

St Thomas the Apostle School - Student Retention Policy



St Thomas the Apostle School is a school which operates with the consent of the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne and is owned, operated and governed by Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd (MACS), where formation and education are based on the principles of Catholic doctrine, and where the teachers are outstanding in true doctrine and uprightness of life.

Purpose

This Policy ensures a consistent approach is made across all MACS schools regarding decisions allowing a student to repeat a year of study. The Policy sets out the principles and procedures to be followed if considering a retention learning plan for individual students. To ensure the dual goals of the Melbourne Declaration (2008) of equity and excellence, students must have access to appropriate opportunities to flourish in pursuit of excellence. In rare instances this may mean allowing a student to repeat a year level. Retention should only be considered in exceptional circumstances where there is strong evidence that it is in their best interests.

Scope

This Policy applies to all students at St Thomas the Apostle School who are being considered for year level retention

This Policy acknowledges that all students are different and that for a very small number of students, curriculum differentiation may require repetition of a year of study to meet their individual needs.

Consultation, support and access to resources are available to assist schools via the Learning Diversity staff in the Regional Offices in assessing specific needs and in making appropriate program recommendations to teachers and practitioners.

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 all students, including those who are 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 exactly what their needs are. 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 whilst supported historically in some Australian schools is not evidenced in the broader research where retention has been conclusively argued as being ineffective (Anderson, 2012, 2015). Educational practice founded on the research base is generally opposed to year level retention with a preference for improved student differentiation within an inclusive school curriculum.

For students who are at risk, educational practice at St Thomas the Apostle School promotes the promotion of students with their age peers in favour of retention. Appropriate and targeted intervention is considered the best strategy to ensure quality inclusive learning. Consideration of retaining a student for a year should only be considered in exceptional circumstances and will require confirmation by the Regional General Manager.

Definitions

- **Year Repetition / Retention** – repeating the last year of schooling a student has been enrolled in
- **Late Entry** – commencing school one year later than expected according to chronological age
- **Exception** – there are some exceptions 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 at St Thomas the Apostle School.
- **Exemption** – a student who does not fall within an exception requires specific application for consideration. Exemptions from the minimum and maximum age requirements are rare, rather than being considered acceptable practice.
- **Parent** – is a reference to Parent or Guardian

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 (Rathmann et al., 2020). 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 socioemotional well-being (Romanes & Hunter, 2015). 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 with primary schools catering for students aged 5 – 12 years and secondary schools catering for students aged 13- 18 years. 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. 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 MACS Retention Guidelines for the full range of available exceptions.

Exemptions may be granted in exceptional circumstances to individual students following application via the Principal to the Regional General Manager.

Students aged 13 years and over must be enrolled in a secondary school. A student can only repeat one-year level e.g. a student that repeats a four-year-old kindergarten year will be deemed to have already been retained. Maximum age requirements will also need to be considered e.g. a student aged 13 years and over must be enrolled in a secondary school.

The Student Retention policy is underpinned by the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) (DDA) and the associated [Disability Standards for Education \(2005\)](#) (Cth).

Procedures

The Student Retention Policy supports the Catholic faith by celebrating each student's uniqueness and embracing all students as respected and valued members of the learning community. The Policy acknowledges that local pastoral discretion at the School level is an important element of decision-making in regard to student retention.

1. Establishment of Review committee

- 1.1 St Thomas the Apostle School has established a committee to review all applications for year retention.
- 1.2 The committee consists of the Principal, the Learning Diversity Leader and the Learning and Teaching Leader.
- 1.3 Detailed minutes of all meetings should be kept ensuring transparency of process.

2. Review of issues underpinning the request

- 2.1 A detailed review of the issues surrounding the request for retention must be undertaken by St Thomas the Apostle School.
- 2.2 Evidence is to be provided of 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 VRQA [Guidelines for the Minimum Standards and Requirements for School Registration](#).

3. School decision making

- 3.1 Parents should be considered as partners during the process.
- 3.2 Where appropriate the student 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 in the best interests of the student and school community will make a recommendation for retention to the Regional General Manager where this is considered in the best interests of the student.
- 3.5 All applications must be endorsed and lodged on Form 1A provided in the Appendix by the Principal in partnership with the family.

4. Regional Office decision making

- 4.1 Each Regional General Manager 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 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 Additional members should be involved to consider applications on cultural grounds e.g. Learning Consultant New Arrivals Refugee and Education Officer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander as applicable.
- 4.4 A rationale for the final decision must be provided on Form 1A submitted by the Principal and the outcome will be returned to the school by the Regional General Manager.

5. Confirming decisions

- 5.1 Parents or guardians will be advised formally of the decision by the Principal, through completion of 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 if they disagree with a decision.
- 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/guardians should be referred to the MACS complaints resolution process.
- 6.4 Any appeal will follow the Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Complaints Handling Framework.

Templates

Student Retention Template: Form 1A