

13th July 2018

Dear Parents and Carers,

It was good to meet many of you at Tuesday's Open Evening at school to hear firsthand about how you feel about the class arrangements for years 3 and 4 next year.

We understand that communication of this decision could have been better and for this we unreservedly apologise. This was simply a function of the usual very busy end of term and the realisation that, despite months' of discussion and weighing of the options by governors, you - the parents - had not yet been informed of the final decision. I can only repeat that we are sorry about the poor communication and that we will try to do better in future.

In fact, only a minority of Y3 and Y4 parents made any comment to governors about the Y3/Y4 mixed classes and, of those that did, at least as many wished to say they felt it was a positive thing as those who expressed concerns. This was based on their previous positive experience of older children who had been in mixed age classes at certain points during their journey through school.

Governors are always concerned about the impact of decisions on the children's learning and appreciate that you may feel that mixed-age classes are not ideal. In fact they are at least as effective as single-age classes. We have many examples where, in the past, children have been in a mixed age class at some point during their school career and this has been wholly beneficial; the children have not been disadvantaged in any way by this.

This year's Y6 are a case in point. Their journey through school has not been without its challenges: at various times they have been in mixed-age classes, been taught by 2 teachers as a job-share, been in a large class of 34 children and this year, in their Y6 year, had 2 changes of teacher after their original class teacher took maternity leave. Although many parents and some governors had concerns about some of these arrangements, none has been a barrier to effective teaching and learning; all of our Y6 have achieved the expected standard in all subjects that they are required to take SAT tests in (that is reading, maths and spelling, grammar and punctuation) – a truly remarkable achievement.

Change is always unsettling, especially so when it is unexpected. I can only ask that you trust our staff to act with professionalism and integrity in the best interests of the children. If you have concerns we do want to hear them. However, it goes without saying that social media is not the best way to contact us; the easiest way is through the school office.

At the end of this letter I have collated the general questions and answers about the Y3/4 mixed classes that were asked. If you would like more information please do contact us through the school office. If you have concerns which relate specifically to your child in particular please raise these with the class teacher or the head teacher.

I know some of you have asked for a meeting to discuss the class arrangements. We would be pleased to meet with you although there is little time for this to happen this term. Some of you have

suggested that a meeting early next term would be more helpful, once your children have settled into their new classes. We will look to organise this with our new head teacher, Mrs Moore.

I wish you and your children an enjoyable and restful summer break and look forward to working alongside you next term at school.

Yours sincerely,

Penny Conway
Chair of the Governing Body

Questions about class arrangements for 2018/2019:

Why will the school only have 13 classes next year when there are 14 classrooms available?

Physically we have the space but we do not have the funding to staff 14 classes.

Funding is received for the financial year (April to April) based on pupil numbers on census day in October. In October we had 330 pupils on roll so we have funding for this number for this financial year.

330 is in fact only enough children for 11 (maximum 12) classes. We have only been able to open additional classes sooner because of prudent use of funds in previous years so we have a budget carry-forward we have used. (It costs about £35k - £40k to run a class for a year including staff and resources.)

Why did you spend a lot of money on an extension if you couldn't afford the staff to use it?

The decision to extend the school to become a 2-form entry school with 14 classes was part of the Local Authority's (LA) overall plans and strategy for this area. The funds were never available to school to spend in any other way other than for buildings. We will get funding to staff all 14 classes as pupil numbers rise – this is linked to house building and sales which is not in our control.

Why have you chosen to mix only Y3 and Y4 rather than any other year groups?

This is partly because these year groups have lower numbers. We have about 90 pupils across these year groups which equates to 3 classes – other year groups have too large a number for this to be possible.

These year groups have benefited from very small class numbers this year (22 or 23) where as others have been in much fuller classes (for example current Y4 have a class of 28 and Y6 have 32).

Some year group mixes are easier to manage than others because the curriculum and approach for those year groups are more similar: Y2/Y3 might be possible on numbers but it would not be so easy to manage across KS1/KS2 as these are more different in approach.

Why have you mixed all 3 classes instead of having just one mixed (that is: one Y3, one Y3/Y4 & one Y4 class)?

Having 3 parallel classes makes it much easier for staff to plan together to ensure all pupils (regardless of age or prior attainment) receive a curriculum suited to their needs.

For some subjects, such as maths, pupils will be taught in their year groups (by using some of our budget carry-forward mentioned earlier, we can afford additional staff for part of the time to enable this).

Having 3 similarly balanced classes is fairer to all and makes this more supportive for pupils.

Won't my Y4 child just end up repeating work from Y3?

No child will be repeating learning that they have already mastered. Some may well need to consolidate learning from Y3 but they would have done this anyway in a single Y4 class (a Y3/Y4 class in fact makes this much easier to do).

Topic work (geography, history etc) is taught in a 2-year cycle to Lower KS2: the National Curriculum does not specify the order that topics are taught in, simply that they should be covered over the 2 years. All children in the Y3/Y4 classes will study the topics that this year's Y3 pupils (ie next year's Y4 pupils) have not studied this year. This means no child will repeat the topics they have already done this year and all children will cover the Lower KS2 curriculum by the end of their 2 years in Lower KS2.

Won't smaller Y3 pupils be overwhelmed by larger Y4 pupils?

This is seldom a problem in class. Teachers are skilled in ensuring all pupils (including younger, smaller or quieter ones) take an equal part in lessons and access the learning that is appropriate for them. This is just as much the case in a single year group class as in a mixed age class.

They all play outside together and have friendships across a wider age-range than is seen in a class that contains just two year groups.

How will you monitor children's attainment and progress – which standards will they be measured against: Y3 or Y4?

All children will be assessed by their class teachers in the usual way: tests at the end of units of work; assessment of written work in pupils' books; teachers' assessments of responses and contribution during whole class and group teaching.

All children will be assessed against the standards (age-related expectations) for their year group whether the work has occurred in a mixed-age or single year group setting. This is so school can ensure that all pupils have been well prepared for moving on at the end of the year to the next year group.