ADVANTAGES OF MULTI-AGE EDUCATION

Research shows that multi-age grouping promotes cognitive and social growth. The wider age span also promotes an active learning environment as the students are not expected to 'perform' at their 'age level,' but are encouraged to perform to the best of their ability.

Multi-age education recognises the natural development of the child.

Advantages for students of multi-age education include:

- quality relationships with teachers
- a positive classroom climate
- better learning and enhanced self-esteem from increased inter-dependence and peer tutoring
- increased independence from teachers
- a wider range of roles within the group for students
- peer tutoring - students learn from each other
- small grouping
- enriched academic activities
- better socialization
- improved self esteem

- respect for individual differences
- movement around the classroom is encouraged, and indeed many activities require the students to move from one area to another. Children, whose learning style is an active one, therefore require an activity based learning experience.
- students are assessed on a daily basis and learning is based on the individual, so no class levels are evident, therefore children are not held back, or rushed into the next grade
- the focus is on success, the student moves forward, building on prior knowledge
- students think of learning as fun, and therefore become life long learners

The advantages for teachers include:

- better relationships with students and parents
- less stress and more productive use of time
- increased continuity in planning
- a more satisfying teaching experience
- integrated curricula
- extra resource and support
- flexible grouping to take advantage of each activity.
As adults, we are all different. We learn differently, we excel in different areas, and we have different emotional maturity. Children are no different.

Multi-age education is the deliberate placing of children of different ages and abilities in the same classroom. Within the classroom, students are often re-grouped into different learning abilities, rather than being taught at age level. They are taught at their point of challenge.

A multi-age school has a philosophy of mixing children together across age and ability. The belief that underlies it is that children are ready to learn at different times and attempting to group children according to age and grade doesn't necessarily reflect a child's development or learning.

Multi-age is not the same as composite, although it may look the same in relation to having several different ages together. A traditional composite does not base itself on a philosophy of mixing ages and abilities, whereas multi-age does.

International and national research demonstrates that in multi-age classes, children learn just as effectively as children in single grade schools.

The multi-age classroom is an environment where the teacher provides a developmentally appropriate curriculum based on each child’s needs. The term ‘developmentally appropriate’ means that each child’s unique progress and growth are used to determine what he or she is ready to accomplish. This philosophy recognises that students learn and develop at different rates, just as they crawl, talk, and ride a bike at different rates. Children should not be held to time constraints, such as year levels. A child may not be developmentally ready to meet the expectations of a traditional grade where experiences are aimed at the ‘average’ student.

A multi-age school does not stream children according to ability but encourages a mix of diversity and ability between children to enhance their own learning, and also to show that we are all different. However, there will be times that it is necessary to group students according to ability for specific learning tasks.

A multi-age approach, however, is not just how it structures or groups children in a class. It reflects that the curriculum emphasises the academic and also the social and emotional development of children, and how this affects learning, interactions and behaviour.

In their day-to-day teaching, classroom teachers place a high priority on identifying and addressing the learning needs of individual students. Teachers closely monitor the progress of individuals, identify learning difficulties and tailor classroom activities to levels of readiness and need.

Some of the ways in which this may be evident in Sandgate are:
- although students are at different stages in their learning and may be progressing at different rates, all students are capable of learning successfully if motivated and given appropriate learning opportunities
- teachers work at understanding where students are up to in their learning, including their current knowledge, skills, learning difficulties and misunderstandings, to identify starting points for teaching
- teachers work to ensure that all students, including high-achieving students, are appropriately engaged, challenged and extended by designing classroom activities to meet students’ learning needs, levels of readiness, interests and motivations
- teachers closely monitor the progress of individual students and continually adjust their teaching in response to the progress that individuals are making
- teachers assist students monitor their own learning and to set goals for future learning
- communication with parents provides information about where students are up to in their learning, what progress they have made over time, and what they might do to support their children’s further learning
- tailored, early and sustained interventions are in place for students identified as requiring additional support.