

12 points to think of when skipping a grade

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1. Pupils who are proposed for skipping a grade should be in the upper range of the receiving grade in terms of their intellectual requirements. In the first two years of primary school, the performance assessments give a first indication, in the following years it is the grades. Even more important, however, are the attitude to work and the motivation to want to work harder and progress faster. If there is uncertainty as to whether the aptitude is sufficient for skipping, an IQ test should be carried out.
2. If the pupils show below-average performance in only one area compared to the receiving grade, the deficits can be compensated for with support. If, however, the above-average abilities and motivation are only evident in one subject, then subject-related acceleration or enrichment or extracurricular support is preferable. - It may be that highly gifted pupils were still highly motivated and performed very well in the first years of school, but that both developed negatively over the years due to demotivation and lack of challenge. The ability for high performance can still be expressed in individual IQ tests. In this case, skipping a grade despite poor grades can be a solution to motivate a child or youngster again. It goes without saying that in a case like that, exceptional care must be taken.
3. Teachers are sometimes unnecessarily pessimistic about the "emotional-social maturity" of children or young people, despite good and even very good achievements. In the case of gifted pupils, they may confuse poor behaviour stemming from dissatisfaction with inadequate learning and social conditions with immaturity or behavioural problems. If there are concerns about emotional-social maturity, the assessment should include the knowledge of parents, a professional experienced with gifted pupils and skipping grades, and/or an experienced qualified psychologist.
4. The pupils should not normally have serious emotional and social problems. They should also show perseverance and high motivation. However, if problems are caused by previous - prolonged – lack of challenge or by the lack of developmentally similar friends, they can be remedied by acceleration.
5. Height should only be taken into consideration insofar as the child is very interested in team sports and if sports competitions may play a role later on. It is not in itself a reason to abandon grade skipping.
6. As far as possible, it should be ensured that the pupils are not put under pressure to skip. However, if all responsible adults think that skipping is the right thing to do, but the children are very hesitant, they could be persuaded to have a look at the higher grade for a while. The time period can be flexible and depends on when skipping is considered: until the holidays / end of the month / next test. It must be clear that after this period of probation, the child's decision both for and against skipping will be accepted. However, this "convincing" should be handled very carefully. The parents should have a positive attitude towards skipping, but the pupils should want it themselves, they should take the final decision. This also applies to primary school.

7. The releasing teachers, but above all the receiving teachers should have a positive attitude towards skipping and be prepared to help the pupils settle in and catch up with the material. They should provide information on what material can be caught up on and how, have worksheets and / or old tests ready and provide information on books with which the children can learn material independently. If the new teachers are negative or pessimistic, it should be considered whether the skipping can be postponed to a later date, whether a parallel class can be found, or whether it is necessary to change schools.

8. The best time for skipping, both during the school years and in the course of one school year, is when the lack of achievement becomes so clear that skipping seems to be a sensible alternative. A general postponement to a later date, especially if it is more than six months in the future and there is no adequate alternative in the context of enrichment, is demotivating and promotes neither a willingness to learn nor social behaviour, but primarily school fatigue.

9. The host teachers should be informed or gather information themselves where the pupils have special needs or gaps of knowledge. The classmates, and possibly the parents, of the receiving class should also be informed in good time by the form teacher in an appropriate way, so that those who skip are accepted as the "new" one. The child should have a partner for the first weeks who will help and support the process of settling in. The partner should have a high status in the class so that this can be conferred on the new child or youngster.

10. Any skipping should take place on a trial basis. In some states there is a transition period of several months, but usually it is clear after about two to three weeks whether the child wants to stay. This does not mean that all the material must have been caught up by then, but the pupils will then know where they can already keep up and where they still need to work. They should know that they can return to their old class at any time during the probation period. Experience shows, however, that there is seldom a desire to do so. A teacher should be available for discussions and counselling throughout the transition period.

11. Care should be taken not to associate too many expectations with skipping. The pupils should not get the feeling that they have failed if they go back or the grades are not quite as good as before. On the other hand, the intellectual development of some gifted students is so rapid that there may be a lack of challenge again after a shorter or longer period of time after skipping. In that case additional (in class or outside differentiating or extracurricular) offers or even repeated acceleration are necessary.

12. The decision to skip should be based on facts and not myths. The research literature shows that acceleration can contribute to improved motivation, emotional well-being and thereby achievement. No general negative effects have been found in relation to social and emotional development. If there are adjustment problems, they are usually minor and short-lived. On the other hand, if skipping is refused without really convincing, factual reasons and against the pupils wishes, this can lead to poor work habits, apathy, lack of motivation, maladjustment and poor academic achievement.

The basic information for these points has been known in the USA for decades and in Germany since the 1990s, and they are still valid. Central to successful acceleration is a supportive attitude but not asking too much on the part of parents and a supportive and positive attitude on the part of teachers in the receiving class, both towards skipping itself and towards the individual child or youngster. A negative or sceptical attitude, even if it is not obvious, is expressed in body posture, voice, choice of words, etc. It is picked up unconsciously - both by the child who skipped and by the class - and that can lead to unnecessary difficulties.

This supportive and positive attitude of teachers applies as a matter of course to all pupils they teach.

If a pupil voluntarily goes back to the old class after some time, this need not be a drama if the adults do not turn it into one. And even if she/he later repeats a grade - which happens only rarely - it does not have to mean that skipping was wrong at the time and that demands had been too high. A divorce of the parents, illness, unemployment, the difficulties of puberty and other problems can mean that she/he is no longer free to learn. Even for children who did not skip a grade, such circumstances can lead to repeating a grade.

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