



**Aspire to achieve together**

# **Class Placement Policy**

## **2021**

## **RATIONALE**

Aspiri Primary School aims to demonstrate a high level of commitment, responsibility and duty of care to ensure we nurture the aspirations of every child and help them reach their full potential at school. When planning classes for the school year and allocating children to these classes the greatest of care is taken to ensure this aim contributes to our decision making processes.

Aspiri Primary is a large and rapidly growing new school. This makes the determination of class structures and the allocation of teachers and students to classrooms a complex role that begins in June / July of each year for the following year. There is a need to acknowledge that student enrolment numbers are constantly increasing and this means that confirmation of classes usually occurs at the beginning of the school year, so as to avoid changes over the summer holidays. If enrolments change throughout the year, then the class structures may change too.

### **1.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The design of class structures, the allocation of teachers and students to these structures and the composition of the classes at Aspiri Primary School is guided by the following principles:

#### **1.1 BELIEFS AND VALUES**

The staff members of Aspiri Primary School are committed to nurturing all aspects of every child to their full potential. The classroom is a place for learning and all teachers are suitably qualified to cater for each child's unique needs and interests.

A year group (i.e. Year 1 or Year 5 etc.) is a chronologically convenient way to group students for classes in Australia. However, all year groups contain a wide range of student needs, developmental level and abilities. All of our teachers use assessment processes to determine what your child already knows in the curriculum, and what your child needs to learn to continue moving forward. They then tailor their teaching programs to cater for every child in the class. At any given time in any classroom, students are working at different levels.

We believe all children are capable of, and should be given the opportunity to make new friendships in new classrooms. It helps develop resilience in children where they learn to adapt to change, broaden their friendship circles and experience real life situations where they need to use and develop skills in working with new peers and teachers. This prepares them for real life beyond primary school, including high school, university or TAFE and work life.

Foundational to the above beliefs and values is the trust that parents / carers hold that the school will do the very best for their child/ren. Parents are encouraged to support the school and child in their class placement. Children look for clues as to how to react to change and adversity from trusted adults in their lives. A parent or caregivers anxiety, or at the opposite end to this scale, optimism and flexibility is transferred to the mindset of a child when it comes to adjusting to change and challenge.

#### **1.2 CLASS SIZE REGULATIONS**

The administration team establishes class structures for the following year based upon anticipated enrolments in accordance with the school Western Australian Education Act Employee's General Agreement 2017.

This Agreement specifies notational class sizes and maximum capacity (for example Years 4-6 notational 30 students and maximum capacity 32 students) in order to ensure student learning needs can be met within a reasonable workload for teachers and schools.

Schools plan, where it can be achieved within available school resources (see below), to have class sizes in line with Notional Class Size Target.

Factors influencing class structure are:

- The educational needs of students;
- The projected numbers of students in each year level;
- The ratio of girls to boys;
- Projected enrolments during the year based upon past trends;
- The number of teachers employed at the school; and
- The constraints of resources and facilities, such as classroom availability.

### **1.3 ONE LINE BUDGET**

Schools operate with a one-line budget and are funded through the student-centred funding model (SCFM). This means that they are funded per student enrolment at a given point in time (usually February). The school needs to work with the allocated funds to ensure all salaries, facilities and ongoing costs are met.

When considering class structures, schools need to effectively plan to ensure that their proposed model is economical and the best use of funds. For example, small class sizes are very costly to a school and the school needs to determine if this is the best use of their funds and within their budget for any given year.

### **1.4 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Placement of children in classes will be made considering the following, where relevant, for both the student and the cohort:

- Academic ability / learning needs
- Gender mix
- Peer groups
- Sibling divisions
- Behavioural needs
- Cultural considerations
- Special family circumstances
- Social or emotional needs
- Cohort dynamics
- Fairness
- Teachers assigned to the year level (if known)

## **2.0 PROCESS**

### **2.1 PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Planning and preparation for the following year begins in June / July of the previous year.

The Executive Team (Principal and Associate Principals) establishes class structures for the following year based upon anticipated enrolments in accordance with the school Education Act Employee's General Agreement 2017.

Once class structures have been finalized, generally late Term 4, teachers meet to establish class lists. The teachers who form the year level / grade team, in collaboration with the Learning Support Team (and other key stakeholders, when and where appropriate), will work together to determine classes for the following year.

Class lists are then submitted back to Executive Team for approval.

Class lists are modified, if needed, over the summer holidays and prior to the commencement of school in January. Modifications are necessary to allow for new enrolments.

