

Hawthorn Community Primary School

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5th July, 2019

Dear Parent/Carer,

You may be aware that at the start of this academic year we moved away from Hawthorn's traditional way of organising classes with one straight age and one mixed age class per year group, to having three mixed age classes within key stage 1, which incorporated children from years 1 and 2 into all three classes. This was based on a lot of research that had been undertaken into the value of mixed age classes.

It was always our intention that if this trial proved to be successful, that we would extend this new way of organising the classes into key stage 2, and we have now taken the decision to move forward with this from September. This means that for the next academic year the organisation of the school will be as follows:

- EYFS – 2 straight age classes
- KS1 – 3 mixed age classes with year 1 and 2 children in each class
- LKS2 – 3 mixed age classes with year 3 and 4 children in each class
- UKS2 – 3 mixed age classes with year 5 and 6 children in each class.

We feel that re-structuring the school in this way will allow the staff to more effectively work as a team, allow a larger group of adults to target support where it is required for individual children, and help to encourage the children to learn from each other, with the aim of developing a more community-minded approach across the school; rather than splitting children up into their classes based purely on their birthday.

As we have always had a mixed age class within each of our key stage phases, this re-structuring will not affect the way that we deliver our curriculum, as we have always operated a 2-yearly cycle, where the children gain access to all of the elements that they need to cover within the phase. We believe that having three mixed age classes across the phase, instead of one will enable us to provide a more equitable experience for all of our children. All of the staff were unanimous in their support of the extension of the mixed age classes across key stage 2, having seen how it has operated this year in key stage 1 and from their own previous experiences of mixed age teaching.



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Miss Blakeley, who has taught the mixed year 5 and 6 class at Hawthorn for a number of years and also has experience of mixed age teaching in a previous role at another school, volunteered her thoughts about this restructuring.

“Mixed year groups allow children to work with children of different ages and encourages all children to aspire to be the best they can. For the younger children in the class, working alongside older children gives them a tremendous sense of well-being as well as a determination to access work that the older children are doing. For the older children in the class it enables them to show the younger children good work ethic, maturity and responsibility. At no point is any child disadvantaged in terms of academic achievement and well-being. All classes currently have access to the same lessons and learning intentions, so being in a mixed age class will make no difference to the topics and subject-content being taught. Children will still have the chance to work as a whole cohort at various points during the year. The Y5 children will start to develop an understanding of how to manage themselves in Y6. The Y6 children are able to hone their academic understanding as they head towards SATs. I thoroughly advocate mixed-age classes for all involved.”

We will be continuing to set individual targets for all children based on either their attainment at the end of EYFS for our Key Stage 1 children, or their performance at the end of KS1 SATS for our key stage 2 children, and will also look at their performance over the current year, to ensure that the children are being pushed to achieve their full potential. The evidence that we have from our current and previous experience of having a mixed age class in each phase is that the children in this class have not been disadvantaged in any way; and this is something that Governors have agreed to closely monitor with the senior leadership team over the coming months.

In the run up to SATs the year 2 and year 6 children will continue to receive booster sessions and targeted interventions, as they have always done, to ensure that they are ably prepared for sitting their SATs in the summer term.

We appreciate that some parents/carers may have a few questions about this new structure, be we are confident that this will be a beneficial move for our school and will help us to continue on our journey of school improvement towards ‘good ‘ in our next OfSTED Inspection.

Included with this letter is an information sheet of frequently asked questions about the mixed age classes, and I will be available during the meet the teacher session after school on Monday should you have any questions regarding this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Julie Cluble
Headteacher



Frequently Asked Questions about Mixed Age Classes

Why are mixed age classes being used?

For some time we have been considering whether organising the school with one straight age class and one mixed age class per year group most effectively meets the needs of all of our children. Our intake number of 45 children unfortunately means that we have neither the budget nor the classroom space to be able to offer two straight age classes per year group – in effect we have the number of children for one and a half classes per age group. Historically we have organised this by having one mixed age class where we have taken the youngest children from the age group above and put these with the oldest children from the younger age group – in effect organising the classes based on their date of birth. Following research, and having discussions with colleagues in other schools, and having trialled using three mixed age classes across years 1 and 2 during the current academic year, we feel that the best option to allow the school to continue on its improvement journey is to combine the classes from each of our phases – KS1 (years 1 and 2), LKS2 (years 3 and 4) and UKS2 (years 5 and 6) for the new academic year. From years 1 through to 6 we already operate a curriculum that is developed over a two-year cycle (to cater for the mixed age class that we currently have) and so this will not mean any major changes to our curriculum map or the way that lessons are delivered at Hawthorn. Our intention was always to introduce these three mixed age classes into key stage one last September and if this proved to be successful, to extend it through into our key stage 2 classes from September 2019.

How will two year groups be taught alongside each other in one classroom?

