

Repeating Year Levels Or Changing Schools



How to decide if your child should repeat a year or change schools

by Liz Dunoon



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All the information, techniques, skills and concepts contained within this publication are of the nature of general comment only and are not in any way recommended as individual advice. The intent is to offer a variety of information to provide a wider range of choices now and in the future, recognising that we all have widely diverse circumstances and viewpoints. Should any reader choose to make use of the information contained herein, this is their decision, and the contributors (and their companies), authors and publishers do not assume any responsibilities whatsoever under any condition or circumstances. It is recommended that the reader obtain their own independent advice.

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To Repeat Or Not To Repeat?

Also known as grade retention, this is where it is suggested that your child repeats a year in order to catch up academically. There are positive and negatives arguments for and against this practice. Here are a few things to consider if you are thinking of having your child repeat a school year, or if a school suggests this to you:

- The chronological age of your child
- The level of maturity of your child
- Their social skills, networks and friends
- The numbers of school days missed due to illness or absenteeism in a particular year
- The psychological impact on your child
- Ask yourself - Will the positive benefits far outweigh the negative benefits?
- Ask yourself and your child's school - How will repeating directly benefit my child?

- Ask yourself and your child's school - What processes will be put in place to assist my child in the coming year?

Repeating your child or retaining them is something you need to consider very carefully. Children with dyslexia do not outgrow it or become instantly cured as they mature. You know your child best; so don't allow others to make this decision for you and your child.

“You must make this decision for yourself because as a parent you will be responsible for the long-term ramifications of it”.

There is a huge social stigma attached to repeating a school year. Children are well aware of it and schoolyard talk can have a negative impact and follow your child throughout their school years. Students with learning disabilities do not generally benefit

from repeating a year. In some instances an academic gain due to repeating can be attributed to covering the same year level content twice, yet research indicates the psychological damage caused by repetition can far outweigh this benefit.

You also need to keep in mind that your child cannot keep on repeating. Children with dyslexia generally need ongoing educational support, not just more of the same. They do not need the message that you do not believe in them and feel they are unable to keep up with their peers. Maintaining their self-confidence is more important than a report card when it comes to being successful in life.

As you can see I'm not generally a fan of repeating children with dyslexia, but there are times when repeating your child may be more appropriate for example.

Times When It May Be More Appropriate To Repeat

- When your child is changing schools altogether
- If by repeating them you are placing them at a more appropriate chronological and/or social age
- Your child becomes eligible for educational services that are not available if they move up a grade
- Your child would have access to a teacher with particular skills to benefit your child
- Your child is requesting it; make sure you discuss their fears and concerns in depth
- Your child is changing schools and the new grade level curriculum is more challenging
- If you are moving inter-state or inter-country and schools have different age and educational standards

- You have decided to delay entry into middle school or high school in order to offer them a school or home school catch up year.

When teaching, I had cases where younger children who were not psychologically or socially ready for school were held back and repeated their first year of formal schooling. This can be highly beneficial because academically and psychologically they can go from the bottom of the class to the top of the class instantly the following year. Many young children I observed gained enormous confidence from this experience and maintained it for years to come.

The opposite can occur if you retain children based purely on academic ability and disregard intellect, maturity, friends and social networks. They feel left behind and often they stay left behind. In my mind the ability to get along well with people is more important than

academic skills. We all know how important networking is.

“Remember the old saying – it’s not what you know, it’s who you know”.

In most cases your child is operating in a formal academic system, which creates educational limitations for them. If it is your belief that your child is of equal or greater intelligence to those around them, do not insult their intelligence by making them repeat a year unless appropriate.

How To Choose The Right School For Your Child

Choice of school for most parents comes down to cost and convenience. Even if you do not have the luxury of choosing a specialised school for your child with dyslexia, you may have the opportunity to choose one

school over another within the suburb or region that you live.

“No two schools are ever the same, so never make this assumption. People run schools and people are all different.”

Choosing your child's school can be one of the most important decisions you will ever make, so do some research and put some thought into it. You are not trying to find the perfect school, because it doesn't exist, you are trying to find the perfect match of school to your child. If you get the school right, it can mean the difference between happiness and success for your child or ongoing struggle and failure.

How To Find Out If A School Is The Right One For Your Child

The best way to research a prospective school is to ask questions. These are some of the people you should seek out to speak to:

- ✓ Parents whose children already attend the school
- ✓ Parents of children who are identified as having a learning disability who attend the school
- ✓ Education specialists, dyslexic assessors and child psychologists who work in the area surrounding the school
- ✓ Teachers and teacher aides at the school
- ✓ Learning support teachers from within the school
- ✓ Police officers from within the local community policing squad.

