

CLASS STRUCTURES

A guide for parents and carers



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Learning Together

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Millen Primary School is an Independent Public School



INTRODUCTION

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.

Grading students was purely an administrative innovation of the mid 1800's devised to accommodate large numbers in a compulsory education system. There was no educational basis to the decision, rather a strategy imposed on schools to suit the administration of the day.

Why does Millen have split classes?

School's are staffed based on enrolment numbers. Split classes are usually formed because of the uneven pattern of enrolments at the school.

Year 1—3 class size is recommended to be no larger than 24 for a straight class and 23 for a split class. Years 4—6 class size is recommended to be no larger than 32 for a straight class and 31 for a split class. A Kindergarten class is recommended to be no larger than 20 and a Pre-primary class no larger than 27. A Pre-primary and Year 1 combined class is recommended to contain no more than 20 students.

This way of organising classes assists schools by:

- Providing more options for placing students and teachers.
- Providing flexibility in class structures to provide 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/split classes benefit students?

Split 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.

Split 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.
- Verbalizing the learning process, sharing strategies and different ways to use equipment
- Sharing enthusiasm and enjoyment.

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.

Split classes provides an ideal setting for the teachers and the classroom program to:

- Challenge the range of students across the levels using open ended tasks and questioning
- Involve students in planning a program which 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 split 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, explore,

plan and design, experiment, talk, share 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 happens whether or not a teacher has a straight or split year level.

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 split class?

When children move from class to class they continue to work at their own rate with support and encouragement from the classroom teacher and the classroom program. There are times when children do 'revisit' particular topics or concepts as part of learning. This enables them to develop their thinking, build on previous knowledge and explore other possibilities.



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