

# **IMPLEMENTING AND TEACHING SMALLER CLASSES: ADVICE FROM PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS IN THE 2003 CLASS SIZE PILOT**

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NEW SOUTH WALES  
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## INTRODUCTION

As part of the evaluation of the 2003 Class Size Pilot principals and teachers were asked to provide advice on smaller classes to their colleagues participating in the Class Size Reduction Program starting in 2004. A summary of this advice was provided in the *2003 Class Size Pilot Evaluation Report*. A copy of the report is available on the Department of Education and Training's website at [www.det.nsw.edu.au](http://www.det.nsw.edu.au). Copies of this report were sent to all schools which participated in the pilot and those schools participating in the evaluation of the Class Size Reduction Program. The evaluation reported the substantial benefits of the pilot as judged by parents, teachers and principals.

This document contains a wider collection of the comments from principals and teachers of schools involved in the 2003 Class Size Pilot. Comments were gathered using questionnaires sent to all principals and teachers in the pilot. For ease of reference the advice of principals and teachers has been organised under different aspects of schooling and teaching.



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## 1. Advice From Principals

The following comments were in response to a question in the survey which asked: "What advice would you have for principals about implementing smaller classes?"

### 1.1. Class organization

- Because significantly more time is spent in groups (smaller groups) the class allocation of various students needs to be carefully monitored.
- Consider staged learning outcomes in class structure.
- Allow for growth throughout the year when setting up classes. Quite often new enrolments can turn the tables and you can end up with larger classes than planned.
- Attempt, where at all possible, to maintain the integrity of the class size.
- Look at the composition of the group, always keeping the whole school perspective in mind.
- Make sure it is a worthwhile experience for all by selecting the appropriate staff and place students according to their academic and social capabilities.
- Ensure that structures and resources are adequate to take full advantage of this great opportunity.
- The flow on effect to other grades was significant in this school (reduced numbers and opportunity to form straight classes in years 5 and 6).
- (Provide) parent information about benefits of multiage classes. Move to stage classes.
- Benefits of developing very small Kindergarten classes far outweighs any disadvantage of forming a multiage K-1 class particularly for the first six months of the school year.

### 1.2. Communication with the community

- Share the journey with all aspects of the school community.
- Engage with teachers and parents in consultation beforehand to ensure shared understanding and expectations.
- Inform the community and keep them up to date with developments.
- Communicate clearly to the community about what is happening.
- Involve parents in the process where possible.
- Ensure that the parent community is kept informed about the class, the teaching/learning that will be undertaken and how they can support students.
- Publicise the benefits through newsletters, parental contact, and public opportunities like weekly assemblies.
- Keep the parent community informed. Smaller classes are more functional and productive.
- Monitor teacher and parent programs and ensure transparency for parents of students regarding structure of school, groups, class organisation and the projection that Year 1 is 22, however, until fully implemented, Year 2 is still 29.
- Consistent consultation with the teacher and parent body.

### 1.3. Communication with staff

- Teachers on upper grades need to share the belief that smaller class sizes in the early years lead to long time benefits for all.
- Engage with teachers and parents in consultation beforehand to ensure shared understanding and expectations.
- Make sure that the whole school supports the initiative and that those teaching larger classes see the value

of the more intensive learning K-2 children can achieve in small classes.

- Promote within the school the benefits of a good early start to school and, that even though smaller class sizes are happening in the early years, the benefits flow on to senior years.
- My advice would be to work closely with the teachers in setting up the structure.
- Collaborate with staff (whole) about who will teach these classes.
- Address equity issues for staff who will be teaching classes of 30 in Year 3 to Year 6 so it does not become a divisive staff welfare issue.
- Consistent consultation with the teacher and parent body.

#### **1.4. Data collection and assessment**

- Sustained focus on project and data collection.
- Implement assessment practices to identify individual needs.
- Emphasize the importance of collecting data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the enhanced teacher to student ratio.
- Test the children initially so that growth, value added, can be quantified.

#### **1.5. Early intervention**

- Early intervention is the key to maximising smaller classes.
- Support early intervention through appropriate school based programs to build on the advantages of smaller class sizes.
- Start early intervention programs in Term 3 because by that time children who are beginning to struggle are evident and difficulties can be often corrected by the time they begin Year 1.
- Early intervention i.e. Stage One is most appropriate.

