



Downton Church of England VA Primary School

Gravel Close, Downton, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 3LZ

Telephone: 01725 510556

Email: admin@downton-pri.wilts.sch.uk Website: www.downton-pri.wilts.sch.uk

Headteacher: Mrs Paula Carlton BA (Hons) QTS NPQH

Acting Deputy Headteacher: Mrs M Ford BA (Hons)



Tuesday 24th May 2022

Class Structure – September 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

September 2022 marks an important milestone in our school’s growth, and I am writing to share details of our new class structure and the rationale behind it.

Context:

The school building at Downton Primary School currently has 11 classrooms with the capacity to hold 315 pupils or 45 in each year. In other words, our Published Admissions Number (PAN) will eventually be 45 in every year group. A PAN of 30 would equate to one class per year group. Likewise, a PAN of 60 would equate to two classes per year group. This figure of 45 per year group makes us a one-and-a-half form entry primary school. Increased pupil numbers to this level posed the question, “What class structure would best serve the outcomes of our pupils?” We found our answer by looking at the current configuration of classes in Key Stage 1 and by investigating how the best 1.5 entry primary schools do it.

Class Structure:

Having completed this due diligence, which included talking to professionals at other schools and within the Diocese, we concluded that each phase (Key Stage 1, Lower Key Stage 2 and Upper Key Stage 2) will contain **three mixed-year group** classes. Reception will continue to comprise of two classes of no more than 45 pupils in total.

Specifically:

Year R	Rabbits
Year R	Squirrels
Year 1/2	Foxes
Year 1/2	Dormice
Year 1/2	Hedgehogs
Year 3/4	Badgers
Year 3/4	Kestrels
Year 3/4	Hawks
Year 5*	Stags
Year 5*	Owls
Year 6*	Falcons

*Due to current pupil numbers, 3 x Year 5/6 classes will begin from September 2023.

Rationale:

1. We know mixed classes work, from our own experience. Our KS1 team has taught a mixed class for two years and the children have made exceptional progress. Each child has been taught the National Curriculum, with expertly considered challenge and scaffold. Again, the outstanding teaching ensured a differentiated learning experience that met the needs of all learners. The best example of this was our excellent pass rate in the Year 1 phonics screening in November 2021. Remember, those pupils shared a class with Year 2. Just like that class, our classes will contain a mixture of attainment levels.



2. We know mixed classes work in a 1.5 entry set-up from the experience of others. St. Luke's Primary, St. Boniface RC Primary and Walington Primary are just three examples of 1.5 entry primary schools that are currently rated 'Outstanding' by OFSTED. Our leadership team have visited St. Peter's CE Primary Academy in Salisbury, to review this in action and we hope to work alongside them as we move forward to fulfill our vision of 'Dream Believe Achieve.'

3. Teachers collaborate efficiently. Teams of teachers can delegate planning and resource preparation such that the overall quality of the learning is enhanced. Curriculum design is complex and we want our teams to share the very best practice so each teacher can draw inspiration from evidence based, carefully sequenced examples. Instead of reinventing the wheel, they will be able to collaborate, and ensure that planning continuously evolves and gets better and better on the back of feedback from each other - saving time and improving outcomes immeasurably.

4. Peer mentoring and cross-year group friendship groups are stronger. Behaviour expectations can be modelled by older pupils whilst younger children quickly gain a sense of maturity and responsibility. So summer born children aren't continually the youngest pupils in the class.

5. Better attainment and self-esteem for all children. This is because children get to be the more experienced older child every other year. They are then encouraged to take on the role of mentors to support their younger classmates while developing their own social competencies. The schools we spoke to strongly believe that mixed-age classrooms encourage children to discover their untapped potential spiritually; academically, socially and emotionally.

6. Nurturing. Teachers can potentially have the same class for a couple of years. Just ask our Year 6 team about the massive benefit this presents; they have taught the same pupils for two years and know their learning styles and habits intimately.

It is important to realise that being a 1.5 entry primary (which was determined prior to my arrival) with mixed classes is very different to being a 0.5 entry primary school. As a large school, we naturally have more staff and, in the case of Downton Primary, our classes will remain relatively small. This will afford use of a range of additional teaching and learning opportunities. For example, whilst the children will spend the vast majority of their time learning in mixed year groups (where all classes have a range of abilities), we shall have focused phonics across Key Stage 1 (i.e. pupils will learn phonics in smaller ability groups). This is one example of the specific arrangements that will be shared with you once final pupil numbers and admissions are clearer.

Ultimately, children from Years 1 to 4 will be taught in a mixed year group class next year and will spend the vast majority of their learning time with the same classmates and teacher. Our next step is to finalise class lists and share them with the pupils and you.

This final communication will take place on or just before Wednesday 6th July – our 'Bump-Up' day – when all children will spend the afternoon with their new teacher. Please note that we will be asking children to name five friends that they would like to learn with next year; this process will take place before the end of this term and all pupils will be guaranteed one or more of these. We will clearly be considering friendships, but learning styles will also factor heavily in our class lists; parental requests for specific teachers will not be considered. Please contact the school with any queries not addressed in this letter and many thanks in advance for your trust in the process.

Please contact the school with any queries not addressed in this letter, all staff and governors are fully briefed and will be available. Many thanks in advance for you trust in us. Downton Primary School is a very special community.

Yours sincerely,

Paula Carter

