

Ban on automatic promotion welcome

The decision to halt automatic promotion in schools, as announced by State minister for Primary Education Joyce Kaducu, is a timely and courageous intervention in Uganda's education system. The minister said children must be promoted on merit. At a time when concerns about declining learning outcomes have grown clearer, the move signals a return to a fundamental principle: education must be anchored in merit, and measurable progress.

The automatic promotion had quietly eroded the integrity of classroom achievement. While it was often justified as a way to reduce dropout rates and avoid congesting many students in the class as a result of repeating classes, given the limited capitation grant from the government, it has produced unintended consequences.

Many pupils have advanced from one class to the next without fully grasping foundational skills in literacy and numeracy. The result is a widening gap between grade level and actual competence. This is a disservice not only to the learners themselves, but to the nation that depends on a skilled and knowledgeable generation.

The Issue:

Automatic promotion.

Our view:

Education must equip learners with competence, confidence, and critical thinking skills. These cannot be manufactured through administrative decisions.

The same students who move through classes without grasping the fundamentals later fail in the course of their academic journeys. Merit is about preparation for the next level of study.

In the education journey, each class builds upon the knowledge and skills acquired in the previous one. A child who struggles to read fluently in Primary Three will find it far more difficult to comprehend science, social studies, or mathematics in higher classes. Automatic promotion masks these learning deficits instead of addressing them. By contrast, requiring learners to meet minimum standards before progressing ensures that advancement is meaningful.

Education must equip learners with competence, confidence, and critical thinking skills. These cannot be manufactured through administrative decisions. They are earned through effort, guidance, and demonstrated understanding. Learners must internalise the value of hard work and personal responsibility, virtues that extend beyond the classroom into adulthood.

Failure to meet promotion standards is not a death sentence. It is a second chance. In many successful education systems worldwide, repetition is used strategically to consolidate learning where necessary. When properly supported by teachers, parents, and school administrators, repeating a class can rebuild confidence and strengthen academic performance. It allows learners to mature, revisit difficult concepts, and develop at their own pace.

By reaffirming the principle that progression must be earned, Ms Kaducu has reignited a critical national conversation about standards, and excellence in education. Merit assures every child that their promotion reflects real achievement. And when a learner must repeat a class, it sends a message that education matters too much to be rushed.