

Mullaloo Heights Primary School

Independent Public School

Student Class Placement Policy



INTRODUCTION

At Mullaloo Heights Primary School, we are committed to meeting the educational needs of all students. A great deal of thought, planning and time goes into placing children into classes each year. Every effort is made to place each child in a learning environment that is productive and successful.

Outlined below is the process we use to place students in classes for the start of each year. Also included are answers to questions that parents may have about class placement.

RATIONALE

Individual class placements can have a significant effect on a student's attainment and well-being and must be based on professional judgements about the student's needs, circumstances and interests.

GUIDELINES

Factors influencing class structure (Please note, these are not listed in order of importance)

- educational, social and emotional needs of students
- projected number of students in each year level
- ratio of boys to girls
- projected enrolments during the year based on past trends
- number of teachers employed at the school
- the constraints of resources and facilities
- priorities and targets as set out in school's Business Plan

Factors considered in placement of students (Please note, these are not listed in order of importance)

- student well being
- academic achievement (to create classes that include a range of ability of levels)
- work habits e.g., ability to work independently
- behaviour
- gender
- social network
- family situations e.g., twins, siblings

PROCESS

- The administrative team establishes class structure options for the following year based upon anticipated enrolments and school priorities.
- Class placement requests are advertised in the school newsletter in Term 4, providing parents/carers with the opportunity to explain the educational basis for their child's preferred placement. These must be in writing and submitted within the advertised period, addressed to the Principal and marked confidential. The school admin team has the ultimate responsibility for these placements.
- In Term 4, teachers consider the students in their current class in the following areas - emotional well-being, academic achievement, work habits, behaviour issues, special educational needs, social network and personality clashes. They complete a chart with all this information recorded.
- In addition, the students record their friends, the children with whom they work well and those they don't. This is given to their teacher to include in class placement decisions.
- Both sets of information are used by teachers who work in phase teams to compile the first draft of next year's classes - *Year 3 teachers work on Year 4 classes for following year*. They ensure that all classes represent a balance of boys and girls, as well as a range of students' abilities and levels in relation to their academic, social, physical, behavioural and emotional development. Students are not always placed with their best friends in order to allow new friendships to be formed. Teachers also factor in the need to split students as guided by their experience. Parent requests are considered by the Principal and students are placed in classes accordingly.

- Drafts of classes are revisited several times during the term as more information is gained, such as students leaving, new enrolments etc. Additional parent requests are often emailed during this time. These late requests may be considered by the Principal, but this will be in light of the impact changes will have on the make-up and balance of the draft classes.
- Teachers are matched to classes by the Principal. Teachers are informed of classes once final drafts are agreed at the end of Term 4.
- Staff members will not disclose the composition of the proposed classes prior to any formal announcements.
- Student class placements are advertised on the immediate working day prior to the commencement of Term 1 each year.
- New enrolments to the school throughout the year will be appropriately placed in areas of the school where there are vacancies, and after consultation with the school's administrative team, with the understanding that the child's placement may be changed if further information regarding the child becomes available.
- The Principal may reallocate children throughout the year, if necessary, and restructure classes due to changes in the school's enrolment figures.

MIXED AGE CLASSES

The decision to organise mixed age groups classes is reviewed regularly within the context of enrolments and school strategic planning. Over the past few years, we have organised children in Year 3-6 into mixed age classes. We have used this as a deliberate strategy to improve teaching and learning for our students. The points below outline how this works:

