

30 October 2018

Dear Year One Parents,

In June 2017, prior to your child starting in our Foundation Stage, we wrote to our parents explaining that after much consideration, and with the best interests of the children at the heart of our decision making, we decided to move to mixed age classes from September 2017.

Throughout the last academic year our newsletters and inspection reports have referred to the mixed classes but I understand that you would not have received the letter and therefore have a number of questions and would like greater clarity as to how it is organised and how it effects their child so I hope through this letter we will be able to answer them.

What do mixed-age classes mean?

Mixed age classes occur when children from different year groups are taught in the one class e.g. Year 1 and Year 2.

Why do we have them and what are the benefits?

In mixed age classes, children benefit in many ways from the opportunity to become an 'expert' for the younger children and a positive role model, which the younger children often aspire to. This 'vertical' grouping often nurtures thinking & problem skills, vocabulary & social competences. There is often a greater sense of cooperation and opportunities to work with a wider circle of peers. Because of the broader range of ability within a class, children can access work that will challenge and stretch them or enable them to consolidate a concept they find difficult; this will benefit the children significantly and support us in raising standards and aspirations and improving social opportunities and dynamics.

How were the classes organised?

When organising classes, experience has shown that it is important to take a range of influences into consideration and make a professional judgment. Split year groups are considered very carefully, depending on each cohort of children. These include:

- Social learning group;
- Emotional development;
- Readiness to learn;
- Stage of learning;
- Gender and age (balance of class and year group);
- Additional needs.

All these factors were taken into consideration by the class teachers before a decision was taken as to which class the children would be in. This was a lengthy process as it was important to get it right for all children to be successful.

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What support is in place to ensure the change in class/ friendship groups doesn't disrupt children, socially and academically?

Once classes for the academic year were finalised, we worked closely to plan and deliver collaborative learning opportunities throughout the transition events at the end of last year and we have continued to build on that over the recent weeks. This has helped children develop friendships and build their confidence. As with every new class, teachers have planned lessons that support the children in developing friendships and confidence at the start of the academic year. The Year One and Two children have had lunchtimes and playtimes together throughout the last academic year so are familiar to one another.

Will each class within a phase follow the same curriculum?

All of the classes in Year 1/2 will experience the same creative curriculum. The teachers plan together to ensure that every class receives the same learning opportunities. This is exactly the same in Phase 2 and 3. The curriculum is organised on a 2 year rolling programme so all objectives and requirements are covered. In order to help the children transition from Foundation Stage to Year One, the children are taught in small phonics and maths groups with peers of their own year group, in the mornings. The phonics is delivered by highly trained phonics staff and the maths is delivered by your child's class teacher, with normally no more than 12 children in a group. We are incredibly fortunate to be able to offer this small group teaching.

How is time be divided between the age groups?

Children are taught collectively except for maths and phonics as discussed above. We believe collaboration helps consolidate learning and reinforces children's understanding. As with a single age class, the teachers will provide support for all children relevant to their individual needs. All children will have their needs met through differentiation of planning and teaching.

I hope that the information we have provided you with above is useful and answers many of your questions. However, should you have any further queries or questions please do not hesitate to contact your child's class teacher, vice principal or myself and we will be happy to answer them.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Kerry Mills
Principal