

## **Mixed age classes**

Parents often have questions about mixed age classes. We believe that there are great advantages in having this organisation and we hope this guide will answer them.

Teaching a mixture of ages, year groups and abilities in one class is more common than might be expected. All local education authorities in England (including Liverpool) have schools operating mixed-age classes and according to the Department for Education, the number of schools taking this approach is rising.

### **How can you teach two year groups in the same classroom?**

All children develop in maturity at different rates. It isn't automatic that the youngest child will be the least mature and the oldest child the most mature. We teach children to their individual needs (maturity and ability) not their age.

All classes have a large range of abilities; teachers are used to dealing with different abilities. They never teach the same level of work to every child. They make sure that each child has the correct level or work irrespective of age. Two year groups merely extend this range a little. We teach children at THEIR level not at an age related level.

All the children will learn to add two numbers together, while some may add 3. This is called differentiation and is something that teachers learn during their training because differentiation is needed in every lesson, even in a single age group class.

The children may all start the lesson together however the teacher personalise the questions.

### **Do the children end up repeating a year?**

No. They will of course return to particular aspects of the curriculum repeatedly such as fractions or shape, but these are visited multiple times during the year anyway. Topic areas such as Tudors or 'People who Help us' are used on a cycle that is at least bi-annual. If a child studies the Victorians one year, they won't do it again the next.

### **Do mixed age classes require more careful planning by teachers?**

Teachers will be able to work in teams to plan so they are better placed to update and refresh planning each year, rather than just rolling out old plans year after year.

### **Do the children suffer academically?**

None of our data or national data suggests there is any negative impact on children due to mixed age classes. At individual school level this is borne out by LA and Ofsted inspection. A mixed age classroom means that children have greater flexibility to learn with children of their own abilities. They can either be challenged if more capable or avoid the stigma of "failure" if they fall slightly behind other year-group peers.

Studies have shown that children can develop academically and socially through interacting with older and younger children. One important fact to have emerged is that children benefit greatly from the opportunity to become an 'expert' for younger children to learn from. Younger children look to the older ones to show them, and older children view the younger ones as in need of

nurturing. Educationalists strongly believe that this can develop thinking skills, problem solving skills, vocabulary and other social competencies.

**Do children suffer emotionally?**

Quite the reverse. We see children learn to form wider friendships and to relate to broader groups of other children. It also allows the younger children to experience being one of the older children in a class.

The mixed age group environment creates an atmosphere where children learn to help and be helped by other children, because they interact consistently with children whose age and abilities are varied. Children gain an appreciation for their achievement and the accomplishments of others, and are naturally challenged by the achievements of others. Mixed age group classes reflect life outside of school as a child and adult more realistically; we are friends with someone because we like them and want to spend time with them, not because they are the same age as us.

**How do you ensure Year 6 children get special privileges?**

Even though from September 2017 there will be mixed Year 5/6 classes we still value the 'Y6ness' and prepare the children for secondary school by ensuring that Year 6 have the responsibility of being House Captains, Prefects, Playground Buddies, and leading the School Council and Eco-council. They are asked to undertake special jobs like showing visitors and prospective parents around the school. The teachers arrange for Year 6 to have their residential visit together and to have an end of year treat together. The Year 6 also complete their final production by themselves and have a leavers' assembly focused on the next steps in their learning journey.