

REBALANCING CLASSES

RATIONALE FOR THE CHANGES

- Most children spend approximately 7 years at Firs Farm. Previously the classes they enter in Reception remain unchanged until Year 6 regardless of changes to the class dynamics, need and mix of abilities.
- We believe that this will improve outcomes both academically and socially for all children at Fir Farm.
- We know very little about the children who enter Reception, mainly due to lack of nursery, this is done throughout the Reception year. This means it is difficult to effectively plan the classes and places
- An increasing number of children enter and leave Firs Farm at other times. This can have a significant impact on a class in terms of class dynamics and ability.
- We are no longer streaming for English at Year 2, Year 5 or Year 6. Therefore classes need to be balanced to enable teachers to plan effectively, children to collaborate and maximise their learning.
- Currently classes do not have equal numbers of ability or gender. At times it is needed to mix classes due to dynamics (and these can change over time).

MORE ABOUT ABILITY MIXING

- The Primary Curriculum is based on a number of curriculum objectives set over a number of years: Early years, KSI (Years 1 & 2), Lower KS2 (Year 3 and 4) and Upper KS2 (Year 5 and 6). Children are judged as achieving Age Related Expectations (ARE) or below ARE or greater depth within ARE.
- We have to ensure our judgements as to what is an ARE child is standardised to enable teachers to plan, deliver and assess learning.
- This becomes very difficult where classes have wide differences in abilities e.g. (these are real scenarios)
 - A class may have a number of children working at greater depth or below ARE but very few securely at ARE. This creates difficulties in teaching an ARE curriculum and planning across the year group.
 - A class may have a high number of ARE but very few or no greater depth. ARE children with the potential to be greater depth may not have access to an aspirational curriculum
 - A class may have a high number of SEN, SEN support or below ARE children. This class would have a disproportionate level of support from additional staff denying other classes additional support.

A BIT MORE ABOUT ABILITY BALANCING

Mixing classes is the most common method of balancing groups (or “steading”) however, over previous years, we did look at some other ways of supporting mixed ability teaching:

- Created mixed ability groups for English and Maths across the year group (parallel classes). Children are mixed just for these lessons

We tried this in Year 6 but found that the “form” teachers had very little knowledge of children in their class and their abilities. They were unable to communicate effectively with parents/carers.

We are increasingly delivering our English curriculum through cross-curricular links e.g. in History. Teachers found they wanted to keep the same balance for those lessons.

Children wasted time moving to classes and some found it stressful. It is not a suitable system for younger children.

- Moving key children but not the whole year group: Very unsettling for just those children (why me?) and based on what rationale?
- Only mixing on ad-hoc basis. This has been done at Firs Farm in the past – however it is not strategic or logical. It tends to be a reactive measure.

WHY DO WE NO LONGER STREAM (SET) CHILDREN

In the past it was common to “set” or stream children by ability for English and Maths. This usually involved children moving to different classrooms for English or Maths. This is no longer done for a variety of reasons:

- Changes to assessment (from the old levels to Age Related Expectations) mean that all children are expected to be taught the same objectives. Teachers need to plan for those children who will need support (scaffolding) and those that need extending (greater depth). Those that need support or extending are not necessarily the same children all of the time.
- Out of class teaching staff: The school has had to reduce the number of teachers who work out-of-class. Where we still have teachers who support children they are focussed on children who need “boosting” to be age-related. Along with best practice for interventions these groups can change frequently (as children no longer require support and others take their place).
- Evidence shows that streaming has very limited impact in a primary school and can have an adverse effect on certain groups including children with limited English and disadvantaged children. Studies have shown these are the most likely to be placed in groups below their actual abilities. Please see EEF document on the website.
- Streamed classes create ceilings. There is very little movement within these groups. Higher ability groups become complacent and can lack the skills to cope with challenge. Children and adults are very rarely very good at everything – equally children in ARE or lower groups can work at times at a higher level.
- In Year 6 children may be grouped for a very time-specific period for SATs preparation particularly those that are working at above age related expectations and those working significantly below.
- Some children may receive a tailored curriculum (often delivered out of class) this is done in conjunction with the SEND team and that child's individual education plan.

COMMON CONCERNS

Children anxious/upset at not being with all their friends in the class:

We will ensure that children are with at least one of their friends and they will be able to see all their friends at break time and lunch time.

In reality, when in class, children do not sit with their friends and have fixed seats/groups. Often they only play with their friends at lunch and playtime.

This is an opportunity for children to widen their friendship group and develop new relationships.

My child really struggled to settle into school and is now making good progress. I'm worried that this will set them back.

When your child starts school it is a step into the unknown. When we mix the classes, children will still have many routines that are the same (how lunchtimes work, structure of the day etc) we would expect this to alleviate anxiety.

We will have some transition work later in the summer term and children will spend time with their new class. We will also continue to monitor transition into September to ensure children are settling.

HOW THIS WILL HAPPEN AND WHAT HAPPENS NEXT.

The Governing Body alongside the Headship team have agreed to mix classes at key points in a child's education at Firs Farm. Children will be mixed at the end of:

- Reception (for entry into Year 1).
- Year 2 (for entry into Year 3: lower Key Stage 2).
- Year 4 (for entry into Year 5: upper Key Stage 2).

Children will be asked to nominate 5 children they would like to be in a class with (with a guarantee of at least 1 of those children being in their class) and the classes will be created using the nominations, class teacher judgements, the latest assessment data.