

Policy 2.41

Student Retention Policy

PURPOSE

The Student Retention Policy ensures that a consistent approach is taken across all Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne in decisions made regarding the determination for a student to repeat a year of study. This policy sets out the principles and processes to be followed when considering a retention learning plan for an individual student. To ensure the equity and excellence goals of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008) are met, students must have access to appropriate opportunities to flourish in pursuit of excellence. In rare instances this may mean a decision is made for a student to repeat a year level. Retention should only be considered in exceptional circumstances where there is strong evidence that it is in the best interests of the student.

SCOPE

- This policy applies to Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.
- This policy applies to students who are being considered for year-level retention.
- This policy acknowledges that each student is different and, for a very small number of students, repetition of a year of study may be required to meet their individual needs.

RATIONALE

Students who are identified as being at risk of not progressing academically will require a Personalised Learning Plan that sets out appropriate interventions that can be provided to support them. Inclusive education requires that all students, including those at risk, have access to a curriculum that encourages high expectations. To achieve this, students at risk require specific and targeted interventions based on a detailed diagnostic evaluation to identify their specific needs. A range of interventions responding to individual learning needs, strengths, talents and interests should be considered to best meet the needs of each student.

The practice of repeating early years of schooling, while supported historically in some Australian schools, is not evidenced in the broader research where retention has been conclusively argued as being ineffective.¹ Educational practice founded on this research base is generally opposed to year-level retention. Instead, there is a preference for improved student differentiation within an inclusive school curriculum.

Appropriate and targeted intervention is considered the best strategy to ensure quality inclusive learning for all students in Catholic schools. For students who are at risk, educational practice in Melbourne's Catholic schools promotes the progression of students into the next year level with their age peers in favour of retention. The retention of a student for a year should only be considered in exceptional circumstances and will require confirmation by the relevant regional general manager.

DEFINITIONS

Retention/year repetition	Retention describes the repetition of the last year of schooling in which a student was enrolled.
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¹ Anderson, R 2015, 'Grade repetition risk for boys in early schooling in Queensland, Australia', *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 40 (4), 87–95.

Anderson, R 2012, 'Indigenous students' increasing risk of grade repetition in early schooling', *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 41 (02), 196–207.

Late entry	Late entry refers to the commencement of school one year later than expected, according to chronological age.
Exception	Catholic Education Melbourne provides some exceptions to the maximum age requirements which allow students to enrol, with agreement by the principal. A student who falls within an exception automatically meets the age eligibility requirements to apply to enrol in a Catholic school.
Exemption	A student who does not qualify for an exception will be required to apply for special consideration. Exemptions from the minimum and maximum age requirements are rare, rather than being considered usual practice.

PRINCIPLES

Year-level retention aims to redress concerns that students are unlikely to make successful progress in the next school year due to their low performance.² Retention usually means a change in the learning environment with new classmates who are younger.

Research uniformly concludes that year-level retention is not an effective intervention for supporting students with lower academic achievement or ensuring their social and emotional wellbeing.³ Retention is perceived as a critical event in a student's schooling that may trigger profound emotions and stress and affect student wellbeing. In most research studies, retention has been linked to a decline in motivation and found to be an ineffective intervention for later achievement and success.

In Victoria, compulsory schooling is from 6–17 years of age, with primary schools catering for students aged 5–12 years and secondary schools catering for students aged 13–18 years. Students can only repeat one year level, e.g. a student who repeats four-year-old kindergarten will be deemed to have already been retained. Note that maximum age requirements will also need to be considered – e.g. a student aged 13 years and over must be enrolled in secondary school.

In certain circumstances, some exceptions or exemptions may be granted to this age restriction. Exceptions include the enrolment of students aged 19–20 years where they are completing an approved course of study, e.g. completing the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) over four years rather than two years to accommodate a disability. Exceptions also include 18-year-old students changing schools in Year 12 to accommodate subject selection options or family relocation. See the *Catholic Education Melbourne Guidelines for Student Retention* for the full range of available exceptions.

Exemptions may be granted in exceptional circumstances to individual students following application via the principal to the relevant regional general manager.

The Student Retention Policy is underpinned by the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and the associated *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth).

