Pontnewydd Primary School Policy for the Placement of Pupils in Mixed Age Classes

Mixed-age classrooms offer numerous benefits for student development, including enhanced social skills, increased academic achievement, and the fostering of a sense of community. These environments allow students to learn from and support each other, creating a more holistic and enriching educational experience.

Rationale

In Pontnewydd Primary School we have an admission number of 30 per class and 60 per year group and therefore we need to reorganise our classes every year. The school's motivation when organising classes is to protect the teaching and learning interests of the whole school, making the decision in the interest of all pupils, not one child or indeed one year group. This policy has been written to outline the reasons for our organisation and the process used. It has been written following feedback from staff, parents and governors.

Context

Surplus places in schools have historically been an issue across Wales and Welsh Government has recommended that there should be no more than 10% surplus places across primary and secondary schools. The school roll at Pontnewydd Primary has been consistent for a number of years and therefore the admission number remains at 30. Currently, the school has 12 mainstream classes, including a Nursery / Reception unit, with a capacity for 30 pupils per class and a Learning Resource Base for 32 pupils with complex or highly complex needs. Should class numbers exceed 30 on 1st September, an additional class would be needed, taking the total to 14 classes.

There is a requirement in Wales that children be organised into classes of no more than 30 pupils. This is statutory in all progression steps.

In Pontnewydd some of our cohorts (year groups) contain just over 30 children and some contain less than 30 so we need to reorganise our classes each year. Very occasionally, a class of children may stay together for a number of years, but it is unlikely that one cohort of children will be able to

remain together as one class throughout their time in the school; while their cohort may be under 30, the cohort below or above may be bigger.

NB numbers in a class may occasionally exceed 30 after 1st September under certain circumstances, please see admissions information.

How are children taught in a mixed year class?

- At our school, mixed-age classes are implemented as a deliberate and well-considered approach to maximise learning opportunities and meet the needs of all pupils.
- Teachers will ensure that all children work within progression steps suitable for their age, aptitude and ability. Your child will not be 'held back' or 'struggle to keep up' in any class. The Curriculum for Wales ensures that every child is taught as an individual and that their stage of development, not their age, informs the teacher's planning.
- All our teachers are trained to work with mixed ability classes from Nursery to Year 6 and sometimes staff request to move progression steps to broaden their experience.
- In all primary classes there are wide ranges of abilities and all children will learn in different ways, responding to a variety of methods and resources. Teachers provide for the different needs within any class and plan accordingly.

Mixed-age classes allow teaching to be flexible and responsive, rather than limited by age alone. Pupils are taught according to their:

- stage of learning
- ability
- readiness to progress

This ensures that all children are appropriately challenged and supported.

- Pupils who require targeted or specific support (as identified in the ALN Reform Bill) will continue to learn in a mainstream setting with access to additional resources and support as necessary.
- Projects and learning journeys are compiled to suit the developmental needs of all learners in different groupings. All schools with mixed age classes plan their curriculum carefully to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales and Pontnewydd is no different; our diagnostic toolkits and tracking systems allow us to monitor the progress of each individual. In Pontnewydd we use a thematic approach to teaching and projects are chosen carefully each year to ensure that children moving through the school have the opportunity to enjoy a wide range of learning experiences and skills.
- There is no evidence to support the view that the performance of children in mixed age classes is either above or below that of pupils in single-age classes. There is however some evidence to show that pupils in mixed year classes gain socially

Curriculum for Wales – Progression Steps

What are progression steps?

The Welsh Curriculum and its assessment arrangements are now built on Progression, so each AoLE (area of learning and experience) includes progression steps. In this way, learning and progression go hand in hand, bringing a purposeful approach to sequencing learning.

Learning should be an expedition, not a straight line. Progression is a 'road map' for each individual, and each may progress at a different rate or take a different path to get to the next stage in their learning journey.

How are the progression steps divided?

The New Curriculum for Wales progression steps was implemented in September 2022.
These are:

- Progression Step 1 - age 3-5 Casnewydd (Nursery) Caerdydd (Reception) and some pupils in Bala
- Progression Step 2 - age 5-8. Tregaron (Year 1/2) Tredegar (Year2) Tongwynlais (Year 3) and some of Saundersfoot (Y3/4)
- Progression Step 3 - age 9-11 Pembroke (Year 4) Cwmbran, Anglesey (LRB) Pontrhydyfen, Merthyr Tydfil (Year 5), Tenby, Rhossili (Year 6)
- Progression Step 4 - age 11-14. Year 7, 8, 9
- Progression Step 5 - age 14-16. Year 10, 11.

Children can be anywhere on the progression line, though. The above steps are more rough guides as to where children of certain age groups are expected to be.

How do we organise classes?

- The school aims for our children to achieve their full potential both academically and socially. Our Mixed Age Classes policy mirrors these aims and provides the most benefit for the greatest number of pupils.

