Bridgewater Primary

Together rain or shine

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Dear Parents & Carers,

We are writing to inform you of a change that we will be implementing at Bridgewater from September 2027.

Currently our children begin their school life with us in either Ducklings or Reception and they then stay in the same class with the same children all the way through to Year 6 before heading off to secondary school where they are split across a larger number of classes. We are proposing that at the end of key stage 1 (year 2) and the end of year 4, we shuffle the classes to create two new classes.

Research shows that there are many benefits to doing this:

Social Resilience and Network Expansion

One of the primary drivers for mixing classes is to prevent "social stagnation." In a fixed class of 30, social hierarchies can become rigid over seven years.

- Wider Peer Groups: Mixing allows children to form a broader range of friendships across the whole year group (60 children rather than 30). This provides a "safety net" if a particular friendship sours, as the child already has established bonds in the other class.
- Breaking Negative Dynamics: Research into school environments often highlights the "social trap" where certain children fall into fixed roles (the "quiet one," the "troublemaker," etc.). A fresh mix allows children to reinvent themselves and breaks up cliques or exclusionary groups.
- Preparation for Transition: Studies on school transitions suggest that children with wider, more flexible social networks find the move to secondary school less daunting because they are accustomed to forming new relationships.

Academic Balance and "Role Modelling"

Schools often use the reshuffle to ensure an even distribution of academic abilities and needs across both classrooms.

- Peer-to-Peer Learning: Research, such as the study by Markus Gehrsitz (University of Strathclyde) on composite/mixed groupings, suggests that exposure to a diverse range of peers can boost attainment. Younger or lower-attaining pupils often benefit from the "modelling" behavior of older or higher-attaining peers.
- Equity of Support: Over time, one class may inadvertently become "heavier" in terms of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or behavioural challenges due to families moving or new admissions. Mixing ensures that teacher attention and school resources are distributed fairly, preventing "sink" classes.

3. Managing the "Summer-Born" Gap

A significant concern in primary education is the disadvantage faced by summer-born children (those born in July/August).

- Research Insight: A study from the Institute of Education (UCL) found that younger children in a year group are significantly more likely to be placed in lower-ability groups simply because of their relative age.
- The Benefit of Mixing: By reshuffling classes, schools can ensure that summer-born children are not permanently "trapped" in a lower-confidence group. A new class environment allows teachers to re-evaluate these children's progress as they mature, preventing them from internalizing a "low-achiever" identity.

While the benefits are clear, the process matters. Research from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) emphasises that any change to class structure works best when parents are consulted and children are given a say to reduce anxiety during the transition. Parents were consulted about this at a parent forum and by sending this out now, we are giving over a year's notice before this change takes place.

Please rest assured that when this happens, it will be a very carefully thought out process and completed with the children's best interests in mind.

Year 6 will continue to mix classes in the afternoons for non-core subjects. This is to prepare the children for their transition to secondary school where they will not always be with the same group of children for the whole day. This has proved to be extremely beneficial in the past few years and the children have really enjoyed the experience and the opportunities it provides.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Sarah Alexander

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