

Guidelines for Repetition of a School Year in Primary Education

Repeating a year in primary school can be a sensitive matter for both students and parents. It's crucial to approach this situation with empathy, understanding, and a focus on the child's overall development. In regards to the overall decision here at Bishop Drutt College, we look at each student's case on an individual basis and the research that goes into forming our decision.

The logic behind retention is that students who do not meet a required benchmark or are seen to underachieve will be given extra time in that year's level to catch up, mature or master key concepts that have been missed along the way. Current research does not support repetition as a strategy for students who are not achieving expectations and is one of the educational interventions that is seen to do a great deal of harm.

In years gone by, repetition was a common and accepted practice where concepts and skills that were taught were in stand-alone one-year courses. The indicator of success or failure was the academic achievement of the student. Current pedagogy and practice suggests schools cater for a wide range of student abilities, offering modifications to classroom programs. A more modern approach is to provide the support a student needs, no matter where they sit in the learning continuum, alongside their peers.

The average Australian classroom is host to a wide range of; achievement and maturity levels, social and self-regulation skills, and concentration and engagement levels.

Each year there are students who do not achieve as well as their teachers or parents expect and those who excel far beyond the expectation level. As such, the average classroom may expect to have *'a five to six year spread between the most and least advanced 10% of students.'*¹

Research into repetition suggests that there are few if any benefits for a student repeating a year level. The updated version of Hattie's research (2018) evaluated the effectiveness of retention and found that as an intervention strategy, it was to be ineffective ($d=-0.32$)² and in some cases harmful to a child. This ranks as having a greater negative effect on a child than lack of sleep (-0.05), their family being on welfare (-0.12) or television (-0.18). The means that on average, students repeating will perform 0.32 standard deviations below the mean of students who do not repeat.

Here at BDC, we prefer to adopt a personalised learning approach to each child's education. Data gathered by classroom teachers allows staff to provide targeted intervention for students who may need extra support to grasp concepts that need consolidation. Much like a strength and conditioning coach targets a specific deficiency in an athlete, our teachers drill down at the specific need of the

¹ *'Grade repetition: there are better ways to move kids forward than by holding them back'*, Danielle Romanes, Associate, Grattan Institute, Jordana Hunter, Fellow, School Education Program, Grattan Institute

² <https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/>

students and provide Learning Sprints with our Learning Coaches to help the student within this specific area. Learning Sprints work for three sessions a week and are twenty minutes in duration. The repetition of this intervention, lasting five weeks in total, works to build the student’s skills and confidence to engage back within the classroom. For our older Stage 3 and secondary students, we choose to provide targeted support amongst their peer group and within their class. This is an intentional choice to reduce the stigma associated with needing support, attending to the students wellbeing. This targeted approach ensures that challenges associated with learning are quickly identified and addressed, rather than carry through to the following year.

Whilst there is evidence to suggest that a student may benefit in a year of repetition, it appears that the benefits are short-term and within a few years the positive effect has disappeared. Unfortunately, unlike the short-term positive effects of repetition that can occur, the negative effects can have a long lasting impact that may not arise until the secondary years of schooling.

Evidence is clear that repetition should not be the default system within a school for students who may have difficulties with their learning. At Bishop Drutt College, we understand that the relationship that a student has with their teachers and with the school, have a huge impact in their learning. We work closely with families to look at alternate approaches that monitor, identify and respond to the needs of their child before learning becomes a challenge, and when necessary, personalise and adapt the teaching program to meet the specific needs of the child.