

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Policy for Grade Repetition and Acceleration in Primary and Secondary Schools

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1. INTRODUCTION

- a) The mission of the Ministry of Education & Human Resource Development is to build a coherent and comprehensive system of quality education and training reflecting universal and national values that will promote the integrated development of the person and empower him/her to participate fully in social and economic development.
- b) Maintaining high standards of attainment are vital to a system of quality education and are of national concern. In his State of the Nation Address of 6th March 2018, President Danny Faure noted a disappointing trend in the end of year examination results. He stated that “*it is important that students learn, learn and learn, to attain their set targets before progressing to the next level*” and that “*one of the important decisions that will be implemented from this year concerns “automatic promotion”*”. This is a call for improvement in student attainment at all levels with grade repetition as a possibility in the event that children do not attain the defined skills and competencies required for them to proceed to the next grade.
- c) Relevant to the consideration of grade repetition are students that require special education provision and may not meet the set academic targets of each grade level in the context of their particular needs and available support. The Education (Amendment) Act (2017) Article 15, subsections (1) to (6) provide information on the Ministry’s obligations with respect to special education. These imply that while adaptations should be made to the prescribed general education programme in order to provide appropriately for students with diverse learning needs, this must be done in a way that is the ‘least restrictive’ and ‘most enabling’ and with regard to ‘the educational needs and rights of children’.
- d) Determination of whether any proposed measure to be applied for a student, including grade repetition, meets the above criteria requires that a clear policy and systematic procedures be in place, including a comprehensive assessment of each individual situation. Considering that “*Automatic Promotion*” is the norm in the local education system, it is therefore imperative that a policy on “Grade Repetition” is developed, with a view to provide schools, students in need, their parents and other relevant parties with a proper framework within which decisions will be made.
- e) Another scenario in which a student may not follow the default process of progressing from one grade level to the next each academic year in accordance with their age is if they were placed in a grade above their age group, usually relating to advanced academic performance. This could occur if the student were placed in a higher grade than they typically would for their age at the time of admission to the school system or if a student were to ‘skip ahead’ a grade. This is termed ‘Grade Acceleration’. While this is currently a very infrequent practice, it is nevertheless important that clear structures are in place for situations in which it may be implemented. Grade acceleration is therefore included in this policy.

2. BACKGROUND

Grade Repetition

- a) Since post-colonial education era the Ministry has firstly, through the Education Policy *“Education for a New Society” (1985)* followed by *“Education for a Learning Society” (2000)* practiced the model of automatic promotion. “Grade Repetition” - also known as “Retention” - is not common in our state education system although, in exceptional cases, grade repetition is applied (with parental consent), most commonly at the Early Childhood stage, for children that show significant developmental delays. Children are usually held back for only one year. In some cases, Primary and Secondary school students may repeat a year if they have had extended periods of absence or disruption in their schooling due to illness, pregnancy, behavioural issues, or transferring from a different educational system.
- b) To date, the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development has not conducted any formal objective study on the impact of Grade Repetition on learner performance in the local context. Statistics on grade repeaters is not systematically compiled and does not feature among the official Education Statistics, although these statistics can be obtained on a yearly basis.
- c) The following observations and comments are worthy of note:
 - (i) Although “Automatic Promotion” has been in the Seychelles education system since 1978, empirical evidence on its effect on educational standards is practically non-existent.
 - (ii) The SACMEQ (Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for the Monitoring of Education Quality) studies in which Seychelles has participated to date, have yet to pronounce on any association between automatic promotion and learner performance in the competencies studied (literacy and numeracy).
 - (iii) Research done in other countries (e.g. in the US) shows that, for the most part, making children repeat a grade is not the best practice.
 - (iv) Reports that some children do better in school the first year or two after repeating a grade also says that this effect does not last and that children with learning and attention issues may not do better at all unless there are new, specific interventions in place. E.g. If a child is made to repeat a grade because s/he is struggling to learn, more of the same kind of teaching does not help.
- d) Even if grade repetition is seen by some educators as a remedy for students who are not meeting prescribed learning goals, it is criticised by others;

advocates of Automatic Promotion cite studies showing that repetition does not necessarily translate into better learning outcomes.

