

**This document has been archived
because it is no longer current.**

The Early Years Foundation Stage: Dacre Braithwaite Church of England Primary School

URN: 121627

Local authority: North Yorkshire

Date published: 18 July 2011

Reference: 120313

Brief description

How a small rural primary school delivers the Early Years Foundation Stage effectively in a mixed-age class.

Overview – the school's message

'Our school is typical of so many rural North Yorkshire primary schools in that staff have the challenge of planning for and teaching mixed-age classes. The school team is committed to providing an outstanding curriculum for all our pupils. One of the greatest issues has been ensuring we provide the correct balance of activities and level of challenge for Reception children and Year 1 pupils working together in the same classroom. We are confident that the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum gives our Reception children the best start to school life and we want our Year 1 pupils to benefit from this approach to learning in order to maximise their full potential.'



Catherine Lassey, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

Many factors contribute to successful class management in a Reception/Year 1 mixed class including: effective organisation; thorough and yet manageable observation and assessment; differentiated and creative planning using a variety of resources both indoors and outdoors; ownership of learning; and effective communication. In addition, the size of the school, its setting and policies, the learning styles of the children and the teaching styles of staff are

also key features. No two schools, staff or children are the same; therefore, what may work for one school, may not do so for another. It is about standing back, taking stock and having the confidence to do what feels right for the school and the children within it. Nicola Cox, the class teacher says that, 'While seemingly impossible at times, to get a balance and meet the needs of every child in a mixed Reception and Year 1 class, with the right level of support and a good deal of confidence and positivity, it can be done!'

The mixed Reception and Year 1 classroom at the school is set up as an Early Years Foundation Stage unit with a variety of continuous indoor and outdoor provision areas that are enhanced regularly to meet the needs of all children. Provisions within the areas are planned for at the end of each week based on observations and assessments made during the week. Sometimes, areas within the classroom are not planned in detail to allow independence and imagination to develop through the children's own selection of resources.



Outdoor provision area



Outdoor provision area

Planning for this mixed-age class is initially based upon the Year 1 curriculum with constant cross-references being made to the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Phonics lessons for each year group take place daily and are predominantly taught as discrete sessions in small ability groups. These sessions are conducted at a brisk pace. Children are able to use and understand appropriate vocabulary and the teacher incorporates fun activities and games to motivate and engage the children. Nicola Cox says: 'Time management can be tricky at times due to the requirements of the Year 1 curriculum and the differing needs of Reception children, and it

is especially so if the class size is large and staffing resources are limited. Success can be achieved however, when the unit is well organised, plans are thorough and staff are flexible in their approach.'

After an initial input on the carpet as a whole class, teaching staff make observations and question the children to move their learning on, or work with smaller groups or individuals on specific focus activities; for example, a teaching assistant working with Reception children and the class teacher with Year 1 pupils. Staff believe that in working this way, individual needs can be met more readily and assessments can be undertaken more easily.



Child-initiated learning outdoors

While focus groups are taking place, the rest of the class is encouraged to initiate and develop their learning in continuous provision areas. This approach allows social interactions to take place within and across year groups. Sometimes challenges linking to a specific area of learning are set up within continuous

provision areas, including in the high-quality outdoor areas and the children are encouraged



Independently taking care of plants outdoors

to move their learning forward and reach objectives in specific ways. Modelling by a member of staff is always carried out beforehand.

Topics and themes are mapped out with the children whenever possible to encourage ownership of learning. Lessons are planned according to particular interests or questions raised which helps to keep the children engaged and motivated in their learning.

Children are confident to explore and develop their own ideas. For example, during a topic on light and dark, one group chose to produce their own play based on astronauts arriving on a different planet and meeting a group of aliens; another group produced a shadow puppet play; and a mixed group of Reception and Year 1 pupils created their own dance. They were performed with great confidence to the whole school at the end of the day. Two pupils made high-quality 'space buggies' in the construction area while others made planets with mod-rock or created aliens with dough. Children work extremely well in partnership with one another and the younger pupils benefit from learning skills from those in Year 1. 'Talking partner' and 'buddy' sessions are used for children to develop their speaking and listening and also their creative and thinking skills through discussions and teamwork. These lessons are particularly successful as the teacher takes every possible opportunity to link areas of learning and to ensure that no time is wasted; every minute is used to reinforce concepts in learning, such as practising telling the time while waiting in the queue for lunch. There are high aspirations of what children can achieve which inspires them to want to achieve the best for themselves.



Reception and Year One working cooperatively together



Sharing 'learning journeys' together on non-school uniform day

Learning objectives and success criteria are shared with the children and differentiated for each year group so that they know what is expected of them and why. Children are reminded of their aims during lessons so that they can take note of their progress. At the end of the lesson, they are asked to check if they have achieved the success criteria. Self- and peer-assessment takes place through evaluation of any work produced or through discussions on the carpet.

