



RICHMOND PRIMARY SCHOOL

'Learning & Caring for Life'

Term 4 No. 5 13 December 2019

Principal: Ella Blake

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Dear families,

Thank you for those of you who participated in our parent survey. These results were shared with staff and Governing Council members recently and have assisted us to reflect and project. We are always aiming to improve.

As a staff, we have spent many hours together trying to configure classes and make decisions which are focused on optimising student learning outcomes for all. Much discussion has been based around class sizes, and as a result, we will begin next year with 13 mainstream and 5 IELP classes. We are pleased to be able to offer smaller class sizes in 2020 in most year levels. This will allow spaces for IELP students to exit their program and attend mainstream classes, if we are their local school, throughout the year. This week's newsletter offers information about composite classes, which you may find useful when receiving your child's/children's class placement letters/reports.

2020 also brings staffing changes. Mike Chartres, Primary Maths Association consultant, will be working with us as a numeracy coach each week in order to continue to improve our numeracy programs. Our Deputy Principal role will change; to continue to focus on best literacy practices, and our Special Ed and EALD (English as an additional language and/or dialect) teachers will work together to coordinate intervention programs. We welcome Anna Pok in the role of EALD teacher. Performing Arts program will be replaced with specialist science teaching, this teaching role is still be finalised and once confirmed, will be shared once school commences in January.

We offer our farewells and many thanks to; Narelle Schultz, pastoral care worker (choir assistant extraordinaire, various lunchtime club organiser and always a kind ear and heart) and Louise Cielens (Year 4 teacher, Zoo Snooze helper, and a valuable contributor to our school community).

Farewell to Julia Harris and Lorraine Coupe, Speech and Language teacher and school assistant, who are both heavily involved in this wonderful program, and will be located at Lockleys Primary School in 2020.

Congratulations to Emma Voigt who has won the Well-being Counsellor role at Clovelly Park PS in 2020. Emma's leadership in respect to wellbeing and the consultation/creation of our school values, Honesty, Inclusivity, Courage and Empathy has been highly valued and most appreciated. We welcome back Glenn Hart in this role.

Our finance officer, Nathalie Dunser has been successful in securing 6 months in a finance role at Hahndorf PS, and we wish her well. Thank you to Gail Rose for "bridging the gap". Her replacement will be announced at the beginning of the new school year. Lastly, our community farewells our 2019 Year 7 Graduates. We thank them for their positive role modelling and contributions and wish all them many opportunities to succeed.

Stacey and I will remain Richmond PS Deputy Principal and Principal respectively, something we both feel privileged to be.

In the coming days I hope you are able to share your child/children's report as a family and reflect in a positive and affirming manner. The link and message below may assist you.

A report card is not a defining factor of a child's success in life – it's just a little picture of 'now'. And 'now' looks different for us all.

<https://keytokids.com.au/3-things-to-consider-when-reading-your-childs-report-card/>

Thank you to our wonderful and supportive school community. I wish all of our families a happy and festive holiday, filled with children's laughter!

Feliz Navidad, Ella



The following is written to help parents understand a composite class structures.

A composite classroom is one which children from two year levels are combined within one class. This is common practice in many schools around the world. They define classes in which students of varying ages, abilities, or interests might be grouped together. Extensive research shows it makes no difference to performance whether students are in a straight or a multi-age 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.

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; or that the curriculum for each year level will be inadequately covered. According to experts, education is about more than 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 a multi-age class. Experts agree the most important factor in determining how well a student does is the quality of the teacher.

Composite education is backed up by the theory of teaching by 'stages, not ages'. Students are able to work to their own developmental level, rather than grade expectations. Composite classes have become a common feature in many urban Australian schools, almost half of all state primary students are taught in composite grades. This theory that children should be taught 'by stages, not ages' points out that in life, age stratification does not exist. As it has been established, the age of a student does not define the learning outcomes. What does play a significant role in the positive outcomes is more dependent upon quality teaching than anything else. 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.

Here are some key benefits of composite classes:

- Older students are able to practice and reinforce their own skills as they teach them to younger students as mentors and experts.

- 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.
- 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.

Where needed, composite classes will be the chosen structure. This is primarily in 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 an appropriate solution that not only allows us to ensure more consistent class sizes, but also enables us to address gender balance issues within each class and maximise school and teacher funding and resources. From year to year the class structures will differ to cater for the needs of individuals in the best possible way, so therefore became our preferred structure.

Schools should be providing a 'differentiated' curriculum: one that caters to all children as individuals, according to their needs. Teachers manage workloads for a range of ages and abilities in any given class, not just composite classes. There will always be a mix of ages and abilities whether it is a straight or composite class.

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.

Whatever choices we make in relation to grade structure will most definitely have the students and their learning needs at the forefront of the decision making process.

“I’m Bored”

Working Together

My last newsletter piece is short and sweet. I'm sharing advice from one of my favourite parenting books, *Raising Beautiful Kids* by Mark Le Messurier and Bill Hansberry.

As parents we've all heard the dreaded words, "I'm bored" from our children. It's usually delivered in a whingeing, whining voice with an expectation that we'll magically cure their boredom and if we don't respond with an answer they're expecting to hear, the situation often escalates.

What role should parents play in entertaining kids?

During the holidays I love staying at home with my kids doing very little. Life is so hectic during the school term: crazy mornings, packing lunches, school sport, homework, housework, even walking the dog feels like a chore some days. A slow school holidays allows everyone to recharge their batteries. So why do I feel a tiny bit of shame when asked, "What did you get up to in the holidays?" And my response is, "Not much". Social media has a lot to answer for! Posting images of folding laundry, playing board games and cleaning the fish tank is the reality of my life but the pressure to post a busy, exciting eventful life exists.

So what do our parenting experts advise?

I've attached free chapters from, 'Raising Beautiful Children'. The experts provide handy hints and tips to tackle boredom and unpack the child's thinking behind the expression, "I'm bored". Hope you find the information valuable.

I wish all families a safe, happy holidays. I've enjoyed working with the school community and welcome Mr Hart back into the role next year.

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