

Mixed Year Group Classes at St Paul's - Information for Parents and Carers

Mixed Year Group Classes at St. Paul's CofE VA Primary School

Introduction

Welcome to our guide about mixed year group classes at St. Paul's. As a small primary school with 152 pupils, we sometimes teach children from different year groups together in the same class. This approach allows us to provide high-quality education for all our pupils while making the best use of our resources and teaching expertise.

We are committed to ensuring that every child receives an excellent education, regardless of whether they are in a mixed or single year group class. This document explains our approach, how we ensure high standards, and how we support all children to thrive.

Why We Have Mixed Year Group Classes

At St. Paul's, we have mixed year group classes due to:

- Our school size and pupil numbers across different year groups
- The educational benefits that mixed-age learning can bring

Research and data from schools across the country shows that being in a mixed-age class has no negative impact on children's academic achievement. In fact, some studies suggest that children often perform better when placed in classes with a bigger age range.

How Mixed Year Group Teaching Works

Planning and Curriculum Coverage

Meeting National Curriculum requirements:

- Within each Key Stage, we are required to teach the relevant programme of study by the end of the Key Stage, rather than in a specific year
- This means we have flexibility to introduce curriculum content earlier or later for individual pupils based on their needs
- Subject leaders have developed a clear progression of skills for each year group, and teachers keep detailed records of what has been covered each year

How we plan lessons:

- In English and maths, we align the two year group curricula, with objectives matched to appropriate levels of challenge

- For maths, we use White Rose mixed-age planning materials, which means pupils learn about the same concept at the same time but are taught the appropriate content for their year group
- English lessons use carefully chosen texts that contain relevant sentence structures and vocabulary to stretch children at the appropriate level
- Foundation subjects follow a progression of skills with teachers ensuring all National Curriculum objectives are covered for both year groups

How Lessons Work in Practice

A typical lesson might look like this:

Whole-class introduction:

- The teacher introduces the concept or topic to the whole class
- Questions are targeted at different pupils based on their learning needs
- All children benefit from hearing different levels of discussion

Focused teaching and independent work:

- Children work in flexible groups based on their current learning needs, not just their age
- The teacher works with small groups to facilitate additional support or greater challenge
- Sometimes one year group works independently while the teacher focuses on the other year group for a short period
- We ensure the same children aren't always working independently

Plenary and review:

- The whole class comes together to share learning and consolidate understanding

Key teaching strategies we use:

- **Flexible grouping** - children work with others at similar ability levels, which may include pupils from both year groups
- **Differentiated activities** - pupils have tasks matched to their learning needs, with appropriate support or challenge
- **Age-appropriate learning objectives** - children are given specific outcomes for their year group so they know what they need to achieve
- **Targeted questioning** - teachers direct questions at the appropriate level for each child
- **Peer support** - older pupils sometimes support younger ones, but only after completing their own work

Classroom Organisation

Seating arrangements:

- Teachers organise their classrooms in the way that best supports learning
- In most lessons, pupils sit in specified places (e.g., year group tables or with others working on the same task)
- Seating is flexible and changes based on the lesson and learning objectives

Adapting the environment:

- We adapt the classroom environment as pupils mature and progress throughout the year
- For example, we introduce new vocabulary into displays as pupils learn about them
- We change books in the reading corner to reflect different interests and abilities
- Resources are clearly labelled and accessible to all pupils

Educational Benefits of Mixed Year Group Classes

Our experience, supported by educational research, shows that mixed year group classes offer significant benefits:

Academic Benefits

✓ **Flexible learning groups** - Children can work with others at their own ability level, regardless of age, which means they receive teaching precisely matched to their needs

✓ **Deeper thinking** - Mixed grouping enhances deeper thinking and problem-solving skills, particularly in mathematics

✓ **Extended vocabulary** - In English, mixed grouping allows for a wider range of vocabulary to be taught, helping children become strong communicators who use language often beyond their current year group

✓ **Curriculum flexibility** - Teachers can introduce more challenging content to pupils who are ready for it, or provide additional consolidation time for those who need it

Social and Emotional Benefits

✓ **Independence and confidence** - Children don't always rely on adult support and become more confident, independent and collaborative learners

✓ **Positive role models** - Older children have opportunities to become 'experts' and positive role models, which younger children often aspire to (this is only used when it doesn't mean the older child misses their own learning)

✓ **Mentoring opportunities** - Older pupils can help younger pupils with work, transitions and social interactions, developing their own sense of responsibility

✓ **Wider friendships** - Children form friendships across year groups and learn to relate to broader groups of peers

✓ **Co-operation skills** - There is a greater sense of co-operation and opportunities to build a wide range of positive relationships

✓ **Leadership development** - Mixed year groups provide broader leadership opportunities for older children

Our School Community

✓ **Experienced staff** - We have considerable experience within our teaching team of working successfully in mixed-age classes

✓ **Small school benefits** - As part of a small school community, St. Paul's children know each other well across different classes, creating a supportive family atmosphere

Maintaining High Academic Standards

We are committed to ensuring the highest academic expectations for all pupils, regardless of their year group or class composition.

