



Composite Classes at Churchill Park School

Like in previous years, Churchill Park School will have some composite classes, where classes are made up of children from more than one year level. Whether your child is placed in a composite or same-year class, please be assured this is done with thought and care.

Internationally, as well as in New Zealand schools, composite classes or multi-level have been the traditional class-level organisation. There is significant research that identifies a range of benefits for the students.

Understandably, parents may question how the teacher can cater to the range of abilities across two-year levels. The key to understanding this model is to appreciate that “growth and learning is determined by stages, not ages”.

Although a child might be chronologically older or younger - their maturity, social needs, and academic and behavioural needs are all individual. Teachers group students to match these specific needs to teach. New Zealand teachers are recognised internationally for their ability to responsively teach to the needs of every pupil (also called personalised learning).

If you reflect on students that attend kindergarten and pre-school centers, there can be up to two or more years difference – same class but a different stage. The key is the relationship with the teacher. Older students are not “held back” in composite classes as there is no one curriculum level per age group. The New Zealand curriculum is not designed as one level per year (as many overseas education systems are) but is set up in developmental bands which can range from 1 - 3 years per level (see Years and Curriculum Levels table over page).

There are several other additional benefits that multi-level classes support:

Peer modeling - more socially able students set the tone, through the values and key competencies for the class. Role models and great class citizens can come from both younger and older students irrespective of age.

In terms of school organisation and class numbers, this increased range of classes also provides a greater balancing of class numbers. You may be aware that some years we have differences in class numbers as students do not enter school in exact groups of 25, plus our roll can fluctuate with unexpected enrolments during the year.

Frequently Asked Questions

Won't it be much harder for teachers to have a greater range of ages in their classes?

Due to staggered enrolments on a child's 5th birthday, there has always been a range of at least 12 – 14 months in any classroom. In New Zealand, teachers group students according to their ability, typically for maths and literacy. They also “flexi group” for specific needs.

Are children “held back” if they are one of the older students in the multi-level class?

Teachers assess individual students. Groups are then based on need or ability “stage not age” e.g. A Year 6 student may be at the end of Level 2 for writing but a Year 5 student may be at Level 3.

Why don’t you “stream” classes?

Unlike some high schools or international schools where some subjects are streamed, New Zealand Primary teachers are expected (and trained) to teach multi-level classrooms. At the primary level, teaching and learning programmes are developed through a wide range of experiences across all the learning areas of the curriculum with a focus on literacy and numeracy along with the development of values and key competencies.

What about the difference in maturity between two-year levels?

Regardless of their age, students who have well-developed social skills are role models for others. These students are not necessarily the oldest in a class but may even be the year-level younger. Some teachers specifically group students to teach or model our key competencies or to reinforce social/cooperative skills. The culture of high expectations is set by the teacher (regardless of year level). The analogy of a sports team, which may have several age levels - but huge variances in skill, resilience, or player attitudes, will perform as a team depending on the coach’s expectations.