



Together or Apart

MULTIPLES IN THE CLASSROOM

The question of whether to place our same-age children together or apart at school is one of the biggest decisions we as parents have to face when it comes to our multiples' education.

The International Council of Multiple Birth Organisations (ICOMBO) shared the results of a survey focused on school placement of multiples, finding that 50% of parents asked for their multiples to be placed in the same class due to the children preferring to be

together and the ease of having the same teacher and assignments, while 40% of parents asked to place their multiples in separate classes to help their individuality, reduce competitiveness, or because one multiple was too dominant.

“At times it has been a challenge...
Don't be afraid to step in as a parent
if you feel something isn't working”

Hyedi

As part of Multiples Awareness Week 2023, Multiples Hutt Valley interviewed some of our members with school-age multiples to gain insight into their unique experiences of having multiples at school.

“Putting multiple birth children into separate classes requires careful consideration and consultation with parents. Most multiple birth children have little experience of separation prior to starting school – many sleeping together in the same room as well as sharing friends and activities. The children may be deeply upset if they have to cope with a dual separation from parents and their co-multiple(s). The needs of each child must be considered both as an individual and as a multiple. No decision should be irreversible – flexibility is the key both for parents and teachers”

PhD, Education Research
Consultant for Twins Trust (UK)

Pat Preedy



MULTIPLES
HUTT VALLEY

CHRISTINE & JASON'S STORY

From the age of four, our boys have attended separate daycares. It was noted one twin's behaviour was impacting the other's ability to make meaningful connections, and after six months of different strategies, another great daycare position was secured. We remember the decision like it was yesterday – it was pretty harrowing. We wondered if it was the right choice, were they going to be lonely – but we found that the separation gave them much more individuality and they were both able to connect more with their peers. Their behaviour at home also notably improved.

Going into school, it was our preference to have the boys in separate classes, however that wasn't possible at the start of the year. The school echoed our

observations and concerns, and as soon as they were able to be, they were put into different classes.

We've found the biggest challenge with having multiples at school was getting people to treat them as individuals, and teaching them that every class is different with different homework books.

Our advice for parents preparing to send their multiples to school is to talk to any current care arrangement about your multiples' relationships and how much they depend on each other. Come up with a strategy to help others tell your multiples apart; we used coloured polo shirts (in a non-uniform school) which has worked well for teachers, other parents, as well as the other kids. And finally, be prepared for plenty of messy play laundry!



HYEDI'S STORY

My twin girls were only separated this year as they started Year 4. The decision followed a discussion with their teacher regarding their social and academic development, and was based on what would best raise their potentials as students and individuals.

At times it has been a challenge, as our girls relied heavily on each other and they didn't want to be separated, which at times has hindered their potential. Their relationship is a beautiful bond, and one that we have seen flourish and get stronger.

My advice is to remember that they are individuals – their individuality needs to be accepted, praised and pushed. Their bond will not break, and encouraging their potential as separate people is important for their future. Liaise with teachers, ask how they are in class, and weigh up the challenges, strengths, and weaknesses. Don't be afraid to step in as a parent if you feel something isn't working.

"It is important to assess each child's development and needs from year to year. To have a firm policy of separation or not denies the individual growth of each child and how their bond may or may not affect their ability to concentrate and learn. This is why ICOMBO is asking our members to reach out to decision-makers and promote the resources we have available to help when making these crucial decisions"

LOUISE'S STORY

My twin girls are placed together at school. For us, it was never an option to separate them as it's not something we wanted for them. We don't intend to separate them until they ask and understand what it means to be apart from one another. We've raised them as individuals so encourage them to build their own relationship both with and without each other.

There's never been an issue with being together in and outside of class, as they are close and have an

amazing bond. Since starting school, the girls are thriving - they have become much more sociable, and their personalities are really shining.

Our biggest challenge is that having identical twins means teachers struggle to tell them apart, and sometimes get the children's identities wrong. They are individuals and aren't always alike - even though they do like to dress the same.

