



Parent Briefing

'Success for All'

How Students are Grouped for Teaching

There are many ways in which students can be grouped and placed in classes. Ensuring that students are taught in appropriate groups helps to support them to achieve the very best of their ability. This briefing attempts to share our thoughts around groupings and gives an overview of the set labels used.

Our Aims

Our priority is to ensure that every student receives high quality learning opportunities and challenge for all to achieve, regardless of which class they are in.

Most importantly we believe some of the essential parts of learning are:

- Each student is set their own aspirational targets
- Appropriate teaching and support is in place to allow students to meet, and hopefully, better these targets
- Marking and feedback takes place regularly to ensure each student knows what they need to do next.

How We Group - In some subjects, ability groups may be implemented and in others, more broad ability groups are established. Curriculum Leaders use the following information to help carefully construct these groups:

1. *Performance Data (including SATs results and standardised tests)*
2. *A full range of Performance Data from 'in school assessments'*
3. *The professional judgement of teachers*
4. *Recommendations from primary teachers in Year 7*
5. *Other factors, as necessary, may be taken into account in relation to each student's own needs and situation*
6. *The cohort make up.*

The way that subjects interact to make the school timetable is complicated. Subjects may exist in their own discrete blocks of half year groups, where the Curriculum Leader is able to set students independently of other subjects and allow for set movements without consultation with other subject areas. Some subjects may share common class setting, leading to the need for communication between linked subjects in order to establish and facilitate moves.

Essentially then, while we have to use numbers to identify classes (usually 1 to 6), 1 does not necessarily mean a top set and 6 a lower set. For example, at present in Modern Languages, 1 and 2 identify students taking two languages, 3 and 4 are those taking French, while 5 and 6 are those taking German. So, a very able student in German could have a 6 against the class number they are working in.

Classes at Key Stage 3

Subject ability grouping will vary in its structure across different curriculum areas. The following list shows some of the ways that subjects may set students:

1. As a large school, when we use setting, there may be more than one 'top set'. For example, students in Key Stage 3 Geography/History blocks, in sets 1 and 2, follow the same curriculum. Students in the remaining sets may be supported more by their teacher, addressing a student's needs with the additional support of Learning Support Assistants.
2. Mathematics and Science setting in Years 7 and 8 follows a 1-6 set number pattern for each year half. Mathematics teachers regularly assess students' work and, in consultation with the Science department, may move students between sets so that the needs of the student in mathematics can be met in the most appropriate way. The mathematical link to science is explicit but the science department's setting is less rigid than that of mathematics, with sets 1 and 2 following the same curriculum aims. Likewise for sets 3-5, whilst set 6 allows for students who need any extra support.
3. Linked subjects have a common class set—ICT, Music, Art and PSHEE/Ethics/Lifeskills. Even though the classes, particularly in Year 7, may well be created in terms of Mathematical or English ability, the set numbers in no way relate to the student's Art, ICT, Mathematical or English ability. We would expect our best musicians, computer programmers and artists to be spread across the teaching classes, with appropriate differentiation of teaching taking place.
4. Setting by gender and House. Students in Year 7 PE are put into gender House classes (for example Altair boys - 7PE1N class) with a view to students building strong competitive links with their House, ready for the many House competitions.

There are many other possible variations to the above models that could be used within departments to make ability grouping successful. However, the underlying principle is one of grouping to ensure appropriate challenge and effective differentiation of learning for every individual student.

Classes in Key Stage 4

In Years 10 and 11 there continues to be half year groups of ability classes in the separate blocked core subjects (Mathematics, English, Science, Design Technology). Curriculum Leaders will ensure that the students follow the correct examination pathway relevant to needs and ability.

Preference subjects exist across the whole year group. Where a subject appears only once in a block the class will exist as a broad ability class, where the class teacher will differentiate work appropriately, so that every student is challenged to achieve the best of their ability.

Procedures and Timings for Class Changes

Throughout the year there will be a need for class changes and teachers are continually assessing students both formatively (lesson by lesson outcomes along with homework tasks completed) along with summative assessments (end of topic/term assessments).

Where a subject appears in its own block, Curriculum Leaders and teachers will consider class groupings at appropriate times of the year and make any changes which will allow the students to achieve their full potential.

Where a subject is linked with other subjects, a student may be proposed for a set change (in order to support the student) by any of the linked subjects. It is only when agreement is reached by all subjects that a student may be moved sets.

During the year some of our students will leave us and many more may join. This movement does have impact on the cohort, leading to a further need to make class changes.

A move of class should not be viewed negatively if the student is working as hard as they possibly can. Please remember, the numbers allocated to a class do not always relate solely to ability. We ask you, as parents, to support if a change of class is made, so that your child's motivation is maintained. Indeed, we have seen many examples where set moves that initially are seen as negative, have greater motivation and success. We will talk to students before any changes are made to classes so that they understand any changes.

In Summary

We come back to our aims of each student knowing their targets, being taught and supported appropriately and knowing what they need to focus upon, whichever group they are placed in.

As you can appreciate from the examples given in this briefing, the timetabling and appropriate grouping for students is a very complicated task!

Just as you, as parents, wish your children to succeed to the best of their ability, Thorpe St Andrew School and Sixth Form shares this desire. The staff are professionals who use their judgements to support, motivate and encourage.