



## Mixed-Age Classes at Whittington Primary School

### Information for Parents

We recognise that the proposed introduction of mixed-age classes has generated questions and concerns for some families. We are grateful to those parents who have taken the time to share their views courteously, ask questions and engage thoughtfully with us.

At Whittington, we care deeply about every child and every family. We know that decisions affecting children's school experience can feel significant, particularly when they involve friendships, class groupings and the important milestones associated with primary school. We hope this document provides further information about the thinking behind the decision, how mixed-age classes will operate, and the ways in which we will continue to support children to flourish.

As always, our approach is guided by our school values of **Love, Honesty, Quality, Courage** and **Community**. These values underpin every decision we make and reflect what we often describe as *The Whittington Way* - placing relationships at the heart of school life whilst maintaining high expectations for every child.

### Why are we introducing mixed-age classes?

The decision has been carefully considered by school leaders and governors as part of our long-term vision for the school.

Mixed-age classes will enable us to:

- *Create balanced classes that support strong learning, wellbeing and positive relationships.*
- *Provide greater flexibility to support, challenge and respond to the needs of individual children.*
- *Strengthen collaboration between teachers and make the best use of expertise across the school.*
- *Ensure that all children benefit from high expectations and high-quality teaching.*
- *Provide a sustainable structure that supports the continued growth and success of the school.*

Most importantly, this is a proactive educational decision. Having carefully considered a range of possible approaches, leaders and governors believe this structure will best support children's learning, development and long-term success within the context of Whittington Primary School.

This change also reflects the continued success and growth of our school. In 2023, Whittington's admission number was increased from 30 to 45 places per year group (for new Reception intakes) in recognition of growing demand for places and housing development within the local area. We are proud that increasing numbers of families are choosing Whittington, and the move to mixed-age classes forms part of our longer-term planning to



ensure we can continue to provide a high-quality education and strong sense of community as the school grows.

### **Are mixed-age classes common?**

Yes.

Mixed-age classes are a well-established feature of many successful primary schools, including schools much larger than Whittington. They are particularly common in schools that place a strong emphasis on personalised learning, flexible grouping and strong relationships between children.

Many children will experience mixed-age teaching at some point during their primary education, and schools across the country successfully use this model to support high-quality teaching and learning.

### **What does evidence say?**

Mixed-age classes are a well-established feature of many successful primary schools and are used effectively in schools of all sizes across the country.

Educational research suggests that children in mixed-age classes achieve as well academically as those in single-age classes when teaching is carefully planned, expectations remain high and learning is matched appropriately to pupils' needs. Importantly, the quality of teaching, curriculum design and relationships within a school have a far greater influence on children's success than the way classes are organised.

At Whittington, our decision has not been driven by a belief that mixed-age classes are inherently better than single-age classes. Rather, it reflects our professional judgement about what will best support children within the context of our school.

As Whittington continues to grow, we believe this structure will allow us to create more balanced classes, make the best use of staffing expertise, strengthen collaboration between teachers and provide greater flexibility to meet the needs of individual children. It will also support us in maintaining the strong relationships and sense of community that are central to our school ethos.

Most importantly, this decision has been made because we believe it will further our aim to provide a high-quality education for all children, whilst ensuring that learning remains appropriately challenging, supportive and responsive to individual need.

### **How will learning be organised?**

Children will continue to be taught the curriculum appropriate for their year group.

Teachers will carefully plan learning so that all children are appropriately supported and challenged.

At Whittington:



- English, foundation subjects and wider curriculum learning will often take place within mixed-age classes.
- Children will regularly work collaboratively with a wider range of peers.
- Learning activities will be adapted to meet individual needs and abilities.
- Expectations for each year group will remain unchanged.

**For mathematics**, children will continue to be taught in single year-group cohorts. This means that pupils will receive mathematics teaching alongside other children from their own year group and will be taught the curriculum appropriate to their age and stage.

This approach allows teaching to be closely matched to the requirements of each year group's curriculum whilst ensuring that children receive the support or challenge they need to make strong progress.

