



Composite Classes - Parent and Family Information

How are classes combined at IHM?

The child is always at the centre when classes are established at IHM. We believe that every child is created in the image of God and are committed to ensure every child flourishes in a personalised learning environment enriched by the Charism of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. We know each child deeply and value each of them as a capable and competent learners.

At IHM when teachers make decisions about best class composition they consider each student individually, their interests, strengths, social/emotional needs and academic profile. There is professional consultation with prior teachers and the leadership team. Our educational philosophy embraces the concept of “teaching by stages, not ages”. Therefore, we recognise that students develop at different rates and have diverse learning needs, so we tailor and personalise learning for individual students in all domains.

A composite class is not comprised of advanced younger students and older students needing remediation. These practices are outdated, not supported by research and can have a negative impact on student engagement and academic achievement.

Why are there composite or multi-age classes at IHM?

Composite classes have always been a feature at IHM, grounded in current research, educational philosophy, and practicality. There are composite classes or multi-age classes at IHM as a practical response to enrolment numbers in year levels; for example, when there are too many students to form one “straight” year level but not enough to form two. Composite classes are an inclusive and flexible way to ensure there are even class sizes as well as a balance of students with diverse learning strengths and needs in each class.

Regardless of a straight year level class or composite class, you will see high quality teaching and learning that is personalised, data informed and builds on students’ prior learning.

What does current educational research say?

At IHM we align ourselves with quality research. Research by renowned 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 learning. The factor that has the largest influence by a very large margin is teacher quality. Additionally, other research concludes that there are benefits relating to student independence, responsibility and study habits. For example, younger children within a composite year level generally aspire to emulate older children in their work, and older children can lift their self-esteem, show leadership and demonstrate high level understandings and complex thinking skills to model and explain their learning to younger students.

How do teachers cater for a range of abilities and year levels?

Teachers are trained professionals in differentiating the curriculum to meet the varying abilities of their students. They have a very clear understanding of the curriculum requirements and expectations for each year level. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) define the National Literacy and Numeracy Progressions as the skills, understandings and capabilities which students typically progress in particular aspects of the curriculum, regardless of age or year level. This helps our teachers ascertain the stage of learning reached, identify any gaps in skills and knowledge and intentionally plan for the next step to progress the student’s learning.

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Teachers will:

- Plan tasks that allow for different entry points and cater for a range of different abilities that allows learning to be demonstrated in different ways.
- Provide targeted small group and individual instruction based on learning needs and specific teaching points.
- Set individual goals, challenges and projects which encourage children to demonstrate independence and responsibility in their learning.
- At times separate into year level groups for instruction; this may include linking with another class or working in smaller groups within the classroom.
- Explore opportunities for same year level group activities to help maintain existing friendships and build social connections throughout the year. We acknowledge that many existing friendships naturally strengthen and flourish during free play at break times each day.
- Plan class excursions/incursions and camps to align with their learning programs and enhance real life learning connections. These may differ to best suit the needs of the collective group of students. Excursions/Incursions and camps are designed to build cohesive relationships and shared experiences within a class not just a year level.

What can parents do to support their child?

- Your attitude and conversations at home will shape your child's optimism towards their class and the excitement of a new school year. Keeping your language, comments and conversations positive will ensure your child will be excited and happy about school and their learning.
- Other than the involvement and support of a parent(s), the classroom teacher is, and always will be, the greatest single factor in a child's progress at school. Parents are encouraged to keep in contact with their child's learning by communicating with the teacher so that a strong, positive and respectful partnership between home and school is fostered.
- Give yourself permission to take some time at the start of the school year to better understand what the new class can offer. Our experience and research show that parents with positive and supportive attitudes towards partnering with the teacher is the most important factor in a child's success at school, regardless of class structure.

This information paper has been informed by the following documents:

[Catholic Education South Australia - All Classes are Composite Classes](#)

[Parent Guide to Composite Classes - Kidspot](#)

[The Sydney Herald Sun - Students can thrive in multi-age classrooms](#)

[What is a Composite Class and how are Children Chosen to go in one?](#)

[My child is in a composite class, is this a good thing?](#)

