



# Newtown Primary School Governing Body

## Reorganisation of Key Stage 2 Classes - Parent Information Meeting

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2016 at 18:00  
Venue: Newtown Primary School Hall

	Jenny Lloyd (JML) <b>Chair of Governors</b>	Vicky Darios (VD)	Penny Burnside (PB)
<b>Governors Present</b>	Laetitia Brochon-Harmsworth (LBH)	Jill Mather (JM)	Steve Fearn (SF)
	Richard Westlake (RW)	Ruth Jones (RJ)	
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Jessica Benger (Clerk)	Alex Dolphin (AD)	Rachel Barnes (RB)
	Jess Johnson (JJ)	Sarah Miller (SM)	Steph Rowse (SR)
	Jo Turner (JT)		

### 1. Reorganisation of Key Stage 2 Classes

JML welcomed every one to the meeting and introduced all the governors.

RJ gave a presentation, now published on the school website, and explained the planned class structures for September 2016. Both sets of parallel classes will be mixed ability and will contain pupils with SEND and English as an Additional Language (EAL) needs.

RJ noted that in the school, especially in the upper years, there are very small cohorts and only one class per year group. The parallel classes will create teaching teams who can plan lessons, assess and moderate together. There will be greater opportunities for children to mix outside their own year groups and widen friendships between children.

RJ showed data on mixed age classes in Devon, the South West and nationally.

RJ discussed the benefits of mixed age classes and how it can encourage active learning and remove some of the stigma for lower achievers.

JML noted questions that parents have already sent to RJ and the governors in advance of the meeting and gave an opportunity for the parents to ask these questions within the meeting. It was acknowledged that some questions from different parents cover same areas of enquiry and that some questions may have already been answered by the presentation.

JML thanked staff for attending the meeting.

#### Dan and Melissa Barton

- **How will age relevant topics be delivered, such as sex education - will the Year 6 children be taught as one class for this?**

RJ explained that where topics were age-relevant, this would be taught by bringing that year group together or through small group work.

#### David Parslow

- **Isn't it more challenging to teach mixed age year groups due to the variation in ability?**
- **Will there be more repetition from one year group to the next?**
- **What is the evidence that this change will improve/ facilitate teaching & learning?**

David Parslow acknowledged that some of his questions had been answered by the

presentation but asked for further information on how the initial decision to move to parallel classes was made. JML noted the challenges all schools face with the rollout of the new National Curriculum, which is set up to be taught differently from the previous curriculum.

RJ noted that there were high levels of pupil mobility in the upper years at the school. Within the current class structure, with only one class per year group, the child is placed according to year cohort; there is no other option and no flexibility. With a parallel class system, children can be allocated to one of two classes which can create a better balance.

RJ categorically stated that the reason for the parallel classes was not the current Year 5 cohort. The school would never make a decision based on one cohort, and this decision was based on future planning and giving the best education possible to the children, within a small city school.

#### James and Kelly McNamara

- **Is it just the changes to the curriculum that have prompted the KS2 restructure and what research/ evidence supports this change?**

This question was answered by the presentation and earlier in the discussion. James and Kelly noted that in principle they agreed with the decision for parallel classes but felt that communication on the changes was very poor and the meeting to inform parents should have been held earlier, when the decisions were made.

- **As the decision looks to have been made in January why has it taken so long to inform parents?**

RJ responded that the decision on class structure was not finalised until April when the budget for the next financial year was set and agreed by governors. RJ acknowledged that the staff team had been considering a move to parallel classes much earlier than Spring 2016 but nothing could be confirmed until budget and class structure agreed by the Full Governing Board in April. RJ acknowledged that in retrospect we, as a school could have communicated the information better and earlier

- **Do you feel that the announcement of the KS2 changes has been handled correctly? Was there a reason that parents were not consulted before a final decision was made?**
- **Children were asked to choose three friends who they would like to be in class with next year, or should I say, 'would concentrate best with'. This upsets a lot of children, including my daughter Daisy and us as parents. We were not given the full information on the changes before the children were asked to do this so we haven't been able to discuss this with Daisy and tell her what's happening. Why wasn't this delayed until after the meeting, or until we had the full facts?**