For Year 6 pupils, this means dedicated teaching and preparation for the end of Key Stage 2 assessments. For all year groups, expectations remain unchanged and children will continue to be taught the knowledge and skills required for successful progression through the curriculum.

Children who require additional support, as well as those who are ready for greater challenge, will continue to receive teaching that is adapted to meet their individual needs.

The new structure will also strengthen collaboration between teachers. Staff will work closely together to plan learning, moderate standards and share expertise across year groups, helping to ensure greater consistency and continuity for children throughout the school.

### **Will my child be stretched and supported?**

Absolutely.

One of the key reasons for introducing mixed-age classes at this stage is our desire to ensure that all children are appropriately challenged and supported to achieve their full potential.

Children develop at different rates and bring different strengths, interests and experiences to the classroom. Mixed-age classes provide greater flexibility for teachers to tailor learning, respond to individual needs and create opportunities for children to learn alongside a wider range of peers.

Teachers will continue to adapt learning within every classroom to provide support where needed and challenge for those who are ready to go further. Expectations for each year group will remain unchanged, and children will continue to be taught the knowledge and skills required for their age and stage.

At Whittington, we want every child to flourish academically, socially and personally. Mixed-age classes are intended not simply to maintain standards, but to create an environment in which all children are encouraged to be ambitious, confident learners who are supported to achieve their very best.



## **How will children with additional needs be supported?**

Supporting children with additional needs remains a central priority for the school.

Mixed-age classes do not change the support available to children with SEND, additional learning needs or those who may require extra pastoral support. In fact, one of the advantages of the new structure is that it provides greater flexibility for teachers and support staff to respond to individual needs and tailor provision accordingly.

Teachers, teaching assistants and the SEND team will continue to work closely together to ensure that children receive the support, adaptations and interventions they need to succeed. Individual targets, support plans and specialist provision will continue as appropriate.

## **How will classes be organised?**

Classes will be organised using a range of factors, including:

- Creating balanced class sizes.
- Learning and pastoral needs.
- Friendship groups.
- SEND and additional needs.
- Social and emotional considerations.
- Maintaining positive learning environments.

No single factor determines class placement.

Importantly, classes are not being created based on attainment, and there will not be a 'top class' or 'bottom class'.

## **What about friendships?**

We know that friendships play an important role in children's happiness, confidence and sense of belonging at school. For this reason, friendships have been carefully considered as part of the class organisation process.

However, creating classes requires us to consider a wide range of factors, including learning needs, pastoral considerations, SEND provision, class balance and the creation of positive learning environments. Whilst we are not always able to keep every friendship group together, we have worked hard to ensure that every child has familiar peers within their class and opportunities to maintain important friendships.

Children will continue to spend time together throughout the school day, including at playtimes, lunchtimes, educational visits, sporting events, productions, worship and wider school activities. Many friendships naturally extend beyond individual classrooms, and our experience is that children adapt quickly, maintain existing friendships and often develop new ones.



We recognise that friendships can feel particularly important as children approach the move to secondary school, and this has been carefully considered when determining Year 6 class placements.

### **What about Year 6?**

We recognise that parents of children entering Year 6 may have particular questions about these changes. Year 6 is a significant and memorable year, marking the culmination of a child's primary education and their preparation for the transition to secondary school.

Our commitment to Year 6 remains unchanged. Children will continue to receive high-quality teaching, targeted support and appropriate challenge to ensure they are fully prepared for the end of Key Stage 2 assessments and the next stage of their education. Mathematics will continue to be taught in single year-group cohorts, ensuring that teaching is closely aligned to the Year 6 curriculum and assessment requirements.

The new structure will also support our ambition for every Year 6 pupil to achieve their full academic potential. By enabling teachers to work more closely together, we believe we will be better placed to provide targeted support where it is needed and greater challenge for pupils who are ready to go further. Children will continue to be taught the Year 6 curriculum and will be encouraged to think deeply, work independently and aim high. Our expectation is not simply that pupils meet age-related expectations, but that every child is stretched, challenged and supported to achieve their very best.

