catholic Education; Rebecca Parsons, Brisbane Catholic Education Consultant – Inclusive Education; Pat Coughlan, Brisbane Catholic Education Area Supervisor and the St Columba's School Board (2012 and 2013)



St Columba's School

Repeating or Accelerating Students: Guidelines and Protocols

St Columba's School will work with parents to ensure all students experience success in their learning.

We acknowledge that there is a variety of reasons (predominately developmental) as to why students, families or school personnel may consider the option of repeating or acceleration for a student. Each child nominated for this option will be considered as an individual who brings their own unique perspective.

Retention, or Repeating Students

Our school recognizes a number of significant effects of repeating, aligning with the following dimensions:

- (a) "The effects on academic achievement – where research has indicated short-term gains and long-term problems because grade-repeaters eventually fall further behind;
- (b) The effects on student self-esteem, peer relationships, and attitudes towards school – with negative outcomes in these areas leading to an increased rate of dropping out; and
- (c) The effects on school operations – whereby high levels of grade repetition can lead to increased class sizes and classroom management problems (due to large age differences among pupils in the same classroom)." (Brophy, 2006, p6) In addition, at our school, with the high demand for places in our early years classes (especially Prep), repeating a child in Prep can result in a child from a Catholic family living in our parish not receiving an offer of enrolment due to an additional place being reallocated to a repeating student.

At St Columba's, our default strategy is therefore automatic promotion of students, including those with verified learning needs. This position is accompanied with the commitment that such student promotion is supported by a range of initiatives (for example early intervention, inclusion support, remedial instruction, behavior support, collaboration with other professionals, personal education planning, parent involvement etc) that are specifically designed to help a struggling student to achieve.

Within this context, we acknowledge however, that in some circumstances we may need to give consideration for a student to be retained in a level for an additional twelve months. This will result in a discernment process involving key stakeholders. If a class teacher considers that having a child repeat the current Year level is in the child's best interests, or is approached by parents who believe this may be the case, the following protocols are to be followed:

- The class teacher is to complete *Nomination of a Student for Retention form* (Appendix 1)

Or

- If a parent approaches the class teacher, the class teacher is to actively listen to their concerns and ask the parent/s to complete *Nomination of a Student for Retention form* (Appendix 1), returning it to the class teachers as soon as possible. The class teacher should not be put in the position to provide advice or an opinion at this point in time. Parents with such concerns are called to have initiated this conversation with class teachers no later than **Week 1 of Term 3**.
- It is expected that the class teacher will have already accessed the Brisbane Catholic Education document *What if I Have a Concern About a Learner?* Parents may also choose to access this reference. This document supports teachers and parents in focusing their concerns and identifying what supports are needed for a learner and how, when and where these can best occur. Further reading, as noted below, may also be accessed by interested parties.
- The class teacher is to speak with relevant personnel at school. This will involve the Support Teachers – Inclusive Education (ST-IEs) firstly. This conversation is required to have taken place no later than **Week 2 of Term 3**.

- If necessary, the ST-IE will take concerns to school Leadership at a Support Team Meeting (which is inclusive of the Guidance Counsellor), no later than **Week 3 of Term 3**. At this meeting, the completed *Nomination of a Student for Retention* form will be tabled, plus teacher / ST-IE collected evidence / information about identified concerns (work samples, reports, NAPLAN, incident reports, running records, observations, behaviour tallies, etc).
- Involved stakeholders will be called to a meeting, if necessary, to discuss implications and action, no later than **mid Term 3**. Prior to this gathering, all stakeholders will be reminded of this *Position, Guidelines and Protocols*, inclusive of the above *Background Information*. Additional literature may also be provided. It is anticipated that notification of a decision will be provided no later than the commencement of **Term 4**.