#### **1.6. Early years of schooling**

- The gains and progress made in this year (Kindergarten) will have benefits for mainstream / independent learning in years to come.
- The early years of learning are vital in providing a foundation on which to build key knowledge and understanding of concepts across all areas of the curriculum. If this firm foundation is not established early, then children are having to play 'catch-up' in future years and often do not reach the attainment of their peers.
- The early years of schooling also shape a child's view of school and learning in general. Many social skills that shape how a child reacts to the world around them are established in the early years of school. To this end, I would highly recommend that principals capitalise on the opportunity that smaller classes provide to establish these skills and reinforce basic knowledge and understanding.
- Class sizes of twenty Kindergarten students and twenty-two Year 1 students provide an ideal foundation for our students' educational future.

#### **1.7. Parents**

- Parents are very positive.
- Parents have higher expectations regarding:
  - ✓ individual attention
  - ✓ parent contact.
- Be prepared for an increase in willingness of parents to volunteer for classroom assistance.
- Get ready for more parents wanting their children in smaller classes.

#### **1.8. Principal's role**

- Become totally involved in ALL aspects of the implementation - structuring classes, teacher allocation, student placement and

parent meetings. Give it a high priority as skills (academic and social) acquired in the early childhood area must be positive and will reflect on the child's development in later years. This would then have a positive effect on the whole school climate as these children progress through school.

- Ensure that structures and resources are adequate to take full advantage of this great opportunity.
- Provide supportive structures to co-ordinate the learning improvement initiative which needs to align training and development, best practice and whole school assessment so that it does not become a 'small class' without optimising benefits across the stage, school etc.

### **1.9. Professional development**

- Support teachers with professional development in developing small group instruction and integration of computer technology in Key Learning Areas.
- Training and development to emphasis higher order thinking e.g. multiple intelligences theory and mental computation.
- Emphasise focussed training and development to support the changes.
- Continue to support staff with ongoing professional development.

### **1.10. Social interaction**

- Take the opportunities with fewer students to develop improved social interaction between students and teacher, and amongst students.

### **1.11. Support staff**

- ESL teachers and Support Teachers Learning Assistance (STLA) should still be allocated on a needs basis.
- Don't allow the benefits to be eroded by reducing the amount of support allocation to smaller classes.

Maintain the level of support that is appropriate.

- Link support personnel to the closer link with staff and families.
- Continue to maintain support for smaller classes (especially AEs etc) as this relationship building is also important.
- Maintain support staff program to ensure early intervention.

### **1.12. Teacher allocation**

- Allocate a teacher who will take advantage of the reduced numbers of students by preparing more lessons with activities at their core.
- Early childhood teachers may need to be given additional expertise in this area.
- Select teachers who have experience and knowledge of that stage's programs.
- Allocate teachers with literacy/ numeracy expertise to K-3 classes.
- The teachers who are placed on these classes should be committed to the process and have a thorough understanding before they begin managing smaller groups.
- Teachers need to be committed to group work as well as whole class teaching, have a good understanding of assessment practices, and interact positively with students.
- Select staff to participate that will use the opportunity to effectively enhance opportunities for students and their own training and development.
- Choose your teachers for Kindergarten well.
- Choose teachers with expertise and skills in early learning to enhance the likely effects of smaller numbers.
- Make sure it is a worthwhile experience for all by selecting the appropriate staff and place students

according to their academic and social capabilities.

### **1.13. Teaching**

- Encourage teachers to maximise learning possibilities due to the smaller class size and structures. Encourage teachers to extend students and to create more effective learning environments.
- Expectations: raise expectations of what smaller classes can achieve; emphasise changed teaching practices.
- Smaller classes must be accompanied by a greater emphasis on an individualised teaching and learning strategy so as to maximise the benefits of this initiative. Smaller classes not only have a beneficial impact on academic achievement but have an equally beneficial impact on the social/affective domain.
- Maximise opportunities to individualise teaching/ learning programs.
- Recognise with the teachers participating that the smaller class will allow them to move their class and individuals far better along the outcomes learning continuum and thereby insist on more strategic, explicit planning and assessment.
- Ask teachers to predict how the reduction in class size will affect teaching then review through regular discussions.
- Clearly articulate the outcomes that are expected from the classes involved.
- Have higher expectations regarding individual attention, parent contact and outcomes.
- Teachers may still need to be supported with aspects of classroom behaviour management, even though the class sizes are smaller.