- e) Moreover, having students repeat grades implies some costs, including the expense of providing an additional year of education for a student, and the cost to society in delaying that student's entry into the labour market by at least one year.
- f) Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) 2009 shows that countries with high rates of grade repetition are also those that show poorer student performance.
- g) In general, countries seek to reduce grade repetition not only for pedagogical reasons, but also because they consider it a waste of resources (e.g. school places occupied by those repeating grades reduces the supply of school places for new entrants).
- h) High repetition rates are also considered an indication of low quality of education, as they point to poor mastering of the curriculum by students and/or poor quality of teaching.

According to UNESCO'S Education for All Global Report 2008, between 1999 and 2005 repetition decreased in two-thirds of the countries with the relevant data and increased or remained unchanged in the other third.

Grade Acceleration

- a) Grade acceleration is currently rarely practiced in Seychelles. The learning of students who exhibit high academic performance is supported through differentiated instruction, grouping within class, and setting from upper primary level onwards.
- b) Internationally, children who show academic ability or performance that is significantly above that of most same-aged peers, may be classified in the category of 'Gifted & Talented'. These children may receive advanced academic content within their grade along with same-aged peers through differentiated instruction, attend some subject classes in a higher grade, be admitted to school early, or be skipped ahead one whole grade or more.
- c) The aim of academic acceleration is to provide children with appropriate levels of challenge and stimulation to support them to reach their potential.
- d) Advocates for academic acceleration strategies, including grade acceleration, point to short-term and long-term cognitive, social, and emotional benefits to students when these strategies are applied appropriately.

3. POLICY OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this policy are as follows:

- a) To outline the principles and criteria according to which the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development will approve repetition and acceleration of grades, giving particular emphasis to developmental readiness for academic learning in the early childhood phase and to levels of competence in literacy and numeracy across primary and secondary education.
- b) To establish the rights, roles, and obligations of key partners, including school personnel, parents, students, and Department of Early Childhood Primary and Secondary Education Headquarters personnel in the processes relating to grade repetition and grade acceleration.
- c) To establish an effective, accountable and transparent framework for managing grade repetition and acceleration by schools, in collaboration with key partners.

4. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

“Automatic Promotion” means the practice whereby students completing one academic year at a particular grade level progress to the next grade level irrespective of whether they have achieved the set attainment targets.

“Grade Repetition” means the practice whereby students are required to repeat one year of a particular school grade level

“Grade Acceleration” means the practice whereby students are placed in a school grade above their age group, usually relating to advanced academic ability or performance.

“Relevant parties” means the key partners in relation to the students, particularly the parents, the school, the Ministry of Education and the students themselves.

5. LEGAL CONTEXT

- a) There is no specific provision related to repetition and acceleration of grades by learners in the Education (Amendment) Act 2017. However, provisions 15(1) to (6) under Special Education, below offer adequate legal premise for implementation of a policy on grade repetition and acceleration where this is warranted.

- i. (1) The Minister shall provide special education programmes for students of compulsory school age who, by reason of intellectual, communicative, behavioural, physical, or multiple exceptionalities, are in need of special education.*
- ii. (2) A student who is entitled to a special education programme shall have the programme delivered in the least restrictive and most enabling environment.*
- iii. (3) The special education programmes shall be developed in consultation with the professionals or experts in the field, having regard to the educational needs and rights of children;*
- iv. (4) The special education programmes, may, on such terms and conditions as the Principal Secretary deem appropriate, be extended to students beyond compulsory school age.*
- v. (5) Where a student has been assessed and recommended to follow a special education programme and the parent or guardian refuses to enrol the student on the programme, the Principal Secretary shall refer the matter to the Family Tribunal established under the Children Act (Cap 28) for determination;*
- vi. (6) The Family Tribunal may compel the student to follow the special education programme or refer the student to one of the establishments provided and maintained under section 99 of the Children Act (Cap 28)”.*