Importantly, Year 6 will remain a distinct and celebrated cohort within the school. Children will continue to come together for key aspects of school life, including SATs preparation, transition activities, Arthog, our Leadership Program, Leavers' Events and all of the traditions that make the final year of primary school so special. The structure has been designed not to reduce the Year 6 experience, but to strengthen our ability to ensure that every Year 6 pupil leaves Whittington ready for the next stage of their education.

As the oldest pupils in the school, Year 6 children play an important role within our school community. We want them to leave Whittington not only with strong academic outcomes, but also with the confidence, maturity and character that will help them flourish in secondary school and beyond. Opportunities to work alongside younger pupils, serve as role models and demonstrate leadership are an important part of this journey. These experiences help children develop communication skills, responsibility, empathy and independence - qualities that are highly valued in secondary education and later life.

The move to mixed-age classes has been designed to strengthen our ability to meet the needs of all learners, including those in Year 6. Above all, our ambition is that every Year 6 child leaves Whittington with wonderful memories, a strong sense of belonging, confidence in their abilities and pride in all they have achieved. We believe this structure will support us in achieving that ambition.

### **How will children be supported through the change?**

We recognise that any change can create uncertainty.



During the remainder of the summer term, staff will work carefully with children to prepare children for September, providing opportunities to meet teachers, spend time in their new classes and ask questions. We will monitor children's wellbeing closely and provide support where needed to ensure a smooth and positive transition.

As always, strong relationships will be at the heart of this process.

### **Why were parents not formally consulted?**

We recognise that some parents would have preferred earlier communication regarding these changes, and we understand why families feel strongly about decisions that affect their children's school experience.

Decisions relating to class organisation, staffing structures and curriculum delivery form part of the professional responsibilities of school leaders and governors. These decisions are made after careful consideration of a wide range of factors affecting children across the school and are not ordinarily subject to formal consultation.

In reaching this decision, leaders and governors considered pupil numbers, learning needs, class balance, staffing, SEND provision, pastoral factors and the long-term development of the school. Our focus throughout has been on determining the structure that we believe will best support children both now and in the future.

Whilst formal consultation was not undertaken, we remain committed to listening to parents and responding to questions and concerns. The views shared with us since the announcement have been carefully considered and have helped shape the information and reassurances provided within this document.

We value the partnership between home and school and remain committed to working openly and positively with families as these changes are implemented.

### **Can I discuss my child's placement?**

Yes.

We recognise that class placements are important to children and families, and we are happy to discuss any individual circumstances or concerns that parents feel we should be aware of.

Class placements have been determined carefully using a wide range of considerations, including learning needs, friendships, SEND provision, class balance and the creation of positive learning environments. Decisions have been made with the best interests of all children across the school in mind.

Whilst we are always willing to listen and consider information that may be helpful, it is important to recognise that changes to individual placements can have wider implications for other children and classes. For this reason, discussions should not be viewed as a general appeals process or as a guarantee that placements will be changed.



Our aim is to work in partnership with families, listen carefully to any concerns and ensure that every child feels happy, supported and ready to flourish in September.

*Any request for a discussion should be through the MS Form link provided (please see letter).*

### **Our commitment**

Above all, our priority is the happiness, wellbeing and success of every child. Our values of **Love, Honesty, Quality, Courage** and **Community** shape everything we do, and they have shaped this decision too. Whilst we understand that parents may hold different views about how best to achieve this, leaders and governors would not proceed with a change unless we believed it would support children to flourish both academically and personally.

As with any significant development, we will carefully monitor the impact of the new structure during the coming academic year. This will include consideration of children's wellbeing, progress, engagement, relationships and overall experience of school. We will continue to listen to children, staff and parents as the new arrangements become established.

We are proud of the caring, ambitious and inclusive community we have built together at Whittington. We believe this structure will strengthen our ability to provide a high-quality education for all children whilst preserving the values and relationships that make our school special.

This is the Whittington Way.