### **2.2 PARENT / CAREGIVER REQUESTS**

Parents and Caregivers are able to make requests for specific class placement. Requests should be made in writing and addressed to the Principal.

Only valid educational reasons will be taken into consideration by the school in decision making. The school reserves the right to determine valid educational reasons.

It is important for parents to know that requests cannot be made:

- For a specific teacher by name or gender
- For a child not be placed in a composite year level class (split year level class).

Where possible parent and carer request will be considered, however there is no guarantee that they will be acted upon. It is not to be assumed that information provided to a school in the past in relation to class placement will be considered in current discussions. Previous requests are not kept on record and need to be voiced yearly, if necessary.

## 2.2 COMPOSITE CLASSES

The school is funded on the number of students enrolled and student allocations are made based on the recommended class sizes. Therefore, depending on the number of enrolments for each year, it is likely there will be a number of composite classes (split classes), where two year groups are combined.

When forming composite classes at Aspiri PS, other factors are considered:

- A student's work habits; for example, the ability to work independently
- Behaviour
- Social maturity
- Academic performance
- Previous class placements

Parents and carers should expect that their child/ren will be placed in a composite class on a number of times throughout their schooling.

What are the positives about composite classes?

Research, which has been predominantly conducted in primary schools, suggests there is no discernible difference between composite and straight grade classrooms in terms of academic performance. However, benefits relating to student independence, responsibility and study habits have been highlighted. For example, younger children within a composite grade generally aspire to emulate older children in their work, and older children enjoy leadership and mentoring opportunities that lift their self-esteem. Some say composite classrooms are more flexible; allow children to work at their own pace; offer a wider range of friendship opportunities; and encourage more co-operation and tolerance.

Proponents of composite classrooms adhere to the theory that children should be taught "by stages, not ages", pointing out that in life, age stratification does not exist. Many acknowledge, however, that composite grades suit some students more than others and that positive outcomes are more dependent upon quality teaching than anything else. Teaching staff will make the decisions on which students are suitable to be placed in composite classes, not parents or carers.

## 3.0 COMMENCEMENT OF SCHOOL YEAR

By the commencement of the school year staff will have completed many weeks of adjustments to the draft class lists.

### 3.1 REVIEWING THE CLASS PLACEMENT OF YOUR CHILD

If a parent or carer wishes to seek clarification on the placement of their child in a particular class, they can do so by writing to the Associate Principals.

If a parent or carer wishes to seek an alternative class placement for their child they will need to do so in writing to the Principal, clearly stating their reasons for an alternative class placement.

### 3.2 CLASS PLACEMENT REVIEW TIMELINE

Parent or carer requests for an alternative class placement will be considered. If the school considers there is an error, the placement will be changed immediately.

In all other cases parents, carers and the child will be asked to undertake a 'cooling off' period of 4 weeks to try the placement. A follow up conversation will be scheduled after 4 weeks.

**The final decision on class placement or changes to class placement remains with the Principal.**

## Extra Notes

*The Class Placement Policy shall be made available to all in the community via the school website. It shall further be referred to in the school Newsletter towards the latter part of Term 3.*

## **APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION COMPOSITE CLASSES**

### **Composite Class Groupings Rationale**

#### **Relationships are the Key**

Composite' classes most often consist of one class containing two grades or years of schooling. You might also hear the term 'split grades' being used.

Extensive research shows it makes no difference to performance whether students are in a straight or composite class.

Furthermore, it is the teacher and their relationship with the students that plays a key role and is significant in the development of students. The nature of a teacher and their relationship with his or her students dictates the impact they will have on students. Strong teacher student relationships shape the way children think and act in school. When a student has a good relationship with their teachers, they are more likely to feel positive about class and about school in general. They are also more willing to have a go at hard work, to risk making mistakes, and to ask for help when they need it.

At Aspiri Primary, we see positive relationships as our priority and from this our class structures are determined. There are other factors such as peer relationships, inclusivity and academic diversity that also guide class placements.

We have extremely dedicated teachers who foster positive relationships with our students and we are confident this in turn will develop good learners. Research shows that constructive teacher student relationships have a positive impact on students' academic results. At Aspiri, we have highly dedicated teachers who have the ability to maximise the learning potential of all students in their class regardless of the class structure.

Composite classrooms, in which children from two or more year levels are combined within one grade, have become common in many schools around the world. Often referred to in a variety of ways, including "multi-age", "multigrade", "split-grade", "mixed-grade", "combined" or "non-graded" classrooms, they define classes in which students of varying ages, abilities, or interests might be grouped together.

