

## CASTLE PARK ELEMENTARY COMBINED CLASSES

Combined – grade classes are not new or unusual in elementary schools. They have been in existence for years and will continue to be a fact of school life. There is a good chance that most Coquitlam children will have the experience of being in a combined – grade class a few times during their elementary school years. If your child is not in a combined class this year, it is likely that he/she will be in one next year.

Castle Park Elementary school believes that being of mixed abilities and ages a combined class can be a most beneficial experience for students. Placement in one should not be looked upon with worry, but rather should be viewed as a normal and expected experience.

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 get just as good an education as in single grade classes. Students learn as much in combined classes. Their ability to learn and to get along with other people is as good as 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 have 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 one needing much assistance each will be challenged towards excellence as much in a combined class as he/she would be in a regular class.

Findings also show that children in classes where there is more than one age level 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; likewise some older students may be more comfortable socially 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.