- Try and look at the individual needs of students. Align teaching and learning styles.
- Ensure that sequential learning programs are in place.
- Smaller class sizes in the early years give the opportunity to provide focused learning experiences for all students in an environment which is free from a crowded classroom.

### **1.14. Team teaching**

- Provide ample opportunities for grades / stages to meet and share strategies.
- Team teachers who are able to work collaboratively and perhaps consider mentoring programs to improve classroom practice.
- Examine the possibilities of being more creative in grade organisation e.g. team teaching.
- Have appropriate staff on the classes and ensure that there is a good team leader who is 'within the logo' with participating teachers i.e. it has worked well to have a Kindergarten, K/1 and Year 1 with the AP on K/1 (although this is not really specific to smaller class structures).
- Encourage a team approach with the teachers who are implementing smaller classes.

### **1.15. Transition**

- I think that close liaison with pre-schools and effective transition, orientation, procedures are important in ensuring that benefits from smaller class sizes in the earlier years can be maximised.

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## 2. Advice from Teachers

These comments were in response to a question in the survey which asked: "What advice would you have for teachers who will be teaching smaller classes next year?"

### 2.1. Assessment

- It is easier to monitor student progress.
- You will have a closer relationship with your students and a more precise knowledge of their achievements (due to more individual assessment).
- Assessment tasks can be very effective.
- Assess at the beginning of the year.
- Begin assessments and more formal aspects of teaching early, in order to gain the benefits of a more comprehensive knowledge of each student.
- Assess all children on arrival; plan using these results.
- Continual assessment is the way to go right from the beginning.
- Assess as you go.
- Use your time to conduct more regular and in depth assessment to closely monitor the progression of each individual.
- Use the chance to assess early and support and extend where required.
- Increase the amount of on-going assessment, so you will know what needs to be taught next at class level and on an individual level.
- You have the chance to monitor students and teach them at a more direct/individual level (every teacher's

dream to be able to have a one on one opportunity with their students more often).

- Know where you are taking students to (e.g. good knowledge of stage 1 and 2 outcomes).
- Always have assessment records nearby as you can manage to do individual assessment more readily.
- Keep up to date with assessment to ensure individual needs are catered for!

### 2.2. Change teaching style

- Try activities you may not have felt comfortable with if teaching a larger group.
- Use the year to try new things.
- Be adventurous and creative - you have more time and control to achieve results.
- Be adventurous - try some strategies that you were reluctant to implement with larger classes.
- Be prepared to adjust your teaching style to accommodate more group work and be prepared to extend the learning outcomes of the students beyond your previous expectations.
- Be prepared to alter your normal teaching style. The children work well in small groups tailored to their appropriate skill level. They can easily be monitored for staying on task while the teacher can give individual attention to students who need assistance or to be extended. Be aware that you may need to adjust teaching programs to accommodate more accelerated learning. You will have a closer relationship with your students and a more precise knowledge of their achievements (due to more individual assessment).

- Utilise all available resources-children will benefit, try new ideas.
- Be prepared for a more flexible approach to teaching.
- Read widely. Research new initiatives and resources.
- Be open to new ideas for programming and classroom management.
- Try out those activities or strategies that previously you thought wouldn't work. You will be pleasantly surprised.
- Experiment with teaching practice in order to optimise outcomes and refresh yourselves. Observe, observe, observe!!!
- Get ready to have a fun year where your class will thrive and enjoy learning. Where marking and organising is reduced and your spare time can be used to reflect and improve your current teaching practices enabling you to teach at the best of your ability and giving your children the education they deserve.
- Teachers of smaller classes are able to present greater variety in lessons and activities because smaller numbers allow greater flexibility.

### **2.3. Classroom environment**

- Students participate in the class more and thus are involved more in their learning.
- Use the time to build closer relationships with your students. From positive relationships you can address student weaknesses and further develop strengths.
- Create a friendly/warm class environment.
- I think that teaching in smaller classes is an excellent experience. It is challenging because the children

always need that extra attention and they seek the teacher's approval or positive reinforcement a lot more often because they learn to interact in smaller group situations.

