

## Information about Combined Classes

Combined classes are those where children from two or more year levels are in the same class. While it can involve more than two years in the same class, the most common configuration is a split between two consecutive years – so Years K and P, 1 and 2, 5 and 6 and so on. They are becoming increasingly common in Australian Schools as variations in enrolment numbers occur from year to year. Every year we have combined classes at Craigie Heights.

Combined classes happen for a number of reasons. A school may have uneven enrolments by age group – for example, there's a larger intake of Year 3 and a smaller group of Year 4 enrolments. In order to keep class size to the optimal number, the school may decide to run one Year 3 class and a Year 3 and 4 combined class to allow for two evenly sized classes. If there were no combined classes, there would be difficulty staffing all classes - some would be full to the brim and others quite empty, which then leads to a problem of equity.

Sometimes, combined classes are formed for educational reasons in schools where it is felt that the mixing of children of different ages is educationally and socially advantageous.

### Will my child be disadvantaged being in a combined class? Will they fall behind?

Some parents fear that their child will fall behind – that the teacher's attention will be split between the two years and they'll get less overall learning time with their teacher. The research, however, doesn't agree. Multiple studies conclude it makes no difference to performance whether students are in a straight year group or in a multi-age class. Experts agree the most important factor in determining how well a student does is the quality of the teacher and their teaching.

Additionally, it seems combined classes can actually enhance development; students becoming more confident and assertive, and learning to operate as part of a group while bolstering independent learning skills.

### Is it better to be the older year or the younger year in a combined class?

Combined classes have been shown to provide benefits to both the older and younger students in the class. Older students often take on a mentoring role, and benefit from helping younger students in co-operative learning situations, while younger students have the opportunity of enhanced learning experiences where they are ready for it.

### What types of children are selected for combined classes?

There's often a lot read into a child being put in a combined class, however, the selection process may vary from school to school. A great deal of careful thought goes into class placements, lots of social engineering, and teachers do everything they can to make sure of the right fit for everyone.

### How do teachers manage the workload across age groups?

Teachers actually manage workloads for a range of ages and abilities in any given class, not just combined classes. As children may start school later than others or have an early or late birthday, there will always be a mix of ages and abilities. Age isn't the only factor either – some students may be brilliant at maths and average at English, while others have the opposite skills and struggles. Some students are better at working independently, while others need things broken down into very small bites. So teachers are already good at taking a class task and making sure each student can master the skills required in the curriculum guidelines.

An example of how these requirements can be met between different grade levels? The class may learn about an Australian explorer as a group, then the teacher will assign different activities and assessments that differ in level of difficulty between the grades.

## When should you be worried about your child's class?

As with any time during the school year, you should only worry if your child shows signs that they are not themselves. Certainly don't worry about something that hasn't happened yet.

If a normally bubbly child starts becoming upset for no particular reason, a previously keen student starts to become difficult to get out the door of the morning or a competent scholar starts to struggle to understand their work, then it is time to talk to their teacher.

Staying involved in your child's schooling and communicating with them and their teacher on a regular basis will ensure you and your child can stay on top of things and make the most of the experience.

- ✓ Read the information that comes home from teachers and the school so that you have the basis for a discussion with staff. The school website is a valuable source of helpful information.
- ✓ Be positive about the way you talk about school with your child and in front of your child.
- ✓ Talk to your child regularly about their school experience and ask them about the great things that happen each day.
- ✓ Become familiar with the curriculum for your child's year level.
- ✓ Communicate with your child's teacher about individual learning needs. If you have concerns or questions, ask about the strategies they are using to cover the different year level curriculum.
- ✓ Be a part of the school. Attend the parent information meetings and school events volunteer at school or join the School Board or P&C. Your child's education will benefit.

At Craigie Heights we are only too happy to talk to you about ways to make your child's experience at school the best it can be. Please feel free to come and talk to the class teacher and then a member of the administration team if you need to.

Jen Graffin  
Principal