

6th July 2023

Academic year 2023- 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

As transition day approaches, I am writing to update you with our class and staffing structure for next academic year. Last year the school moved to a mixed class structure, as did many schools across Calderdale and this approach will continue next academic year. We have found that the mixed classes have worked successfully this year and have found there to be many proven benefits:

- There is a greater focus on individualisation
- Stronger differentiation to meet a wide range of needs
- Positive peer role models
- Pupils form wider friendships from children outside of their age group
- There is greater flexibility of learning opportunities

For further information about mixed classes please see the FAQ's attached to this letter. To further enhance the teaching of maths through school next year, we have made the decision for pupils in Key Stage 2 (years 3, 4, 5 and 6) to be taught maths in their year group rather than in their class. In order to support the children with their transition into their new year group, we have made the decision to keep the children in the same classes that they have been in this year. This will mean that the children will all move up to their new class with their peers, which I am sure you will agree will be supportive of the friendships that the children have built this year.

Below you will find a list of class names and class teachers for academic year 23/ 24.

| Current class | New class name | Year group | Teacher |
|---------------|----------------|-------------------|--|
| Donaldson | Attenborough | Reception /Year 1 | Mrs Sophie Midgley |
| Attenborough | Hawking | Year 2/ Year 3 | Mr Adam Baker |
| Seacole | Ennis- Hill | Year 4/ Year 5 | Mrs Claire Akroyd (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday AM) Mrs Angela Smart (Wednesday PM, Thursday and Friday) |
| Ennis- Hill | Luther- King | Year 5/ Year 6 | Miss Jade Vincent |

Mrs Smart is our newly appointed member of teaching staff who will be working alongside Mrs Akroyd in Ennis- Hill class. Mrs Smart is an experienced teacher and leader with an excellent track record of building great relationships with children and ensuring excellent progress. We are really excited to welcome her to the team. The rest of the teaching team are all familiar faces who our children and families will recognise from this academic year. Having a stable staff team, who the children are familiar with, is a great advantage and a huge positive for our school and families.

Sadly, we say goodbye to Miss Binns who will be going to work at another of our Trust schools and Miss Taylor who is moving on to pastures new. Both these staff members will be missed by adults and children alike, and I wish them lots of luck.

Transition day will be on Friday 14th July this year. This is a day when our year 6 children, who are transitioning to Brooksbank will visit their new Secondary School. We ask that our Year 6 parents make their own arrangements for drop off and pick up at their child's new school on this day. The rest of our children will have the opportunity to spend the morning with their new class teacher and will be learning all about their new inspirational person that their class is named after. I really do value the importance of a good transition programme and we want the children to feel as positive and excited about next year as possible. Additional transition has been put in place for our new reception children, year 6 and also any child with additional needs. Our SEND children will be bringing home a booklet to look through over the summer holidays with information about their new year group, as well as having extra visits to their new classroom and seeing their class teacher.

We are already looking forward to the new academic year and have lots of exciting plans for 2023- 2024.

My very best wishes,

Miss Horsfall

Principal

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Mixed classes at West Vale

The number of pupils in our year groups fluctuates over time, based on the needs of our community. For the school years 2022-23, we ran mixed classes in years 1 and 2, years 3 and 4 and years 4 and 5 and adapted our curriculum to meet those arrangements. For the year 2023-2024 we will be running mixed classes in all year groups.

Below are some answers to 'frequently asked questions' by parents about this.

Why and how has the decision to mix year groups been made?

- Every year we review the numbers in each year group, as well as the individual needs of pupils in the group, the staffing and the classes we have. We then model different scenarios for the year, and the following years, and discuss this with Governors and our Academy Trust. We consider the needs of the year groups alongside the budgetary implications of the different scenarios.
- We have to consider the best ways to meet the needs of all of the year groups. There is never one simple answer but a key factor is that we do not prioritise the needs of one year group above the needs of another.

Why do mixed classes happen in different year groups at different times?

- This is because of the fluctuating numbers over time that we have coming to West Vale.
- This changes over time as families move away from the area or change schools.