- Smaller class sizes mean more structure and order, hence can provide students with more challenging, motivating and interesting lessons. More enjoyable to teach and learn.
- Classroom atmosphere allows for a more relaxed and calm environment for teacher, students and visitors to the classroom.
- Enjoy a more realistic, productive environment.

### **2.4. Classroom management**

- Classes are more manageable with usually fewer behavioural problems.
- This year has been very stimulating and enjoyable for me. Less focus on social/behavioural issues once the children settled in and more academic success now.
- Even unsettled children don't take long to see that their class mates are working and having fun.
- Balance gender numbers wherever possible to avoid isolation and behavioural challenges.
- Use classroom behavioural management strategies as in any other situation. No different!
- Still develop sound classroom behaviour strategies from the beginning.
- Enjoy being able to spend more time with children requiring some behaviour modification or social skills.

## **2.5. Classroom - physical**

- Use the space in your room now there are fewer tables etc. - provide learning centres, interest corners.
- Enjoy having an uncluttered room with spaces for learning centres and small group work.
- Get rid of the extra furniture.
- Take advantage of more room in the classroom with the smaller group sizes.
- Take the opportunity to get to know your students' needs and learning styles and organise your room in a way that meets these needs.

## **2.6. Early intervention**

- Diagnose weaknesses early and implement programs to support students in need so that they can benefit more quickly from whole class lessons as well as small group work.
- Identify problems early.

## **2.7. Expectations**

- Have high expectations as to learning outcomes.
- Aim for higher levels of achievement. You will be amazed at the results from more 'teacher time'.
- Focus on social development early on and start teaching literacy and numeracy immediately. Expect great things and your children will rise to meet your expectations.
- Be prepared to start off with establishing the rules and routines of the class but expect faster acquisition of learning outcomes.
- Be prepared to extend the learning outcomes of the students beyond your previous expectations.
- The children I have this year have progressed more quickly than in

previous years. Do not plan too far ahead.

- Ensure your program allows you to be flexible as children settle more quickly, and are able to progress at a quicker rate.
- Use of small groups in numeracy and literacy is highly beneficial and results in children learning at an accelerated rate.

## **2.8. Group work**

- Group work will become more effective and enjoyable for both teacher and students.
- Smaller classes means easier and more group work.
- Encourage group work and you'll get some fantastic results.
- Try to focus on doing a lot of group work and more hands on activities as the class size is easier to manage.
- Help children develop group work skills and independent learning activities.
- Allow for students to take a more proactive role in their learning by utilising smaller groups and greater space in learning centres.
- Establish co-operative learning strategies.
- Take the time to organise and implement lots of group work - small groups result in more settled children who stay on task longer and give you the time to work with a small number of children.
- Enjoy the peace and harmony that can be fostered and developed when there are fewer children. Encourage co-operative learning as group work is much easier with fewer children - fewer groups, with fewer children in each.

- Use pairs and small groups more in drama, dance, percussion, Count Me In Too, etc.
- Smaller classes will be more conducive to small group work which is particularly useful with Count Me In Too activities.
- Smaller classes enable you to regroup children more easily to meet their personal learning needs.
- Group your students early in the year.
- Take time to plan and assess the children's needs first. Then you will notice that you will be able to group children and have time to help those with most need.
- Look for opportunities in reading, spelling and Maths in particular to provide leveled group work or individual work.
- Utilise parents, aids, practice teaching students etc to create more group learning activities.
- Don't change grouping etc just have a smaller number in groups so that all get more individual time and their needs are met.
- Take advantage of fewer students and work in small group situations with fewer students.
- Make the most of small group situations in all academic areas.
- Plan more group work to enable interaction with small numbers or individuals. Use group work time to do assessment - easier with smaller numbers.

### **2.9. Hands-on activities**

- Having a smaller number of children in your class allows you to use more hands-on activities (allowing children to learn through experience).

- Remember you are able to do lots more activity based learning and to stream outcomes to individual needs.
- Enjoy it and take full advantage of being able to do more practical activities with fewer children to coordinate.
- Enjoy being able to do group work with lots of "hands on" experiences.
- Try to focus on doing a lot of group work and more hands on activities as the class size is easier to manage.
- Vary learning styles with more games, hands on activities, rotating learning stations.

