

Mixed age classes and split year groups –Information for parents

Dear Parents / Carers

As you receive information regarding your child's new class for September 2020, I am aware, from years of experience, that mixed year groups raises many questions and concerns for parents.

Following is a list of common and frequently asked questions:

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 from more than one year group in 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). However it is possible, particularly in smaller schools, that a mixed age class may contain pupils from three or more stages (e.g. FPh, KS1 & KS2) and on occasions year groups will be split between classes. In Ysgol Bryn y Môr mixed age and year groups are most commonly mixed with the year above / below e.g year 3 and 4, year 4 and 5, year 1 and 2 or reception / year 1.

Why are mixed age and split year group classes formed?

Mixed age classes are formed in most schools because of the way in which the pupil on roll (registered) is configured in any given year (i.e. – the numbers of pupils in each year group and as a whole school). It is not uncommon for this situation to change from year to year; as the sizes of year groups vary and cohorts of children leave / enter the school. Therefore, mixed age groups are formed mainly due to budget constraints and the amount that Welsh Government fund per pupil in school. We are **unable** to put on / create more classes than we are funded for.

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

No. The ways in which learning and teaching is organised in primary schools means that teaching and work is tailored to the needs and current achievement levels of individual pupils. The staff at Ysgol Bryn y Môr are experienced at planning and delivering work to match the needs of mixed age learning. Staff plan and work in teams, thinking and working as a department as opposed to an individual class or year group. They provide challenge for the more able children and support for those needing more help whichever year group they are currently in. Much work is undertaken in small groups that contain children from 1 or 2 year groups or those of similar existing achievement levels. Furthermore, the school plans the educational experiences for pupils in all classes in ways which ensure good progression and continuity, whichever year group or class they are in.

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

Different situations occur in all schools. Some schools in Swansea have less than 100 pupils and may therefore be arranged into groups in 3 or 4 or 5 classes. Larger schools (over 350) many have 2 form entry (pure year groups). However, even in larger schools at some point, they would have no choice but to form one or several mixed age classes. In none of these schools is the formation of mixed age classes an issue or a concern.

The overwhelming majority of primary schools in Swansea (large and small) have formed mixed age classes, and there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that being in a mixed age class has any detrimental effect whatsoever on the education of children in that class.

I am concerned that forming a mixed age or split year group class may mean that my child's friendship grouping is being broken up.

Although your child may be in a different group for the next academic year to that of their friend, their social needs are not ignored. We recognise that this may cause anxiety for some pupils but to other pupils it may be an opportunity to reform past friendships. Supporting the wellbeing of all types of children will be part of the transition period, the settling in period at the beginning of term. 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).

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. In fact, children that have been in mixed year groups use those friendship groups to transition exceptionally well into Secondary as they already 'know' pupils attending the secondary school and the pupils already in the secondary school feel a stronger sense of belonging seeing their old class mates arrive at the school.

What are the benefits to the arrangements?

Children benefit in many ways such as 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 and problem skills, vocabulary and social competences. 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 is often a greater sense of cooperation and opportunities to work with a wider circle of peers. In some cases, children have continued learning with the same teacher and this provides an 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 is formed, how are decisions taken about which children should be allocated to which class?

Currently at Ysgol Bryn y Môr, grouping children is based on **age** (gender will also affect the balance of class and year group i.e that not 1 boy / girl is on their own) and **class sizes** (number of pupils).

In some individual cases, additional learning needs (ALN) may also factor in the decision making process.

I hope that these FAQs answer some of your concerns if your child has been placed in a mixed year group. Class size and funding / budget place many constraints in **all schools** across Wales, with not much room for manoeuvre but if you would like a further conversation with a member of staff, please do not hesitate to give us a call.

Regards

Elin Wakeham