

At Freegrounds Infant School, our Pupil Admission Number (PAN) has traditionally been 90 pupils per year. However, due to a sustained reduction in the number of children in the local area, Hampshire County Council asked us to reduce our PAN to 60 from September 2026, as our intake numbers have fallen below 90. As infant class sizes are typically organised around 30 pupils, with a statutory maximum of 30 per class except in exceptional circumstances, this decline has required us to adapt our class structure.

In response, we moved from six classes to five in September 2025 across Key Stage 1 and are continuing to transition towards a model that reflects 60 pupils per year group. During this period of change, our current organisation for Year 1 and Year 2 includes a combination of mixed-age and single-age classes to ensure effective provision while numbers reduce.

For the 2026/27 academic year, our structure will consist of two Reception classes, one mixed Year 1/Year 2 class, two Year 1 classes and two Year 2 classes. Our experienced staff team understands both the benefits and complexities of mixed-age teaching and works hard to ensure that all teaching remains consistently high quality and well-adapted to meet pupils' needs.

We remain fully committed to providing the highest quality education for all our pupils. As part of this, we continually review and adapt our provision in response to changing circumstances. The continuation of a mixed-age Year 1/Year 2 class not only supports our transition to lower pupil numbers but also provides a valuable opportunity to enrich learning experiences for our children.

Benefits to Children

1. More Personalised Learning Experience:

The mixed-age class allows for a highly tailored approach to teaching, where children are taught based on their stage, alongside their age. This aligns with best practice in early years and Key Stage 1 pedagogy, where continuous provision, play-based learning, and thematic planning enable children to progress at their own pace.

2. Improved Confidence and Social Development:

Younger children benefit from observing and learning alongside slightly older peers, often accelerating their language, social, and self-regulation skills. Older children develop leadership, empathy and resilience as they model learning behaviours and support younger classmates.

3. Higher Adult-to-Child Ratios:

This structure allows for the redistribution of staffing to ensure a favourable adult-to-child ratio, enhancing small-group teaching and targeted intervention. These conditions foster a nurturing environment where all children can thrive.

4. Seamless Transition Between Year Groups:

Children experience continuity in routines, expectations, and relationships, reducing the anxiety often associated with the transition from Year 1 and Year 2. This model supports emotional well-being and accelerates adaptation to more formal learning structures.

Mixed-age classes encourage a spirit of co-operation where learners are more likely to support each other than compete. Giving older learners the chance to support younger learners socially builds their confidence and leadership skills. The younger learners also benefit as they see their older peers modelling positive, mature behaviours.

Challenges and Solutions

Teachers of mixed-age classes face the challenge of responding to a wide diversity of learners within their classroom - this is the norm in any primary classroom, and high- quality inclusive teaching and learning successfully addresses the full range of diversity.

We have developed a rolling programme of topics (cycle A and B) for our Key Stage 1 curriculum. This will be monitored and tracked by subject leaders to ensure full coverage is achieved. Foundation subject expectations are set out over a Key Stage, with the additional flexibility to deliver content earlier or later, based on the learners' needs. This ensures that learning is progressive for all learners.

Frequently asked questions:

HOW WILL TWO YEAR GROUPS BE TAUGHT ALONGSIDE EACH OTHER IN ONE CLASSROOM?

All children develop at different rates and it is best practice in mixed-age teaching, that pupils are placed based on their age, however with the knowledge we have of how all children learn, the pupils will be taught to their individual academic needs and not simply to their age. All classes in the school have a large range of maturity and attainment. By grouping the children based on age, we are actually likely to reduce the maturity gap that would be expected in a non-mixed class, where children can be as much as 364 days apart in age.

Teachers will choose work appropriate to the standard a child is working at, ensuring that all needs are catered for. In the majority of lessons, the children will start the session together, with the teacher targeting questions at individuals or groups of children at an appropriate level. We refer to this as 'flexible grouping.' Children will then be provided with appropriate tasks to consolidate or practise what they have been taught, with the teacher and/or learning support assistant working with children who require additional assistance or who need to be challenged to explore concepts in greater depth or learn something new.

HOW WILL TEACHERS PLAN, ENSURING COVERAGE OF BOTH THE YEAR GROUP CURRICULUMS AND PREVENTING REPETITION OF CONTENT?

With the exception of Maths, English and Science, the curriculum content isn't split into separate year group content, rather, there is an expectation for the end of the key stage. Subject Leaders have developed a progression of skills for children to work through in each year group. Ensuring coverage of national curriculum objectives for both year groups in the same classroom will therefore be easily facilitated by normal classroom practice.

HOW WILL WE ENSURE THE HIGHEST ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL CHILDREN?

Both national and local data for performance of children at the end of KS1 suggests that being placed in a mixed age classes has no negative impact on children's academic achievements. A mixed-age classroom means that the children will have greater flexibility to learn with children of their own standard. Children who find aspects of the curriculum more challenging will be supported in the same way as in single year classes. Children working above the expected standard will be provided with work which both deepens their understanding and moves them on to explore new concepts. As part of our curriculum, learning will continue to be focused on explaining reasoning and problem solving, both of which extend children's understanding without them having to access a separate curriculum. Rich texts will be carefully chosen, ensuring that they are easy to learn but contain the relevant sentence structures and vocabulary to stretch children at the appropriate levels.

HOW WILL WE ENSURE THAT CHILDREN COPE SOCIALLY AND EMOTIONALLY WITH CHANGES IN THEIR CURRENT CLASS STRUCTURES?

Experiences of schools in the county who currently operate in mixed-age classes show us that children thrive in these groups. Children learn to form wider friendships and relate to broader groups of children, creating a classroom atmosphere where children are eager to help others and seek support from their older peers rather than simply relying on adult support.

Will my child be held back if she/he is placed in a mixed age or split year group class?

Definitely not! The ways in which learning and teaching are organised in primary schools means that teaching and work is tailored to the needs and current achievement levels of individual pupils. The staff at our schools are very experienced at planning and delivering work to match the needs of mixed-age learning. They provide challenge for the more-able children and support for those needing more help whichever year group they are currently in. Furthermore, the school plans educational experiences for pupils in all classes in ways which ensure good progression and continuity, whichever year group or class they are in.

Will forming a mixed age or split year group class mean that my child's friendship grouping is being broken up?

Although care is taken in allocating pupils to classes, their social needs are still an important consideration and, in general terms, it is likely to be good for children to experience classes with different classmates so that their circle of friends and acquaintances can be extended beyond the traditional age boundaries. Where new classes are formed, it is of course perfectly feasible for schools to create opportunities beyond the standard curriculum for pupils to maintain contact with friends who have been allocated to other classes (such as at lunchtimes, breaktimes, PE etc.). Certainly, when children transfer to junior and secondary school, new friendship groupings in different subject areas become a fact of life, and this situation is generally welcomed by many children.