Accelerating, or Promoting Students

Our school recognises that for some gifted students, accelerated progression is one way of enhancing the child's growth and development. The pursuit of this avenue will result in a discernment process involving key stakeholders. If a class teacher considers that having a child accelerated beyond the current Year level is in the child's best interests, or is approached by parents who believe this may be the case, the following protocols for investigating acceleration are to be followed:

- The class teacher is to complete *Nomination of a Student for Acceleration form* (Appendix 2)
- Or*
- If a parent approaches the class teacher, the class teacher is to actively listen to their concerns and ask the parent/s to complete *Nomination of a Student for Acceleration form* (Appendix 2) , returning it to the class teacher as soon as possible. The class teacher should not be put in a position to provide advice or an opinion at this point in time.
 - Members of the school Leadership Team, Student Support Team (inclusive of the Guidance Counsellor), Gifted and Talented Support Teacher and Class Teacher consider the *International Guidelines on Suitability for Accelerated Progression*, from the GERRIC Modules (6) (Appendix 2).
 - The above group considers the use of the Iowa Acceleration Scale (suggested by GERRIC Modules), as an instrument to investigate suitability for acceleration.
 - The Gifted and Talented Support Teacher collates data – IQ tests, Standardised test results, GC reports, Work Samples, Observations, Meeting Notes and a list of what has happened so far, and presents to the groups identified in point 3 above.
 - A member from the school leadership team discusses consideration with the Area Supervisor.
 - The group identified in point 3 above meets, with the addition of Parents, and Consultant- Inclusive Education, to discuss all of the above and create a new plan for the student.
 - Should acceleration be nominated as a way forward, the new plan for the student created at this meeting will specifically plan for the student's acceleration. This is to be reviewed in 6 weeks (set date at meeting), listing – Goals, Strategies and how the plan will be reviewed (How will we know this has been successful?).

The final decision to retain or accelerate a student will be made in the best interest of the student and in full consultation with parents. The final decision will rest with the Principal.

Further Reading

The Major Issues in the Retention Debate

<http://www.acsso.org.au/hattie080722.pdf>

Influences on Student Learning

<http://www.education.auckland.ac.nz/webdav/site/education/shared/hattie/docs/influences-on-student-learning.pdf>

Still Unacceptable Trends in Kindergarten Entry and Placement

<http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/Psunacc.pdf>

NASP White Paper - Grade Retention and Social Promotion

http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/positionpapers/WhitePaper_GradeRetentionandSocialPromotion.pdf

NASP Position Statement - Grade Retention and Social Promotion

http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/positionpapers/GradeRetentionandSocialPromotion.pdf

Teachers Make a Difference: What the Research Says

<http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Pedagogy-and-assessment/Building-effective-learning-environments/Teachers-Make-a-Difference-What-is-the-Research-Evidence>

References

ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE, CATHOLIC EDUCATION COUNCIL (July, 2012) *Enrolment of Students Policy*

ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE, CATHOLIC EDUCATION COUNCIL (July, 2012) *Family School Partnership Policy*

BAILEY, S, with DEPT. OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING, THE UNIVERSITY OF N.S.W and GIFTED EDUCATION RESEARCH RESOURCES AND INFORMATION CENTRE (2004) *International Guidelines on the Suitability for Accelerated Progression*, in *Gifted and Talented Education Professional Development Package for Teachers, Module 6, Primary*

BRISBANE CATHOLIC EDUCATION, What if I Have a Concern About a Learner?

<https://kweb.bne.catholic.edu.au/LandT/Curriculum/LiteracyNumeracy/AdjustmentsforLearners/Documents/What%20if%20I%20have%20a%20concern%20about%20a%20learner.pdf>

BROPHY, J. (2006) *Grade Repetition*. Education Policy Series, International Academy of Education and International Institute for Educational Planning. UNESCO <http://www.unesco.org/iiep/PDF/Edpol6.pdf>

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN (2009) *Where We Stand on School Readiness*

MARTIN, A (2011) *Holding Back and Holding Behind: Grade Retention and Student's Non-Academic and Academic Outcomes*. British Educational Research Journal, 37:5, 739 - 763

McGRATH, DR H. (2006) *To Repeat or Not to Repeat?* Faculty of Education, Deakin University, Melbourne (Published July 2006, in *WORDS: Journal of the Western Australian Primary Principals' Association*)

QUINN, MARK (2006) *Repeating Students: Why do we still do it?* (copy available from St Columba's School)

UCLA CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS – PROGRAM AND POLICY ANALYSIS (July, 2006) *Grade Retention: What's the Prevailing Policy and What Needs to Be Done? (A Centre Policy and Practice Brief)*



Nomination of a Student for Retention

APPENDIX 1

(To be completed by a student's teacher or parent/carer)

Student's Name:

Date of Birth:

Current Year Level:

Class Teacher:

Childhood History:

Please give a brief history of the student's years prior to school with emphasis on behaviours that led you to believe in his/her need to repeat / be retained in a year level of schooling.

