



# Poynter Primary School

## COMPOSITE CLASSES AT POYNTER

Dear Poynter Families

I write to provide you with information, education and clarification surrounding composite classes. Some people call these split classes; however, the classroom is one unit, one learning environment, the teachers teach students in their class as equals, as a team, not split. Grade structure is immaterial and at Poynter, we provide a 'differentiated' curriculum, one that caters to all children as individuals.

Sometimes parents express concerns when their child has been allocated to a split /composite class and believe that it may be a disadvantage to their child. It is important that you, as parents, are aware that contrary to these beliefs there is no disadvantage to a student being in a composite class. In years gone by composite classes were formed by placing talented students in the lower grade level with lower achievers in the higher grade. This concept has long been abandoned. All classes are formed by teachers and school leaders considering a multitude of factors and placing students with a range of information available (see our Class Placement Policy).

### **Reasons for a composite class and how the school decides the classes each year:**

There will almost always be a need to run composite classrooms at Poynter. This is because of the way we are funded. Funding is allocated to public schools on a per student basis and this is calculated by the number of students we have enrolled on the census date in March. As documented in our Class Placement Policy, the State School Teachers Union WA has a set of 'recommended' class sizes. We budget our staffing formula according to these recommended sizes, occasionally go slightly over if required, but generally stick to the recommended number, and leave space for in-area enrolments throughout the year.

Composite classes are therefore a necessity, and a practical response to the problem of uneven grade enrolments; for example, when there are too many students to form one 'straight' grade but not enough to form two. Combining students in this way is an administrative solution that allows schools to ensure more consistent class sizes, maximise school and teacher funding and resources, and cope with declining or increasing enrolments.

In summary, the Principal takes into consideration the student numbers and individual needs in each year group, the recommended class sizes for each year group and the total number of staff the budget can afford. Various scenarios are examined by staff and evaluated based on the needs throughout the whole school.

### **How do teachers cater academically for more than one grade in a class?**

Teachers are skilled at delivering the required curriculum. In addition, teachers must adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of individual learners within the classroom. A composite class generally has very little extra variation in



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the needs of learners compared with a straight grade. Each year the curriculum builds on the curriculum from the year before so, in order to cater for the different needs of students, teachers are consistently teaching above and below that year's curriculum requirements.

Research by Professor John Hattie into the effect sizes of factors that influence achievement show that composite classes make no difference to the academic outcomes of students. In fact, the factor that has the largest influence by a very large margin is teacher quality. Experts agree; the most important factor in determining how well a student does is the quality of the teacher and providing a 'differentiated' curriculum which caters to all children as individuals. Differentiation describes a concept being taught universally to all students within a class and creating related tasks at varying levels of complexity. When differentiating instruction in this way, teachers are providing for multiple levels of understanding at the same time. Differentiation occurs in every classroom at Poynter and has been a focus for the last two years, which aligns with the Department's *Teaching for Impact* statement.

## What about socially?

Children benefit enormously from having friends outside of their year group. It allows them to develop a wider group of friends which gives them more options in the playground, greater connections across the school and can benefit them within the wider community. It helps them build social skills which have long term effects for building resiliency. Children in composite classes have nothing to fear but plenty to enjoy. Some parents are concerned that their child will lose friendships with the bulk of other students in their year group. Most children quickly adapt to new classes and reform friendships in subsequent years.

## Excursions and school activities:

Each teacher within a year group has designated time built into the timetable to plan and work collaboratively. Poynter staff are highly collaborative, and it is an expectation that teachers meet weekly to discuss student outcomes, share learning area content and resources, review student data and plan accordingly. It is common for cohorts to plan excursions together. Some programs are offered to year groups rather than classes, for example Year 6 camp or dance. Generally, assemblies are organised by classes not year groups.

## Further information:

You will hear your teacher talk about the learning program they are offering and how your child will be catered for at the Parent Information Evenings (PIEs), which will be held in the first three weeks of Term 1.

Below are links to further reading:



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Article from the Sydney Herald addressing this topic:

<https://www.smh.com.au/education/many-parents-dislike-composite-classes-but-the-evidence-does-not-support-their-anxiety-20150413-1mk4g9.html>

Professor John Hattie's research:

<https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/>

The contents of this letter sit alongside our Class Placement Policy. As articulated in last week's newsletter, Poynter staff spend hours and hours creating these intricate class lists. They know students very well, consider multiple factors and have every child's best interest at heart. Please approach each and every class your child enters with an open and positive mindset.

Decisions regarding placements are final, and class swap requests will not be entered into.

Please do not approach your child's class teacher and make last minute requests or query where your child has been placed.

Thank you for your understanding and ongoing partnership in your child's learning development.

Lisa Wade  
Principal

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