

Re-balancing of classes - FAQs

1. When did the school decide to do this?

In December 2019, the Governing Body supported the move for all future Reception, Year 2 and Year 4 classes to be mixed and rebalanced in terms of academic attainment, gender mix and positive behaviours for learning. The school had always mixed some year groups but this had been a reactive measure and the Senior Leadership wanted it to become a productive measure to support children's academic and pastoral progress throughout the school.

2. Why are Reception and Year 2 only being done this year?

Last year (2021-22) we caught up with one-year group that had not been rebalanced due to disruption caused by Covid. This meant that the Year 3 children in 2021 were rebalanced for Year 4. They will not be done again until Year 5. This is the only year group currently out of sync with the system.

3. Why are you mixing the classes?

Currently, children enter Firs Farm in Reception and stay in those classes until Year 6. However, during that time children's needs, abilities and the dynamics of classes change. Some children also leave and others start. It is therefore a good principle to agree that at key points we will review all the classes and mix them to ensure a consistent mix of ability and sometimes gender across all the classes.

In 2014 the National Curriculum moved away from Levels as a way of assessing children to Age Related Expectations (ARE). The expectation is the majority of children are taught the same learning objectives. We, therefore, no longer stream classes as an ARE curriculum means this is unnecessary and it is no longer seen as best practice.

Therefore, children remain with their classes for the majority of lessons. It is, therefore, imperative that classes have an effective mix (otherwise you have year groups where one class has higher ability than the next, or classes with a large number of late joiners etc). To be able to plan consistently across the year group we need to ensure our planning, teaching and learning is appropriate for all classes.

This also allows the school to standardise learning e.g. our view of what makes a child working at age appropriate expectations is the same across all classes. By having a good balance, all children are exposed to age related learning at the highest level and they can collaborate effectively in paired and team-work.

For the past 2 years we have mixed Year 6 and this has proved to be very successful. We also looked at other schools, both in Enfield and further afield, that do this regularly with success.

Children may receive intervention-based support in small out of class groups if it is felt necessary to meet their needs. This is often time-limited or a specific part of our SEND provision. Children may also be specific groups for SATs preparation – again this would be time-limited and focussed on a particular aspect/

4. What evidence is there to support the mixing of classes?

To answer this, we must look at the evidence against streaming. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF: The PDF for this study is uploaded on the website) concluded that setting or streaming had a negative impact. The PDF on our website summarises their own studies and gives meta-analysis of a number of other studies over a large period. In brief, the current evidence indicates that setting or streaming:

- Adversely affects key underperforming groups including Pupil Premium Children and EAL as they are more likely to be mis-grouped (downwards). This is because streaming is based on attainment (how well you did in an assessment), not on ability.
- Creates a 'ceiling' approach to learning. Middle and lower groups do not access the greater-depth part of a lesson, as often that is kept for the higher groups. This creates curriculum narrowing (and a narrowing of expectations) and lowers expectations generally. There is also evidence that children in the Higher Groups

fail to reach their potential as they either feel they have proven themselves and no longer need to work, or do not recognise areas that they need to improve on.

- It assumes that students work at a consistent level for all parts of the curriculum whereas, in reality, pupils neither excel at or struggle with every aspect of maths or English uniformly. By taking this outlook, streaming can mean that children have less opportunity to develop skills and knowledge across a continuum or do not develop the ability to view their abilities as being a mixture of good or needing improvements.
- Children in middle or lower streams can view this as their fixed level (they may feel that they are in the lower stream therefore they will never be good!). This is clearly not the case throughout our time in school or lives. Just because you didn't learn to swim as fast as your friend doesn't mean you won't learn to swim-equally. Just because you struggled with aspects of grammar when you were in Year 3 doesn't mean you will always struggle. This adversely affects their own self-image and damages their motivation to engage in their learning

Consequently, if we feel that streaming is no longer best practice (as the majority of primary schools now do) then we need to ensure our mixed classrooms have a clear balance of children to work effectively.

One option is to have parallel English and Maths Groups that are mixed ability but children return to their forms for registration or other lessons. In practice, where we tried this in Year 6, the children worked far better in the mixed groups and it made sense to keep them in them for afternoon lessons as well. This is particularly important as we develop a more cross-curricular approach to English. In this scenario, the children are only in their original forms for registration. This leads to time lost in moving around from classroom to classroom and means that form teachers do not get to know what the children in their form are able to do and what they need to work on (this also happens with streaming).

Teachers felt that they were the main point of contact for parents/carers but knew very little about certain children as they were never in their lessons. Therefore, it becomes more effective to have the same teacher or teachers, who become experts in that group of children.

We will continue to provide interventions where needed in Year 5 and 6, including Booster lessons in Year 6 for children who need additional small group teaching to help them

achieve Age Related Expectation (sometimes called the Cusp groups). We may also group children nearer to SATs for exam practice but again this would be time limited.

5. My child is really upset that they won't be with their friends.

We understand that this has the potential to cause anxiety and we want to reassure children that they will be able to choose 4 friends and we guarantee that they will be with at least one of them. We will also have a whole programme of transition and settling in, in September. Children will have time to see everyone at lunch and break times.

6. Why these year groups?

There are key points in Primary School where children move from one curriculum and key stage to the next. We have chosen the key points for re-balancing the classes:

- Reception to Year 1: End of Early Years stage and start of Key Stage 1.
- Year 2 to Year 3: End of KS1 and start of Lower Key Stage 2
- Year 4 to Year 5: End of lower key stage 2 and start of Upper Key stage 2.

7. How will the school support the children?

We will plan transition work before we break up for the summer holidays. Children will have time to spend with their new classes before we break up for the Summer. In September teachers will continue with some transition and children will, of course, be able to see their friends in the playground.

We will of course try and anticipate any children that we feel may be more anxious than others and work with them and their families both at home and in school. Teachers will be keeping a close watch on the children and identifying any that need additional support.

8. How will children be allocated to classes?

We will use the following information to allocate children to their new classes:

- Chosen friends
- Teacher input
- Spring assessment data
- Demographic data

9. What is the Governing Body's role and what are the regulations around this?

The Governing Body's role is strategic. Governors are not expected to be involved in the detailed day-to-day management of the School. The Headteacher has responsibility for the internal organisation, management and control of the School and for implementation of the strategic framework established by the Governing Body.

The Governing Body works in partnership with the Headteacher and the Senior Leadership Team, acting as 'critical friends'. The Governing Body has a role to support and challenge the work of the School. School Governors contribute to the work of the Governing Body in ensuring high standards of achievement and progress by all children in the School by:

- setting the school's vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- holding the Headteacher to account for the education performance of the School and the children;
- Overseeing the financial performance of the School and making sure its money is well spent.

The Governors handbook provides guidance, not statutory direction, on the roles and duties of Governing Bodies and what to be mindful of and have regard to when undertaking their duties.