



Circular Letter 11/01

Department of Education and Science Primary Branch

To: Boards of Management, Principal Teachers and all Teaching Staff in Primary Schools

Retention of Pupils in Primary Schools

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Circular outlines the regulations governing the retention of pupils in Primary Schools.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Department's policy on the promotion of pupils is set out in Rule 64 of the Rules for National Schools, and in Department Circular 10/67:

Rule 64 (7) states "As a rule, a pupil should not be retained in an infant's class beyond the 30th June next following the date on which he has
(a) been enrolled in the school for one and a half years, or
(b) reached the age of six-and-a-half years, whichever is the earlier

Rule 64(10) states "The promotion of pupils to the next standard should normally take place at the beginning of the school year".

Circular 10/67 states "The normal procedure should be that a pupil is promoted to a higher standard at the end of each school year. There may be cases, however, where the principal teacher feels that a pupil would benefit educationally by being held back for a second year in a class. In regard to such cases it is felt that by reference to educational principles they should be minimal, that no pupil should be held back for longer than one year throughout his/her national school career, and that usually the retention should take place only in the third or fourth standard".

3. Current Policy on Retention

- 3.1 The Primary School curriculum is designed as an eight year course, including a two year infant cycle followed by six years in standards from first to sixth,

with children progressing to the next grade at the end of each school year. The primary curriculum is flexible and child-centred, and can be adapted to meet childrens' needs.

- 3.2 Under the Department's policy, children should only repeat a year for educational reasons and under no circumstances should an additional grade level operate through the retention of all or a substantial number of pupils for a second year at a grade level.
- 3.3 The Department is providing considerable support for pupils with learning difficulties in schools. Learning support teachers, resource teachers, special needs assistants and a wide range of resources under the various schemes for schools in areas designated as disadvantaged are among the forms of provision allocated to schools for these pupils. The level of provision available should enable pupils to make progress in keeping with their needs and abilities and to move consecutively through the different class levels in the school in keeping with their peers.
- 3.4 There may be cases where a Principal teacher, following consultation with the learning support teacher and class teacher and parents of the pupil, conclude that a pupil would benefit educationally by being held back for a second year. A record outlining the educational basis for the decision to retain a child in class for a second year should be kept for any pupil so retained. In addition, there should be a clear programme outlined for such a pupil that records precisely what new approach will be used for her/him and what its expected benefit will be. These records should be retained within the school and should be brought to the Inspector's attention by the Principal when s/he visits the school. A pupil should not be held back for longer than one year in a primary school.
- 3.5 In all cases where the proposed retention of pupils has staffing implications the Primary Payments Section of the Department of Education & Science should be notified.

4. Transfer of Pupils to another Primary School to Repeat Sixth Class

- 4.1 Pupils who have completed sixth class must not transfer to another primary school to repeat sixth class. In the event that a school were to enrol pupils from another school to repeat sixth class the pupils shall not be included as eligible pupils for staffing and other purposes. Capitation and other grants in respect of such pupils shall not be paid.

5. Elimination of Nine Year Cycle

- 5.1 A school must not operate a repeat middle infants class or a repeat sixth class/ seventh class. Schools must not enrol any pupils in these classes for the 2001/2002 school year or thereafter. In the event that a school were to continue the practice of enrolling pupils in a repeat class after the 1st September, 2001 the Department will discount the pupils in such classes for the purpose of determining the valid enrolment of the school. Capitation and other grants in respect of such pupils shall not be paid.

This circular may also be accessed on the Department of Education & Science website at www.irlgov.ie/educ.

Dermot Ryan,
Principal Officer.

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