Dear Parents and Carers,

So far we have enrolled 170 new students, this number is larger than our school opened with and is not usual in most schools! As you will appreciate with this many new students and the uncertainty of when we will be appointed a new teacher, it has been problematic to organise our year. Rest assured all of your children have been learning. Teachers have also been assessing their abilities in readiness for their new class teacher.

We have had to take this time to ensure that all children are placed in a suitable class. We were also waiting for Staffing Services to appoint the new teacher. During the week I made the decision to place the new transferred teacher (when they are appointed) into the teacher librarian role rather than on one of the classes. That way all of our classes will have a teacher as of now.

Placing so many new children and allocating teachers has taken time. Your support with this is appreciated. Our children are now in their new classes, they were placed in them mid way through today. These classes will remain the same unless we have an influx of new students. If that happens we may need to create a new class and classes may change. As you are aware we are a new and growing school and to ensure that our classes are capped in numbers this is an unavoidable situation. I will of course keep you all informed if that is the case.

We hope that your children are all happy and that they quickly settle in. This year we have formed 17 mainstream classes and 3 Special Education classes. These classes are:

**Early Stage One/Stage One**
- Bahamas - Mrs Banfield (ES1 Acting Assistant Principal)
- Brazil- Mr Betts
- Canada- Mrs Bailey
- Netherland- Mr Boyd
- Sweden- Mrs Seguna

**Stage One**
- France- Ms Fulwood
- Germany- Ms Young
- Greece- Ms Gibney
- Italy- Ms Smith
- Japan- Ms Westcott
- Switzerland- Mrs Sullivan
Stage Two
New Zealand- Mrs Nott
Spain- Mrs Selakovic
USA- Ms Odefey (Stage Two Assistant Principal)

Stage Two/Three
China- Mrs Cooper
Mexico- Mrs McDiarmid
South Africa- Mrs Salter (Stage Three Acting Assistant Principal)

Special Education
Barbados- Ms Bons
Hong Kong- Mrs Hayek
Kenya- Ms Wortley

Specialist Teachers
School Counsellor – Ms Drinnan (Tuesday)
Support Teacher Learning Assistance- Ms Bland (Stage One Acting Assistant Principal)
Positive Behaviour for Learning Teacher- Mr Dodd
Library Teacher- Ms Knopp (Awaiting new teacher)

School Learning Support Officers
Mr Browne (Also General Assistant)
Mrs Crabtree
Mrs Griffith
Mrs Jerik
Mrs Nelmes
Mrs O’Donnell

School Administration Staff
Mrs Bradley – School Administration Manager
Mrs Nelson – School Administration Officer
Mrs Sheehan - School Administration Officer

Meet the Teacher Afternoon
On Tuesday 23rd February from 3.30pm to 4.30pm, all teachers will be in their rooms to meet with you, to discuss requirements for 2016 and to answer any questions you may have. If you have children in different classes please ensure that you see each teacher for their information handout. If you need further information, please organise an individual appointment time to meet with the class teacher.

Multi aged or Stage Classes
The majority of our classes are stage based. When we are forming classes we are very careful to provide a balanced mix of students in each class. In each class there are children of different ages and with varied learning styles and abilities. This begins in Kindergarten. Children range between the ages of 4 to 6 when they start school. So whether made up of a Year group or a stage group, ages will always differ by 12 months or more.

Classes based on years 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. This is the 21st century and we live in a technological society! Our children learn differently and we need to cater for them differently.

At Oran Park Public School all children in a grade follow the same mandatory curriculum program no matter what class they are in. Teachers manage different grades in the one class by grouping children according to what they already know and by giving small group instruction. The children benefit greatly by this differentiated approach. Not only does this allow students more individual instruction, they are able to mix with a greater range of children, develop independent learning skills and develop friendships that improve their social skills.

Classes that are made up of children of different year levels have traditionally been called composite classes. In recent times, these classes are now labelled multi aged or stage classes. There are two
reasons why these classes are formed:

- Administrative - this is where there is an uneven enrolment in school years and classes need to be formed across a number of school years. This occurs in most primary schools.
- Educational - where classes are formed on the basis of educational rationale as they are seen to have educational benefit for the student.

We also follow this method because our syllabus and curriculum programs are taught in stages.

Composite classes have been the source of much controversy over the years, with parents often believing that their child is being disadvantaged in some way by being in one. The key to understanding composites is realising that educational growth is determined in stages and not by ages. Our stage classes teach children who are at compatible stages - not ages. It makes sense then to group children who are going through a similar stage so they can relate, help and experience together. In any class divided into years or stages, children will be at different academic levels. Teachers recognise this and usually extend the work of those who learn more quickly and give more attention to those who learn at a slower pace.

Strengths:

- The syllabus documents (which we teach) are in stages. Unfortunately publishing companies print their workbooks in ‘years’, which gives the community a false impression of teaching.
- 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.
- The Department of Education published the report *Multi-Age Classes in NSW* (1997), which found that these classes based on educational principles do not disadvantage students academically and actually benefit them socially and emotionally.
- 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.
- 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.

At Oran Park Public School the quality of the teaching and learning that takes place is far more important than whether or not the class was formed on an age basis. Children need time to settle into their new class and get to know their new classmates and teachers.

During this term we will hold an Information session regarding our approach to the education of our students here at Oran Park Public School. This will provide you with information regarding our stage-based curriculum and our approach to the teaching of phonics and reading. I will advise you of this Parent Session in a future newsletter.

Kind regards,

Donna Shevlin