6. SCOPE

- a) This policy makes provision for the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, through the delegated authority vested in school governance and leadership, to permit grade repetition and grade acceleration by students based on the principles, criteria and conditions established in this policy.
- b) With regard to Grade Repetition:
 - i. The policy will apply primarily to students within Key Stage 1 (Crèche to P2) who, by reason of intellectual, communicative, behavioural, physical, medical conditions or multiple exceptionalities, or other life circumstances, would benefit from repetition of a grade.
 - ii. In exceptional cases, this policy may be applied to older students up to Secondary 5 level.
- c) With regard to Grade Acceleration:

- i. The policy will apply to students in primary and secondary schools who are performing well above grade level across academic subjects on a consistent basis.
 - ii. It will also apply to students who enter the state school system and are found to have acquired academic skills that are well above that of same-aged peers
- d) Requests for repetition or acceleration of grades should be made primarily by school management following documented observations of a student's abilities and progress, and consultation with relevant partners resulting in a reasoned conviction that the students' learning and holistic development would benefit from the proposed action.
- e) Requests for repetition or acceleration of grades initiated by parents will also be considered on a case-by-case basis, with due consideration to the provisions of this Policy.

7. CRITERIA FOR GRADE REPETITION

Students covered by this policy may be considered for grade repetition in the following circumstances:

At Key Stage 1:

- a) They are displaying a lack of readiness at the start of schooling in that they are functioning at a developmentally younger level than same-aged peers and there is evidence to support the view that they can benefit from repeating a grade. For example, repeating a grade will result in a better fit socially and emotionally, as well as better holistic development and performance academically.

At any level of Primary and Secondary School:

- b) Developmental assessment indicates delays (cognitively, physically, socially, or emotionally), and there is evidence to support the view that repeating a grade may reduce the stress of trying to "keep up."
- c) They are so far behind in their literacy and numeracy skills that it is unlikely they will catch up in the next grade and there is agreement among the relevant parties that, with a defined support structure in place, they will have the opportunity to master the necessary established learning targets to catch up and manage at the next level.
- d) They have missed a substantial number of school days for reason of ill health, social, emotional or behavioural issues, or other life circumstances, including pregnancy, and there is also evidence on record from their previous performance/profile (in particular relating to their proficiency in literacy and numeracy) that they may benefit from repeating a grade.

- e) They are making limited academic progress in spite of targeted additional support
- f) They are transferring from a different educational system and their level of academic performance is well below that expected for their age.

Please note:

- The conditions listed above do not guarantee that students should repeat a grade.
- Students with SEN should be provided with adapted programmes that meet their learning and development needs irrespective of grade level.

8. CRITERIA FOR GRADE ACCELERATION

Students covered by this policy may be considered for grade acceleration in the following circumstances:

- a) They are performing well above grade level across academic subjects on a consistent basis as evidenced by assessments conducted at school and national level
- b) They are entering the state school system from a different system and have well-documented evidence that they have acquired academic skills that are well above that of same-aged peers
- c) They demonstrate levels of social and emotional maturity that would enable them to adapt to being in a classroom environment with older students
- d) Entry to a higher grade is likely to benefit their development as a whole

Please note:

- The conditions listed above do not guarantee that students will be accelerated into a higher grade.

9. RESPONSIBILITIES & PROCEDURES

9.1 Compliance & Monitoring

- a) The Early Childhood and Primary Education Division and the Secondary Education Division, in collaboration with the Student Support Services Section shall have oversight of the implementation and compliance of the policy.

- b) The School Management shall be responsible for the implementation of the policy through well-defined guidelines and procedures which will include a comprehensive assessment and intervention plan for individual learners both prior to consideration of grade repetition/acceleration and when grade repetition/acceleration is applied.
- c) The School Management in collaboration with the Special Needs Support Team and designated teachers shall ensure that:
- i. For grade repetition, early identification of the source of the learner's barriers is detected through evidence and data collected through multiple assessments of learning and other relevant factors, and that targeted remediation, including use of an Individualised Education Plan (IEP), where appropriate is implemented.
 - ii. For grade acceleration, the student's exceptional academic performance is identified through evidence and data collected through multiple assessments of learning and consideration of other relevant factors, such as social-emotional development.
- d) The School Management shall ensure that records pertaining to students are maintained diligently throughout the implementation of the assessment and intervention plan of individual learners. This includes:
- Report cards
 - Record of Achievement (RoA)
 - Assessments of literacy and numeracy competencies
 - Portfolios
 - Assessments conducted by Special Education Needs Co-ordinator, School Counsellor, or other school personnel
 - Standardised Assessments
 - Records of assessments conducted by other relevant professionals, such as psychologists and speech pathologists
- e) A database of information on applications for grade repetition and grade acceleration will be kept at school and Department level for monitoring purposes.
- f) The School Management shall evaluate the implementation of the intervention plan of individual learners at the end of the year and submit a report to the Principal Secretary for Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education.