PROCEDURES

1. Establishment of a review committee

- 1.1 Schools should establish a committee to review all applications for year-level retention.
- 1.2 It is suggested that the committee should consist of at least three people, including the principal and the learning diversity leader.
- 1.3 Detailed minutes of all meetings should be kept, ensuring transparency of process.
- 1.4 The school may develop its own year-level retention policy, taking into account the *Catholic Education Melbourne Student Retention Policy*, local environment and context, and any cultural and socioeconomic issues.

² Rathmann, K, Loter, K & Vocker, T 2020, 'Critical events throughout the educational career: The effect of grade retention and repetition on school-aged children's well-being', *International Journal Environmental Research & Public Health*, 17, 4012.

³ Romanes, D & Hunter, J 2015, 'Graded repetition: There are better ways to move kids forward than by holding them back', *The Conversation*, 21 September, accessed 16 November 2020 <https://theconversation.com/grade-repetition-there-are-better-ways-to-move-kids-forward-than-by-holding-them-back-47269>.

2. Review of issues underpinning the request

- 2.1 A detailed review of the issues surrounding the request for retention must be undertaken by the school.
- 2.2 Evidence is to be provided of the student's ability and diverse learning needs in one or more curriculum areas.
- 2.3 Additional formal assessments are to be sought, if appropriate.
- 2.4 For late entry, students must meet the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) *Guidelines to the Minimum Standards and Requirements for School Registration*.

3. School decision-making

- 3.1 Parents or guardians should be considered as partners during the decision-making process.
- 3.2 Where appropriate, the students themselves should be involved in the decision-making process.
- 3.3 Consideration must be given to any social or emotional effects and cultural needs that may transpire as an outcome of the decision.
- 3.4 The principal, having considered fully the views of all stakeholders and the best interests of the student and school community, will make a recommendation for retention to the regional general manager where this is considered to be in the best interests of the student.
- 3.5 All applications must be endorsed and lodged on [Form 1A](#) (Appendix 1), by the school principal in partnership with the family.

4. Regional office decision-making

- 4.1 Each regional office must establish a committee, chaired by the regional general manager or delegate, to review all minimum age exemption, maximum age exemption and retention applications.
- 4.2 Each committee must encompass the expertise required to make an informed decision, e.g. a psychologist, learning diversity consultant, wellbeing consultant and regional leadership consultant/regional general manager as core members.
- 4.3 Where applications on cultural grounds are to be considered, additional members should be involved, e.g. learning consultant, education officer, those with specialist knowledge related to new arrivals, refugees and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, where applicable.
- 4.4 A rationale for the final decision must be provided on [Form 1A](#) (Appendix 1), submitted by the principal to the regional general manager.

5. Confirming decisions

- 5.1 Parents or guardians will be formally advised of the decision by the regional general manager as recorded on Form 1A.
- 5.2 Parents or guardians are required to sign a consent form to confirm the proposed year-level retention where this is the final outcome.

6. Right of challenge of a decision

- 6.1 Parents or guardians should initially be referred to the principal and the school's complaints handling policy if they are dissatisfied with a decision made by the school.
- 6.2 Confidentiality, protection of privacy, respect, access, dignity and impartiality should form the basis of any complainant's resolution process.
- 6.3 If unresolved, the parents or guardians should be referred to the Catholic Education Melbourne complaints resolution process.
- 6.4 Any appeal will follow the Catholic Education Melbourne complaints policy process.

REFERENCES

[Horizons of Hope Foundation Statement: Learning Diversity in a Catholic School](#)

Legislation and regulations

[Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#)

[Disability Standards for Education 2005 \(Cth\)](#)

[Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians](#)

External websites

Evidence for Learning – [The Teaching & Learning Toolkit](#)

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) – [Diversity of Learners](#)

[Victorian Department of Education and Training](#)

Responsible director	Mary Oski
Policy owner	Judy Connell
Approving body/individual	Executive Director
Approval date	November 2020
Date of next review	November 2021

POLICY DATABASE INFORMATION	
Related documents	Guidelines for Student Retention in Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne Assessing and intervening with impact Advice to schools regarding students repeating a year of school
Superseded documents	There are no superseded documents
New policy	This is a new policy