39 Questions To Ask A School Headmaster When You Are Choosing A School For Your Child Or Considering A Change To A New One

Once you are well researched, the final person you should speak to is the school Headmaster. Questions you might like to ask are:

1. How many students attend this school?
2. What is the average class size? Does this vary throughout the age groups?
3. Do you offer composite, (mixed age classes) or straight age levels?
4. What is the ratio of male to female students?
5. What is the ratio of male to female teachers?
6. What is the average age of the teachers?
7. Do they have teacher assistants in the lower grades of the school?
8. How many teachers are qualified or trained as special education teachers?
9. What is the preferred teaching approach utilised by this school: formal, informal, practical, theme based, multi-sensory or other?
10. Can you give me some insight into the school's preferred method of teaching reading, spelling, writing and math? Ask which programs the school uses. You can quite often research their effectiveness via the internet.
11. Are there any additional features or programs being offered in this school that I should know about?
12. What subjects do children leave the classroom for, e.g. music, sport, spelling, art?
13. How many teachers/students have left the school in the last three years? You can often tell if a school is having difficulties through teacher and students turnover in the last three years. If numbers seem

higher than you would expect, ask them why they think this is the case?

14. How many student free days do you have per year in addition to school holidays?
15. What is the school's expectation for the ongoing professional development of teachers and special education teachers?
16. Can I have a copy of the school curriculum?
17. Does the school offer a broad curriculum that will support your child's strengths? A quick note here - highly academic schools can prove challenging for children with dyslexia, but many of these schools also offer excellent, music, performing arts, science, hospitality, graphic design, engineering, information technology, sport and outdoor education programs. These are all areas in which children with dyslexia can excel. This can be a plus if it allows your child to explore

their strengths and build their self-esteem. You will need to weigh this up.

18. What does the school excursion and camp program include for each year level?
19. What is the school's behaviour management or discipline policy? Ask about their policy for bullying and anti-social behaviour too.
20. Do they offer pastoral care, a school counsellor or a psychologist?
21. How many children with learning disabilities does the school have? Ask for specific numbers of children with dyslexia.
22. What is the ratio of qualified special education teachers per number of students who require extra support?
23. How is special education or learning support provided for children at particular class levels? Do they leave the classroom and receive instruction individually or in

- small groups? How many times per week does this occur? How long are the sessions?
24. Which educational programs is the school currently using in the learning support program? Make a note of these so you can do further research. Ask how successful the programs are. You can also ask how they measure their effectiveness and also whether they are scientifically proven.
 25. What resources and equipment are available to support children with learning disabilities?
 26. How often do teachers in the special education department liaise with other teachers and specialists within the school who come into contact with your child?
 27. What is the school policy on providing remediation, modification and accommodation for your child during normal class work and during tests and exams?
 28. What are the strengths of this school? Are there any areas in which the school is trying to improve?
 29. What are the homework expectations for each year level?
 30. Do they offer any extension programs for highly gifted and talented children? You may also like to check if the prerequisite for access to a 'gifted program' is high academic grades or whether children with high-level intelligence who do not do well in formal testing are also included.
 31. How does the school keep parents informed about how their children are progressing? What does the school reporting program entail? Are students assessed purely on academic ability or is student effort included?
 32. How are computers utilised within the school?
 33. What is the school's preferred method of communication between parents and teachers?

34. What is the schools policy on parental involvement?
35. If you were to choose this school what does the orientation program involve?
36. Can you see a school canteen or tuckshop list?
37. Are foreign languages compulsory?
38. Do they stream by class and subject? If so, at what year level does this occur? Streaming is grouping students based on their academic results and capabilities to be taught different levels of the same subject. For example, some students may qualify to do basic math as opposed to others who may qualify to do more advanced math subjects.
39. If parents were going to complain about something – what would it be?

One More Thing....When You Visit A School, Consider The Following

1. What is the overall environment like – I call this 'the vibe?'
2. Do the children seem happy and content?
3. Are staff members receptive to you? Are they happy to answer your questions and do others respond warmly as you come into contact with them within the school?
4. Is there a sense of order, unity, teamwork and productivity?
5. Observe classes in session. Note how the classrooms are set up, what is displayed on the walls, how the children are behaving, interacting with others and responding to teachers and your presence.
6. Follow your intuition and gut feeling as to the character of the school and what it can offer your child.

About The Author

Liz Dunoon is a teacher and a mother to three children all with dyslexia. It was through her own research to find ways to help her children that she discovered a huge divide between what is known by scientists about dyslexia and what is happening in our children's schools today.



Liz's determination to rectify this has culminated in her working with some of the world's leading dyslexia researchers to write this empowering, but simple and easy to read eBook.

Liz has also created a website full of free information, worksheets, resources, teaching aids, reports, interviews and personal stories. From one parent to another you will soon realise that you are not alone in your quest to support your child.

Liz Dunoon is also the author of:

Helping Children with Dyslexia

21 Super Strategies to Ensure Your Child's Success at School.

N.B. This eBook is an excerpt from this book

EBooks

Guide for Teaching Your Dyslexic Child to Read from Home

Guide for Teaching Your Dyslexic Child to Write and Spell from Home

Guide for teaching Your Dyslexic Child to Do Math from Home

Available from the website

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