- Our current organisation of multiple, mixed-age classes enables teachers to work collaboratively when preparing teaching and learning experiences. In a small school, where we do not have numerous classes of the same grade, mixed-age groupings allow us to organise clusters of classes that can work together. At Mullaloo Heights, this translates into phase teams comprising of Y3/4 and Y5/6 classes. Research shows that in schools where teaching improves most, there is a high level of collegiality; staff work as a team and see themselves as having a responsibility to support their colleagues. They share ideas and take collective responsibility for the success of the school. There is a climate of learning and growing for both the students and staff. Our current organisation of teams of mixed-age classes has enabled a strong culture of collaboration between our teachers. The result is an ongoing development and adoption of innovative practices, as well as consistency in teaching and learning strategies. *This feature of our school was commended in our recent independent school review (November 2017).*
- The practice of combining grades in one class supports our beliefs about how children learn. Peer to peer learning, while not unique to a mixed-age class, works naturally and frequently in these classes, as does the development of a highly cooperative and independent attitude. More able, higher achieving and older learners 'cement' their learning through teaching and helping others. The less able, lower achieving and younger learners look up to and learn from others. In addition, younger children learn appropriate social behaviours from the role models offered by older children. The range of ages benefits both high and lower achievers, not just the latter as is commonly believed.
- Research shows that students are not disadvantaged by being in a mixed-age class. This is because in mixed-age classes, teachers must teach to the individual student's need rather than focusing on what is expected at a particular age. The difference in students' academic ability and maturity can vary by about 5 years across a straight grade class and this is not much different for a mixed-age class. This does not mean we only appoint teachers who can teach mixed-age classes at Mullaloo Heights. Rather, we expect all teachers to be able to do so because catering for a range of abilities and needs is a non-negotiable part of the job.
- An added advantage of a mixed-age class is that students make friendships across grades. In our mixed-age classes, older students choose to socialise with younger and vice versa, both in and out of school, enabling access to a wide group of friends. This reflects real life, where we as adults have friends of different ages.
- The West Australian Curriculum organises teaching of skills into 2 year blocks meaning children are exposed to the same skills in Y1&2, 3&4 and Y5&6. Curriculum requirements match naturally to our class organisation, allowing teachers to prepare appropriate teaching and learning programs.
- Finally, this approach avoids us having to organise some straight and some mixed age classes, with the mixed-age class being viewed as an inferior option. Consistency for children is achieved regardless of their class.

Please read the attached research to find out more about the benefits of mixed-age classes:

<http://multigrade.ioe.ac.uk/fulltext/fulltextLittle.pdf>

COMMON QUESTIONS

Why do we ask parents to leave class placement in the hands of the teaching staff?

As professional educators, we strive to make the right choices, taking into account all of the information we have about all students. Parents do know their children best. However, teachers have considerable academic and social information about every child and can make sound judgements to meet the needs of every student.

Can I request my child to be placed with another child or not placed with another child?

Parents may request this, but need to give clear reasons why this is necessary. It is important to consider that the school knows your child's friendships and that placing them without that particular friend may be so that your child expands their friendship base. Often children placed with best friends will work and play exclusively with each other and this does not promote the social interaction we try to foster. We want children to be able to work and socialise with a variety of other children and build skills to make new friends.

In addition, sometimes we may get competing requests from parents, where one parent wants their child to be in a class with a friend, but the friend's parents have requested that they not be in the same class. Friendships can change throughout primary school; students leave, more students arrive and so it is important for your child to develop friendship skills rather than always have the same friends.

What if my child or I am unhappy with my child's placement?

Class placements are considered final. Changing one student at the request of a parent can mean that many other changes also need to take place to continue to meet the needs of all of the other students. Parents need to understand that it is a complex balance that cannot just be solved by moving their child. Many other changes are likely to be needed in addition. Parents can talk to the Principal or Deputy Principal about their concerns, but changing a student placement would be rare. The Principal or Deputy and the classroom teacher will work with the parent to help students adjust to their new class.

If your child is unhappy with their placement, we as parents must speak to them positively and model how we want them to face disappointment now and in their future. Learning how to positively deal with disappointments builds resilience in children.

What if my child is having difficulty in his/her new placement after school has started? Can we request a change then?

We will do everything we can to solve problems. Parents need to talk firstly to the class teacher; if the matter needs to be referred on, the Principal or Deputy Principal will be involved so your child's needs can be addressed. Changing classes is not part of the Class Placement Policy. Please be assured that all information about children is valued and heard. Teachers work hard to make the transition between years a smooth process for all our students. Parents can help by being as positive and encouraging as possible to their children in this process.

Do teachers request certain student placements into their classes?

No, as teachers are not assigned to a class until after the class placement process. Teachers focus on class balance to ensure a successful year for all classes.

We really like the teacher one of our children had. Now our other child will be entering that year level. Can we assume our second child will get that teacher?

It is a coincidence if this happens as the school does not use historical records when placing children. New relationships are constructive and help us grow. All children are different and may respond well to a different teacher.

I have noticed that a small group of my child's friends have been together in classes for a few years in a row, but my child has been in different classes. Is favouritism going on here?

If this is happening, it would be a coincidence. Please inform the principal or deputy principal if this is the case.

Finally, we want to stress that all information about children is valued and heard. Teachers want to construct the smoothest transition possible for the students for whom they care so much. Parents can help also by being as positive and encouraging as possible to their children in this process.

If you have any more questions please feel free to contact one of the administration staff or your child's teacher.

EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's review cycle.
[review June 2020]

HISTORY OF CHANGES

Effective date	Last update date	Policy version no	Notes
6 February 2015	May 2018		