Wishing you all the best with your multiples' school journeys!

"The most recent research on the placement of multiples in school states that the best policy is a flexible policy, where the needs of each child are evaluated prior to making the placement decision. It is also important to reevaluate the needs of same-age siblings if their educational needs are not being met, and not waiting until the following academic year"

PhD; Assoc Professor
of Education, Ohio
Dominican University

John Mascenzine

CLAIRE'S STORY

My girls were initially placed together in school for one term of new entrants and then for Year 1. Following the school's policy, in Year 2 they were separated into neighbouring classes, along with the other two sets of twins in their year group. The policy encourages separating multiples to help them develop their own friendships and independence - and it was something I was keen to do too.

The girls were getting to a stage of being 'stuck with each other', causing squabbles and fights. Being separated at school has meant they are now looking forward to spending time with each other - if anything, being separated in the classroom has strengthened their bond.

With identical twins it's a challenge for people to learn who's who, and

I have almost always dressed mine differently to help with this. But even with their own 'wardrobe', some teachers and a lot of students ask them "which one are you?" which can be upsetting for my girls, especially when they have known the other students for a while.

My advice as a parent of multiples is to work with the school staff - but if you feel strongly about keeping them together or separating them, follow your gut. Separating them felt scary, but for us it has so far been the best thing we have done in terms of their education. It's really encouraged them to learn without competitiveness or constraints of being together, and has allowed them to enjoy their time together even more.

"I feel as though there is a bias to separate twins that is based on opinion rather than research. The twin relationship is unique, and I think treating twins as 'singletons' does not help."

"Being a solo mom, my main argument for them being in the same class is that I can't split to attend meetings at school for each child. It is out of the question that I would have to choose which meeting or outing or activity to attend."

"As a mother of triplets, I ask myself a lot of questions about the schooling of my girls. I'm looking for information from other parents, not theories or statistics."

"No problems at all. We discussed our wishes with our school and that was respected."

A selection of quotes from parents
collected in the ICOMBO 2020 Survey

KELLY'S STORY

Our boys are in the same class; we've not been asked by the school to split them yet. Our boys sit at different tables, and work independently from each other, they choose where to sit, and sit apart from each other with no hesitation. If it comes up in conversation, we'll think about it then - I felt that it was up to the teachers if they thought they should be together or split.

Having identical twins has been the biggest challenge, for teachers and fellow students to know who is who. To try and help, the boys' stationary, drink bottles, lunchboxes

and school bags are coloured blue for one twin, and green for the other. Filling the teachers in about recognisable features and making it as easy as possible for the teacher to remember is important, however our boys don't seem phased about getting asked 'which one are you?' by kids who don't know them yet.

If you're worried at all about anything, go in and talk to the principal/teachers and be open-minded. For many teachers, it's not their first time having twins in their class, so they can give you plenty of advice.

"For many teachers, it's not their first time having twins in their class, so they can give you plenty of advice"

Kelly

"The clear message for educators and school policy makers is that they should be making placement decisions for multiple birth children based on the individual needs of each child"

PhD, Research
Director & Vice
Chair, ICOMBO

Carolyn Lister

ICOMBO: School Placement of Multiples Survey Results

ICOMBO conducted a survey in 2020 focused on school placement of multiples. The survey was completed by 2,842 parents of multiples from over 18 countries. The key findings were:

46.5% of schools did not contact the parents for their input on how they wanted their multiples placed

11.8% of families stated they faced resistance from the school administration on achieving their desired school placement

Many countries have laws that protect the parents' right to choose school placement for their multiples, but over 60% of parents are unaware these laws exist



A majority of the parents said that their school didn't have a fixed policy on placement of multiples, yet it was often difficult to achieve the school placement they wanted



Almost one-fourth of the families were denied their desired school placement at least one of the years that their multiples attended school



As multiples get older, parents are more likely to ask that they be placed separately, and this percentage becomes larger as the children advance in school.



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HUTT VALLEY