How We Ensure Quality

Individual learning needs:

- All children develop at different rates - it isn't automatic that the oldest child in a class will achieve better than the youngest
- Children are taught to their individual academic needs, not simply to their age
- All classes in our school have a range of maturity and attainment levels
- Teachers choose work appropriate to the standard each child is working at

For children who find learning challenging:

- We provide support in the same way as in single year classes
- This might include in-class support or targeted intervention groups
- Teachers use assessment information to identify exactly what support is needed

For children working above expected standards:

- We provide work that deepens understanding and explores new concepts
- Our curriculum focuses on explaining reasoning and problem-solving, which extends understanding
- Children can access content from the next year group when appropriate and ready

Supporting Children's Wellbeing

Children's Feelings About Mixed Classes

Moving into a mixed class:

- Moving classes can create anxiety in all children, regardless of whether it's a mixed or single year group

- Some things make anxiety worse, such as moving into a new key stage or something that feels unknown
- In our experience, once settled, pupils adapt very well to mixed-age classes and most enjoy the mix

How parents/carers can help:

- Acknowledge that nerves are normal
- Help children think about times they've experienced change and the good things that followed
- Focus on the exciting opportunities ahead
- If your child is very anxious, please contact their current class teacher or the school office so we can provide extra support

Understanding different expectations:

- Children are naturally aware that there are differences between their own skills and those of others - this happens in all classes
- Staff support pupils to understand that each year group has different expectations and different work to do
- We make it clear that expectations are based on individual learning needs, not just age
- Children understand that their work is the next 'step on' in their learning journey

Friendships and Social Skills

Do pupils in mixed classes get on well?

- Yes. It is normal for friendships to emerge and develop in all classes
- Pupils tend to find their own social groups, which often include children from both year groups
- Our monitoring of behaviour shows no significant differences between pupils in mixed or single year groups

Creating a nurturing environment:

- Our experience shows that children thrive in mixed-age classes
- Children learn to form wider friendships and relate to broader groups
- We create a classroom atmosphere where children are keen to help others
- As a small school community, St. Paul's children know each other well, creating a supportive environment

Supporting social development:

- All children occasionally have difficulties with friendships and social skills
- A key focus at St. Paul's is supporting pupils to develop strong personal and social skills
- In lessons, pupils often work in small groups based on learning needs rather than friendships

- We teach children to work collaboratively with different peers

Practical Information

School Trips and Visits

Most trips take place as a whole class. The number of classes that can attend at one time depends on:

- The venue's capacity and requirements
- The nature of the trip
- Staffing and supervision ratios

We ensure that all activities and trips are appropriate for the age range in the class.

How Parents/Carers Can Support Learning at Home

Stay informed:

- Read the weekly newsletter and class updates
- Attend parent consultation evenings
- Check your child's homework and reading records

Support your child:

- Ask about what they're learning in class
- Encourage them to explain concepts to you (this reinforces their understanding)
- Celebrate their achievements, regardless of how they compare to others
- Focus on effort and progress rather than comparison with peers

Communicate with us:

- Let us know if your child is worried about anything
- Share information about changes at home that might affect learning
- Ask questions if you're unsure about anything

Frequently Asked Questions

Will my child miss out on learning?

No. Every child receives teaching matched to their year group curriculum. We are required to cover the National Curriculum for each Key Stage, and we carefully track that all objectives are taught. If anything, mixed-age classes can provide more flexibility to ensure your child receives exactly the right level of challenge.

What if my child struggles or finds work too easy?

We differentiate work for all pupils based on their individual needs, just as we would in a single year group class. If your child needs extra support, we provide interventions and

additional help. If your child needs more challenge, we can introduce content from the next year group or provide deeper, more complex tasks.

How will I know how my child is doing?

You will receive:

- Regular updates through our weekly newsletter
- Termly parent consultation meetings
- An annual written report
- Informal opportunities to speak with the class teacher

If you have concerns at any time, please don't hesitate to contact your child's teacher.

Will my child be expected to help younger pupils instead of doing their own work?

No. Older pupils only support younger ones after they have completed their own work, and this is always optional. We see peer support as a valuable opportunity for older children to develop leadership and communication skills, but it never replaces their own learning.

How do you make sure both year groups cover everything they need to?

Subject leaders have developed detailed curriculum maps showing progression of skills for each year group. Teachers keep careful records of what has been covered and when. We monitor this through regular planning reviews and book scrutinies to ensure no gaps in learning.