

## **Composite Classes at Wainui Beach School**

- Primarily we have to organise children into composite classes because we are a smaller school. We want to keep class sizes as small as possible. Schools get new children in and others leave. When we set the classes we don't know who these children/families are so we have to make sure that there is some flexibility in the classes.
- All teachers teach to children's needs -this is what our job is.
- In all classes teachers will group children to teach to their needs.
- The experienced and talented teachers that we have at WBS understand how important it is to teach the child to their needs, giving them extra support if they need it, or extension if they need it.
- Children are at different stages. They don't make the same progress at the same time. Think of babies, some crawl early, talk later... The teachers are skilled at assessing where each child is at and teaching them the next step.
- When we looked at classes there are groups of children at similar stages. Throughout the year we would expect this to change a lot. Teachers will regroup children as their needs change.
- We want a partnership with parents, so it is very important that if you have concerns about your child's progress that you talk to the teacher, as soon as possible. Nip problems in the bud.

## **Some Research on Composite Classes.**

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 co-operative learning situations. The younger students have the opportunity of enhanced learning experiences where they are ready for it. There are many examples where younger children can show older ones a thing or two! 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. A major review of international research into multi-age classes was undertaken by Veenman (1995). He investigated 56 studies in 12 countries including Australia, looking at the cognitive and non-cognitive effects of multi-age and single-age classes. He found that there were no differences found with respect to maths, reading, or language and that with respect to attitudes towards school, self-concept and social adjustment, students are sometimes advantaged by being in multi-age classes instead of single-age classes. Research from the UK has shown children in composite classes do 'no better or worse' academically than their peers in a straight grade class, but that, socially, their development is enhanced. They are more

confident, can operate better as part of a group, are more assertive, become more independent learners and better problem-solvers. They also make friends outside of their standard age-groups. In later life, if we have a one year age difference with someone this becomes of no consequence.

A University of Glasgow study found that in Europe, there is

“no evidence to show that composite classes affect pupils’ academic performance adversely. It is possible that pupils may gain socially from the experience and show non-cognitive benefits which to date have not been quantified... the academic performance of pupils in composites may ‘simply be no worse and simply no better’ than that of pupils in single-age classes. Some evidence from Scottish primary schools seems to suggest that pupils in composite classes may even have out-performed any other group in the assessment process.”

Anderson & Parvan (1993) analysed 64 research studies in the US and Canada and found that schools with composite classes were most likely to benefit students from all circumstances and all ability ranges. They noted that longitudinal studies show that the longer the students are in a composite programme the more likely it is that they will have positive attitudes and high academic achievement. Of the 64 studies, 58% found that students in composite programmes had higher academic achievement scores than those students in single-graded programmes; 33% showed the attainment was the same and only 9% showed that the students in multi-age programmes performed worse.

In Australia when the NSW Government discussed this matter in parliament, the Minister of Education V. Chadwick said, “Composite classes have always existed in public education and always will. Educational research by experts says that composite classes are not educationally detrimental; for acceleration of gifted students, they are an educational necessity.”

A New Zealand research project led by Ian Wilkinson and Richard Hamilton to study learning to read in composite classes (in which our principal - when a classroom teacher - took part) found that being in a composite class did not contribute to lower reading. The most important factor in reading success was the nature and the quality of the instruction.

Composite classes are not new. They are a common form of class organisation in schools in all nations’ education systems. In most schools that adopt the practice, such as Wainui Beach School, while straight classes may operate from time to time the decision is often based more on a “numbers game” caused by uneven patterns of enrolments. By juggling the numbers of students, schools attempt to come up with the best solutions to provide an equitable and practical school structure in any one school year. This ensures that no one age group in a school has too many or too few children in each class.

There is no empirical evidence for any assumption that student learning is hindered in composite classes. 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.

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[http://www.northsydneydem.com.au/5-community/4-info/files/2007-Composite\\_Classes.pdf](http://www.northsydneydem.com.au/5-community/4-info/files/2007-Composite_Classes.pdf)

[http://www.schoolparents.canberra.net.au/composite\\_classes.htm](http://www.schoolparents.canberra.net.au/composite_classes.htm)

[http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=EJ672315&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=EJ672315](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ672315&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ672315)

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