



Rhayader Primary School
Ysgol Gynradd Rhaeadr

Mixed age classes and split year groups – 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 primary school. On occasions 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 number of pupils in each year group. It is not uncommon in Rhayader School for this situation to change from year to year. The sizes of year groups can vary quite dramatically and we also have the Welsh and English language split of pupil numbers too.

Currently, Rhayader School is oversubscribed with many parents applying for a place for their child at the school. The school building can only accommodate 9 teaching bases, 3 of these are in the Welsh Stream. The Welsh Stream has mixed age classes with a Reception and year 1 class, a year 2 and 3 class and a three-year-group class of year 4, 5 and 6. That leaves us with six classrooms and teachers for the English stream. In Foundation Phase (reception, year 1 and year 2) children should only be registered and taught in groups of 30 or less children. In Key Stage 2 (year 3 to year 6), these classes can be larger, but the school staff and governors aim to make 30 the maximum class size. Year 5 and 6 are sometimes an exception to this if numbers dictate; this is due to these children being older and more independent and less reliant on a high adult input.

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 in primary schools means that the teaching and the level of work is tailored to the needs and current achievement levels of individual pupils. The staff at Rhayader Primary School 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 different groups or those of similar existing achievement levels.

Furthermore, the school plans educational experiences for pupils in all classes in ways which ensure good progression and continuity, whichever year group or class they are in.

The curriculum for Wales lends itself well to this style of teaching as it focuses on stage of the child rather than age. The progression steps are loosely based on progression step 1 for nursery and reception, progression step 2 for year 2, 3 and 4 and progression step 3 for year 5 and 6.

I am concerned that forming a mixed age and split year group class may mean that my child's friendship grouping is being broken up.

Although the school uses dates of birth to decide the class splits, 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, new friendship groupings in different subject areas become a fact of life, and this situation is generally welcomed by many children.

The whole school have same morning playtime, allowing friendships to flourish with children in other classes. The reception, year 1 and year 2 children have lunchtime at 12 o'clock and year 3, 4 5 and 6 have a rota for lunch starting at 12.30pm. All of the year 3s will go to lunch at the same time and choose who they sit with, this is followed by a playtime until 1.30pm. This arrangement allows for old and new friendships to develop.

Why is the situation different in my child's school from that in other schools?

Every Primary school is unique. Many schools in Powys and Wales have mixed ages in one class, many small schools will have four different year groups taught together and fluctuating intake numbers mean some year groups will be split. In none of these schools is the formation of mixed age classes an issue or a professional concern.

My child will be in Dosbarth Colomen, does that mean they will have to play in the fenced off play area on the playground?

No, the fenced off area is so the teacher can set up outdoor learning without it being played with and messed up at lunchtime and playtime. All of the children have full access to the main playground, wood chip area and tyres during playtimes.

Will my child have the same opportunities as the rest of the year group who are educated in another class?

Yes, we try to organize whole school trips as this is the only way to make them cost effective and viable. When sports coaches come into school, the whole year group will have access to the coaching. Clubs such as football when they run are for year groups and not classes. Cross country for example is open to all pupils from year 3 to year 6, the stream or class does not discriminate against any child. Sports events will be offered to whole year groups.

However, at Rhayader School, the class topics are mainly planned by the class as it follows their interest and therefore there may be some opportunities or events that will differ. For example, if one class is doing life cycles or the Elan Valley dams, a trip for pond dipping etc to the Elan Valley may be arranged. Again, swimming for year 2 to year 6 will be taught per class on a half term basis, meaning all year 2s will swim for example but not all year 2s will swim at the same time; Dosbarth Colomen may swim in the Spring Term and Dosbarth Gwddi-Hw may swim in the Summer Term. The dates and rota for the swimming for the academic year 2023 – 2024 has not yet been decided and will be shared with all parents at the start of the new school year in September 2023.

The topic chosen by the class may differ but the skills taught in the different classes for a split year group will be the same.

What about school concerts and plays?

The school is changing how it does concerts as the space in the hall very limited and our numbers mean it is hard to accommodate every parent. Next year, we will be hosting class assemblies so your child can perform more regularly for you as well as hosting outdoor events and performances. At Christmas, we will be holding carol services and nativity performances and these will be for full year groups, regardless of language or registration classes.

Why does the school split on date of birth rather than friendship and/ or ability?

At Rhayader School, we celebrate every child's achievements and understand every child is different and progresses at different rates. To quote Albert Einstein "Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid". No staff member at Rhayader School would be willing to say a child is not good enough to be in a certain class and therefore would not split based on ability. In the same way, friendships evolve and change and developing social skills is a big part of early life learning. Having a wide social circle is essential for emotional and physical well-being. Learning to network and build circle of friends is very important for everyone, meeting different people develops resilience, understanding and empathy.

Pastoral support is available for any child who needs additional adult time and help with managing change.

If anyone, has any further questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs Crockett or Mrs Thompson in the school office. Please get in touch on 01597810288 or via email office@rhayader.powys.sch.uk.