

Mixed Aged Classes at High Ham

Each year I am asked a number of questions about the split classes, so I thought it would be useful to put together some FAQ's.

Frequently Asked Questions (Updated 2021)

Why do we have mixed aged classes each year?

There are seven primary year groups and we are funded for six classes. Our current number on roll is 168 (our maximum number is 180) and to have the funds for seven classes we would need to have around 200 students.

Why can't we just fundraise for an extra class?

The costs associated with purchasing a classroom, equipping a classroom, employing a teacher are too high to be sustainable.

Why don't you always split the same year groups each year so that everyone takes it in turns?

This is not possible as it relates to pupil numbers in each year group. For example, one year group in September will have 30 pupils while another will have 19.

How do you make the decision about which year groups to split?

We look at the numbers of pupils in each class and see where we can split the minimum number of year groups while taking a range of factors into consideration. For example, the attributes/grouping in each class, have the children been split before, what are the skills and experience of the class teachers, levels of attainment, the content of the curriculum etc.

What do other local schools do?

In our CLP (Community Learning Partnership) only a few schools have single year groups, over half of the schools have 3 or 4 classes so have several age ranges in a class.

Will my child be taught by the same teacher twice?

Quite possibly yes as we have six teachers but it will be dependent on staff changes as well as teachers changing year groups.

Do you wish you did not have to split the year groups?

Ideally yes that would be nice. But I know from when I was a class teacher that children learn at different rates anyway, so whatever class you have there is always a mix of ability to teach and it is down to the skill of the teacher to adapt the curriculum accordingly. I chose as did my staff to work in a six class village primary school because of our ethos, supportive teamwork and the fantastic facilities we have.

Have you taught in a mixed age class?

Yes. I have taught in a single year group school, a five class school, a school with three classes per year group as well as another six class school. As a teacher my mixed year group classes were Y2/3 and Y5.6. When I started at High Ham as Head there were two Y4,5,6 classes and we have had various mixes including R/1, 1/2.,2/3, as well as 5/6.

Last year, you said my child in a mixed class would mix at playtimes and lunch time and do some curriculum work together, this did not happen, why?

It is always our intention to offer some break times as well as curriculum experiences together. But due to Covid and the bubbles this has not be possible for the last two years, this was something we could not predict.

If my child is with the younger children, will they achieve less in their end of year assessments?

No. A child will achieve what they can achieve regardless of their class. For example, many pupils who are in the younger class outperform those in the older class in their end of year assessments. There is no limit to learning and all learning is carefully monitored.

How can I support my child if they are disappointed about which class they are in?

By explaining to them that they will have opportunities to be with their friends and perhaps arrange play dates so that they can keep in touch.

Why can't you give out the class structure earlier in the year?

Pupil numbers frequently change in the final months of the summer term. Therefore, it is unwise to plan until nearer the time.

How do you decide who goes in which class?

We look at a range of factors The class teachers meet with the Senior Management Team and we look at attainment, confidence, friendships etc. For example, sometimes it works well keeping some children apart while others together.

How can I help my child to progress regardless of their class?

By supporting them at home, through reading regularly and completing homework tasks.

How do the younger children feel in a mixed class? Do they feel they are behind & compare themselves to the older children?

In the class there will be an opportunity to work as a whole class as well as in single year groups. In our experience, pupils are aware that there are differences between their own skills in all areas of life, as it is natural to compare ourselves to others. Staff will support pupils to deal with these feelings, they will explain that each year group has different expectations and different work to do.

Have staff identified any benefits of mixing year groups?

- Staff are aware of the complexities of teaching mixed classes as well as the problems that could arise if teaching is not effective.
- Children have a great opportunity to build independence in their learning. In this way, children do not always rely on adult support to access a task and become more confident independent learners
- Children benefit in many ways the opportunity to become an 'expert' for the younger children and a positive role model which the younger children often aspire to. However, this is not used as a strategy if it will mean the older child miss out on their own learning opportunities or that the younger children feel inferior to their older classmates.
- Mixed grouping can enhance and nurture deeper thinking and problem skills in Maths
- In English mixed grouping allows for a wider range of vocabulary to be taught and children to learn stronger social and verbal competences. Children can become strong communicators using language often beyond their current year group
- There can be a greater sense of co-operation and opportunities to work with a wider circle of peers and opportunities to build friendships from across different year groups, which reflects their life in the adult world. Also our main feeder Secondary School (Huish Academy) has vertical tutor groups so that pupils in years 7-11 support each other as the school clearly sees the benefit of collaboration.

How is attainment and progress monitored?

- Teachers regularly assess pupils, both informally (from day to day) and formally (with tests and other assessments). Where pupils need extra help we work on creative ways to support this. This could be in class or through intervention groups. This is the same whether within a mixed or single year class.
- Teachers regularly compare books across the team to compare outcomes and develop consistency between different teachers.
- Members of the Leadership Team frequently monitor lessons and books, and this includes observations of lessons. Where things could be improved, staff are supported in this.

- Three times a year teachers have Pupil Progress Meetings which focus on monitoring assessment information and ensuring that pupils are making the progress we expect based on their previous attainment. Information from these meetings is shared with Governors as part of their monitoring role.
- Staff Appraisals are linked to pupil outcomes, progress over time, and progress towards targets
- Governors monitor the progress of pupils termly, as well as over time.

How is the impact of the pandemic being considered?

- Pupils do have some academic gaps across all year groups and across the country. As always, we will work to ensure that pupils have the best support we can give them to move forward.
- This a key consideration in planning the whole school curriculum for 2021-22 and we are working with the Local Authority on how we can best support the recovery of all pupils.
- This year pupils in the mixed classes especially have missed seeing others in their year group as they have remained in class bubbles. However, we are looking to open up to year group bubbles at break times as soon as we can.
- Our support for pupils with emotional needs is strong, and at the moment we are working alongside our PFSA (Parent Family Support Assistant) to meet the emotional needs of pupils.

What about trips?

These are being organised in single year groups not in mixed classes.

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