Student's Profile:

Intellectual ability / areas of concerns:

Academic strengths:

Social and emotional maturity:

Physical aptitudes:

Creative behaviours:

Special interests:

Work habits: eg task commitment, responsibility, independence.

Other Questions:

Why do you want the student to be retained in a given year level?

What goals would you hope to achieve through retention?

What strategies have you used to meet these goals? Please give a brief history of these and the outcomes.

Signature (Parent/carer or teacher) _____

Date: _____



Nomination of a Student for Acceleration

APPENDIX 2

(To be completed by a student's teacher or parent/carer)

Student's Name:

Date of Birth:

Current Year Level:

Class Teacher:

Childhood History:

Please give a brief history of the student's years prior to school with emphasis on behaviours that led you to believe in his/her giftedness.

Student's Profile:

Intellectual ability / areas of concerns:

Academic strengths:

Social and emotional maturity:

Physical aptitudes:

Creative behaviours:

Special interests:

Work habits: eg task commitment, responsibility, independence.

Other Questions:

Why do you want the student to be accelerated?

What goals would you hope to achieve through acceleration?

What strategies have you used to meet these goals? Please give a brief history of these and the outcomes.

Signature (Parent/carer or teacher) _____

Date: _____

Some of the guidelines used internationally to assist school Principals in determining gifted students' suitability for accelerated progression include the following:

1. It is not necessary for every student to be psychometrically tested. However, in the case of students who are being considered for accelerated progression, there should be a comprehensive psychological assessment of their intellectual functioning, academic skill levels and social-emotional adjustment by a trained psychologist.
2. Academically, the student should demonstrate skill levels above the average for the class they desire to enter.
3. Socially and emotionally, the student should be free of any serious adjustment problems. Principals, should be aware, however, that in some gifted students social or emotional difficulties may have been caused by inappropriately low grade placement. In such cases the situation may be alleviated by accelerated progression.
4. The student should be in good physical health. The student's size, however, should be considered only to the extent that competitive sport may be viewed as important in their later years.
5. It is important that the student should not feel unduly pressured by parents / guardians. The student themselves should be eager to move ahead.
6. The receiving teacher must have positive attitudes towards the grade advancement and must be willing to help the student adjust to the new situation.
7. Judgements about the student's social and emotional maturity should include input from the student's parents / carers and the psychologist. Gifted students are sometimes rejected by their classmates. It is important that teachers do not confuse the absence of close peer relationships with social immaturity.
8. Ideally, grade advancement should occur at natural transitions points, such as the beginning of the school year. However, mid-year advancement may sometimes be desirable where the student's prior teacher and receiving teacher may more easily confer about how best to help the student make a smooth transition.
9. All cases of accelerated progression should be arranged on a trial basis of at least six weeks. The student should be aware that if the trial period is not a success, they will return to the original grade placement. It is important that in such a circumstance the student should not be made to feel that they have 'failed'.
10. Care should be exercised not to build up excessive expectations from grade advancement. A small minority of gifted students are so far advanced in their intellectual or academic development that one year of accelerated progressions may still leave them bored at school. For such students further advancement may be considered at a later period in their schooling.
11. Decisions regarding accelerated progressions should be based on facts rather than myths. The research literature on acceleration reveals that accelerated progression benefits the gifted student both academically and socially. Conversely, failure to advance a highly gifted student may result in poor study habits, apathy, lack of motivation and maladjustment.

Adapted from Feldfusen, J. F, Proctor, T.B. & Black, K.N. (1986) *Guidelines for Grade Advancement of Precocious Children*, Roper Review, 9 (1), 25-27.

At: www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/manuals/pdf_doc/accelerated_guide.pdf (pp.37-38)