



Naphill and Walters Ash School
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Dear Parents

I wrote to you last year informing you that we were looking at the possibility of moving to mixed aged classes. This is because the birth rate in the local area has fallen over the past few years and is set to continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Numbers for all local schools are falling and so we have to adjust the structure of the school in order to deliver a good level of teaching and resources for the children.

Due to current pupil numbers we will gradually move from single-age classes to mixed-aged classes from the 2023/2024 school year. These changes have to be made as the school's funding is based primarily on pupil numbers, which have dropped from about 400 to the current level of 330, a drop of nearly 20% with a commensurate drop in funding. This is expected to drop further in a year's time. If we do not make the structural changes now, the school will not be able to provide the resources and activities it currently does.

The Governors and I have worked hard over the past few years to maintain the current structure of a two from entry school (2 classes per year group) but this is no longer viable. By making the gradual move to mixed aged classes we know we can continue to ensure a good education is given to each child.

The Result

Our gradual move to mixed-aged classes will eventually result in the structure seen in the table overleaf. Reception will remain a single-aged year group as they have a separate Early Years Curriculum; every other year group follows the National Curriculum.

This will mean, 45 pupils in Year 1 and 45 pupils in Year 2 will be split across 3 classes with a maximum of 30 pupils and 1 teacher per class (except where a job share arrangement exists)

The Plan

Our plan, based on us meeting the maximum of 45 pupils per year group is below, you can see that some year groups remain as they currently are for now:

2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Year R - 2 classes	Year R - 2 classes	Year R - 2 classes	Year R - 2 classes
Year 1/2 - 3 classes	Year 1/2 - 3 classes	Year 1/2 - 3 classes	Year 1/2 - 3 classes
Year 3 - 2 classes (No Change)	Year 3/4 - 3 classes	Year 3/4 - 3 classes	Year 3/4 - 3 classes
Year 4 - 2 classes (No Change)	Year 5 – 2 classes (No Change)	Year 5 – 2 classes (No Change)	Year 5/6 – 3 classes
Year 5 - 2 classes (No Change)	Year 6 – 2 classes (No Change)	Year 6 – 2 classes (No Change)	
Year 6 - 2 classes (No Change)			

This plan is subject to change based on how many pupils are actually admitted to the school. Although the birth rate in the catchment area is likely to continue to fall for the foreseeable future, these numbers may change. Any change to the plan above will be communicated to parents and guardians as and when it is known.

Where we will have three mixed aged classes, the children will be grouped using the same criteria that we use now; gender, ability, forces/non-forces and SEND. We ensure a balance of forces and non-forces as it has been known in the past for one class to have more changes than the other.

The Impact

This is going to be a big change for the school but it is one that will be well planned for. The changes will be gradual and the teachers have been aware of this possibility for several years so have started to look ahead in terms of planning and teaching.

The National Curriculum is organised into 'phases' so Key Stage 1 is Years 1 and 2, Lower Key Stage 2 Years 3 and 4, and Upper Key Stage 2 Years 5 and 6. This means that most subjects can be taught in any order over two years (a two year rolling programme of subjects would be established) and this includes science. English and Maths will need more consideration as they obviously build more on previous learning and we will ensure that this continues to happen. Even now we have children in each year group who are working at a much higher level or lower level than their peers and so the teachers adapt their planning and teaching accordingly.

The topics that will be covered by the Year 1/2 classes in 2023/24 will be the Year 2 topics e.g. The Great Fire of London, then the Year 1 topics e.g. local area will be covered the year after. The children will continue to cover all areas of the National Curriculum and will be exposed to a unique wide range of benefits that come with being taught in mixed age classrooms.

Way back in 1995, a study by Simon Veenman titled '*Cognitive and Noncognitive Effects of Multigrade and Multi-Age Classes: A Best-Evidence Synthesis*' found that there is no empirical evidence that student learning suffered in any way in multi-age (mixed-age) classrooms. Students in such classrooms did not learn more or less than students in single-age classes. In fact, students in multi-age classes scored higher on attitudes towards school, personal adjustment and self-concept than students in single-age classes.

Socially, pupils enjoy being taught in mixed-class groups and love growing in stature across the two years. Older children have the opportunity to serve as mentors and to take leadership roles and younger pupils are able to accomplish tasks they could not do without the assistance of older children. Pupils develop a better sense of familiarity with their classmates and learn to mix with a wide range of age groups from a young age.

There are no reasons why our children will not continue to thrive in mixed aged classes. It would not be in the school's interest to put any child in a situation where they do not succeed.

Our Commitment

In 2017 our school was judged by Ofsted as providing 'high-quality and effective leadership, which is creative and sometimes challenges the norm'. Our teachers are committed, and know they have the ability, to lead and manage the change. We will not only ensure an easy transition for pupils, but will see the change as an opportunity to further improve the way in which we deliver the curriculum, delivering the best educational outcomes to our pupils in the most efficient way.

I will be looking at good practice in other schools; there are many in Buckinghamshire that have a two year rolling programme of subjects and I will be talking to schools where this structure is well planned for and the delivery is excellent.

We will be holding a meeting in the first half of the summer term to share our curriculum plans with you. In the meantime if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via the school office.

Yours sincerely

K. Gwynn