Class Structures - common questions and answers

Isn’t it better if children are in classes of the same age or year group?
Classes made up of children of the same age or year group are part of our school system today simply because they reflect how educational administrators originally set up schools, not because they were found to reflect good educational practice. This model for schooling was intended to prepare workers for the factory societies of the 1850’s.

What is a multi age or composite class?
A composite class is one where children from different year groups or stages are groups are placed together in one class. Families are composites with adults and children of different ages at different stages. How many of your adult friends are exactly the same age as you?

The children in the composite class study different topics from the single stage class. Should I be concerned?
There is no need to be concerned. Different classes can be studying different topics and still covering the syllabus. Topics are used to provide a relevant context, case study or example for teaching the key concepts in each subject area. For example, “Antarctica” is a topic. It is an example of the much broader concept of Endangered Environments. This allows teachers to choose the most relevant example for their students.

How can a teacher teach two or more stages at once?
The curriculum is now organised as a learning continuum from Kinder to Year 12. Students can be anywhere along this learning continuum. This continuum is broken into stages. Students are expected to achieve particular goals (outcomes) by the end of each stage. The following examples show the expected outcome for Reading in Stage 2 and 3.

- **Stage 2 Reading**: Reads independently a wide range of texts on increasingly challenging topics and justifies own interpretation of ideas, information and events.
- **Stage 3 Reading**: Reads independently an extensive range of texts with increasing content demands and responds to themes and issues.

You will note that the expectation for Stage 3 is more challenging and complex. It is quite possible for students to be studying the same text with a completely different set of expectations. It is not the age of the child that determines what students are ready to learn next. If that were the case every child would learn to walk, talk or read at the same age. Students are at many stages of readiness in any classroom, regardless of whether the class is a straight class or composite class. Teachers cater for differences in readiness by grouping children according to purpose and setting curriculum goals appropriate to the needs of the students.

Why group?
It all depends on the purpose. Grouping can be based on
- readiness
- interests or
- different ways to learn, such as collaborative groups, independent study, peer tutors, the internet etc.

We now have a curriculum that is a developmental continuum stretching from Kinder to Year 12 in all Key Learning Areas (subjects). Students can be anywhere along this continuum so grouping students according to subject, achievement and readiness makes a lot of sense.
Groups can be formed full time or part-time. Groups can be formed within classes, across classes or can operate as ‘pull out’ groups. Grouping in Maths and Reading is formed on the basis of readiness so that students are learning content that is ‘new’. That is, the content is just difficult enough so students are challenged but not so hard they want to give up. Research tells us that grouping in Maths and Reading is highly effective in terms of student learning and growth. Groupings can be formed within the class, within stages or across stages. Groupings can be full time or part time or just some of the time. Currently we have an Extension Maths ‘pull out’ group that includes students from Years 3 to 6! It works brilliantly! After this lesson the kids go back to their home class and complete their usual class activities.
Will the children in the composite class get the same opportunities as the children in the single stage class?
Children in all classes will follow programs constructed to help them progress at their own level, regardless of whether or not they are in a composite or single year stage class. In addition, the school will make every effort to involve children of any one year group in activities which bring them all together. However, it is important that the natural identity of each class is maintained and the school will ensure that this happens.

My child has been put into a composite class with students from a class stage below him/her. Is he/she being kept back?
No, this is certainly not the case. You can be confident that classes have been structured to make best use of available staff, resources and space. Children will progress through learning experiences appropriate to their developmental level.

My child’s friends are all in another class. What should I do?
You should be assured that your child’s teacher will be sensitive to the needs of all children in his/her class and will be encouraging the class to develop good working relationships with each other. It is important that children learn to adapt and not be fearful of change. Children usually make friends very quickly and can cope far better than adults imagine. Children will spend time in the playground mixing with their friends and there will be many opportunities for your child to continue to be involved with his/her whole year group including some curricular activities and social activities such as playtimes.

Can I refuse to have my child in a composite class?
No. The management of the school is the responsibility of the principal. Class structures are formed with a great deal of consideration. We understand parents only want what they believe is best for their child, as do we. Parents will be able to make any requests for special consideration in Term 4. However, there is no guarantee that we will be able to accommodate special requests.

When will my child know which class they are in?
Until we know how exactly many students have returned to school we are unable to form new classes. Numbers at Newtown North Public School can fluctuate quite a bit so children start the school year in the same class as the previous year. We aim to have children in their new class by the end of the first week. In very exceptional circumstances, classes can sometimes be restructured at any point during the year.

How can I help my child adjust to their new class?
The teachers and school executive consider each child's academic, social and emotional needs when forming class placements. While friendship groups are considered in forming classes, friendship groups are not the basis for constructing classes. This is an opportunity to put our school vision and value statements into action. We need to help children learn that they can
- learn to make new friends
- learn to work with people other than their friends
- learn new routines
- learn that they can adapt to change and
- learn to explore the world with courage.

Some children adjust well to change. Others find it harder. Your child will look to you for guidance. Be positive and reassure them that adjusting to change takes time. Let them voice their concerns but try not to step in to solve the problem for them. It takes a lot of time and thought to put new classes together. Moving your child to a different class might seem an easy solution but it is not always possible. It is important that your child’s year begins on a positive note and we all work together to build strong and supportive partnerships. If you need to discuss any concerns or issues in regard to your child you should:
1. Firstly have a chat with the class teacher then:
2. If you need to discuss the matter further please make an appointment with the appropriate stage supervisor – Neroli Palmer for children in Stages 2 and 3, and Lynne Sun for children in Early Stage 1 and Stage 1.
3. If the matter remains unresolved or requires further attention please ring the school office on 9517 1110 and make an appointment to talk with Sally Hogan, the school principal.