3 February 2010

Dear Parents and Carers

This year, we have formed three mixed-aged, or composite, classes. Composite classes are a long-standing and widely used method of forming classes which can successfully cater for the learning and social needs of students. Many schools form composite classes as a preferred option, because of the benefits they can bring. We have had composite classes at this school for a number of years, and our teachers are very experienced and comfortable with catering for the students in these classes.

You may not be aware that, since the mid '90s, the Department of Education and Training syllabus documents have been written in terms of stages, rather than grades or years. Each stage caters for students across two school years, with the awareness that not all children learn at the same rate. These syllabus documents, which drive class teaching and learning programs, ensure that teachers group children according to their needs. Even in a “straight” class, with children of approximately the same age (although this can vary by up to eighteen months), there will be big differences in students’ ability, maturity and learning readiness. In effect, all classes are composite classes! Research indicates that in a typical, for example, Year 4 class, with children of approximately 10 years of age, the differences in reading age is seven years. That is, some children will be reading at the level of a seven year old, while others will be reading at the level of a 14 year old. Obviously, to meet these children's needs, teachers have to group and provide appropriate work which challenges and extends children at their particular level.

The same is true in a composite class. Being mindful of the stages and outcomes which children need to achieve, teachers group according to children's needs and levels of ability. This is particularly important in English and mathematics, where skills and understandings are more finely differentiated. No child should be held back, nor unduly pushed forward. Teachers assess the children's current level of understanding and performance, and move forward from there.

Please be assured that all students, including those placed in a composite class, will enjoy teaching and learning activities which are designed to meet their needs and abilities. In selecting students for the composite classes, teachers have sought to form a balanced class, academically and socially. Ms Scally and Mrs Jessup (1/2S), Mrs Fowler and Mrs Dutton (2/3K) and Mrs McCain (4/5M) are highly experienced and talented teachers who will provide their students with a great year of learning and development.

Our teachers plan and work collaboratively, so that students in composite classes are involved in grade groups, events and activities. Our students will also mix socially and be actively encouraged to make friendships across their grade.

Please be reassured that, in whichever class your child has been placed, they are in excellent hands. Research evidence strongly indicates that it is the teacher, and support from home, which makes the difference in student achievement, not the name or composition of the class.

Mrs Anne Hewson
Principal