The Process:

- The Governing Body requires that the Headteacher will arrange classes generally of no more than 30 pupils.
- A complete school listing is prepared in the date of birth order. New pupils, expected for the September term will be provisionally included, as will the new Reception children, from the numbers given to us by County Admissions, with whom parents register. Pupils who are expected to leave the school will not be taken from the list unless we have had notification that their admission to their new school has been approved.
- The class distribution will be considered on the basis of pupil numbers. Provisional class sizes will be determined if possible, according to the principle of ensuring that generally no class exceeds 30 pupils.

- The distribution for the class numbers may change each year according to numbers in the school and the effects of different numbers in each class or year group. This may result in mixed age classes or 'parallel' classes, e.g. two classes each containing Year 5 and Year 6 children.
- As mixed age classes have become necessary in Pontnewydd, it is important for parents to understand that pupils may have the same teacher more than once during their journey through the school.
- Mixed classes placement of pupils is based on professional judgement and Collaboration Decisions are based on:

  -teacher assessments

  -knowledge of the child over time

  -discussions between staff

  -(where appropriate) input from additional learning needs professionals

Please be reassured these decisions are not taken lightly and follow careful consideration.

- In all progression steps we aim to achieve 'balanced' classes. Gender and the needs of the pupils are our priorities (this means that we seek a balance of both; not that we group according to ability) however other factors may be considered, e.g. behaviour, age, placement of additional support staff, location of classroom within the building.
- We aim that, wherever possible, no child is without any friends in their new class, however this cannot be guaranteed. We will always take friendship groupings into account when making decisions.

Next steps

Teaching staff then work together to group the children accordingly, taking into account the factors described above.

It is important that we highlight the fact that sometimes the views of children, teachers and parents may differ and while all views are welcomed and considered carefully, we cannot guarantee that it will be possible to satisfy all preferences – please see FAQs 'May I refuse to have my child in a class'.

Ultimately, the children's friendships continue on the playground and their time in class is intended for learning. Children are only occasionally given the opportunity to work in friendship groups in class. Teachers organise groups and pairs of children according to the task that they work on and children move into different groupings frequently throughout the course of a day with the aim of maximising the learning potential within the lesson. Sometimes children are organised so that they work in mixed or same ability pairs/groups and sometimes they are organised entirely randomly so that they get a chance to get to know all of the other children in the class – this helps to promote positive relationships and a supportive atmosphere within the class.

For all progression steps we also consider:

- twins - separated or kept together according to parental preference
- siblings - separated if that is parental preference (this occurs occasionally, when siblings are in different years groups but are close in age)
- Additional Learning Needs provision e.g. targeted or specific support
- compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act
- safeguarding issues

Announcing the classes for the following academic year

We recognise that parents and children prefer to know as early as possible however in some years it may not be possible to announce class organisation until near the end of term. This is to avoid any potential reorganisation of the classes after they have been announced.

Occasionally we are unable to announce the teachers for each class until the end of term. This may be, for example, because staff may be applying for promotions and we are awaiting the results of the appointment process. These matters are confidential and cannot be shared with parents.

We will always aim to allow the children to have a transition morning with their new teacher before the end of the summer term and this is how the classes for the new year are usually announced. These sessions ensure that children are aware of which children they will be with (we cannot give class lists to parents for safeguarding reasons) and who their teacher will be.

Frequently asked questions

May I refuse to have my child in a class?

Generally, no: all factors have been considered as a whole staff. Parents are asked to be mindful of the fact that the Headteacher is responsible for ensuring classes do not exceed 30 and that confidential issues (such as safeguarding) are taken into account. The organisation of classes is carefully considered to ensure the best chances of educational success for all pupils in the school. The school's motivation, when organising classes, is to protect the teaching and learning interests of the school, making the best decision in the interest of all pupils, not one child or indeed one year group.

Can you explain why my child was selected for a particular class?

With regret, often the response to this will be that we cannot. When we organise classes we are considering group dynamics and individual pupils are only discussed if relevant. Another factor that prevents clear explanations is that we cannot share information about other children with you.

Can I make a complaint through the school's Complaints Procedure?

Whilst there is no formal right to appeal against a decision on a child joining a mixed age class, parents are always welcome to raise their concerns. If a parent feels that the school has not adhered to the Mixed Age Group Policy they can raise this in the first instance with the class teacher, at Stage A of the school's Complaints Procedure. If still not satisfied, they should put their concerns in writing to the Headteacher (Stage B). However, a formal complaint can only be raised if you believe that the school has failed to follow the procedures outlined in this policy.

If you are not happy with the content of this policy this cannot be raised formally through the Complaints Procedure. You are, however, welcome to submit your views to the Governing Body to consider when the policy is next reviewed. This policy is reviewed each Summer for the following academic year.

Agreed 18/5/25