

ORAN PARK PUBLIC SCHOOL

STAGES NOT AGES

Oran Park PS has created stage-teams for our classes. This ensures that our school is up-to-date and ready for the changes and challenges occurring at a rapid rate in Education in NSW.

'Stage-based classes' is a style of classroom organisation with its basis in the educational belief that the individual child is important, learns at his/her own pace and should not have their learning restricted to a confined grade or period of twelve months. Legislation allows students to start school between 4½ yrs and 6 yrs (so children have always been in multi-aged classes from kindergarten onwards). This range of ages continues to be reflected throughout the schooling process.

The key to understanding staged-based classes is realising that **growth is determined in stages and not by ages.**

In the classroom, students are grouped according to their progress rather than their school chronological year. Children also develop positive attitudes to other children of different age groups and relate well to them, similar to the way they do in 'out of school' situations. We feel this is more natural for them. It also allows smaller class sizes in the primary.

Strengths:

- ☺ The syllabus documents (by which we teach) are in stages (and have been for over 20 years). Unfortunately publishing companies print their workbooks in 'years', which gives the community a false impression of teaching.
- ☺ No 'one' group is seen to be disadvantaged – all classes in each stage will be given the same opportunities, expectations and strategies.
- ☺ It acknowledges that there are significant individual differences in each child to be addressed regardless of age. The formation of classes can reflect and cater for these individual differences.
- ☺ Board of Studies documents refer to "stages" of development and reflect the developmental nature of learning in young children. The organisation of classes should take into account current research on learning and best practice in teaching and learning.
- ☺ A 1997 report *Multi-Age Classes in NSW* found that these classes based on educational principles do not disadvantage students academically and actually benefit them socially and emotionally.
- ☺ It makes sense then to group children who are going through the similar stage so they can relate, help and experience together. Even within the same class, children will be at different levels. Teachers recognise this and usually extend the work of those who learn more quickly and give more attention to those who don't. The class then becomes outcome based rather than competition based.
- ☺ This multi-age philosophy places each learner at the centre of the considerations of curriculum and classroom practice. Children are able to progress at their own rate without regard for restrictive 'grade' expectations.
- ☺ Overseas research has shown that children become more confident, can operate better as part of a group, are more assertive, become more independent learners and

better problem-solvers. They also make friends outside of their standard age-groups, and develop tolerance & diversity.

- ☺ Multi-age grouping creates an environment at school similar to that of home, resulting in greater continuity, thereby easing the transition to the school environment.
- ☺ Multi-age grouping reflects the social environment of the work force, which is made up of all different ages.
- ☺ The fundamental difference between multi-age grades and straight age grades is in the way the curriculum is planned and delivered. In our multi-age learning groups we accept that different children learn at different rates. Our integrated curriculum is planned to reflect the developmental stages of the children.
- ☺ Research shows that children in multi-age learning groups appear to be more caring and cooperative with each other. Diverse social groups provide opportunities for the older children to reflect on the needs of the younger ones and they are more likely to see the younger children to be in need of their care and help. Older children provide valuable role models for the younger children both socially and academically. Year by year as the classroom structure changes, all children gradually find more opportunities to develop and practice their own leadership skills.
- ☺ Remember: any class of more than 1 student is technically a 'composite', so the terminology is no longer appropriate.
- ☺ Straight-age grades originated in the 1850's in America and were then adopted by many countries around the world. This factory model for schooling was intended to prepare workers for the industrial society of the time.

Managing stage-based classes requires skilled teachers. Teachers at Oran Park Public School are well-versed and experienced in conducting programs in stage-based classes. Working in teams will certainly enhance the opportunities provided to the children. Teachers will ensure that our 21st Century students can develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to be life long learners.

If you would like any more information on our classes, class structures, or other aspects of school life at Oran Park, please call the school and make an appointment to see the Principal or an Assistant Principal.

Early Stage 1: Mrs Banfield

Stage 1: Mr Betts

Stage 2: Ms Odefey

Stage 3: Mrs Salter

Donna Shevlin

Principal