Composite classes

Ask any school principal - if there’s one issue that will create angst amongst parents, it’s when their child is allocated to a composite class.

Parents may believe their child will be disadvantaged in some way either by being ‘held back’ if they are in the higher year level or that they may find it hard to keep up if they are in the lower year level.

**Every class is a composite class**...

In reality every class is a composite class as each child’s development, whether it is physical, social, cognitive or spiritual, occurs in stages and children move through these stages at varying rates.

There are variations in the physical development, social skills and academic abilities of students in ‘straight’ year level class groups. Put 25 Year 1 students in a room and you will have 25 individuals with needs that reflect these variations in development as well as individual strengths, challenges and interests.

Contemporary teaching strategies accommodate the individual needs of a student whether that child is in a ‘straight’ class or a composite class.

Schools are social environments. Composite classes, buddy classes, vertical learning groups all provide settings for social development across ages. There are benefits for younger and older children in terms of “learning to learn” skills such as confidence, social interaction and independence and they also make friends outside of their standard age-groups.

Importantly, research has shown children in composite classes do no better or worse academically than their peers in straight year level classes.

Teachers and school leaders take many factors into account when determining class structures and composition. These include the academic needs, social needs (including friendship groups) and physical development of students. Schools also need to consider logistical factors such as enrolment numbers in each year level so that class sizes do not contravene workplace agreements. They also consider parent input about the specific needs of their child. With this myriad of factors to take into account, it is not a simple task.
What you can do....

Meet with the teacher or principal to discuss issues you may have about composite classes and respond positively to any invitations to contribute information about your child which will inform their class placement.

Talk to your child’s teacher about what is expected of children in your child’s year level to find out if your expectations are realistic.

Share information with the teacher about what you know about your child that may enhance or hinder his/her learning.

Keep informed by participating in the range of information sessions, expos, workshops and programs offered by your school.

Be in regular contact with your child’s teacher about his/her progress throughout the year.

As partners in the education of their children, parents:

- Work collaboratively with teachers and staff
- Respect the skills, knowledge and experience of school leaders and teachers
- Access information and resources provided by the school to support them in their role as the primary educators of their children

(Charter for Parents in Catholic schools)

This article was developed by Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities (SA) Inc. in consultation with educators from Catholic Education SA and may be used or adapted without permission only with acknowledgement of the source and associated references (below).

Reference:
“Composites – Stages not Ages” by Susanne Witt, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations