



24.11.2017

Information on Composite Classes

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

Silverdale School, like the majority of New Zealand primary schools has, and has had for many years, composite classes. Next year our Year 3 and 4 students will be in composite classes. All classes are formulated considering a total balance in each classroom - considering social behaviour, gender and learning needs.

Why do we have composite classes?

For a variety of reasons including:

- Meeting social needs of the children
- Meeting academic needs of the children
- Matching children to teachers
- Minimising/making equitable classroom sizes

What are the benefits?

Composite classes can provide significant benefits to both the younger and older students in the class. Older students can benefit from helping younger students in collaborative learning situations. The younger students have the opportunity of enhanced learning experiences when they are ready for it. Role models and leaders can come from both the younger and older children; the children who excel at these traits do so irrespective of age. Research, both in New Zealand and overseas, has shown no detrimental academic effects from composite classes but many additional benefits: enhanced social development, increased confidence, children can operate better as part of a group, children are more assertive, children become more independent learners and better problem-solvers, children make friends outside of their standard age-groups, older children get more leadership opportunities and frequently build self-esteem as they become role models to the younger classmates.

How do Teachers cater for a range of abilities across two year levels?

There is not a set learning programme at each particular year level, rather there are expectations set at curriculum levels. The New Zealand curriculum was designed in the knowledge that learning is not linear and children, regardless of their age, have differing needs and learn at different paces.

The New Zealand curriculum is set up in developmental bands which range from 2-3 years per level. It is also possible that a class, whether composite or same-year level, may have teaching and learning programmes that cover more than the one curriculum level. Teachers are very skilled at adapting a learning task in order for it to challenge one set of children while being achievable for others.

In any class whether composite or straight level there is a range of ability - with children working above, at or below their age and expected curriculum level. All classes regardless of whether they are composite or straight year groupings are based on recognising differences and not seeing students as the same; children are taught according to individual need, not age. Composite classes recognise differences by not seeing all students of the same age as the same.



Composite classes are not new. They are a common form of class organisation in schools in all education systems, both in New Zealand and across the world. Regardless of if children are in a straight class or composite class, our focus is always on how to best meet the needs of the children at our school. By having composite classes we are more effectively able to ensure no one age group has too many or too few children, plus we have the added benefit of having more options as to where we can place children, meaning that we can match the needs of the child with the strengths of the teacher, and we are better able to ensure the best combinations of children to support effective learning. Ultimately, whether children are in composite or straight-age classes, it is not the age combinations that matter. What matters is the quality of teaching and learning and the relationship between the child and the teacher. We know it is the teacher who makes the biggest difference not the composite/straight organisation. We hope this has explained some of the reasoning and theories behind the concept of composite classes.

If you have any questions please contact us at school.

Laura Webster
Team Leader Team Pukeko

Cameron Lockie
Principal