Communication with parents and carers takes place on a daily basis through the children's planners, a 'This week we have ...' year-group newsletter, and the

School Liaison Officer. 'Learning journeys' for all children across both year groups are sent home to parents and carers at the end of each half term portraying photographs and evidence of children's work. They are returned at the start of term with parental and child contributions so that children can share their learning from home. As one parent states, 'The

children flourish because they are valued as individuals and nurtured to be responsible and loving people. They are constantly encouraged to develop their own interests at school and at home in practical ways. The careful balance of child-initiated learning coupled with high expectations allows all children to find their strengths and thus enables them to be effective learners.'

Files and books are efficiently organised so that evidence can be collected and found readily for each child. Reception children have individual learning profiles which display their progression through the year across the six key areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage.



Planning learning together

Evidence collected for each child is dated, annotated and placed in the most appropriate area of learning with cross references being made to other areas of learning where necessary. An area for assessment is also included and Early Years Foundation Stage profile scales are ticked off when they are achieved and then highlighted at the end of each term. Although kept in school, learning profiles are shared with children and their parents and carers.

Year 1 children have their own literacy, numeracy, science, religious education and topic books. All work is dated and annotated showing next steps for progression. They are shared with each child so that they know where they are in their learning and what they need to do to progress further. Parents and carers enjoy looking through these with their children at parents' evenings as well as browsing through whole-class science and information and communication technology books, and a 'We are happy' photograph book. Individual targets for Reception and Year 1 children are also set and discussed with children and their parents and carers each half term.



Reception/Year 1 buddy system

The children are happy, confident and motivated to learn. The atmosphere is positive and engaging, and the classroom vibrant and stimulating with examples of the children's own work and photographs on the walls. Children thrive and particularly enjoy having a Reception or Year 1 buddy to work with or turn to when needed. 'Year 1 children feel more responsible and show a sense of pride when helping younger peers,' says Nicola. 'Reception children listen and respond well to older peers giving them direction. Collaborative working is fantastic when tasks are appropriately challenging and interesting. Working cooperatively with others provides each child with numerous opportunities to revise and consolidate their learning.'

So what are some of the key features of this success?

1. Understanding the children and differentiation

Getting to know the children well and understanding what they already know in terms of prior learning is fundamental to all teachers. This is especially the case for those in a mixed Reception/Year 1 class as time needs to be managed efficiently because of the varying demands of both year groups and their respective curricula. In recognising that each child

develops at a faster or slower pace in comparison with others, staff within the unit always ensure that planning and questioning is differentiated using appropriate levels of language and vocabulary.

2. Observations and assessment

Sessions begin with a review of previous learning as this gives the children the chance to check how much they have retained and to consolidate their understanding further. It also enables teachers to observe and assess individual responses, determine what questions to ask next and how to take lessons forward in order to provide the right level of challenge.



Enabling children to explore and learn independently at a pace that is right for them

Observations for Reception children are predominantly carried out on short observation sheets with photographs taken by staff and children on a daily basis. 'Wow!' moments are also captured on sticky notes which, for Year 1 children, contribute to their 'learning journeys' and are used as assessment evidence. Long observations for Reception children supplement class work, photographs and shorter observations on an ad hoc basis. All observations are dated and annotated. 'It is really difficult trying to fit everything into the day when teaching a mixed Reception/Year 1 class and so we have decided to focus upon what works best for our children and what can be easily managed,' says Nicola.



Working together through play

3. Teamwork and Communication

As in most areas, communication is fundamental to the successful functioning of a mixed-age class. Lines of communication within the unit are open on all levels so that staff, children, parents and carers understand clearly what is happening. Teaching staff foster positive relationships which enable them to work together effectively and to generate a happy learning environment for the children. The children are encouraged to be resourceful at all times so that they know where to find help and not become too reliant on the teacher.

4. Ownership and independence

Children are given various daily responsibilities and are actively invited to think about what and how they want to learn. They are given clear objectives and offered choices whenever possible so that they can take responsibility for their learning and choose activities that will challenge them most. Cooperative working across both year groups provides all children with opportunities to develop negotiation and time management skills, in addition to social skills.



Mrs Cox having fun dancing with the children indoors

5. Flexibility



Mrs Cox learning with the children in the school woods

Staff are prepared to be flexible with their planning and are not afraid to 'go with the flow' to meet the needs of the children. Nicola says, 'Veering off the well-planned track can be exciting, leading to some fantastic independent thinking and producing some great results! As long as the learning objectives are kept in mind for both year groups at all times, having the confidence to follow the children's lead can be very rewarding. We are often amazed with the questions and ideas our children come up with and how much we can learn from them!'

The school's background

Dacre Braithwaite Church of England Primary School

is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. It is situated in a remote rural setting, four miles from the nearest village. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is half the national average. The school has been successful in achieving a number of awards including Highly Effective School, Quality Mark Inclusion, Healthy School and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.



Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

To view other good practice examples, go to:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice