



Wateringbury Church of
England Primary School

Mixed Age Classes Policy

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Learning, growing, achieving....our journey together with God.

Our Vision and Values

Guided by our Christian values and nurturing culture, we aspire to enable everyone to grow green leaves to meet the challenges of our ever-changing world and to send out our roots to the wider community.

Every child is seen as a unique learner, loved by God and is equally valued and championed to grow and achieve their very best in all they do.

LOVE FORGIVENESS JOY RESILIENCE RESPECT COURAGE

Mixed Age Classes

Following our reduction in published admission number due to falling birth rate in the area, the school will be teaching children in mixed age classes. The structure of classes will change depending on the size of cohorts.

A mixed-age class is defined to be a class in which there are children who are from more than one year group of the primary school. On occasions, where pupil numbers and class size restrictions dictate, year groups will be split between classes. The expertise of the staff is used to ensure your child is placed in a class with their best interests in mind (see below).

“Research strongly supports the idea that mixed-age classrooms are better for students.”

The mixed-age classroom is like a family: the older students nurture the younger ones and motivate them. We also believe that one of the best ways to improve one’s knowledge or abilities in a subject is to teach the subject to others.

Most human activities involve a cycle in which a beginner learns necessary skills, perfects them through use, and hones them through mentorship. That is true of careers, sports teams, and even hobbies. It is also true of the educational experience of children in mixed year group classes. Research strongly supports the idea that mixed-age classrooms are better for students. Not only do children out-perform peers of the same age academically, studies also show that they thrive socially. Here’s why:

Competition is removed

In mixed-age classrooms, children are more likely to cooperate than compete. This spirit of cooperation and caring makes it possible for children to see each other as individuals as opposed to competitors. This reiterates our nurturing, family approach.

Children develop a sense of family with their classmates

Mixed-age classrooms generate a family of learners who support and care for one another. Older children have the opportunity to serve as mentors and take leadership roles. They model more sophisticated approaches to problem solving, helping younger children to accomplish tasks they would not be able to do independently. This dynamic increases the older child’s level of independence and competence while increasing the younger child’s spirit of belonging in a community of learners.

Younger children will have the opportunity to extend their learning and increase their vocabulary whilst working alongside older children. Mixed year classrooms are both socially and psychologically healthy because they promote friendship and provide extended contact with adults and peers of varying ages. Children in these classes therefore show a notable increase in self-esteem.

Children seen as unique individuals

When classrooms contain students of varied ages, teachers concentrate on what children *can* do, rather than what they *can’t* do. Teachers focus on instructing each child according to his or her own strengths.

Self-esteem blossoms

Multi-age classrooms are socially and psychologically healthy because they promote friendship and provide extended contact with adults and peers of varying ages. These groups show a noticeable increase in self-esteem.

How the Curriculum is Planned

The curriculum is planned so that all pupils have the same experience and access:

- ◆ Maths and English – is planned weekly within each phase and is adapted accordingly for the needs of pupils within each class.
- ◆ All other subjects are planned within a two-year rolling programme which is also adapted according to individual, or class needs. The rolling programmes have been developed to create a broad and balanced curriculum over a two-year period. National Curriculum content for children from both years within the key stage has been carefully considered to ensure that the progression of skills is clear.
- ◆ The RSE elements of the PSHE curriculum (that is covered in Term 6) will be taught in individual year groups.
- ◆ Where a year group is taught across two classes, the children will be covering the same skills and concepts even if it is through different subject matter, e.g. the concept of chronology will be covered at the age appropriate level whether it is through learning about the Romans or Ancient Mayans.

Principles

- ◆ The arrangements for class splitting/mixing are based on the professional judgements of class teachers, teaching assistants, the senior leadership team and the headteacher
- ◆ We will always consider what is in the best interests of individual children and classes as a whole when making decisions
- ◆ We will communicate the criteria for class mixing in an open and transparent way
- ◆ We will always consider the happiness and welfare of the children and will take into consideration existing friendship groups when we create new classes

Splitting/Mixing Classes

Our previous experience of mixed age classes has shown that we take a number of influences into consideration and make a professional judgment based on this. Split year groups are considered very carefully, depending on each cohort of children.

Classes will be mixed to achieve a good balance according to the following criteria (in no particular order of preference):

- ◆ Protected characteristics – to create a balance of the number of pupils in each class;
- ◆ Ability – as far as possible, a mix of abilities will be in each class;
- ◆ Social - staff will make a professional decision about where a pupil should be placed for educational, social and emotional reasons (including friendships)*;

***Friendships**

Over the course of their time in school, children will have a range of friendship experiences. We find that some friendships can be very fluid, whilst others can stand the test of time. With that in mind and as we prepare to draw up the class lists we will consult with the children, use observations of them in the classroom and at play to inform our decision making.

All these factors will be taken into consideration by the staff when making a decision.

We do not take into account requests from parents about which class they would like their child in or if they can “be with their friends”. This is because it would be impossible to take all requests into account and we must make a decision that is in the best interests of all the children in the school both educationally, socially and emotionally. The one point where we seek out parental views before our decisions are published is in the case of twins and siblings close in age. However, it is the teaching staff who make the final allocation based on their professional judgement of where the child will best flourish in both their personal, social and academic achievements.

As the decision about which class a pupil goes into is based on confidential information, the school cannot explain the full decision about class-setting to parents or children as this would mean discussing confidential matters. No pupil is disadvantaged by which class they are in.

The process:

- ◆ All staff observe the children's friendships at work and play
- ◆ Children will be consulted for their views on friendships and children they work well with.
- ◆ Class teachers meet to ensure a good balance of friendships, range of educational, social and personal needs, gender and maturity are represented in each class
- ◆ Senior leadership team meet with class teachers to discuss and finalise groupings
- ◆ Headteacher and senior leadership team meet and approve classes
- ◆ New classes are shared with parents and children in the second half of the Summer term to support transition.

Timescales

- ◆ Staff discuss their observations of friendships in the Summer Term
- ◆ All information is considered along with the other criteria after May half-term
- ◆ Class lists are drawn up and shared with the senior leadership team (June)
- ◆ Class lists finally approved by headteacher (June)
- ◆ Classes communicated to parents and children as part of the end of year arrangements

Concerns from parents/carers

We are aware that having children in a mixed age class where a child is not with all of his/her friends can be a concern for parents. We work hard to ensure that children are not disadvantaged by which class they are in. When children are placed in mixed age classes, they will follow the same National Curriculum through a variety of concepts and levels appropriate to their individual ability. Children will not be "held back" or "struggle to keep up" in any class.

All teachers are trained to work in mixed ability classes whether currently in a straight year group or in mixed age classes. All learning is adapted to challenge the needs of individuals wherever they are on the learning continuum.

In all primary classes there are a wide range of abilities and all children will learn in different ways at a different pace, responding to a variety of methods and resources. Teachers are able to adapt to the different needs within any class and plan accordingly. The range of abilities will not be significantly different in a mixed age class. Programmes and schemes of work are compiled to suit the development needs of all learners in different groupings.

Opportunities are made for children from the same year group to mix together during break times, lunch times, after school activities, sports teams etc.

Children quickly adapt to their new classes, and we ask they are given an opportunity to do so. We will give them opportunities before the end of the school year to meet their new class mates. However, being a small school, the children already all know each other and regularly play together.