### **2.10. Individualised learning**

- Plan and teach more individually to gain the most benefit from smaller class sizes.
- A teaching professional will find that they have the ability to teach more effectively because smaller class sizes allows for greater individual attention.
- Enjoy the feeling of knowing that each day you have been able to communicate meaningfully with each child.
- Smaller classes create more time to allow for individual differences in the children.
- Maximise individualized instruction wherever able. Utilise group work - focus on student to student interaction. Use of technology for research and student-centered learning as much as possible. Use the freedom of having less pressure (in trying to rush around and try and reach every child in a lesson) to really confer with each child thoroughly in lessons such as guided writing and reading. Apply yourself more to KLAs like CAPA - where each student is able to be more

involved, when fewer students are there to take turns or share equipment.

- Use the opportunity provided to work individually with students. Every 'spare' moment in the day I work with students, hearing them read or helping in any other area. Use the chance to assess early and support and extend where required.
- Give individual children plenty of individual teaching. Try to hear your children read each day.
- You will get to know your students sooner and be able to cater for their needs more thoroughly.
- Quicker knowledge of children's ability. Greater time to understand needs of individual children.
- Enjoy the time you have with the children and appreciate them for the individuals they truly are. You will find programming less of a worry although more individualized and preparation time more appropriately utilised.
- Spend time with each child while they are working. Talk to them about their work. A small class enables you to really know each child and their parents and find out what they are thinking
- Spend time talking with children and working with them one-on-one regarding learning outcomes e.g. with Count Me In Too how did they work out answers?
- Smaller class sizes means you can help students with special needs (gifted/learning difficulties) more effectively.
- Take the opportunity to get to know your students needs and learning styles and organise your room in a way that meets these needs.

- Enjoy having the time to implement individual programs for children with learning difficulties and talented children.
- Take advantage of the smaller numbers in class to develop each child's individual needs academically and socially.

### **2.11. Job satisfaction**

- Expect to experience more job satisfaction.
- Enjoy! I have been teaching for a long time but this has been the most rewarding, relaxed and stress free year of all. The classroom is a happy learning environment.
- Feel like you are making a difference.
- Be prepared for a more rewarding teaching year.
- More effective teaching means you are happier, children are more effectively schooled and parents feel more confident about their child's welfare and education.
- Enjoy it as there are so many benefits for the students; make the most of your time.
- You will have an enjoyable year so take the time to get to know what each of your student's needs are, and you will find you can cater for them better than ever before.
- I think the individual teachers will feel the benefit not only for students but their own welfare will be enhanced. They will be happier in their profession; therefore, students will be more settled and able to feel valued and learn more easily; therefore, parents/ caregivers will be content and confident that the best is being done for their child. Children will encourage parents to be involved.

- Enjoy. You are less stressed, less pressured and more likely to enjoy your time with your children in assisting them to achieve improved learning outcomes.
- Enjoy the experience and appreciate its benefits. I have thoroughly enjoyed this experience and appreciate the many benefits for the children (most importantly), the teacher, the school and the parents.
- This year has been very stimulating and enjoyable for me. Less focus on behaviour once the children settled in and more academic success now.

### **2.12. Literacy and numeracy**

- Listen to every child and read every day. Take time to talk to each child every day.
- Nurturing reading by hearing each child every day.
- Listening skills and talking skills are so important and need to be addressed specifically at this age for significant periods of time and this is so easily done in smaller classes.
- Take advantage of the one to one assistance you can give to the children as I have realised that children will learn more on a personal level when you can read with them and discuss and correct their written work. They can see their errors and learn from them.
- One-on-one reading of texts at instructional level is more possible and enables teachers to tailor guided reading sessions to student needs more effectively.
- Reading groups achieve desired results.
- Look for opportunities in reading, spelling and Maths in particular to provide leveled group work or individual work.

- Develop their language in literacy, numeracy and other Key Learning Areas.
- Use of small groups in numeracy and literacy is highly beneficial and results in children learning at an accelerated rate.
- Smaller classes will be more conducive to small group work which is particularly useful with Count Me In Too activities.