What are the staff thoughts about mixed classes

- Staff are aware of the complexities of teaching mixed classes. There is a wider than normal age range of pupils and the difference in maturity between the oldest and youngest pupils needs to be considered. Our curriculum is adapted so that pupils don't repeat learning from an earlier year group, and ensure that all pupils are stretched.
- However, they have identified the following benefits:
 - Children have a great opportunity to build independence in their learning. In this way, children do not always rely on adult support to access a task and become more confident independent learners
 - Children benefit in many ways from the opportunity to become an 'expert' for the younger children and a positive role model which the younger children often aspire to. However, this is not used as a strategy if it will mean the older child miss out on their own learning opportunities or that the younger children feel inferior to their older classmates.
 - In English mixed grouping allows for a wider range of vocabulary to be taught and children to learn stronger social and verbal competences. Children can become strong communicators using language often beyond their current year group
 - There can be a greater sense of co-operation and opportunities to work with a wider circle of peers and opportunities to build friendships from across different year group

How will the situation be monitored?

- Teachers regularly assess pupils, both informally (from day to day) and formally (with tests and other assessments). Where pupils need extra help we work on creative ways to support this. This could be in class or through intervention groups. This is the same whether within a mixed or single year class.
- Teachers regularly compare books across the team to compare outcomes and develop consistency between different teachers.
- Members of the Leadership Team frequently monitor lessons and books, and this includes observations of lessons. Where things could be improved, staff are supported in this.

- Three times a year we hold Pupil Progress Meetings which focus on monitoring assessment information and ensuring that pupils are making the progress we expect based on their previous attainment.
- Staff Appraisals are linked to pupils outcomes, progress over time, and progress towards targets
- Our Academy Trust monitor the progress of pupils termly, as well as over time.

How will the pupils be chosen for the classes?

- Staff have clear considerations when planning classes. We look carefully at the academic makeup of the classes to ensure that there are a range of abilities across each class in both year groups.

Children's feelings

How do the younger children feel in a mixed class? Do they feel they are behind & compare themselves to the older children?

- In our experience, pupils are aware that there are differences between their own skills in all areas of life, as it is natural to compare ourselves to others. Staff will support pupils to deal with these feelings, they will explain that each year group has different expectations and different work to do.
- Children are given specific age-appropriate outcomes for lessons so that they are clear about what they need to achieve.
- Expectations for children are often different and this is not always solely linked to age. Not every child is working at their age expectation. Lessons and activities are differentiated for all classes – mixed year group or not.

How do the older children feel in a mixed class?

- Most enjoy the mix and children carve out their own friendship groups – sometimes they sit in mixed age and sometimes with children from their own year group.
- In lessons, children understand that their work is another 'step on' and need to achieve specific objectives.

Will pupils' emotional needs be picked up, and pupils nurtured in a mixed class?

- We have a strong pastoral approach in school and work with all pupils on this through daily interactions and specific Personal and Social lessons.
- There are a number of children in school with complex or high-level emotional needs and we work with children and families, in different ways, in order to help support the pupils.

Do the pupils in mixed classes get on well?

- It is normal for friendships to emerge and develop in all classes. Pupils tend to find their own social groups. All children have occasional difficulties with friendships and social skills in all school years, and a key focus for education at West Vale is supporting pupils to learn to develop strong personal and social skills. In all classes though, pupils tend to work in small groups which are based more on academic need than friendships. This also helps pupils get to know other people.

Learning and the curriculum

Will the separate curriculums be covered?

- At West Vale we plan and teach the wider curriculum (eg science, history, art) lessons as a 2 year cycle across the school to accommodate mixed class teaching. We ensure that all areas of the National Curriculum are taught across the correct phase (Key Stage 1, Lower Key Stage 2, Upper Key Stage 2).
- English lessons have always been the same for both year groups although the finer teaching objectives for each year group differ.
- At West Vale Maths is taught in a bespoke way to each year group to ensure the content of the Maths curriculum is delivered

How do lessons work in a mixed class

- Most lessons take place as a whole class although staff plan creatively so that pupils are taught what they are needed in the way that will help them learn best.
- Sometimes teachers teach one year group at a time for short periods within a lesson, while the others do an activity led by the Teaching Assistant (TA) or work independently. This is how all classes at school work, but this can happen more in the mixed class. Because of this, we have carefully considered the staffing of both Teachers and TAs in all year groups.
- Teachers plan activities to ensure that the same children aren't always working with the Teaching Assistant or independently.
- Staff 'differentiate' activities which means that pupils have slightly different tasks, or more support or challenge, to ensure that pupils practice the skills that they need to move on at their level. This is the same in all classes, mixed or not.

How will pupils be sat in classes?

- At West Vale teachers set up their classrooms in the way that best facilitates learning for their classes. Some prefer tables in rows, others prefer tables in groups.
- In most lessons, pupils sit in a specified place, eg year group tables or with others working on the same task.

How will trips/ experiences be managed?

- At West Vale our curriculum offer is that all classes will have a class visitor, workshop and trip. These experiences will be class based.

