



# MULTI-AGE CLASSES INFORMATION FOR PARENTS



Parents/caregivers often want to find out about classes where children of differing ages are grouped together.

In junior primary and primary schools “multi-age groups”, “composite classes”, “vertical groups”, “family groups” are names used to describe these class arrangements. In this broadsheet the term “multi-age groups” is used to describe such groupings.

Multi-age grouping is not new. Junior primary, primary schools and in particular small country schools have used this organisational arrangement to ensure balanced class sizes and support for children’s learning.

## Why have multi-age groups?

Children belong to a variety of groups. Some of these groups have a diverse age range. Within families, neighbourhood and friendship groups, sports and clubs, younger and older children play and learn together.

In schools, the arrangement of classes into multi-age groups provides the opportunity for children to work with others of various ages and benefit from the broad range of knowledge, skills and experience in the class.

This way of organising classes assists schools by:

- Providing more options for placing children and teachers
- Providing flexibility in class sizes and even distribution of boys and girls across classes
- Building long term relationships between teacher, child and parents when children stay with the same class teacher over a number of years.

## How do multi-age classes benefit children?

*“Educating for the Twenty First Century: A Charter for Public Schooling in South Australia”* challenges schools to provide quality education for all students. Multi-age grouping is one strategy that supports teachers in providing quality education for students.

Multi-age groups provide opportunities for children to:

- Work together and learn from each other
- Work at their own rate, experience success and acknowledge the success of others
- Accept, value and care for others as individuals
- Be in the same class as other members of the family group
- Foster a “sense of community” as they share the responsibility for learning
- Stay with the same class teacher over a number of years enabling teachers to develop a realistic and detailed understanding of each child, their ability and their potential.

## Some frequently asked questions.

**Does the placement of my Year 4 child in a Year 3/4 class rather than a Year 4/5 mean that he or she is less able?**

No! Year levels indicate the length of time a child has 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.

In determining the placement of children in multi-age classes, teachers consider maturity and independence, gender, friendship groups, length of time spent with the teacher, balance of class numbers, physical layout of the school and parent requests.

**Will my child miss out on any work or have to go through similar work again, as a result of being in a multi-age group?**

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 “re-visit” particular topics or concepts as a part of learning. This enables them to develop their thinking, build on previous knowledge and explore other possibilities.

**Will my child’s learning be hampered in any way if he or she spends time helping other children?**

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 cooperation, communication and leadership, to build confidence and self - esteem, and to accept and value difference in each other.

**With a wider age range in multi-age groups, is it more difficult for the teacher to provide individual attention to my child?**

In any class there is a range of abilities and teachers are able to cater for individual differences. Teachers work in a variety of ways, sometimes with the whole class, perhaps for a class story, discussion of sharing time; but more often with small groups of individuals.

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.

The ‘*Curriculum Framework*’ guides all schools (Government, Catholic, Independent, home-school) in providing learning experiences pitched to the developmental needs of individuals. The document describes what students need to be able to know and do as a result of experiencing each of the phases of schooling;

Early Childhood (K-3)  
Middle Childhood (4-7)  
Early Adolescent (8-10)

There is not a curriculum specifically for Year 1 or Year 2 or .....Year 5. Teachers develop the curriculum within each of the phases of schooling, accommodating the needs of individuals, the class group and the school’s circumstances.