### **2.13. Parents**

- You get more chance to talk to all the parents, which leads to smoother transition to school and better parent-school links and involvement.
- Get to know the parents more in depth.
- Parental support in learning activities is most helpful - make use of parental help in the classroom if possible.
- Utilise parents, aids, practice teaching students etc to create more group learning activities.
- Involve parents early in the classroom program.
- Know your parent body well.
- Establish open communication with parents.
- Interaction with the students and also their parents / guardians is more productive, as the teacher is not 'spread' as thinly to cover all areas.
- Promote the benefits to students, families and staff of smaller classes.

### **2.14. Social development**

- Focus on social development early on.
- Utilise this wonderful opportunity to build up students' confidence in school (learning) and play. Establish positive learning behaviours as

quickly as possible which will enhance their social and academic development.

- Really take the time to enjoy having a smaller number of children in your class. You will find they respond well to you and each other and are not so self-conscious about themselves.
- Smaller classes are excellent but be aware of the social aspect within a smaller group. More work on personal relationships needs to be looked at.
- Be very careful when allocating children into classes - fewer children per class can mean separating friendships, especially with multi-age classes.
- Watch friendships closely as a smaller size may mean fewer groups for social connection.
- Enjoy the experience - having a smaller class makes a lot of difference to the children (personally, socially and academically) and to the teacher.
- Ensure that a social skills program is introduced early on as students will have fewer peers to socialise with, and may find it difficult to 'get away from' personality clashes.
- View social skills as an integral part of overall learning and development.
- Less choice of friends if personality clash happens (peer groups smaller).

### **2.15. Teaching general**

- Make the most of the opportunities to expand experiences in the classroom. Enjoy greater discussions involving all children and whole class problem solving/creating activities.
- Smaller classes help effective classroom discussion and student participation.
- Whole class instruction and discussion may now be beneficial for all class members.
- Smaller class sizes means you can help students with special needs (gifted/learning difficulties) more effectively. Smaller class sizes means more structure and order, hence can provide students with more challenging, motivating and interesting lessons. More enjoyable to teach and learn. Organisation is so much easier!
- Smaller class sizes will allow a teacher to not only manage individual needs more readily, but to evaluate and use resources more effectively as well.
- Try to develop an even structure within your classroom which caters for: quality of learning,
  - intellectual quality, significance.
- There is more time to make classroom resources to assist and support students in their learning.
- Begin assessments and more formal aspects of teaching early, in order to gain the benefits of a more comprehensive knowledge of each student.
  - Ensure all children participate.
  - Get routines/timetables underway as quickly as possible.
  - Retain support staff - smaller classes should not mean that you do not need support.
- Team teach and share children and ideas especially in social play situations.
- I would advise teachers who will be teaching a smaller class next year to work as a team with other teachers in the same year to develop a concise program that motivates and

encourages each student to develop to their potential.

- To work as a team with other teachers on the same grade with the smaller classes.
- Share lessons with other teachers - cross groups. It has positive effects.
- Use technology for research and student - centered learning as much as possible.
- Apply yourself more to Key Learning Areas like CAPA - where each student is able to be more involved, when fewer students are there to take turns or share equipment.
- Take full advantage of being able to do more practical activities with fewer children to coordinate.

### **2.16. Teaching programs**

- Be aware that you may need to adjust teaching programs to accommodate more accelerated learning.
- Ensure your program allows you to be flexible as children settle more quickly, and are able to progress at a quicker rate.
- Have extra lessons and activities on stand by as we tended to get through work faster than past years and were keen to keep working.
- Set up routines as normal but understand that the children will settle into school at a faster rate and therefore teachers need to be flexible with their teaching and learning programs.
- Plan more intricate lessons as there is the scope to do so.
- Programming changes slightly because you can fit more into the day because less time is spent on simply organising and managing the children.

- Be open to new ideas for programming and classroom management.
- Change your way of programming. Program for individual students rather than groups of students. With 20 students, this is achievable.
- You need to program better for ability levels and individual needs.
- A smaller class allows for individual programming.
- There is no reduction in preparation or planning/ programming time.
- You will find programming less of a chore although more individualised and preparation time more appropriately utilised.
- Enjoy getting to know your students better than you could before. This will help you to plan your teaching program more effectively to suit the needs of your students.
- Plan for smaller groups and have plenty of lessons planned ahead of time.
- Take advantage of the opportunities presented to work individually with each child and to get to know them. Plan carefully, activities to cater for the huge range still presents itself despite smaller numbers.