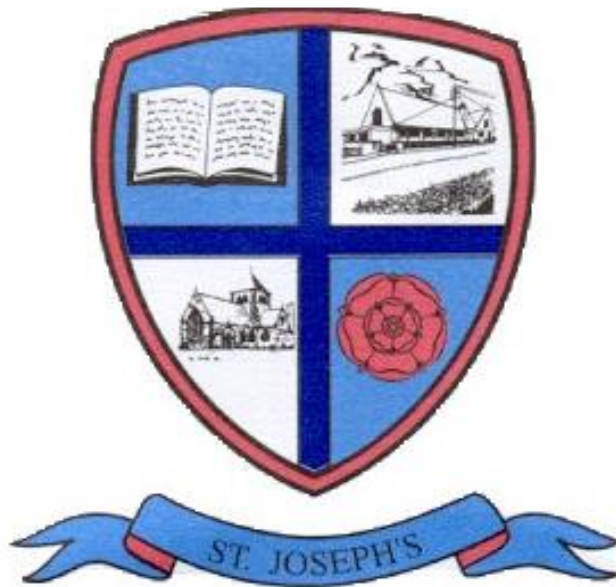


ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC
PRIMARY SCHOOL



MIXED AGE CLASSES AND SPLIT YEAR
GROUPS POLICY

REVIEWED: May 2023
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ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL, WRIGHTINGTON
MIXED AGE CLASSES AND SPLIT YEAR GROUPS – INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

At St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Wrightington, our four class structure, along with the seven primary school year groups, means that we have to have mixed age classes within the school. Due to the differing sizes of year groups we also have a different structure each year.

Principles :

- The primary reason for where your child will be placed is by academic year group.
- We will always consider what is in the best interests of individual children and classes as a whole when making decisions;
- 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.

What is a mixed age and split year group class?

A mixed age class is defined to be a class in which there are children who are in more than one year group of the primary school. In most cases, a mixed age class will comprise of pupils at only two stages (e.g. Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2).

Why are mixed age and split year group classes formed?

Mixed age classes are formed in most schools partly because of the way in which the pupil roll is configured in any given year (i.e. – the numbers of pupils in each different year group). It is not uncommon for this situation to change from year to year, as the sizes of year groups can vary quite dramatically. The admission number at St. Joseph's is 20 and with 7-year groups and with 4 designated classrooms, this means that the school organizes the children into 4 classes. One factor that influences these class sizes is the infants (EYFS and KS1 children). The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 stipulates that all schools with infant pupils must organise their Key Stage 1 classes to ensure that they contain no more than 30 pupils for all ordinary teaching sessions taught by a single qualified teacher from September 2001.

Will my child be held back if she/he is placed in a mixed age or split year group class?

Definitely not. The ways in which learning and teaching 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 St. Joseph's are very experienced at planning and delivering work to match the needs of mixed age learning. They provide challenge for the more able children and support for those needing more help whichever year group they are currently in. The school will plan the educational experiences for pupils in all classes in ways which ensure good progression and continuity, whichever year group or class they are in.

We do not take into account requests from children or 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.

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 themes at a level 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 in a straight year group or in a mixed age class. All tasks are differentiated 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.

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, sport teams etc.

In order to ensure parents are aware of the way we set classes:

- We explain it to parents when they are shown round school before making the decision to apply for a place at St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School;
- This policy is included in our school prospectus;
- Ensure, through a newsletter, that parents are aware of this policy just before the classes for the following year are announced;
- Have a copy of this policy on our school website and available to parents upon request.

Why is the situation different in my child's school from that in other schools?

It is fair to say that different situations pertain in all schools. There are many small schools in Lancashire that have mixed age classes. Each one of these schools has no choice but to form one or several mixed age classes. In none of these schools is the formation of mixed age classes of itself an issue or a concern. There is no evidence to suggest that being in a mixed age class has any detrimental effect whatsoever on the education of children in that class.

In *'Effective Classroom Organisation in Primary Schools: Mathematics (2001),'* a study from the Institute of Economic and Social Research (IESR), the following alternatives are identified:

- Age – used as the basic grouping method in England with some variations according to size of school.
- Mixed-ability grouping – the span of attainment is managed by the class teacher using within class grouping or differentiation according to ability.

It also concludes that there is no support for the view that lower key stage 2 children learn more effectively in sets for maths at any attainment level: “The expectation of greater gain by schools choosing to set by ability was not supported by the figures; in fact the results supported a tentative conclusion by the author that children of all levels of attainment do better when taught in mixed-ability groups.”

It reports that pupils in mixed-ability classes showed an average gain in test scores of up to seven per cent over those taught in set classes, and suggests that “policies of setting were adopted primarily to make the teachers’ tasks more manageable”.

But 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). Certainly, 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.

Are there any benefits to the arrangements?

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. The children usually have several years with the same teacher and this provides a perfect opportunity for the teacher to develop a deeper understanding of a child's needs and strengths and is therefore in a stronger position to better support the child's learning. In turn the child knows their teacher well, understands the expectations they have, and can build upon a level of trust that encourages them to 'have a go' or try something new.

If a mixed age or split year group class has to be formed, how are decisions taken about which children should be allocated to which class?

Experience has shown at St. Joseph's 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. These include: (and are in no particular order of preference)

- Age
- Medical/developmental issues

All these factors will be taken into consideration by the head teacher and class teachers before a decision is taken. Parents are then usually contacted about the new organisation and opportunities are made available for any family wishing to discuss the matter. However, once any parent has had this opportunity, it is the head teacher who makes the final allocation based on their professional judgment of where the child will best flourish in both their personal, social and academic achievements.

Mixed Class Size:

St. Joseph's can accommodate 140 children. However, the make-up of each CLASS SIZE is at the discretion of the Governing Body.

Complaints and Appeals:

Initially, any concerns should be shared with the Head teacher who will be able to reassure you about your 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 Head teacher's motivation when organising classes is to protect the teaching and learning interests of the whole school, making the best decision in the interest of all pupils, not one pupil or indeed one year group. Parents cannot refuse to have their child placed in any class at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School.

The Governing Body has delegated the responsibility of day to day management of the school to the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team.

If a parent feels that the school has not adhered to the Mixed Year Groups Policy they can raise this in the first instance with the Head teacher, and if still not satisfied, they should raise their concerns with the Complaints Committee of the Governing Body. The contact details are available through the Clerk to the Governors.