

Understanding Stage Classes in the Junior School

What are Stage classes?

Stage classes are primary classes with one home room teacher and a blend of students from two Year groups. Stage groupings are a common way for schools in NSW to organise students. They are sometimes called composite classes.

The NSW Educational Standards Authority (NESA) produces a document that outlines the organisation of year groups into Stages, and how the NSW primary curriculum matches these Stages. This document and other important information can be found at

<https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/wcm/connect/25cb2fe5-c5f4-4ce8-920c-6b4b108bb30a/parents-guide-to-nsw-primary-syllabuses-2017.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=>

How are Stage classes organised?

Students progress from Prep into Kindergarten, their first formal year of schooling. Currently there are two Kindergarten classes, with each class a blend of girls and boys. There is usually a range of ages, academic attainment and social development. The aim is to have a balance of learners in each class, commonly known as parallel classes.

Year 1 and 2 are combined into Stage 1, Year 3 and 4 into Stage 2, and Year 5 and 6 into Stage 3.

These Stages typically have 3 or 4 classes, each a blend of ages, gender and ability. Stage classes in the Junior School are parallel classes, there is no grading into an 'A' class or a 'bottom' class.

Why does the College have Stage classes?

Stage classes offer a more flexible arrangement for fluctuations in the number of children in a particular grade. Stage classes provide the same learning opportunities found in a primary school that may have grade classes, or a combination of grade and composite classes.

How does a teacher work effectively with more than one grade in the class?

In any class, whether stage or grade, there will be a range of ages and a variety of ability and need. All expert teaching utilises strategies for teaching this range. Strategies in differentiating the curriculum, cluster groupings, peer modelling and mentoring, as well as tracking individual progress are foundational for successful learning in a Stage class.

There is not, however, the simple 'line down the middle of the room' approach to providing content and skills for students in each of the year groups in a stage.

Additionally, the teacher works within a Stage team and has the resources of the Junior School specifically designed for Stage based teaching at their disposal.

What are the advantages of Stage classes?

Stage classes provide the opportunity for children to learn and socialise with classmates who may be older or younger than them. This reflects more of life outside of school and allows for peer mentoring,

peer assistance and modelling in class activities. There are also opportunities for children to work in a targeted group that suits their level of progress, especially in literacy and numeracy. Stage 1 focuses on literacy development and has 3 streamed (graded) groups. Stage 2 and 3 have maths numeration groups several times per week. Of significant importance is the professional expertise of the teacher in creating a safe, optimistic and growth oriented class climate.

How are teachers selected?

Staff at Shellharbour Anglican College are appointed after a rigorous interview process and are selected for their particular skills, interests and expertise. Their understanding of multi age teaching and their proven ability in the classroom are essential for being a member of the teaching team in the Junior School. Staff have the opportunity to work at a different Stage level after an appropriate time on one Stage. This allows for further professional growth and a vitality to staff teams.

Experienced Staff

Multi age teaching, whether it be in a small country school or a larger suburban school, requires targeted training and professional development for staff. The Junior School staff meet in teams to discuss strategies, student progress, differentiated curriculum programs and class organisation. Stage based class teaching is at the centre of our teachers' daily practice. Communication with parents and caregivers is essential, especially concerning student progress and wellbeing.

How are children assessed and what does a report look like for a Stage class?

The NESA curriculum documents for each subject provide a continuum of learning expectations, commonly called Outcomes. Staff design learning experiences aligned to these outcomes and assess by observation, written tests, recordings, work samples and other methods. The results are aligned to a scale of possible levels of knowledge, skills or behaviours that are commonly called rubrics. This allows teachers to allocate the common grading scale (A to E) required in all NSW primary schools.

Outcomes are written in Stage statements, with descriptors to give more details. Student progress through a stage is indicated by the level of attainment at each point of assessment, and students are given an effort and achievement grade for the outcomes assessed only in the semester (two terms).

There is a more complete description of Junior School reports as part of the report document. It has been included at the end of this information.

What about specialist subjects?

Specialist teachers in Music, PE, Languages and Personal Development and Health use strategies and assessment methods consistent with the home class teacher. Importantly, communication with class teachers and coordinators ensures that student progress is planned for and evaluated in specialist classes.

How do I find out more?

Parents and caregivers are very welcome to meet with the class teacher and discuss the particular concerns, issues or planning that are relevant to their son or daughter. The Head of Junior School, P-2 Coordinator and 3-6 Coordinator are all able to meet and talk through any issue relating to Stage classes in the Junior School