



Composite/Split Classes at Landsdale Primary School

Information for Parents

Sometimes parents express concerns when their child has been allocated to a split grade (composite) class and believe that it may be a disadvantage to their child. It is important that you, as parents, are aware that contrary to these beliefs there is no disadvantage to a student being in a composite class.

Why do we create split classes?

There will almost always be a need to run **composite classrooms** at Landsdale Primary School. This is because of the way we are funded. Funding is allocated to public schools on a per student basis and this is calculated by the number of students we have enrolled on the census date in February. Composite/Split Classes are a fact of life in almost all public schools.

The size of each year's cohort can vary considerably depending on enrolments but we still only receive a total amount of funding for the overall number of students. This means that in order to ensure that all classes are an appropriate size, **composite** classes may need to be formed. There are also factors such as industrial agreements on recommended student numbers for junior and senior classrooms to consider.

How does the school decide the classes each year?

The principal and the staff take into consideration the student numbers and individual needs in each year group, the recommended class sizes for each year group and the total number of staff the budget can afford. Various scenarios are examined by staff and evaluated based on the needs throughout the whole school. The final decision is made by the Principal.

How do teachers cater academically for more than one grade in a class?

Teachers are skilled at delivering the required curriculum. In addition, teachers must adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of individual learners within the classroom. A split grade class generally has very little extra variation in the needs of learners than a straight grade. Each year the curriculum builds on the curriculum from the year before so, in order to cater for the different needs of students, teachers are consistently teaching above and below that year's curriculum requirements. A **composite** class requires more work from the teacher in order to make this happen effectively but does not disadvantage students in any way. Research by Professor John Hattie into the effect sizes of factors that influence achievement, shows that **composite** classes make no difference to the academic outcomes of students.

What about socially?

Children benefit enormously from having friends outside of their year group. It allows them to develop a wider group of friends which gives them more options in the playground, greater connections across the school and can benefit them within the wider community. It helps them build social skills which has long term positive effects for building resiliency. Children in composite classes have nothing to fear but plenty to enjoy. Some parents are concerned that their child will lose friendships with the bulk of other students in their year group. Some students may choose to only play with students from their class but there is no evidence that this has negative long term effects. Most children quickly adapt to new classes and re-form friendships in subsequent years.

Excursions:

Excursions are generally organised by individual classes not by year groups. This is because excursions are related to class programs. Sometimes two classes will choose to coordinate aspects of their program and will plan excursions together. This does not mean that it is appropriate for all classes of that year level to attend as they may be engaged in different program or theme unrelated to the other class's topic and excursion.

Some programs are offered to year groups rather than classes, for example Year 6 camp week. These excursions will specify that these are offered to this year group rather than specific class/es.

School activities:

Some school activities will be offered to specific year groups. Examples of these include swimming lessons, sports carnival events, school councillor positions, etc. Assemblies are organised by classes not year groups. Again, some classes choose to combine, but it is still a class assembly not a year level one.

My child is bright and I believe he/she will be better extended by being with older students.

The concept of extending students depends on the provision of effective learning opportunities appropriate to the developmental stage of each child in the class. Whether a child is part of the younger or the older group of a split class, their individual educational needs will be catered for by the class teacher.

What does the research show about the academic levels of students in composite classes?

Research has shown that students in composite (multi-age) classrooms are at least as successful academically as their typical school peers. Professor Barbara Pavan's October 1992 article for Educational Leadership pp.22-24 titled "The Benefits of Non-graded Schools", reviewed 64 research studies on non-graded (multi-age) schools. Pavan found that 58% of those students in multi-age classes performed better than their peers on measures of academic achievement. 33% performed as well as their peers, and only 9% did worse than their peers. Pavan also found that students in multi-age settings were more likely than their peers to have positive self-concepts, high self-esteem, and good attitudes toward school. Her review of the research also indicates that benefits to students increase the longer they are in a non-graded setting, and that "underachieving" students also benefit from being in multi-age classrooms.

What else does the research say about the benefits of composite classes?

Older students provide a model of intellectual development as well as of appropriate behaviour for the younger students.

Interaction between less and more advanced students, benefits all individuals both academically and socially.

Younger students are able to seek help from a wider range of people rather than relying on the teacher to help them all the time.

Older students are able to practise the skills they learn by teaching them to the younger students.

There are less behaviour problems because younger students integrate quickly into established class routines as older students model appropriate behaviour.

Students are more confident, can operate better as part of a group, are more assertive, develop a greater respect for individual differences, become more independent learners and better problem-solvers. They also make friends outside of their standard age-groups.

Older students can benefit from helping younger students in cooperative learning situations.

Composite classes build self-esteem and personal competence and provide opportunities to build social skills in a context more reflective of the social interactions within families and the community.

Changing the focus of learning from achieving a certain grade to individual personal best, alters the nature of the learning experience to lead children to value learning and the learning process.

Students experience a wider range of roles including leadership and responsibility within a composite learning environment.

Although a student might be chronologically a year older or younger in a composite class, and the learning path may be different, the destination of achieving their full potential will be the same.

Thank you for your understanding and ongoing partnership in your child's learning development.