Mixing Classes - Frequently Asked Questions

Will this apply to all year groups?
We will discuss all year groups, as we do each year, and then make a decision. At this stage of discussions it looks highly unlikely that it will apply to all year groups, partly because the classes are already fairly evenly balanced and partly because decisions made and actions taken at this time last year have been highly effective.

Will my child still be in a class with their friends?
When we have made a decision to mix a year group we will ask the children which group of friends they would like to stay with. These responses will be taken into account when we divide the year group and every child should have at least two friends in their new class. In addition each child will be with approximately half the children from their existing class. Some children already have friends in the other class and have requested the opportunity to work with those friends.

Does “Matching children up to working with other children of similar abilities to encourage challenge” mean that the school will be streaming and/or setting?
What this means is that we’d aim to put together a good balance of abilities within each class, such that children who share similar strengths or difficulties in particular areas can sometimes work together. We are not proposing to stream or set. We would continue to teach mixed ability classes but remain open to flexible groupings for some lessons just as we do now.

“My child has settled down and has been working increasingly well this year with their academic peer group (which does not necessarily overlap with their friendship group) and I worry that mixing up the classes may leave my child having to find their feet again and disrupting their progress.”
The current class teachers are very aware of their own class dynamics. We want children to make maximum academic progress and do not want to put any child in a position where they have a setback. We will be taking such issues into account if we make the decision to mix a year group.

Why have the classes in some year groups become imbalanced?
When 60 children start in Reception the classes are balanced out as much as possible taking into account a range of factors such as friendships, special needs, EAL, age and gender. As the children progress through the school the classes can become less balanced due to variety of reasons:

- Mobility – for a number of years we have experienced quite a high turnover of pupils and due to an apparently random combination of factors this affects some year groups more than others. If a new child joins we can only place them where there is a space as we do not want class sizes above 30 except in exceptional circumstances. To date we have not known through admissions paperwork from county or from pre-school providers, on entry to Reception, as to whether a child will be with us for a short stay. However, this year we are planning to ask that question directly from parents on the “All about Me” sheet and that should help with future planning of classes.

- Special Needs – children develop at different rates and it is not always apparent when joining Reception that at some future point a high level of support may need to be put into place. Sometimes children with high level needs join us further up the school and depending on where there is a space in the year group we may not have any option as to where to place that child. Some children need access to specialist equipment and that may determine which class they need to be based in. Sometimes a child with high level needs may be out of their designated year group.

- High Ability – children develop at different rates and it is not always apparent when joining Reception which children will excel at different subjects. This may cause an imbalance between classes as the year group progresses through the school.
How will you decide the mixing within a year group?
This will be based on a variety of factors including:
- Children’s views on friendships
- Teachers views on friendships
- Working groups
- Ability
- Gender
- Potential mobility

What are the benefits for the children?
- Better resilience in developing friendships in a safe, comfortable environment – arguably even more important in Y4/5 when they will be moving to secondary school soon and having a wider base of friends would be beneficial.
- Widening working groups.
- Being part of a year group and not just a class.
- For some children less mobility within the class
- For some children a better match to a working group

What are the benefits for the school?
- Further development of good attitudes to learning.
- Children developing resilience in facing challenges whilst in a safe and supportive environment
- Greater potential for grouping children as we need for overall improved academic performance across the school

What is the process now?
- Team leaders are in the process of discussions with class teachers and will make recommendations.
- Team leaders and Mrs Hill will decide if a year group will be mixed.
- Children will be asked for friendship information.
- Class teachers will begin to suggest future classes taking into account:
  - Children’s views on friendships
  - Working groups
  - Ability
  - Gender
  - Potential mobility
- Children and parents to be informed of new classes on transition day

Some comments received from parents/carers:
“In general, I think that it might be a good idea for classes to be mixed more regularly, given that Cambridge is a transient place and many kids come and go.”

“I think in general, if you keep kids in the same class for years and years, they develop very strong relationships – either strong good relationships or strong bad relationships. They also develop a strong class identity and perhaps a rivalry between the other class in the year group. If things were mixed up more regularly from the early years, I would hope that this rivalry would lessen and kids would have friends across the year groups, and they would have a strong pride in Mayfield as a school rather than just loyalty to their one class.”

“We strongly oppose this move and hope that you will listen to the views of parents and children before making a final decision.”

A parent with an older child at secondary school commented that on reflection, it would have been better if the children had been mixed more whilst they were at primary school as their child hardly
knew the pupils from the other class but became best friends with children from the other Mayfield class once they got to secondary school.

“My main concern is the enormous disruption faced by children in this class when established members leave and new children join the class. I feel that the class has been particularly disturbed this year.”

“We sent our child to Mayfield School under the mistaken impression that they would be in the same class as local children in the area. However, they are almost the only child in class XX who lives in catchment and consequently has no local friends. Most of the other in-catchment children, including all of the Year X children that live on our road, are in class YY, excluding them from local social activities. They have also seen so many children leave their class over the years that they have become disillusioned about making friends as their perception is that they will only leave.”

“Thank you for listening to the parents’ and children’s concerns as well. In the end, I will support what the school decides as best, especially because I can see that Mrs Hill’s decision to not mix Year XX this year has been beneficial to my child.”

“I can see pros and cons to both sides, and I appreciate that the school is considering each year group individually. I think the teachers know the class dynamics better than anyone so I am glad that they will be consulted, and that they play a large role in the decision.”

“XX seems fairly well balanced, all considered. It’s had its share of comings and goings over the years, but this is par for the course at Mayfield and doesn’t seem to have been too unsettling. Indeed, the general dynamic – and mix – of the class seems good. So unless the other Year X class has issues, I’d need to be convinced about the usefulness of shaking things up, especially in a SATS year. Besides, at the risk of stating the obvious, what most children most crave is some semblance of security and constancy, both at home and at school, and to introduce a significant element of insecurity and unpredictability into their lives at this particular stage might not, I think, be the most sensible course of action. (Children are endlessly adaptable creatures, but there are always limits.)”

“It’s self-evident that a certain amount of class mixing can never be a bad thing, and that it might even encourage competitiveness, the making of new friendships and a greater year, as opposed to class, identity, all of which are perfectly laudable aims. It might also solve problems posed by, say, small groups of pupils who are under-performing and could benefit from a new setting.”

“Being members of this class is part of the children’s identity within the school” and “we would urge the school not to merge the two XX classes”.

Interestingly for this same class we have support for merging from some parents and from some children.

“1 share the concerns of many other parents I’ve spoken to about this – that it’s one thing to mix on a small scale and in an ad hoc fashion, thereby addressing the interests and concerns of particular years and classes. But it would be quite another to formalise the process. In my experience, such systems are invariably the enemy of intelligence and achievement, and Mayfield works better when it thinks on its feet and instead improvises.”