All children develop at different rates. It isn't automatic that the oldest child in a class will achieve better than the youngest child. Children will be taught to their individual academic needs and not simply to their age. All classes in the school have a large range of abilities. The teachers at Hawthorn Community Primary School are skilled at teaching classes which include children working on curriculum content from a number of different years. Teachers will choose work appropriate to the level a child is working at, ensuring that all needs are catered for. For example in a lesson about addition, all children might learn to add two numbers together, most children will add a single digit number to a two digit number and some may work on adding two, two digit numbers. In the majority of lessons, the children will start the session together with the teacher targeting questions at individuals or groups of children at an appropriate level. Children will then be provided with appropriate activities to consolidate or practise what they have been taught, with the teacher and Teaching Assistant working with children who require additional assistance or who need to be pushed on and explore concepts in greater depth or learn something new. On occasion, groups of children may be removed from whole class teaching in order to facilitate this.



How will teachers plan, ensuring coverage of both years curriculums, preventing repetition of content?

With the exception of Maths, English and Science, the curriculum content for Years 1 – 6 isn't split into separate content for each year group; rather, there is an expectation for the end of the phase. This is why we have been able to organise our curriculum based on a two-yearly cycle, where we can ensure that curriculum content is not repeated unless it needs to be built upon. In the case of Maths and English, the two curricula are completely aligned, with the majority of objectives for the younger year group being matched with a similar but slightly trickier objective for the older year group. Ensuring coverage of national curriculum objectives for both year groups in the same classroom will therefore be easily facilitated by normal classroom differentiation. We do not believe that the new organisation of the three classes will not impact on how we have been teaching at Hawthorn as we currently already plan and deliver lessons in one mixed age class.

How will we ensure that children cope socially and emotionally with changes in their current class structures?

Our previous experience of mixed age teaching shows us that children thrive in a mixed age class. Children learn to form wider friendships and relate to broader groups of children, creating a classroom atmosphere where children are encouraged to help others and seek support from their older peers rather than simply relying on adult support. We will be putting a number of strategies in place to support children in their move to new classes to ensure not only that they begin to form friendships with a wide range of children, but that they get to know all of the teachers within the phase team. In addition to this, they will spend a whole day in their new classes, getting to know each other and their classes on our Transition Day on Monday. Additionally, for the first time the organisation of classes will not be based on the children's date of birth which we know in recent years has resulted in some children being separated from their 'best' friend.

How have the new classes been created?

We have considered a number of factors when creating the classes for September, including pre-existing friendship groups, the abilities of children and any other social or emotional concerns. This was done in close liaison with the current class teachers, who have a strong understanding of how different groups of children work together. As part of the process we also consulted with the children before we put them into their new classes to find out their current friendship groups. All of the children were asked by their current teachers to nominate three children that they would like to be in their class next year, and although we have not been able to allocate all of these children to the same class, we have ensured that they are matched with at least one friend.



How will we ensure the highest academic expectations for all children?

Both national and local data for performance of children at the end of KS1 and KS2 suggests that being placed in a mixed age classes has no negative impact on children's academic achievements. This is supported by educational research, with some studies suggesting that children often perform better when placed in classes with a bigger age range. A mixed age classroom means that the children will have greater flexibility to learn with children of their own abilities. Children who find aspects of the curriculum more challenging will be supported in the same way they have been in single year classes. Children working above the expected standard will be provided with work which both deepens their understanding and moves them on to explore new concepts. With our move towards a maths mastery curriculum, learning will be focussed on explaining reasoning and problem solving both of which extend children's understanding without them having to access a separate curriculum. During English lessons, writing texts will be carefully chosen ensuring that they are easy to learn but contain the relevant sentence structures and vocabulary to stretch children at the appropriate level.

How will we manage statutory testing across both Year Groups?

As you may be aware, children in many of our year groups are subject to statutory testing. The Year 1 children undertake the Phonics Screening Check and Year 2 and year 6 children complete end of key stage SATS tests, and from the next academic year our year 4 children will sit a Multiplication Check. At Hawthorn Community Primary School we are committed to achieving the best possible standards for our children without teaching to the test. Year 1 children will be prepared for the Phonics Screening Check in the same way they would be every year, with high quality phonics teaching enabling the children to confidently decode when it comes to the assessment. Equally, preparation for SATS testing in Year 2 and year 6 will not sit outside of normal classroom practice. Year 1 and year 5 children will not be expected to sit the SAT papers and they will be taught their usual curriculum during SATS week, with the Year 2 and year 6 children sitting their SAT papers in some rooms, whilst the year 1 and year 5 children work in other rooms.

Is the new structure being forced upon us by the Academy?

No. We trialled the use of mixed age classes this year, before we had joined with the Academy and it was always our intention to extend this across the school if we felt that it would be beneficial to all children. The Academy supports our decision to restructure in this way, but have not been involved in any of the discussions between staff or governors regarding the matter. The day-to-day operation of the school continues to be in our own hands.

