

Mixed Age Classes and Split Year groups at Hipsburn Primary School – Information for Parents

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 of the school. In some years year groups will be split between classes.

Why are mixed age and split year group classes formed?

Mixed age classes are formed in most schools partly because of the way in which the pupil roll is configured in any given year i.e. the numbers of pupils in each year group. It is not uncommon for this situation to change from year to year; the sizes of year groups can vary quite dramatically, as is often the case at Hipsburn.

For some years Hipsburn has had a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 21 children per year, meaning that the overall school roll will not exceed 147 (21 x 7 year groups.) In recent times when the Headteacher and Governing Body made representations to the Local Authority (LA) for additional resources in terms of space we were advised by them that as children can be taught in classes of 30 then school only actually needed 5 classrooms (147/5 = 29 children per classroom.) It was only because Preschool was occupying one of the classrooms in the main building that a new Ford classroom block was built by the LA in readiness for our conversion to a primary school from September 2016. The addition of Etal classroom from 2017 was funded by a loan from the LA.

Staff salaries account for more than 90% of the school's budget and maximum efficiency is gained by having a group as near as possible as 30 for a member of staff to teach. It is not possible to allocate one teacher to every year group; in recent times some year groups have been as small as 14.

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 are organised at Hipsburn means that teaching and work is tailored to the needs and current achievement levels of individual pupils. For example if the Year 2 year group has been distributed between a Year 2 / Year 1 class the Year 2 children will not 'repeat' the Year 1 curriculum. Nor will Year 2 children in a Year 2 / Year 3 class 'skip' the Year 2 curriculum and move straight to Year 3 work.

Like many other schools mixed age learning has been in effect at Hipsburn Primary for many years. The staff are experienced at planning and delivering work to match the needs of mixed age learning. 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 pertain in all schools.

Each one of these schools has no choice - due to physical classroom space and/or available teaching resource - but to form one or several mixed age classes and this arrangement has become the 'norm.' A large number of primary schools in Northumberland, and certainly all schools of a comparable size (approximately 100-150 pupils) to Hipsburn are required to teach their 7 year groups across 3 or 4 or 5 classes.

There is no evidence to suggest that being in a mixed age class has any detrimental effect on the education of children in that class. Hipsburn's consistently excellent SATS results show that children are being challenged, learning and achieving across the school.

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 care is taken in allocating pupils to classes their social needs are not ignored; in general terms 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, children will be placed with just one or two classmates from Hipsburn within classes of 30, new friendship groupings in different subject areas become a fact of life, and this situation is generally welcomed by many children.

What are the benefits to the arrangements?

Children benefit in many ways from 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 & problem skills, vocabulary & social competences. There is often a greater sense of cooperation and opportunities to work with a wider circle of peers. The children often 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 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?

Hipsburn take a number of influences into consideration and make a professional judgment based on this. Split year groups are considered very carefully, depending on each cohort of children. These include (in no particular order of preference):

- social learning group
- emotional development
- readiness to learn
- stage of learning
- gender and age(balance of class and year group)
- additional needs

All these factors will be taken into consideration by the Headteacher and class teachers when making a decision.

When will I find out what class my child will be placed in for the next academic year?

Parents will be informed of the new class structures for the academic year during the latter half of the preceding Summer term. A letter detailing the class your child will be placed in, the formation of it, e.g. a mixed Year 2 / Year 3 class and the teacher's name will be sent to parents.

Once parents have been informed an opportunity will be offered for any family wishing to discuss their child's class placement. However, in line with guidance from the LA it is the Headteacher, after detailed discussion with teachers, who decides the final class allocations based on their professional judgement of where the child will best flourish in both their personal, social and academic achievements.

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