9.2 Procedures

- a) School personnel identify students who may be a candidate for grade repetition or acceleration based on their academic performance and progress.
- b) School Special Needs Support Teams assess eligibility for grade repetition or acceleration, compiling relevant documents.
- c) When school personnel are considering grade repetition or acceleration for a student, they discuss this possibility with the parent and the student, depending on his/her developmental level and the particular circumstances. The reasons for considering repetition/acceleration and the procedures to be followed are clearly stated and a written record of this discussion is kept. Parents are asked to provide a written document giving their views/recommendations on the proposed repetition/acceleration as well as any other supporting documents, such as medical records.
- d) Application for grade repetition/acceleration along with supporting documents are sent to the Director General for Early Childhood and Primary Education or Director General for Secondary Education, as applicable, **by the end of Week 2 Term 3**. This application must include the reason for the request, evidence of assessment and intervention measures (as specified under section 8.1 (d) above), proposal for the intervention programme if grade repetition/acceleration is approved, and the document from the student's parent(s) stating his/her/their position with regard to the request. Requests for grade repetition and acceleration must be made in a timely manner to allow for appropriate consideration of each case.
- e) Upon receiving a request for grade repetition/acceleration, the Director General for Early Childhood and Primary Education/Secondary Education will liaise with Education Officers within his/her respective Division and personnel of the Student Support Services Section to proceed with assessment of the case. This assessment will include review of the submitted documents and consultation with the parent(s) and the student. Further assessment at the level of the school, Ministry Headquarters', or external agencies may also be conducted. The assessment may include input from several officers but one officer shall be designated to coordinate the process for each referred student.
- f) Feedback on the results of the assessment will be given to the school management and parents. If parents do not agree for their child to repeat/skip a grade, the request will not be processed further. However, mediation to address concerns of the parents and school personnel will be conducted with the aim of reaching a mutually agreed course of action. The decision not to proceed with the request will be communicated to the school management and parent(s) in writing.

- g) The designated education officer(s) will compile a report stating their recommendations and submit it, along with supporting documents, to the respective Director General by the end of Week 10 Term 3 of the same year.
- h) The request will be considered by a Panel composed of the Director General, a representative from Student Support Services, and a Headteacher (not from the student's school). The Panel will consider the request and supporting documents to give a recommendation in line with the principles and criteria outlined in this policy and the Panel's Terms of Reference. The Panel's recommendation(s) will be sent to the Principal Secretary along with supporting documents by mid-December.
- i) The Principal Secretary will make a decision on whether to approve the proposed grade repetition or acceleration based on the information provided.
- j) The Principal Secretary's decision will be communicated in writing to the school management and parents by the end of December.
- k) If a Headteacher or parent wishes to appeal the decision made by the Principal Secretary, they may do so in writing to the Minister for Education within 7 working days of the date of the letter.
- l) A student approved for grade repetition or acceleration should be placed in the approved grade from the first day of the academic year. A student should not be moved into a lower grade once the academic year has started.
- m) For students repeating or skipping a grade, depending on the individual case, consideration should be made as to whether the student should continue their schooling at their existing school or transferred to another school.
- n) The School Management shall provide the Early Childhood and Primary Education Division/Secondary Education Division, Student Support Services Section, and parents with information on the performance of individual learners who have repeated or been accelerated a grade on a termly basis.
- o) In exceptional circumstances, students may be allowed to repeat/skip more than one grade over the course of their schooling. However, the same grade cannot be repeated more than once.
- p) The views of students should be taken into consideration and decisions made regarding grade repetition or acceleration should be communicated to them in developmentally appropriate language. Due thought should be given to the transition process for each student with a view to mitigating any social-emotional impact.

