



## Combined classes

Combined-grade classes have been used in school districts for many decades. There is a good chance that Surrey children will have the experience of being in a combined-grade class at some point during their elementary school years.

The Surrey School District is committed to creating classes of mixed abilities with a balance of student performance levels and student behavioural characteristics. Being in a combined class can be a beneficial experience for students.

Dr. Joel Gajadharsingh, of the University of Saskatchewan, is the leading North American investigator of combined classes. In 1991, the Canadian Education Association summarized his findings and concluded that children in combined classes achieve at equal levels whether in combined classes or single grade classes. The quality of learning experience is the same. Their ability to learn and to get along with other people is as good or better than students in single grades.

Research has shown that combined classes:

- let students learn from one another,
- provide models for younger students,
- let older students see what they've already learned,
- provide a curriculum suited to each student,
- encourage students to work together,
- help students to become independent,
- teach students to respect one another.

Achievement levels of these students are as good as and usually better than the achievement levels of students placed in single-age classes.

Students in combined classes are not held back to the level of younger students, nor are they expected to handle work beyond their ability. In every classroom there is a wide range of abilities, talents and performance levels. Children mature at different rates in various aspects of development. Teachers are aware of these individual differences and structure learning activities according to the needs of each learner.

In combined classes the range of abilities is not significantly different from that of a single grade class. Within the combined class there will be children of both grade levels with similar levels of performance. Whether a child is gifted or needs considerable assistance, each will be challenged to excel as much in a combined class as he/she would be in a regular class.

Findings also show in classes where there is more than one age level, children learn to become more independent, responsible learners and develop a greater degree of social responsibility. Mature younger students are often in a more acceptable social setting in a combined class. Older students enjoy the leadership opportunities they can provide with younger students. Students in combined classes generally develop a greater sense of belonging, support and confidence.

Children learn continuously; their intellectual, social and personal development does not occur in compartmentalized, grade-specific segments.

Teachers of students in combined classes, like those in single-grade classes, employ their skills and strategies so that each student is challenged at the level at which he/she can succeed.

Our primary concern as advocates for children is to provide a stable, effective learning environment for all students in our care.