Parents noted that their child(ren) had been upset by asking to select three friends for next year/ new class and queried the rationale behind the decision to ask the children as this seems anomalous and doesn't make sense, especially where firm friendships are already in place. Several parents noted that friendships for their children change on a regular basis and so therefore it would be impossible to make all class selections based on friendships. One parent asked who would be the class teacher for next year, because any new teacher to the school would take up to six months to get to know the children and therefore would be poorly informed to make class selections.

RJ noted that it will be the current class teachers and herself who will make the final decisions on the classes the children will join to ensure good working links and that friendships are maintained.

Jane Morris felt that consulting the children was a positive approach and that it considered the friendships formed. She stated that if the school had not consulted the children about their friendships that would probably be considered unfair too.

Parents generally agreed with this but the consensus was that parents would have liked to have been pre-warned of this discussion, so they could prepare their children first.

It was noted that RJ had discussed it in an assembly a couple of days before the forms were distributed and children were not asked to select friends but to choose peers who they worked well with.

Parents expressed concerns that children were upset that they have not been 'picked'. Whilst it was acknowledged that this was not a popularity contest, discussion in the playground by the children could construe it that way.

**Kate Dimmock asked how, in the new class structure, teachers would meet all pupil needs.**

Jo Turner explained how teaching is all ability focused and flexible dependent on current subject/ skill being learnt. There will be no 'fixed' groups always working together. The new curriculum is designed to ensure all pupils achieve at the same level by the end of a Key Stage. The focus is on opening up the learning so that tasks are accessible to all pupils and there is no ceiling placed on any child's learning. Levels of progress no longer exist and once a child has grasped the learning target they are encouraged to expand the depth, breadth and application of that knowledge.

Parents asked how teachers can guarantee that every child gets the learning that they need in order to challenge themselves and progress. Jo clarified that Growth Mindset is focused on not limiting how much a child can learn. Teachers know their children really well at the school; it is something we are really good at, so we know how to set challenge and move pupils on.

**Mrs Barton was concerned how one teacher can teach such a range of abilities in e.g. a Year 5 -6 class where one pupil is a high achieving Year 6 and another is a very low achieving Year 5.** RJ noted that teachers already face that challenge within Year 6 where some pupils struggle with barriers to learning and are very low achievers. VD noted that subjects such as Literacy and Maths are taught on a cycle, where the same concepts are repeated but pupils are extended each time the cycle is repeated.

Jane Morris noted that teachers are trained in how to differentiate teaching between mixed ability pupils and this is their area of expertise.

**Mr Ainsley asked how we plan to validate the change [in class structure] We don't want to leave it to the end of the next academic year to find out it's not working.** JML outlined how governors and the Senior Leadership Team will monitor this. The School Development Plan will outline the progress we intend to make over the year. Governors will attend staff moderations and book scrutiny, go on 'Learning Walks', take advice from our School Improvement Partner etc. to ensure that children are making progress. JML noted that the external School Improvement Partner, who comes into school to support, challenge and offer advice, thinks the move to mixed age parallel classes at the school is a good idea.

**Will the metrics/ data be published?** JML noted that at this time no one is sure what assessment data will look like as there are no longer any levels of progress. All schools are currently waiting on central Government to release details on the assessment framework. Once this information is known then the SLT and Governors can develop a way of reporting progress data.

**Mrs Lyons asked why, if mixed age classes are a good idea, did the school move to single year group classes several years ago?** Jane Morris noted that the cohort sizes changed, as the school intake moved from 20 to 30 per year. She, and SF, noted that their children, who started in mixed age classes and then moved to single year classes did not really notice the difference.

