

Dear Parents and Guardians;

We are pleased to inform you that we have been granted an additional grade 3/4 class to alleviate the large numbers in the primary classes.

We are intending to have the new class in place by October 1, 2018. The students will know who their classroom teacher will be by September 28th. There will be some students in each of the grade 1, 2 and 3 classes moving to ensure that our primary classes are at the ministry's cap of 20 students in each class. Also, there will be a few junior students (grades 4, 5, 6) who we need to move to balance the classes. Although, initially, this may be disruptive and upsetting for a few students, they will quickly adjust to their new classes.

Over the past week, we have received questions about the number of combined classes that we have as well as requests from parents for their child to be placed in a single-graded class as opposed to a combined class. In order to address the many queries in advance, here is some information that you should know regarding how we organize our classes and the benefits of a child being in a combined class.

When we organize classes for a school year, there are a number of factors that we take into consideration when placing students into a class. There are Ministry of Education and legislative directives to which we (as principals) need to adhere as well as respecting and honouring collective agreements. Combined classes are the norm in our Ontario education system.

Combined classes are neither better nor worse than single-grade classes. They are simply one of the many ways schools meet students' academic and social development needs. In fact, having combined classes and the teachers team teaching together, supports the philosophy of our project based learning approach to learning. Given that our goal is to build a community of learners in every classroom, it is essential to ensure that the best interests of the students are central in all decisions about classroom organization. Building balanced classes of students in both straight and combined grades is part of the process of equitable organization of **all** classes in the school. In every case, we strive to create a classroom environment that will support the needs of all students. The following criteria is used to build classes:

Criteria

Meet Ministry of Education Primary Class Caps of 20 (Grades 1-3)

Balance Class Sizes

Gender Balance

Students' interests, strengths, and needs

Learning Styles

Academic Needs

Social/Emotional Needs

Resource Supports – Special Education / Educational Assistants / ESL

There are three factors that we don't take into consideration when building classes:

1. Parent requests for a particular teacher.
2. Parent requests for a child to be with a certain friend or group of friends.
3. Parent requests to have a child placed in a straight or combined class.

Several studies have found that students in combined classes do just as well as students in single-grade classes. In fact, some students actually do better in language and reading. Canadian studies show that children in combined classes have more opportunities for emotional and social growth. The rich social environment helps students:

- Learn how to work on their own and as part of a collaborative team;
- Build leadership abilities as they work together and help each other;
- Develop decision-making skills, and become more self-motivated and responsible
- Learn in an environment that reflects the real world. The diverse ideas and opinions of classmates help expand students' perspectives.

Every day, in both single-grade and combined grade classes, teachers work with large groups, small groups, and individual students. But students in combined classrooms also benefit from a broader support structure. Younger children can ask students from the higher grade for help. Older students learn by explaining problems to their younger peers. In fact, peer tutoring can help higher achieving and older students reinforce their knowledge and positive social behaviours.

Teachers use many different strategies to teach students in both the straight and combined grades. They may:

- Introduce a common topic then give each grade a different task or problem.
- Break students into groups to study different problems and report back to the class. These groups can be flexible, including students with varied interests and skills.
- Bring students together for activities like health, physical education, and the arts.

We trust that this information will be helpful in understanding how we develop our class lists as well as alleviating some of the concerns that parents may have about the combined classes. Your child will continue to receive a high quality education in any class. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us at the school.

Yours truly,

Helmut Tinnes
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