

Good afternoon,

I am writing to inform you about changes that we are making to the structure of school from September 2024.

Current structure

Walmsley CE Primary School has a planned admission number each year of 45 children (1.5 classes per year group).

For a number of years, our school has been running as a two form entry school with 2 classes per year group rather than 1.5. Running this school in this way has had a significant financial impact and we have sadly reached a point where it is no longer sustainable.

New school structure

From September 2024, we will therefore begin to go back to the structure originally intended for our school and for which it is funded. There are a number of schools within Bolton that operate very successfully in this way. It has also been a very successful model for our school in the past and we are confident it will be again.

Years 1-4

Children in Years 1-4 from September will be taught in mixed age classes. Children in Years 5 and 6 will remain as 2 classes due to the size of the cohort we currently have in Year 4. From September 2026, all classes from Year 1 to 6 will become mixed age classes. Reception will continue to be taught in two smaller classes.

Reception

As children leave Reception they will be put into 3 groups based on gender and ages. They will then follow a flight path through school so that they will stay with a group of 15 children but have time with the different groups as they move through school. There will be complete consistency across the classes - there will be high expectations for all children with guidance and support where necessary.

High Expectations

At Walmsley Primary, we believe that we should all be teaching to the top, rather than putting a lid on what children might produce by preparing materials which only allow them to go so far. The mastery approach to teaching in primary schools means that the whole class is taught together about the main ideas, and those who need additional support are given this through guidance and discussion by an adult. Those who are early graspers are kept on the same material but are expected to work on aspects of greater complexity and depth.

I understand you may have some apprehension about this change but I can assure you there will be transition sessions so that your child can spend time in their new classes before the end of the year.

Class arrangements

As our classes will be organised by age we recognise that some friendship groups are split across classes however all children will still get plenty of time to socialise at playtime and lunch time. Please see attached the flight paths that will be used through school. We will inform you next week of your child's flight path from September 2024.

