

FROM THE PRINCIPAL

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I have had a number of parents ask questions about composite classes and the benefits and challenges associated with them.

Composite, or multi-age, classes occur in schools for a number of reasons. Composite classes provide schools with more flexibility and options to ensure even class sizes and a balance of student social and academic needs within and across year levels.

It is important to understand that all classes, whether a single year level or composite class group, have children with diverse learning needs and abilities. When planning for student learning, teachers at Lower Plenty take into consideration the strengths, prior knowledge and needs of every student. They use this as a starting point to design the learning and work from where each child is currently at. In any class, there will be teaching and learning that occurs as a whole class, in small groups and at an individual level.

Research tells us that high quality teaching and learning is the key to a successful learning environment in any classroom, not the structure or makeup of the class. There is no evidence that student learning may be hindered in a composite class.

We understand that the idea of composite classes may be unfamiliar to parents and have included some frequently asked questions and answers are below.

Does the placement of a child in a composite class mean that they are more or less able?

In every year level, children have diverse needs, skills and abilities. When placing children into class groups we aim to represent the full range of student abilities from a given year level, whether in a single year level class or a composite class. Children are not "chosen" to be in a composite class based on their learning achievement.

What are the benefits of a composite class?

Children in a composite class have the opportunity to mix socially and academically with a wide range of students. Children are able to work at their own rate within a community of learners and are able to learn from, and with, each other. Younger students have the opportunity to learn alongside older peers, and older students can show leadership and demonstrate high level understandings and complex thinking skills to model and explain their learning at designated times.

How do teachers cater for a range of abilities and year levels?

The teachers at Lower Plenty are trained in differentiating the curriculum to meet the varying abilities of their students. We have a very clear understanding of the curriculum requirements and expectations for each year level. Effective assessments of student learning ensure we know students' needs, strengths and future learning points. Here are some strategies that we use:

- Planning open-ended tasks that cater for a range of different abilities and allow learning to be demonstrated in different ways
- Planning tasks that allow for different entry points and provide opportunities for extension and problem solving
- Providing targeted small group and individual instruction based on learning needs and specific teaching points
- Setting individual goals, challenges and projects which encourage children to demonstrate independence and responsibility in their learning
- At times students will separate into year level groups for instruction; this may include linking with another composite class or working in smaller groups within the classroom.

"Research shows it makes no difference to performance whether students are in a straight year group or in a multi-age class – it's the teacher who makes the difference." Multi-age or composite classes:2008 to 2014, NSW Department of Education and Communities, January

An excellent link for more information

<https://www.kidspot.com.au/school/primary/starting-school/the-parents-guide-to-composite-classes/news-story/31a65e6c0fb57afc8cd242dddb2e88d1>