

Lightcliffe C of E Primary School

# Mixed Age Reception and Year One Classes

In partnership to  
**Educate, Nurture & Empower**



## Rationale: Mixed-Age Reception and Year 1 Classes

### Introduction of Mixed-Age Classes

The projected intake for September 2025 was significantly lower than in previous years, reflecting the wider decline in school-age populations across Calderdale. This required us to find a solution that was logistically viable while placing children's wellbeing, development and access to high-quality teaching at the centre of decision-making.

A model with just one mixed-age class and the remaining classes as single-year groups was explored, but this was not appropriate for these reasons:

- The numbers (Year 1: 49 pupils; Reception: 34 pupils) would have resulted in a mixed class containing only a very small number of Reception children, which we felt was developmentally unsuitable.
- Splitting Year 1 purely by age would have placed many of the most able pupils in the mixed class.
- Instead, we saw an opportunity: establishing three mixed-age Reception/Year 1 classes. This approach provides a highly supportive environment, enables access to rich provision, and is strongly aligned with what research shows to be most beneficial for young children.

### How We Developed the Model

Our approach was carefully planned and evidence-informed. The process included:

- Reviewing research on mixed-age teaching.
- Consulting with AMAT leaders, the Senior Leadership Team and governors.
- Seeking advice from the Local Authority and Early Excellence specialists.
- Learning from successful Ofsted-rated schools already using mixed-age classes.
- Considering staffing structures, timetabling and curriculum organisation to ensure full and appropriate coverage for both year groups.
- Meeting with Reception and Year 1 parents to explain the rationale and answer questions.
- Allocating Year 1 pupils into three balanced classes, considering friendships, ability, SEND and gender.
- Using visits to nurseries and pre-school settings to allocate Reception pupils using the same criteria, ensuring an appropriate range of ages and needs in each class.

### What the Research Shows

A strong body of research highlights several advantages of mixed-age classes in early primary education:

- **Academic and Social Growth:** Studies show that children in mixed-age classes often outperform peers in single-year groups and demonstrate stronger social and emotional development.
- **A Family of Learners:** Older children act as role models, supporting younger pupils with problem-solving and learning behaviours. This benefits both groups—older pupils gain confidence and independence, while younger children feel secure and included.
- **Healthy Social Environments:** Mixed-age settings promote positive friendships, sustained relationships and higher levels of self-esteem.

## **Benefits for Lightcliffe CE Primary School**

### **Team Teaching**

Children benefit from the expertise of four teachers working collaboratively across two-year groups. This creates strong opportunities for shared planning, moderation, and professional learning, ultimately enriching the curriculum and classroom experience.

### **Enhanced Learning Environment**

Mixed-age classes allow:

- Greater access to play-based provision for Year 1
- Quieter, focussed spaces for Reception children
- A flexible learning environment that supports a wider range of developmental needs

### **Smoother Transitions**

Year 1 children remain with familiar staff and in familiar spaces, reducing the typical anxiety associated with transition. Staff also benefit from richer knowledge of children's needs, experiences and next steps.

### **Social and Emotional Development**

Older pupils model positive behaviour and independence, which boosts confidence across both year groups. Supporting younger peers nurtures empathy and responsibility, while mixed-age friendships encourage belonging and emotional security.

### **Cooperative Learning**

Children naturally learn to help, support and collaborate with one another, building teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills.

### **Individualised Learning**

The structure allows for targeted teaching in smaller groups, enabling staff to stretch children who are ready for greater challenge and support those who need more time.

### **Broader Thinking and Vocabulary Development**

Mixed-age interactions expose children to a wider range of language, ideas and ways of thinking, enhancing vocabulary and reasoning skills.

### **Growing Independence**

Younger children take confident steps forward with the support of their older peers, reducing reliance on adult intervention.

### **What This Looks Like Day-to-Day**

- **Morning Session:**  
Children register in their mixed-age class and enjoy early morning activities together. They then split into year groups for phonics, reading, writing and maths. These sessions are taught by two teachers and two LSAs per year group, ensuring strong curriculum coverage.
- **Curriculum Planning:**  
Wider curriculum subjects follow a two-year cycle based on the Year 1 curriculum. These

topics then act as the stimulus for planning high-quality EYFS provision and Reception writing, embedding vocabulary and ideas through meaningful contexts.

- **Afternoons:**  
Children work in mixed-age groups within planned provision, with activities tailored to different levels of challenge. Year 1 pupils also complete recorded tasks to demonstrate understanding. Three teachers and four LSAs work flexibly across the phase.
- **Ongoing Assessment:**  
Staff meet regularly to discuss children's needs, progress and next steps. All class teachers maintain a clear understanding of both Reception and Year 1 pupils within their class.

## **Impact**

- Pupil Voice is overwhelmingly positive, and both year groups feel well supported.
- Staff have identified increased independence and resilience, with Reception pupils benefitting from Year 1 role models and Year 1 pupils gaining confidence from supporting younger peers.
- Parents are strongly in favour of the model, even those who were initially unsure.
- Assessment information shows strong progress for all pupils, including those with SEND and those working at greater depth.