A parent noted that she was happy to trust the school and staff with this decision and to give a good education, but historically she had a sense, which may be inherited, that mixed age classes were a negative thing and was due to being a small school and it was very positive to move to single age year groups. Now this has completely turned round and mixed age classes are being seen as positive. SF agreed with this view over time but acknowledged that he could see the real positives of mixed classes.

SM highlighted that the changes to the National Curriculum have to be factored into how education is provided. Under the old curriculum there were objectives and targets for every year group. Now the curriculum is presented as Year 3-4 and Year 5-6 and there are overarching objectives.

**Mr Peace: would it would not have been better to trial the parallel classes for a term, during the summer term, to see if it would work before moving across to it permanently in September.** SM acknowledged that transition can be a real challenge for some children and parent feedback has allowed the school to know that there is more work we need to do on this with the pupils. RJ stated that trialling the parallel class structure for one term would not be possible, as the structure for teaching for that academic year had already been planned out. There will be a transition day later in the term for pupils.

#### Jo and Graeme Peace

- **We chose Newtown because it was introducing single year groups. Why is this change being implemented so quickly with no consultation of parents?**
- **Why can you not introduce parallel teaching and keep single year groups?**

Mr & Mrs Peace noted that one of their children has joined the Reception Class without knowing that the school would be moving to parallel classes and that their decision would have been different if they had know about the change in class structure.

A parent noted that a positive aspect of the parallel classes, despite her reservations about the decision, was that it would aid good transition for children from a small primary school to a much larger secondary school. VD noted that a larger friendship circle (between two classes) means that in the move to secondary school, children are more likely to recognise more familiar faces and friends.

**Mrs Ainsley asked if there was a plan to support children who are anxious about the change in classes. Is there an ongoing dialogue?** RJ reported that circle time will give an opportunity for discussion but it was noted that some children may not be able to use this opportunity. RJ agreed to take these concerns on board and work with staff on improving transition.

#### Cassie and James Monkman

- **Can you confirm which teachers will be teaching which classes?**

RJ cannot confirm yet which teachers will be teaching which classes as posts are still being recruited. RJ expected to be able confirm teachers/ classes with reports at the end of term.

- **How can it be easy for a teacher to teach a class of children with a 2 year age range and have the more varying abilities than 1 year age range?**
- **Previous parents who experienced this teaching have advised that children reported doing the same work in Years5/6 and were therefore bored in Year 6. How will it be different this time to avoid this?**
- **How will you deal with the social issue of mixing age groups? For example, previous children have reported losing friends from their class who were actually a year older and went to secondary school. Surely this is more disruptive for children when an alternative is an option?**

These questions were answered in earlier discussion.

### Anna and David Pittard

- How will you prevent the Year 4 pupils dominating the Year 3 pupils in classroom activities?

JT, Jane May and SM described the learning attitudes being encouraged in class and children supported by teaching staff in their interactions.

- If the classes are mixed ability how will you ensure that the ability split is exactly the same across the classes?
- Will the classes be split 50/50 between the years?
- Which classrooms will the classes be in?
- Exactly which other schools in Exeter are considering this change?

Anne Pittard asked whether the parallel classes would stay the same through the two years. RJ confirmed that there was no plans to change the classes during that time but she could not make guarantees as the biggest deciding factor will be pupil mobility, which the school experiences a great deal of. Jane Morris also noted that the make up of the classes will change each year as the Year 4s leave the 3-4 Classes and move up, as will the Year 2s in the 3-4 Classes.

Parents and SM noted the enrichment opportunities of having teachers teaching, and confidence-building that the parallel classes can offer. Jane Morris noted that the shared workload of two teachers could make the lesson planning even more engaging and exciting for pupil and noted the Antarctica project undertaken this term.

