

## Repeating a year

Negative impact for very high cost based on extensive evidence.



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Pupils who do not reach a given standard of learning at the end of a year are required to repeat the year by joining a class of younger students the following academic year. This is also known as “grade retention”, “non-promotion” or “failing a grade”. For students at secondary school level, repeating a year is usually limited to the particular subject or classes that a student has not passed.

Repeating a year is very rare in the UK.

### How effective is it?

Evidence suggests that in the majority of cases repeating a year is harmful to a student’s chances of academic success. In addition, studies consistently show greater negative effects for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, suggesting that the practice is likely to increase educational inequality. Repeating a year is also likely to lead to greater negative effects when used in the early years of primary school, for students from ethnic minorities, and for pupils who are relatively young in their year group (often referred to as ‘summer born’ pupils in the US and European literature).

Pupils who repeat a year make an average of four months’ less academic progress over the course of a year than pupils who move on. In addition, studies suggest that students who repeat a year are unlikely to catch up with peers of a similar level who move on, even after completing an additional year’s schooling. Studies also suggest that students who repeat a year are more likely to drop out of school prior to completion.

Although the overall average impact is negative, some studies suggest that in individual circumstances some students can benefit, particularly in the short term. However, it does not appear to be easy to identify which students will benefit, suggesting that repeating a year is a significant risk.

### How secure is the evidence?

There are no studies that have used an experimental design. However, overall, there are a number of high quality evidence reviews which show that negative effects have been found consistently over the last fifty years in both Europe and North America. The evidence is therefore rated as moderate.

### What are the costs?

These costs are estimated on the basis of an additional year of schooling. Annual costs of schooling vary widely in England with secondary school costs tending to fall between £4,000 and £9,000, and primary school costs between £3,000 and £8,000. Costs are therefore estimated at £6,000 per pupil per year.

## What should I consider?

*Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:*

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1. Negative effects are rare for educational interventions, so the extent to which pupils who repeat a year make less progress is striking.
2. Negative effects are disproportionately greater for disadvantaged pupils, for pupils from ethnic minorities and for pupils who are relatively young in their year group.
3. Have you considered alternative interventions such as intensive tuition or one to one support? They are considerably cheaper and may make repeating a school year unnecessary (see [One to one tuition](#)).
4. Negative effects tend to increase with time and repeating more than one year significantly increases the risk of students dropping out of school.