9.3 Records Management and Reporting

- a) Schools must maintain all records that are relevant to administering this policy, as established by the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development.

10. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Successful implementation of this policy will require the following:

- a) School personnel are aware of the relevant requirements and procedures, and have the competencies to engage in the assessment, referral, and intervention processes.
- b) Parents, students, and other stakeholders are familiar with the policy and their respective roles in its implementation.
- c) Comprehensive and objective assessments of learner abilities and attributes are conducted by qualified personnel. This process necessitates the availability of both locally-constructed context specific and standardised internationally-published assessment tools.
- d) Panel review of applications is conducted according to clear Terms of Reference and the principles laid out in this policy and other relevant legal and policy documents.
- e) Set timelines are adhered to.
- f) Systematic monitoring and evaluation are planned and implemented.

11. POLICY REVIEW

The Policy will be reviewed after a period of five (5) years.

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Annex 01: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

	Activity	Timeframe
1.	Circulation of Draft Policy proposal /Sensitisation of Ministry personnel	July – August 2018
2.	Presentation of Policy proposal to Cabinet for approval	September 2018
3.	Policy development	February – June 2019
4.	Development of additional resources for implementation of policy (e.g. Referral Forms, Assessment Tools, Panel Terms of Reference)	May 2019 – July 2020
5.	Consultation with School Leaders and SENCOs	July – November 2019
6.	Further development of Policy based on consultations	December 2019 – March 2020
7.	Presentation of policy to Cabinet	June 2020
8.	Sensitization of SENCOs and School Management on approved policy	June 2020
9.	Issuing of Circular to schools	July 2020
10.	Roll Out	August 2020
11.	Monitoring and Evaluation	September 2020 onwards

ANNEX 02: REFERRAL FORM

Department of Early Childhood, Primary, & Secondary Education

STUDENT REFERRAL FORM – GRADE REPETITION/ACCELERATION

CHILD'S NAME: _____ NIN: _____

AGE: _____ SEX: M ___ F ___ BIRTHDATE: D/ ___M/ ___YR/ ___

CLASS: _____ SCHOOL: _____ ADDRESS: _____

PARENT'S/GUARDIAN'S NAME: _____ TELEPHONE NUMBER: _____

NAME and POSITION of PERSON(S) COMPLETING THIS FORM:

REQUESTING THAT THE STUDENT: REPEATS _____ / IS ACCELERATED TO _____

AGENCIES INVOLVED TO DATE (please tick):

Health Care Agency (speech therapist, OT, physiotherapist, paediatrician, mental health services)

NCC Social Affairs Department Other (please specify): _____

Reason for requesting grade repetition/acceleration:

In what areas does this student **perform better** compared to his/her classmates as a whole (strengths)?

In what areas does this student do **less well than** his/her classmates as a whole (weaknesses)?

What strategies have you used to address the learning needs of the student (currently and previously)?

How successful were these interventions (outcomes)?

Tick any item listed below which you feel is of concern or presents a difficulty for this student at school.

Attendance: punctuality truancy
Attendance %: Term 1 Term 2 Term 3
Number of Exclusions/Suspensions _____
Dates of Exclusions: _____

Social, Emotional and/or Behavioural: Aggressive Noncompliant Withdrawn
 Disruptive Social Skills Deficit Anxious
 Short Attention Span Activity Level (High or low)
 Other (please specify) _____

Communication: Language Articulation Other (please specify) _____

Self-Help: Dressing Hygiene Other (please specify) _____

Health/Medical: Epilepsy Asthma Other (please specify) _____

Physical Difficulties: Fine motor Gross motor Other (please specify) _____

Sensory Difficulties: Vision Hearing Other (please specify) _____

Additional relevant comments, concerns, or information about this student:

Please attach and label relevant evidence (examples: academic reports, assessment reports, social-emotional/behaviour checklists, work samples, IEP, etc.)

Signatures:

Case manager (name): _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Head teacher (name): _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. Please forward it directly to:
Principal Secretary for Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary Education
Ministry of Education & Human Resource Development, Mont Fleuri