Mr Marshall asked whether pupils can get ahead due to mixed classes, will younger pupils be exposed to greater challenge/ higher levels of learning. VD responded that there is the opportunity for pupils to work at greater depth/ mastery if they readily understand a certain objective. Jo Turner outlined how within the curriculum, the same objectives are identified for Year 3-4 and Year 5-6 and this is about increasing the depth and breath of understanding of the objective each time

A parent asked whether, due to the new curriculum, pupils were having to 'catch-up'. VD agreed that the range of the new curriculum and the expectations have risen greatly, but that school has been focused on this since the new curriculum was rolled out and children are achieving well.

### Karen and James Lyons

- It is true that a major consideration in making this change was to mix up certain cohorts, such as the current Year 5?
- What happens if mixed years do not work, how will this be assessed?
- What would you say to those parents who are thinking of talking their children out of this school? Many parents (and children) are talking about moving schools next year and this has caused great stress and upset to some children at school.

James Lyon asked what are the main challenges of teaching and working in this new class structure and what we have put in place to meet these challenges. SM noted that one of the biggest challenges will be allowing the parallel class teachers time to plan together. This has been addressed by timetable planning to ensure the teachers have their PPA release time together. JML noted the benefits of this shared planning time in more rigorous planning and accountability.

Mrs Ainsley asked whether the school was recruiting teachers experienced in mixed age classes. RJ confirmed that both teachers recruited were experienced. JM fed-back on the recruitment process and interviews, neither successful candidate showed concern that they would be teaching parallel classes and were very happy with the arrangement. Governors were very happy with the appointments.

## Helen and Chris Ainsley

- What was the decision making process that led to this change? E.G. who was involved/ consulted, were there any objections, if so how were these overcome, were schools already utilising this approach consulted etc.?
- What is the objective evidence/ rationale that supports this change i.e. the 'educationally sound reasons'?
- How and when will outcomes be objectively measured?
- Can the changes be made without year groups being mixed (i.e. teachers work collaboratively and in parallel?) but year groups remaining the same?
- What are the advantages of mixing year groups again? (Particularly within the context of Newtown having moved away from mixed year groups in 2012 and this at the time being seen as a positive change)
- In what way is this approach different from the mixed year groups that existed before?
- What are the pros and cons of the new approach versus the pros and cons of existing methods of teaching?
- How will this new approach impact (positively and negatively) on the way in which SEN are supported in the classroom?
- How can parents/ care givers be more actively informed, engaged and involved in significant changes in the school in future?
- Will children be grouped in the class according to ability for all subjects or working in mixed groups for some or all subjects? What does this approach actually look like in daily practice?
- How will the school ensure that they adequately identify and support children who are feeling worried, in managing the process and coping with this change?

A parent asked if there is a plan to move to parallel classes in Key Stage 1. RJ acknowledged that the staff team have discussed this idea but are going to wait and see how this works in Key Stage 2 before making a decision.

Mr Parslow asked how teachers would manage 'test training' for Year 6. VD explained the process currently used, which acclimatise children to testing but with minimal pressure and stress.

A parent asked once you have recruited your new teacher, at what stage are you going to inform children whose class they will be in, to manage transition. RJ parents will be informed first, letting them know what class their child will be in and who that teacher will be. There will be a transition afternoon, and our two new teachers have said they can attend this.

A parent asked if there was any plans for the children to spend more time together in their new class groups, not necessarily with their new teacher before the end of the summer. RJ agreed that this was quite a good idea and she would consider this with the staff team and see what we could do.

Mrs Barlow asked whether the move to parallel classes is definitely happening. JML confirmed that yes it would be in place in September.

A parent asked who will be making the final decisions about which classes children will be moving into. RJ stated that the class teachers will get together with the school SENDCo and discuss who goes where, taking into account friendships and needs. RJ offered to re-send forms home to parents so that they can discuss them with their children.

**Action: Ruth to resend home forms for children to select which 'friends' they work well with.**

JML thanked everyone for attending the meeting and for giving feedback. The Governing Board acknowledged that the need to improve communications with parents and stakeholders, in line with our vision for the school. JML encouraged parents to get in contact and let governors know how we can improve.

**The meeting closed at 19:15**