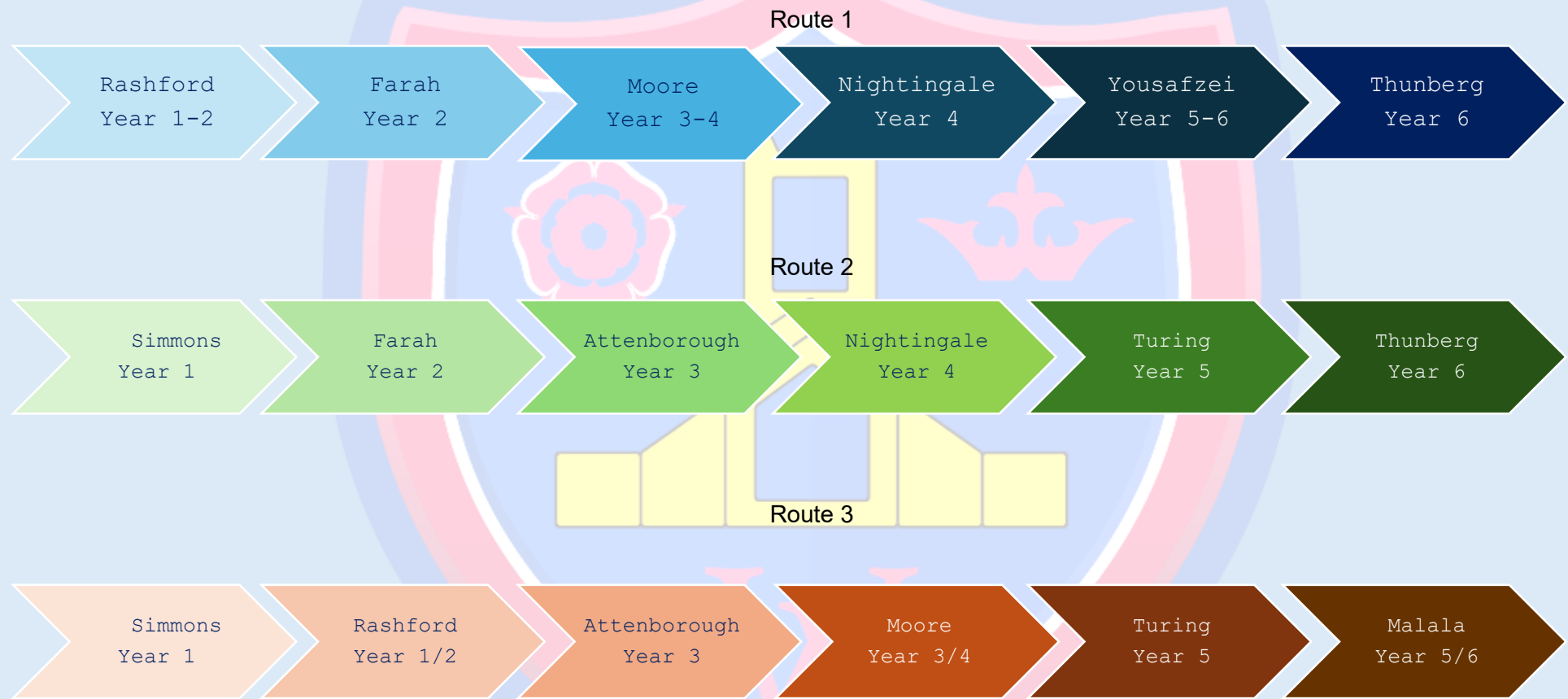
Feedback

Myself and the leadership team will be available in the school hall from 5:00pm-6:00pm on Tuesday 18th June if you would like to discuss this further with us. In the meantime, there are some FAQs enclosed which may answer some of your initial questions.

Kind regards

Mrs J Atherton
Head Teacher

All classes are organised by gender then age. This is the planned route that children will take through the classes over the next six years. Your child will be mapped to one of these routes and their place will not be affected by any children joining or leaving the school.



Questions which may be raised

Why the change?

To ensure the financial stability of the school for the future. As outlined in the attached letter, we are funded as a 1.5 form entry school and can no longer run the school as 2 form entry from a financial point of view.

What about friendships already fostered?

There will always be a number of children who they are friendly with in the classes and this will hopefully widen friendship groups. All the children will still socialise together at break and lunch and any year group specific events will incorporate the whole year group so there will be lots of opportunities to work together, for example going out on trips, visitors coming in to school, curriculum enrichment activities and performances/school events.

How will you make sure that children are not repeating work?

From September, children in Years 1-4 will work on a 2 year curriculum cycle for the majority of subjects, so for example, a child in Year 3 in September will cover all of the Year 3 and all of the Year 4 curriculum over a two year cycle. This has been developed so as not to overlap anything that has already been taught this year.

Specific subjects such as PSHE where the content is very age specific will be taught in year groups rather than across a two year phase.

How will you make sure all children are challenged?

As mentioned in the letter, all teachers will be teaching to the top, rather than putting a lid on what children might produce by preparing materials which only allow them to go so far. The mastery approach to teaching in primary schools means that the whole class is taught together about the main ideas, and those who need additional support are given this through guidance and discussion by an adult. Those who are early graspers are kept on the same material but are expected to work on aspects of greater complexity and depth. It means that all children are exposed to the material at the same time. There will always be exceptions, but for the majority of children in most classes, the expectation is that by teaching to the top – and providing additional support for those who need it and challenge for those who are capable – everyone is exposed to a rich and demanding curriculum.

What will be the impact on the class sizes?

From Reception to Year 2, primary schools are not allowed to go over 30 children per class. This will therefore be our maximum. For Years 3-6 most schools will accept additional children resulting in class sizes of approximately 32 children. The maximum class size for Walmsley Primary is therefore likely to be 32 which is in line with all other schools in our locality.

What about children currently in Years 4 and 5?

Due to the size of the current Year 4 cohort, we will be keeping these year groups separate until they leave school. From September 2026, Years 5 and 6 will also become 1.5 for entry.

For children in Years 5 and 6 from September, the curriculum will remain as an annual cycle as opposed to the two year cycle for Years 1-4.

What about all of the special activities that are provided to specific year groups?

Children will not miss out. Our residential visits will continue to take place – one for Year 5 children and one for Year 6 children. Activities such as business enterprise and the school show etc. will still continue.

How will you ensure all children receive the support that they require?

We will have additional teaching assistant support available from September to provide support where required. This will help ensure there are additional adults in maths and English lessons in a morning and that there are more opportunities for small group interventions throughout the day.

How will staff be supported to adapt to the new way of working?

We are working very closely with two local schools with a similar context who have been running a 1.5 form entry model highly effectively for a number of years. CPD will be provided to staff in readiness for and throughout the year of transitioning to this model. A large number of staff have previous experience of working in this way.

Is this a permanent change or is it likely that the school will go back to a 2 form entry school in the near future?

The projected admission numbers for North Bolton, which includes Egerton and Bromley Cross for entry in to school over the next 5 years shows a declining picture. This is based on live birth rate data. With this in mind it is highly unlikely that Walmsley CE Primary will go back to running as a 2 form entry school in the foreseeable future.

Why now? Is this because of a new Headteacher or the Ofsted report?

Not at all, no. This is purely down to the financial position of the school and the declining numbers over the coming years.

