

To inspire every child to recognise their full potential, believe they can make a difference and respect themselves, others and the world in which they live.

Structured Cooperative Learning Policy 2026

Aims of the policy:

- To ensure that cooperative learning is integrated consistently across the school
- To clearly state how iCAN defines cooperative learning
- To make explicit the expectations of every iCAN learning facilitator for planning, delivering, evaluating and modelling cooperative learning in their classes and the wider school context

What is learning?

At iCAN we define learning as:

> *Learning is an ongoing journey of discovery. We can gain new knowledge, practise and improve our skills and develop our understanding through making connections and learning from our experiences.*

What is cooperative learning?

Cooperative learning is well recognised and accepted as an effective pedagogical practice for promoting academic achievement across curriculum areas from preschool to college. It involves learners working together to accomplish a shared goal. Through the carefully planned and guided development of prosocial skills, learners become more able to give and receive help, share ideas, clarify differences, and construct new understandings.

Structured Cooperative Learning is a form of cooperative learning that emphasises the use of clear, carefully planned structures for the delivery of content. Structures increase active engagement and ensure that learning interactions are managed to maximise individual participation and positive interactions within teams. Structures minimise the issues that arise from unstructured group work such as unequal contribution, focus on individualistic outcomes, disharmony and exclusion.

Kagan's Structured Cooperative Learning is an established, well researched and well-resourced approach which we use at iCAN. We accept the premises on which it is based and have adopted the vast majority of elements as they are described and set out by Kagan. This includes following the PIES principle, using the Quiet Signal, implementing heterogeneous teams as the basis of classroom organisation and using Kagan structures and resources.

We use cooperative learning at iCAN as it is aligned with our ethos, beliefs and approaches to learning: academically, socially and emotionally. Kagan's Structured Cooperative Learning is consistent with and mutually supportive of the IPC allowing strong integration.

Kagan emphasises SEVEN keys to successful implementation. These will be explored during PL throughout each year:

- Structures
- Teams
- Management
- Classbuilding
- Teambuilding
- Social Skills
- Basic Principles (PIES)

The Kagan structures are built upon FOUR fundamental principles, known as PIES. These maximise learners' interactions with each other and engagement with academic content:

- **P**ositive Interdependence
- **I**ndividual Accountability
- **E**qual Participation
- **S**imultaneous Interaction

Features of a cooperative classroom at iCAN

The **seven keys** and **PIES** are the organising features of iCAN classroom learning. They should be understood and broadly followed by all learning facilitators.

The Quiet Signal

All learning facilitators, LSA's and other members of the iCAN learning team are required to use the Quiet Signal as the main tool for establishing quiet attention in school. This must be understood clearly and used appropriately and consistently. Other techniques for gaining quiet attention are secondary and are not encouraged. The exception is the use of additional signals, such as an index finger to the lips and holding up counting fingers for our youngest learners. The consistency of the Quiet Signal is vital in helping learners and staff effectively respond to and respect requests for quiet attention.

Tips:

- Be patient and persevere
- Aim for establishing quiet within 3-5 seconds

- Use judiciously as overuse is tiresome and can be counterproductive. Consider building a repertoire of non-verbal cues to support its use.
- It is essential that you insist on ALL hands up. Anything less signals that it is not important or necessary. This undermines the effectiveness of the signal across the school and ultimately a learning facilitators credibility with learners.

Heterogeneous groups

iCAN classrooms are set up for learning to take place in stable learning teams. These change with each unit and are planned ahead of time. These teams are created to maximise diversity. They are heterogenous; not ability based, and should never identify an individual based on a judgement of their academic skill, capacity or 'level'.

Teams are created by learning facilitators to maximise diversity based on factors in the following order of importance:

1. Broad ability across curriculum areas
2. Gender
3. English language level/stage
4. Social skills/needs

Learners can be organised in other groupings throughout the day depending on learning activities including randomised groups and pairs, interest groups, coaching and mentoring pairs, similarity groupings and many others that are often determined by using a structure. Ability groupings are rarely used for academic purposes though may be used at times in P.E. for example.

