

### **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?**

We value the 'Y6ness' of the final year of primary and prepare the children for secondary school by ensuring that Year 6 have the responsibility of being School Ambassadors, leading the School Council and Eco-group. They are asked to undertake special jobs like showing prospective parents and carers around the school. They have a privilege area purely for their use at play time and help with the younger children. The teachers arrange for Year 6 to have their residential visit together and to have an end of year treat together; in recent years the children have voted to visit Weymouth for the day. The Year 6 also complete their final production by themselves and have a leavers assembly focused on the next steps in their learning journey.



## **Fitzmaurice Primary School**



### **Mixed Age Classes**

### **A Guide to our Policy for Parents and Carers**

Parents and carers 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.

## Mixed Age Classes

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 Wiltshire) have schools operating mixed-age classes and according to the DfE, the number of schools taking this approach is rising.

### Why do schools have mixed age classes?

This is simply the result of school size. There are 7 year groups that children have to go through in primary school and there need to be 27-30 children in each class to make the school financially viable. The government funds schools according to pupil numbers. This effectively means that only schools with 210, 420 or 630 pupils will have single age classes.

Fitzmaurice has 45 children on average in each year group; this equals 315 children and therefore mixed age group classes are unavoidable.

### 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 of 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.

For example in a lesson on grammar and punctuation all the children will learn to be able to use a comma in a list; most will be able to use a comma to separate clauses and some will use a semi colon.

Or in addition all the children will learn to add two numbers together; most will use 2 digit numbers, some will use 3 digit numbers. 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 will be

asking questions for children at all abilities. Not a single minute of learning time can be wasted for anyone regardless of their ability.

### Don't 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.

### How do teachers plan for mixed age classes?

A teacher's craft is the weaving together of the knowledge and understanding that children need to learn in a way which extends learning. The National curriculum is arranged in mixed age groups (Y1/2, Y3/4, Y5/6) with children expecting to be able to achieve objectives by the end of the two years. On the whole this matches the structure of year groups we have at Fitzmaurice. The curriculum we teach is a rolling programme to ensure that children learn new things each year. Teachers are released from the classroom for their non-contact time in the phase teams so that they are able to plan together and ensure that all the children in an age group have the same opportunities in learning.

### 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 teach them, and older children view the younger ones as in need of teaching and support. Educationalists have argued that this can nurture thinking skills, problem solving skills, vocabulary and other social competencies.