

# MIXED AGE CLASSES

Mixed age classrooms present a variety of benefits and challenges for teaching. The approach you use in your setting will be highly dependent on the cohorts of children that you have and the structure in your school. Because of this, we have outlined the possible approaches to help you plan for your setting. If you have three or four year groups in one class, you may need to combine several of these options. It is important to consider how the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) is laid out as this begins to give us some guidance on how we can manage the mixed ages.

**Both the English section and the Spelling Appendix are grouped as:**

- Year 1
- Year 2
- Years 3 and 4
- Years 5 and 6

**For clarity, this document will refer to the phases as:**

- Years 1 and 2 - Key Stage 1 (KS1)
- Years 3 and 4 - Lower Key Stage 2 (LKS2)
- Years 5 and 6 - Upper Key Stage 2 (UKS2)

This means the content delivered in KS2 can be interchangeably taught within the LKS2 and UKS2 brackets. However, in KS1 it is clear that the content is separate. A clear progression can be seen between Year 1 and Year 2, so it is best to keep KS1 discrete.

We recommend as far as possible to keep children with their year group, so they are learning the spellings in their stage, using differentiation within the lesson and interventions outside of the main spelling lesson to help fill the gaps. There is no one way to differentiate your spelling lessons, as it will depend on many factors: the children you are teaching; the objective; the staffing levels of your school and the resources available. It is important not to differentiate by putting children with a higher or lower year group than their own, as this can cause gaps in the knowledge, or limit the expectations for the children.

# Teaching the Year Groups Separately

This is an effective method of ensuring the curriculum content is delivered progressively and helps prevent curriculum gaps when making changes more than the other options. As outlined above with the curriculum expectations, we would recommend prioritising this approach in KS1 and in any cross-phase classes (e.g., Years 2 and 3 together).

## Multiple Adults

The ideal way of achieving this is having one adult take one group and a different adult taking the other group. With this strategy, it is important to ensure that the class teacher knows the children's spelling attainment and progress well, so that they can form accurate assessments and interventions or accommodations where necessary. One way of ensuring this could be to swap the adults teaching the group at regular intervals, e.g., after two or three weeks. Effective teaching and assessment cycles are critical to maintaining progress, therefore all staff should be sufficiently trained in spelling pedagogy.

## One Adult

We know not all schools have the adults available to do this model, so another suggestion is one group having their teacher-led spelling lesson, whilst the other group are working independently. This could be on spelling, or something else independent. This method works particularly well with the lesson structure of 30-minute main teach and two 15-minute practise sessions, as the 15-minute practise sessions can be more independent.

# Teaching the Year Groups Together

This strategy is best if you have limited capacity to be able to teach the year groups separately. It is more effective in KS2 due to the way the National Curriculum is organised. It can also be challenging with a cross-phase school structure, again due to the curriculum demands.

## Rolling Curriculum

If you have a LKS2 or UKS2 class, you can use a rolling curriculum more readily. This means having a two-year cycle on your curriculum. In Year A, you teach the content of one year group, for example Year 3. Then in Year B, you teach the content of the other year group in the phase, for example Year 4. The children will have covered all the required curriculum content by the end of the phase.

When beginning this approach for the first time, you may need to utilise another strategy, such as double curriculum or teaching the year groups separately just for the first year, otherwise the older year group in the phase will only receive one year's worth of objectives and not both. If you are using this approach, ensure you check that the lessons do not require knowledge from lessons in the previous year group to access it. In KS2 this should not happen very often and may be as easy to rectify as copying one slide from the previous year group objective and adding it into the PowerPoint.

## Double Curriculum

This is an over-learning method of delivery. You teach two spelling lessons per week, for example Stage 3 Step 1 and Stage 4 Step 1, and both year groups do both, then repeat again the following year. This is probably the most challenging method to do effectively, as it requires a lot of curriculum time and may need caution in which objectives you do at the same time to avoid overwhelming the children. This method can be effective in a transition year between an old scheme and the new Spelling Shed scheme, then continue with a different option for the following years.

## Linked Curriculum

A linked curriculum is often used in teaching mixed-year maths classes. This is where you teach similar objectives in the same week but alter the lessons so it is at a level appropriate for the different year groups. This can be best when you have cross-phase mixed-year group classes, for example Year 2 and Year 3. You will see sometimes objectives are easily matched: both Stage 2 and Stage 3 have the objective 'words ending in 'al'' (Stage 2 Step 10, Stage 3 Step 19). The objectives do not always match up, so you may need to combine this with some teaching the year groups separately strategies. This one is highly dictated by the objectives of the year groups you are teaching in. Another caution with this approach is it can require a higher amount of planning and preparation time.