#### **Why have composite classes?**

Composite classes are 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 often an administrative solution that not only allows schools to ensure more consistent class sizes, but enables them to address gender balance issues within each class; more easily match teachers to student need; maximise school and teacher funding and resources; and cope with declining or increasing enrolments.

Some schools, however, regard composite classrooms as optimal for student learning and incorporate them as an educational choice, rather than a purely administrative one. At Aspiri Primary School we have and will continue to incorporate composite classes from time to time as an educational choice within a school year. Factors that influence this decision are based on teacher strength and student academic and social/emotional need.

#### **Perceptions of Composite Classes**

Despite favourable research regarding student cognitive and social growth in composite classrooms, negative perceptions persist, particularly among parents. Many fear their children will be unable to keep up with work; will have fewer friendships; that younger children will be overlooked or that older children will not be sufficiently challenged; that

children with learning difficulties will suffer more anxiety; bullying may be an issue or that the curriculum for each year level will be inadequately covered.

Aligned with current research, at Aspiri Primary School we believe education is not only about academic achievement and age is not an accurate predictor of a child's development. Wide-ranging student abilities exist in children of the same age, and not just in composite classes. Multiple studies conclude it makes no difference to performance whether students are in a straight or composite class. Experts agree the most important factor in determining how well a student does is the quality of the teacher and providing a 'differentiated' curriculum caters to all children as individuals, according to their needs.

Composite education is backed up by the theory of teaching by 'stages, not ages'. Whilst we are guided by the WA Curriculum as a mandatory teaching document, students are able to work to their own developmental level, rather than grade expectations. The quality of teaching, combined with student interest and engagement, are considered more important than class structure, whatever form it may take. Research, which has been predominantly conducted in primary schools, suggests there is no visible difference between composite and straight grade classrooms in terms of academic performance.

### **Benefits of Composite Classes**

Here are some key benefits of composite classes:

- Changing the focus of learning from achieving a certain 'grade' to individual personal best alters the nature of the learning experience to lead children to value learning and the learning process.
- Students develop a greater respect for individual differences across the board.
- Offer a broader range of friendship opportunities encouraging more cooperation and tolerance.
- Older students are able to practice and reinforce their own skills as they teach them to younger students as mentors and experts which can lift their self-esteem. Higher order thinking skills are required when teaching concepts to peers. It is one thing to understand a concept yourself, however a higher level of understanding is required when explaining a concept to someone else.
- Older students provide a model of appropriate behaviour for the younger students – this also means less behavioural problems in the classroom because younger students integrate quickly into established class routines as modelled by the older students.
- Younger students are able to seek help from a wider range of people rather than relying on the teacher to help them all the time.
- Younger students generally aspire to emulate older children in their work.

### **Conclusions**

Many argue that problems relating to composite classrooms arise when teachers, students and parents are not prepared for a composite situation, and that these fears can be easily alleviated with openness and good communication. For the most part, however, the quality of teaching, combined with student interest and engagement, are considered more important than class structure, whatever form it may take.

Teachers actually manage workloads for a range of ages and abilities in any given class, not just composite classes! As children may start school later than others, have an early or late birthday, or may have been kept back or advanced a year, 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.

### **Questions that may arise.....**

How can teachers teach different grades?

An example may be the class may learn a form of writing, and then the teacher will assign different activities and assessments that differ in level of difficulty between the grades to meet individual learning needs. The teacher may also offer varying levels of instruction to small groups within the class – set one group a task and then provide a varied level of instruction to the other.

What is differentiation?

Differentiation, a term used often in education to describe the act of taking 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 the needs of students at multiple levels of understanding at the same time which in turn allows students to see clearly not only where they are at, but where they are going.

What are the social implications?

Socially, advocates argue that students in multi-age grades are better able to make friends across age groups, and learn to be more confident and assertive and are comfortable in a group. In the long term, they become more adept at problem-solving and independent learning. The skills of co-operating, sharing and tolerance and being able to mentor other students are very strong in multi-age classrooms.

What are the learning implications?

As already mentioned, it is strongly researched and believed that grade structure is immaterial and schools should be providing a 'differentiated' curriculum: one that caters to all children as individuals, according to their needs. At Aspiri Primary School children are taught in accordance to their individual needs.

Whatever choices Success Primary School make in relation to class structure, we will most definitely have the students and their learning needs at the forefront of the decision making process. It is important to talk through any concerns you may have with the class teacher or Administration Team.