Structures to design and deliver learning

All lessons should include at least one appropriate and carefully planned structure. Structures should:

- Be used for all stages of a lesson including introducing new knowledge/content
- Follow exact steps of the structure in order to fulfil the conditions of PIES
- Be carefully paced and managed
- Not be substituted with unplanned group or pair discussions; group work is NOT cooperative learning
- Regularly include feedback and reflection on the process of the structure itself, not the content

Cooperation rather than competition

Our classrooms prioritise cooperation, inclusion and collective success. In line with Kagan's Cooperative Learning principles, students are encouraged to support one another, contribute equitably and take individual responsibility for their learning.

We avoid classroom practices that rely on public ranking, comparison or competition at the expense of collaboration. This includes individual leaderboards, competitive reward systems and activities in which winning, speed or outperforming others takes precedence over learning and participation.

Planning classroom learning at iCAN

All iCAN classes experience social and academic learning through cooperative learning routines and structures every day. For many learning facilitators, this provides the structure for their planning for each day. Cooperative learning supports learning facilitators in creating a consistent and pedagogically sound framework, minimising the need to determine if planned learning activities are in line with iCAN philosophy and values.

The following activities are required every day:

Morning Meeting – 15-20 minutes

The morning meeting is an important start to the school day and all classes begin with this. It includes:

- Learners greeting each other, LF and LSA
- A classbuilding structure, planned in advance within mileposts
- Intention setting for the day ahead

End of day reflection – 10-15 minutes

Reflection is proven to be a powerful practice for consolidating new learning and building understanding. It is greatly enhanced through shared discussion. Reflections should provide:

- An opportunity to celebrate good news, achievement and positive emotions such as gratitude
- Learners reflect individually and then share in pairs, groups of 3-4, etc
- Excellent opportunities exist for simple, familiar structures
- All learners have an opportunity to speak and listen to each other
- Brief writing, drawing, sorting or role-play activities can be great

Classbuilding – during Morning Meeting plus a minimum 3-5 times throughout the week

This is a key aspect of Kagan's structured Cooperative Learning as it develops many social and emotional skills, a sense of connectedness and belonging. Together, these elements promote resilience as well as other protective factors for children.

Classbuilding can be planned for morning meetings and other structured times of the day such as immediately after break, lunch or quiet reading and return from specialist classes. It needn't take long but must not be minimised when there may be pressure on valuable classroom time.

Team Building – at least once a day in the first week of a new unit and at least 2-3 times a week thereafter

Teams are at the heart of the classroom at iCAN. A team is more than four learners sitting at tables together for a unit of learning. They help learners develop many prosocial skills and, like classbuilding,

promote belonging and connectedness. Team Building routines and activities are particularly valuable for enhancing trust, safety and positive relationships. For this reason, it is essential that expectations, norms and positive behaviours are explicitly described, taught, managed and modelled by learning facilitators.

Structures – at least 8-10 times a week. Used during Morning Meetings, all subject learning lessons, including Literacy and maths as well as IPC time. Specialists aim to use one per lesson.
As learning facilitators become capable and confident with using structures, they tend to use them very regularly, building them seamlessly into their lesson planning. It is not uncommon for a lesson to be structured from beginning to end with one structure leading into another, such as using corners followed by a mixed-pair-share or find-someone-who leading into circle-the-sage and then perhaps consensus mat.

Some tips on using structures:

- Always follow the steps prescribed
- Make the steps explicit – use the existing cards and slides
- Aim to master a small number of structures within a variety of curriculum contexts
- Reflect on and invite a colleague to give you feedback on your management of the structure
- Stick with it, even when you feel unsure or question the value – it takes time!

Forming Teams

- Heterogeneous groups are best for academic and social gains
- 4 members per team. Teams of 4 allow for maximum active participation as even numbers create two options for pair activities. The structures are designed for these groupings.
- If there is an odd number, make one team of 5 (rather than multiple teams of 3)
- Create new teams every unit

Cooperative learning teams are thoughtfully composed to provide opportunities for all learners to contribute, learn from one another and experience success. Learning facilitators consider a range of factors when forming teams, including learners' strengths, learning needs, social dynamics and the nature of the learning task.

Teams are designed to encourage positive interdependence, equitable participation and individual accountability. As facilitators get to know their learners, they may adjust team compositions to ensure that all children are supported, appropriately challenged and able to make meaningful contributions.

Learners' strengths and needs may vary across curriculum areas and over time. Team composition is therefore flexible and responsive, rather than based on fixed ability categories.

Extra learner guidelines

1 extra learner - 1 team of 5
2 extra learners - 2 teams of 3
3 extra learners - 1 team of 3

Policy to be reviewed in May 2028