

Barnes Farm Junior School

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Dear Parents/Carers,

Achievement for All

A shift in our approach to the learning and teaching of Maths

Following unanimous endorsement from the Governing Body last night, we are writing to let you know of an important shift in our approach to the learning and teaching of Maths from September 2015 at Barnes Farm Junior School.

For many years our approach has been to teach children in one of three sets based on their overall maths attainment level. Children can, and have, moved in and out of different sets throughout their time at school. This movement, however, has always been limited by the need to still have three distinct teaching groups. Lower attaining children have been placed in smaller groups to enable a higher teacher:pupil ratio.

Our aim is that we want the very best for every child in a learning environment where children work hard and achieve in response to excellent teaching.

Following a recent review of our very latest outcomes at the end of Y6, this well-intentioned approach of 'setting' is no longer achieving our aims as well as we would like. Significant groups of children are not achieving as well as other comparable pupils across the country. Yet these very same children are doing as well as other pupils across the country in other subjects such as reading, for example. This leads us to the conclusion that 'grouping by attainment' is limiting, not enabling, achievement for significant numbers of our pupils. The respected Education Endowment Foundation (formally known as the Sutton Trust) has undertaken research into this area and found that, on average, where children are grouped by ability they progress 1 month less each year than other comparable pupils where this is not the case. A copy of this research is now on the school website.

Children need to feel that there is never any limit on what they can achieve. To quote our motto, if the children 'aim high' we should be able to engineer the right conditions for them to 'fly higher'.

Therefore, from September 2015, children will be taught maths largely within their own class in line with our approach to all other National Curriculum subjects.

This is also the right time to make this shift for the following additional reasons:

- We are launching a new scheme of work for Maths which has been completely revised to match the needs of the New Curriculum 2014
- The teachers have just received extensive training on improving the way we plan for Maths as a result of this investment in a new scheme of work
- 2015/2016 is the first year that all our year groups are being taught the new curriculum.

It is important to outline that learning will still be differentiated to most closely match your child's need. We know, from experience, that children have different strengths and weaknesses in Maths depending on the area of focus. One child who struggles with number and place value can actually excel in geometry (shape and space), for example. By teaching in more mixed ability groupings, these different areas of strength can be better developed and reacted to. This way of organising the teaching of Maths enables the teacher to react more dynamically to the strengths and weaknesses of the pupils for whom they are responsible. It also, importantly, enables Maths to be taught at any time and combined with any subject to further deepen the application of maths skills into other areas.

At Parent consultations, the teacher you meet with will be able to give you consistent and detailed feedback on your child's progress rather than having to rely on another teacher's evaluations (as may have been the case with 'setting'). There may still be times where the children are grouped or taught in different groups based on their current need in a unit of work. We will do this in order to best match the needs of the pupils. For example, we may plan additional interventions to really extend our higher/lower attaining pupils or those that are not making sufficiently rapid progress.

The Leadership Team, staff and Governors will also continue to monitor the impact of these changes through pupil outcomes (results), lesson observations and other measures in order to review our overall effectiveness in this area.

We are committed to raising achievement further for all pupils in Maths. Regardless of the set into which your child has been grouped, the primary focus of all our staff continues to be improving the way in which we most closely match the needs of each and every pupil in order to extend and deepen their understanding at every opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

The Leadership Team at Barnes Farm Junior School