Multi-age Classrooms

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)



Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools

Question	Response
What is a multi-age classroom?	A multi-age classroom is a class that includes students from more than one year level who learn together in the same learning environment (Cornish 2010). Multi-age classes may be established intentionally because of their educational benefits or to accommodate school enrolments and class structures. Regardless of the reason for implementation, students continue to access curriculum, teaching and support appropriate to their learning needs, ages and stages.
Will my child receive less attention from the teacher?	No. Effective teaching in a MACS school is underpinned by high-quality evidence-based instruction. Teachers differentiate and adjust instruction for students within all classrooms because students learn at different rates and have varied strengths, needs and abilities. A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework recognises that learner variability already exists in every classroom. Even in a single year-level classroom, there can be several years difference in student-level achievement.
How do multi-age classrooms align with MTSS?	Within the MTSS, teachers provide Tier 1 adjustments every day by: • varying teaching approaches • providing different levels of support and challenge • using flexible groupings (Ronksley-Pavia, Barton & Pendergast 2019) • adjusting learning tasks • identifying and responding to individual student needs • monitoring progress regularly. These practices are foundational to teaching in all classrooms, regardless of whether they are multi-age or single-age classrooms. An MTSS requires all teachers to adjust, adapt and support all students to make reasonable progress – aligned with the expectations of the curriculum – regardless of their starting point. A focus on where a student is at informs the process of instruction, underpinned by responsive teaching, not age or year level alone.
Will my child cover the required curriculum?	Yes. Students will continue to engage with content aligned with Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0 expectations. MACS has partnered with Impact Curriculum (formally Ochre Education) to develop a suite of resources to support all teachers to plan and deliver high-quality curriculum across the learning progression, ensuring students can access learning at an appropriate level of challenge and support. Over the last two years, multi-age classroom resources have been structured and delivered to support teachers and leaders to adapt the relevant curriculum and progressions to students in multi-age classrooms.

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What are achievement standards and how are they relevant in multi-age classrooms?	Achievement standards describe the knowledge and skills students are expected to demonstrate by the end of a curriculum level or band of schooling. In multi-age classrooms, students are still taught, assessed and reported against the achievement standards for their own curriculum level or band of schooling. Teachers use common learning experiences and differentiate tasks so that each student can demonstrate achievement against the expectations appropriate to their stage of learning. Multi-age classrooms do not change curriculum expectations; they provide flexible ways for students to achieve them. If a student is operating above age-expected standard, then their teacher will adjust and differentiate curriculum to ensure that the student makes further progress.
Are multi-age classrooms academically effective?	Yes. Research consistently indicates that students in multi-age classrooms achieve academic outcomes that are comparable to those of students in traditional single-age settings. It is important to recognise that student achievement varies considerably within any classroom, including single-age classes where students may be working across a span of several year levels. Multi-age classrooms are designed to respond to this diversity by focusing on students' individual learning needs, progress and readiness, rather than age alone. This approach enables teachers to differentiate instruction and support each student to achieve appropriate learning growth.
What are the educational benefits of multi-age classrooms?	Children in multi-age classrooms experience: • stronger student relationships (Black 2022) • increased leadership opportunities • improved confidence and wellbeing • enhanced collaboration • greater independence.
How do multi-age classrooms align with MACS' *Vision for Instruction*?	Multi-age classrooms align with *Vision for Instruction* because they focus on meeting students at their point of need, while maintaining high expectations for every learner. Teachers continue to use evidence-based practices, explicit instruction and MTSS to ensure students receive appropriate challenge, intervention or extension. Students are taught, assessed and supported according to their individual learning progress and year-level expectations, rather than age alone. This supports MACS' commitment to equity, excellence and enabling every student to flourish.
How are students assessed in a multi-age classroom?	Teachers use a range of evidence including observations, work samples, long-cycle assessments, common assessment tasks and standardised assessment data.
Will older students be held back?	No. Research does not support the belief that older students are disadvantaged academically in multi-age classrooms. Additionally, younger students observe and learn alongside older peers, providing positive role models and encouraging aspiration (Proehl et al. 2013).

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Will younger students struggle to keep up?	MTSS shifts the focus from age-based assumptions to actual student learning data. Teachers use multiple sources of evidence to determine: • what students know • what they are ready to learn next • what level of support or extension they require. This means that students are taught at their point of need, rather than being limited by the age range within the classroom. Students do not all learn at the same pace simply because they were born in the same year. MTSS helps schools respond to student readiness and achievement, rather than age alone.
How does a multi-age classroom support inclusion?	Multi-age classrooms acknowledge that students learn differently and progress at different rates. This approach aligns strongly with inclusive teaching practices and responsive teaching.
Does research support multi-age education?	Yes. Research spanning several decades has found: • no evidence that students are academically disadvantaged by multi-age classrooms (Veenman 1995) • positive impacts on student relationships, social development and wellbeing (Black 2022) • increased opportunities for peer learning, collaboration and leadership (Stone 2010) • enhanced development of empathy, tolerance and understanding of different perspectives (Saqlain 2015) • benefits when teachers are well-prepared and instructional practices are strong, especially differentiated instruction (Proehl et al. 2013).
What does research tell us about parents' experiences with composite and multi-age classes?	Research shows that parents often have questions about composite and multi-age classes before their child experiences one. Common areas of interest include classroom organisation, teaching approaches and student friendships. A study by Cornish (2006) found that many parents developed more positive views over time, particularly when their child experienced academic success, positive relationships with their teacher and the benefits of learning alongside students of different ages. The research highlights the importance of clear communication between schools and families, and supporting students' social connections.

References

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