- ◆ Parents will be informed of where their child is placed and given an opportunity to discuss these placements with the existing teacher if there are any worries.
- ◆ Any serious concerns should initially be shared with the senior leadership team or the headteacher who will be able to reassure parents/carers about their child's allocated class. The organisation of classes is carefully considered to enhance the best chances of educational success for all pupils at school. The motivation when organising classes is to protect the academic, social and emotional interests of the whole school, making the best decision in the interests of all pupils, not favouring one pupil or one year group over another;
- ◆ Parents cannot refuse to have their child placed in any class at Wateringbury CE Primary School. This is a managerial decision based on this policy;

- ◆ The governing body have delegated the responsibility of day-to-day management of the school to the headteacher and senior leadership team. If there are extreme and exceptional circumstances regarding a pupil, on rare occasions, the governing body may consider an individual case;
- ◆ The decision of the headteacher is final. Children will not be moved once the class has met their new teacher since this would inevitably involve moves of other children to accomplish this.
- ◆ If a parent feels that the school has not adhered to the Mixed Age Classes Policy they can raise this in the first instance with the staff at school, and if still not satisfied, they should raise their concerns through the Complaints Policy available from school or on the school website.

Planned Class Structure for the Next Few Years

As we have a varied profile of classes across the school (a range in class sizes across key stages) we will have to vary the make-up of classes in the transition years up to the final class structure of four classes. This plan may need to be adapted if pupil numbers differ from those predicted and budgeted for. There may be other factors that would necessitate an alteration to this plan.

Academic year	Class: Bramble	Class: Dandelion	Class: Honeysuckle	Class: Snowdrop	Class: Bluebell	Class: Primrose
Sept 2025	Years R & 1		Year 2	Year 3	Years 4 & 5	Years 5 & 6
Sept 2026	Years R & 1		Year 2	Years 3 & 4	Years 4 & 5	Years 5 & 6
Sept 2027	Year R		Years 1 & 2	Years 3 & 4	Years 4 & 5	Years 5 & 6
Sept 2028	Year R		Years 1 & 2	Years 3 & 4	Years 4 & 5	Year 6
Sept 2029	Year R		Years 1 & 2		Years 3 & 4	Years 5 & 6

FAQs

Will my child be held back if she/he is placed in a class with the young year group?

Definitely not! The ways in which teaching and learning are organised in primary schools means that teaching and work is tailored to the needs and current achievement levels of individual pupils. The staff at the school are very experienced at planning and delivering work to match the needs of mixed age classes (all classes already have pupils of different ages and abilities in). They provide challenge for the more-able children and support for those needing more help whichever year group they are currently in. Furthermore, the school plans educational experiences for pupils in all classes in ways which ensure good progression and continuity, whichever year group or class they are in. The school are still accountable for children making the expected progress and meeting their year group expectations whatever class set up they are in.

I am concerned that forming a mixed age or split year group class may mean that my child's friendship grouping is being broken up.

Although care is taken in allocating pupils to classes – their social needs are not ignored – in general terms it is likely to be good for children to experience classes with different classmates so that their circle of friends and acquaintances can be extended beyond the traditional age boundaries. Where new classes are formed, opportunities are created beyond the standard curriculum for pupils to maintain contact with friends who have been allocated to other classes (such as at lunchtimes, playtimes, special activities, trips, school performances). When children transfer to secondary school, new friendship groupings in different subject areas become a fact of life, and this situation is generally welcomed by many children. Children don't spend a lot of learning time with their friends anyway as they are rarely sitting together in the classroom.

How will teachers plan, ensuring coverage of both the years' curriculums, preventing repetition of content?

With the exception of maths, English and science knowledge (not skills), the curriculum content for year groups is not split into separate year content, rather, there is an expectation for the end of the key stage. Curriculum areas such as history and geography will be taught on a two-year cycle, ensuring that content is not repeated unless it needs to be built upon.

In the case of maths and English, the two curricula are completely aligned, with the majority of one year's objectives being matched with a similar but slightly trickier objective for the following year. For example, Year 3 are expected to recognise the value of each digit in a three-digit number. Year 4 are further expected to recognise the value of each digit in a four-digit number. Ensuring coverage of national curriculum objectives for both year groups in the same classroom will be easily facilitated by normal classroom adaptations and careful monitoring.

How will pupil progress be monitored?

