

# CLASS STRUCTURES — Composite Classes

## A guide for parents and carers



Churchlands  
*Primary School*

RESPECT

RESILIENCE

ENGAGE

EXCEL



## Why does Churchlands have composite classes?

Schools are staffed based on enrolment numbers. Composite classes are usually formed because of the uneven pattern of enrolments at the school.

Department guidelines state that a Year 1—3 class size is recommended to be no larger than 24 students in a class. Years 4—6 class size is recommended to be no larger than 32. A Kindergarten class is recommended to be no larger than 20 and a Pre-primary class no larger than 27 students. This way of organising classes assists schools by:

- Providing more options for placing students and teachers.
- Providing flexibility in class structures to cater for needs of individual children and identified groups.
- Enabling balanced class sizes and factors such as gender, ability ranges, maturity and social considerations across classes may be considered.

## How do composite classes benefit students?

Composite classes provides opportunities for students to:

- Work together and learn from each other.
- Develop modelling and leadership skills.
- Work at their own rate, experience success and acknowledge the success of others.
- Accept, value and care for others as individuals.
- Foster a 'sense of community' as they share the responsibility of learning.

Composite classes provide opportunities for students to learn from each other by:

- Modelling appropriate behaviour, cooperation, sharing, understanding and tolerance.
- Sharing knowledge of classroom routines, rules and organisation.
- Verbalising the learning process, sharing strategies and different ways to use equipment.
- Sharing enthusiasm and enjoyment.

### Introduction

Churchlands Primary School has a process in place for allocating students into classes each year. The procedure ensures that the professional judgement of both the teaching staff and Executive Leadership Team is informed and that all available information is applied to the placement process. The interests of children are paramount to the decisions taken by the school.

Parents/caregivers often request information about why and how children of different ages are grouped together. The terms 'split classes', 'multi-age groups', 'composite classes', 'mixed classes' or 'vertical groups' are names used to describe these class arrangements.

Grouping students of various ages into classes is not new. Primary schools and in particular smaller schools, have traditionally used this organisational arrangement to ensure equity in class sizes and as a strategy to support children's learning.

When students work with older/younger students, understandings are clarified and developed through sharing, explaining and exploring with others. These experiences also enable students:

- To develop skills in cooperation, communication and leadership
- To build self-esteem
- To accept and value differences in each other.

Composite classes provide an ideal setting for the teachers and the classroom program to:

- Challenge the range of students across the levels using open-ended tasks, high-level questioning and development of their creative and critical thinking skills.
- Involve students in planning a program that reflects their interests and experiences.
- Work in a variety of ways, including whole class, small group and individuals.
- Use resources and materials, investigate, hypothesize, plan and design, solve problems, experiment, talk, share and record their investigations and achievements.
- Develop independence to work cooperatively and to take responsibility for their learning.



## Some frequently asked questions....

### How are students taught in a composite class?

In any class, there is a range of abilities and one of the challenges of teaching is to cater for individual differences. Teachers work in a variety of ways, sometimes with the whole class, perhaps for a class story, discussion or sharing time but more often they tend to work with small groups or individuals. As well, in the process of learning, children use resources and materials to explore, plan and design, experiment, talk, share, question and record their investigations and achievements. Throughout this process, teachers monitor children's learning and record it in a variety of ways and plan future learning from the judgements they make about what the student has achieved. This planning, teaching and evaluating process occurs whether a teacher has a straight or composite class.

### How do teachers manage to teach different year levels?

Year levels indicate the length of time spent at school and not the knowledge, skills and experience of children in that year level. Classes/groups of children are made up of individuals operating at different rates and different levels. All teachers are very much aware of each student as an individual. They focus on what each student knows, and needs to know. They use strategies such as modelling, explicit teaching, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, ability groups and one to one instruction.

### Will my child's learning be hampered in any way if he/she spends time helping other children?

As in any class, the responsibility for the teaching rests with the teacher. This interaction assists each individual's learning. When children work together cooperatively, each child's ideas and understandings are clarified and developed through sharing, explaining and exploring with others. Working with others gives children opportunities to practise what they have already learnt, to use skills in a variety of situations and to share different learning styles and strategies. These experiences also enable children to develop skills in co-operation, communication and leadership, to build confidence and self-esteem, and to accept and value differences.

## Will my child miss out on any work or have to go through similar work again, as a result of being in a composite class?

When children move from class to class they continue to work at their own rate with support and direct instruction from the classroom teacher and the classroom program.

There are times when children 'revisit' particular topics or concepts as part of learning even in a straight class. This enables them to develop their creative and critical thinking, build on previous knowledge and explore other possibilities.

## What about socially?

Children benefit enormously from having friends outside of their year group. Composites 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. Teachers work collaboratively to plan their programs ensuring children in composite classes are provided regular opportunities to join their 'same age' peers in various learning situations, including in-class learning and other events and activities. Consequently, students form wider friendship groups than would normally occur in a straight class. Evidence shows that most children quickly adapt to new classroom situations, developing new social connections while being provided opportunity to continue existing friendships. This opportunity helps build long term social skills while also assisting in building resiliency.

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

Research by Professor John Hattie into the effect sizes of factors that influence achievement show that **composite** classes make no difference to the academic outcomes of students learning. The factor that has the largest influence by a very large margin is teacher quality. Additionally, research conclude d that composite classes can actually enhance development; students becoming more confident and assertive and learning to operate as part of a group while bolstering independent learning skills.

At Churchlands Primary School it is evident throughout the school that whether students are in a straight or composite class, all students are provided with the optimum learning environment that caters for each student's individual needs.

## Further Reading

<https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning%20achievement/>

<https://www.smh.com.au/education/many-parents-dislike-composite-classes-but-the-evidence-does-not-support-their-anxiety-20150413-1mk4g9.htm>

