

# Rearranging the classes at the end of Key Stage 1

## Questions and Answers:

### Why are we rearranging the classes?

First and foremost, school leaders and professionals as well as members of the Governing Body feel that careful and thoughtful rearrangement of the classes at the end of Key Stage 1 will help all of our pupils by promoting their social, emotional and academic development and well-being. Whilst we fully recognise the benefits of stable, established class groups and know that classes form a vital community in which pupils thrive, we feel that after three full years (for most pupils) in school, it will be beneficial to rearrange the classes based on more detailed and up to date knowledge of each child. The benefits of doing this will be felt by each child for their final two years at Marine Park First School.

Unlike single class cohort schools, Marine Park First has the opportunity, with three classes per year group, to rearrange the class membership. Classes of 30 are formed at the start of Reception (when pupils are age 4) and are composed of some pupils from the morning nursery class, some from the afternoon nursery class, and some that are new to the school. Whilst we build the class membership with very careful consideration, our knowledge of the children at the point of admission to Reception is necessarily limited to no more than one year in a school setting, even if a child has attended the Marine Park Nursery, and is much more limited in relation to those children that did not attend our school nursery. The character and needs of each child naturally change as they move through the year groups. In addition, the size, balance, needs and character of a class can change when pupils leave as well as when new children join.

Our children routinely gain from beneficial opportunities to learn and play with others, both in their class and outside it. Children have played alongside each other in the Reception outdoor area, the playground and on the astroturf. Pupils learn in cross-year group phonics lessons as well as mixed-aged family group lessons. The children meet regularly for year group, key stage and whole school assemblies and events and by the end of Year 2, pupils have eaten lunch with children from other year groups for three years. A planned rearrangement of classes is consistent with this and seeks to extend these benefits in a carefully coordinated way. As such, we are confident that pupils will be able to undertake the transition to rearranged classes in their stride. In addition, the rearrangement provides an opportunity for a new beginning for all of our pupils.

We are taking this decision because we believe that the quality of pupils' learning will increase and that they will benefit from having the opportunity to widen their social group. We also feel that this will help with transition to Middle School as they will know a larger number of children much better, and experience learning and playing with a greater diversity of pupils.

### Will this happen again?

The rearrangement will happen just once per cohort at the end of Key Stage 1.

Rearranging the classes in the way described in this Q and A will start in 2018-19 as the children move from Key Stage 1 (Y2) into Key Stage 2 (Y3). The plan is for this rearrangement of the classes between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 to continue to be undertaken **once** as each cohort moves from year 2 to year 3.

The success of this approach will be under ongoing review by school leaders and members of the Governing Body.

### What has been the decision-making process?

Parental questionnaires, including exit questionnaires when pupils leave the school at Y4, and staff questionnaires have, for some time, asked school leaders to consider the possible benefits of rearranging the classes based on their experiences (typically up to 5 years in the same class).

Marine Park is aware of other schools with larger than 1 form intakes both within and outside the Whitley Bay Collaborative that take the opportunity to reconstitute cohorts (we are aware of a local school that does this every year). School leaders have asked these schools about the process.

Staff were consulted, and 100% ticked "yes" to rearranging the classes. A large majority of staff indicated that this should be done just once and at the end of Key Stage 1.

The Governing Body, composed of elected or ex-officio staff, elected parents'/carers' representatives (parents or carers of current and ex-pupils in the school) and co-opted members, reviewed the responses to the staff consultation and discussed the issue and process at considerable length. They considered consulting parents/carers but decided against this. Governors voted unanimously to rearrange the classes at the end of Key Stage 1.

A letter to parents/carers was constructed, approved and the precise date of issue to parents/carers agreed by the Governing Body. A review of responses to the letter was included as an agenda item at the next full Governing Body meeting and discussed again. 12 responses were received by the Headteacher: four were broadly in favour, five were broadly against and three were neutral. Most of the responses raised issues/concerns/requests that were very specific to their child's circumstances such as recently admitted pupils, pupils with additional needs, challenging circumstances, anxious pupils or opportunities to address social dynamics. Some of the responses asked for further information about the rationale and decision-making process which prompted school leaders to create this "Questions and Answers" document for them and any other interested parties.

### **What is taken into consideration when rearranging the classes?**

The rearranged classes will, naturally, include approximately a third of pupils that are already in the same class. Further to this, for the reasons identified earlier, we are confident that the children will know lots of other children.

Primarily, school staff will use the detailed knowledge they have of each child to create carefully rearranged classes. It will not be a random allocation process and should result in a greater balance in size, gender, ability and needs. Consideration will be given to each and every child and their unique circumstances (such as learning and social needs, special circumstances that we are aware of such as admission point, historic issues etc). Please trust that we are undertaking this process in a way that seeks to be beneficial for all pupils. Staff will consider the preferences of pupils but also the consistency of these preferences based on what they have observed and found out about each child during their time in school. We know that existing friendships are vital to many pupils and will seek to preserve these as far as we are able when we believe this will be beneficial to those pupils under consideration as well as other classmates. The views of parents, if raised, will be listened to and taken into consideration as this is often (but not always) consistent with the views, observations and assessment of school staff. However, we do hope parents/carers will recognise and respect the knowledge and insight we have of each child in the school environment.

### **What will we put in place to ensure that the rearrangement of the classes is as successful as possible for every child?**

School staff will spend time creating the new class groupings, and reviewing and vetting the composition carefully before parents/carers are informed of their child's class and teacher in the annual report covering letter towards the end of the summer term. We do not plan to adjust the class groupings further once this information has gone out to parents/carers. School staff will not enter into discussions with parents/carers about the character, needs or presentation of **any other child** in their current and/or new class.

Where this is possible, the new staff will attend the parent information meeting which is held the week after reports go out.

After the letter has been issued, we will plan some additional opportunities for the classes to come together before we break up for the summer. Pupils will, as usual, also take part in move-up morning the week after the

reports go out. Some pupils (and parents/carers) may benefit from further transition work and activities in keeping with extra arrangements that are often put in place for transition between phases/year groups.

All Y2 teachers will meet with Y3 teachers to discuss each child. Support staff will also meet to discuss the needs of pupils. Class records, including reports and health care plans, will be reconciled with new classes and passed up to the relevant classroom. Electronic records, used to track attendance, prior and current attainment etc., will automatically align with the new registration groups.

Once in Year 3, staff will plan additional/proportionate transitional activities to create strong class communities and, as always, we will closely monitor the social, emotional and academic development and well-being of all our pupils and provide additional activities and interventions if required.

### **What can you do to help your child?**

In short, speak positively with your child about the benefits of rearranging the classes. In so doing, give your child the confidence to embrace this as an opportunity to have a positive start, widen their social group, and have new friends as well as their existing friends to learn and play alongside. Remind them that about a third of the class will have been in their Y2 class and that there are others that they will know from phonics, play, lunch, assemblies, Reception and/or Nursery. They are bound to have, and very soon will have more, friends they know in their class. Show confidence and trust in the professionals in school; tell your child that school staff know them very well and have rearranged the classes to make school even better for everybody in the last two years before they move to Middle School. Support your child in the early stages as the new class communities are forming. Have confidence, patience and trust in the good character and resilience of our pupils.

If you are concerned at any point about **your child**, please approach or contact school staff who will be willing to listen, respond and offer suggestions.

Marine Park First School

May 2018