- ◆ Teachers regularly assess pupils, both informally (from day to day learning) and formally (with tests and other assessments). Where pupils need extra help, we work on creative ways to support this through the use of individual and class provision maps. This could be in class or through intervention groups.
- ◆ Teachers regularly take part in moderation across the school and with other schools to compare books and outcomes, and develop consistency between different teachers.
- ◆ Members of the leadership team frequently monitor lessons and books; this includes observations of lessons. Where things could be improved, staff are supported in this.
- ◆ We regularly hold pupil progress meetings with staff 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.
- ◆ Governors monitor the progress of pupils termly, as well as over time.
- ◆ The school is regularly monitored by the local authority.

Will being in a mixed age class be detrimental to my child's transition to secondary school?

Not at all! The physical size of the school will not change although there may be fewer children in total in the school this will feel very different to your child. In mixing the ages of the children, the class sizes will be back to 'normal' class sizes. If your child had been in a class of 18 or 20 for four years, it would be a big jump to be in a class of 32+ at secondary school.

Being in mixed age classes, and changing the children you are learning with, is actually a big benefit in preparing for secondary school where your child will be with a lot of children they do not know and different class arrangements for different lessons. Most schools with more than one form entry mix children up regularly for this very reason.

What about preparation for the 11+?

Schools are not allowed to prepare children for the 11+ so there will be no change to this in mixed age classes. Children just need to have been taught all of KS2 maths and English up to the end of Year 5 to be able to access the maths and English content in the test. There is nothing special taught for the test.

Are you expecting a drop in numbers because of this plan?

The total number of pupils in the school will fall each year (for at least four years) as larger classes leave the school and smaller cohorts join. Last time we had mixed age classes we did not have any significant movement of pupils, so we are not expecting that this time either. In fact, there are many families who have asked us to reintroduce mixed age classes.

Can you tell us when individual children are leaving or joining our child's class?

No. We cannot do this as this is confidential information for the families/children involved. However, most parents do let their classmates know in advance so that the children can say goodbye. Sometimes family circumstances do not always allow for this.

Review

The senior leadership team will review the process and criteria for each year's class mixing arrangements in the Autumn Term ahead of the following year's class mixing.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the leadership team and governors to take account of pupil numbers and budget figures each year.

Appendix - Research Summary

Sutton Trust Report (2011) Toolkit of Strategies to Improve Learning

- feeding into Education Endowment Fund Teaching and Learning Toolkit:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/>

- ♦ The report suggests that if schools adopt mixed ability grouping they are more likely to use inclusive teaching strategies and to promote higher aspirations for their pupils.

Hattie, J (2009) Visible Learning

- ♦ Hattie found that ability grouping (not mixing children of different ages and abilities) “limits students schooling opportunities, achievements and life chances. Students not in the highest sets have fewer intellectual challenges, less engaging and supportive classrooms, and fewer well-trained teachers”.
- ♦ “Ability grouping guarantees the unfair distribution of privilege in that wealthy students benefit from access to high status knowledge that low-income students are denied. If ability grouping leads to proportionally more students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or from particular ethnic groups being placed in lower sets, then the use of ability grouping may serve to increase divisions along class, race and ethnic lines’.

See also

How fixed ability thinking can limit learning, research summary in *Creating Learning Without Limits*, Hart et al (2012)

Several pieces of research (eg **Veenman 1995, Katz 1995, Ofsted 2000**) highlight the **social benefits** of mixed-age classes, as: children form relationships with a wider variety of children, reducing the normative pressure; children teach and learn from each other; older children act as social role models; self-esteem and metacognition of lower achieving children increases from them being asked to support younger children.

From local studies (**Seleznyov 2012, London Borough of Islington 2013**), teachers who prefer setting (grouping children by ability without a range) talk in terms of the notional benefits to them as teachers (simpler differentiation, workload reduction) rather than benefits to pupils. All admit that there are disadvantages for the least and the most able.