

Student Grouping Policy

Stoke Newington School is a local community school and prides itself on being an inclusive school that demands the best for and from every student.

We recognise within this policy that the effect of student groupings on learner attainment is subsidiary to:

- a) Well trained teachers with
 - a. high expectations from all staff
 - b. strong teacher-student-parent/carer relationships
 - c. great student engagement and motivation
 - d. effective teaching in all classes on a daily basis
 - e. excellent skills in teaching disadvantaged students so they make best progress
- b) Well led teachers:
 - a. high expectations
 - b. strong teacher-student-parent/carer relationships
 - c. greater student engagement and motivation,
 - d. a rich, progressive and engaging curriculum
 - e. effective use of data and feedback by staff and students
- c) Students with an ethos:
 - a. of high expectation
 - b. emotional and academic resilience
 - c. with well engaged supportive parents and carers that actively encourage students
 - i. and are interested in how well they are doing both socially and academically
- d) Parents and carers
 - a. With high expectations of the young person
 - b. With high expectations of the school
 - c. That are interested in what happens in school
 - d. That support their young person
 - e. That trust the school to do well
 - f. That intervene appropriately when they are concerned about any aspect of the young person in school.

Student groupings:

The school strongly believes that for students to be a productive and happy member of our community they need to be able to work with others of different abilities, genders and languages. We see this as an important social skill and a key element of preparing young people to be happy adults that are well prepared for a successful personal and working life in a modern multi-cultural, multi-lingual society.

The school therefore believes that students should be taught in groupings that allow them to make the best progress towards achieving their full academic potential and recognise that this may mean that they are taught in a number of different groupings at different points in their school career. These combinations will include mixed ability groups, defined ability/talent groups, single gender groups and balanced gender groups. Students may also be involved in short interventions groups that are focused on only one aspect of their school participation, including but not exclusively early English language acquisition, subject intervention groups and literacy or numeracy intervention groups.

Background and issues:

We recognise that for every argument in favour of ability groupings there are as many against.

- a) A major study by the Education Endowment Foundation found that "attainment grouping appears to benefit higher-attaining pupils and be detrimental to the learning of mid-range and lower-attaining learners".
- b) There are also concerns that setting hits pupils from poor backgrounds who are more likely to be assigned to lower groupings often because they have made less progress at KS2 or KS3
- c) The school has a very strong policy on seating plans and this is seen as an important part of teacher planning. Ensuring that teachers understand the different abilities and personalities in the classroom and how to get them working effectively is a crucial part of our teaching philosophy.
- d) Historically, some lower sets have contained students whose behaviour for learning at times gets in the way of their learning. This is something that we will actively challenge as poor learning behaviour will prevent students making good progress in school.

Option Groupings

- e) Informal school created groupings occur when students choose their options in Year 8. These groupings generally respond to the aspirations of the young people in terms of their subject choice. For the last 3 years we have been more active in monitoring these groupings to make sure that students are choosing a range of subjects that include an appropriate academic subject such as History or Geography or a Language and that all students but particularly PPI students are properly equipped to choose aspirational A Level subjects post 16.
 - a. We also monitor the makeup of some of the non-academic subjects and make changes to them when we feel that the groups are over represented by students with an EHCP plan or where there groups of students who are major behaviour concerns or are over represented by PPI students.
 - b. We provide a small number of students with a supported pathway in KS4 this is for students who even with support will struggle to get at least a grade 2/3 at GCSE. Some of these students will have an EHCP plan for a specific learning difficulty others may be going through the EHCP process. The students will do the core offer of English, Maths and Science and then go into specific groups that are supported in KS4 such as Art & Photography that has proved to be very successful. There are also an IT course, additional Maths and English and potentially Technology and Sport courses that will be on offer.

Accountability

- The leadership group will continue to have an ongoing dialogue with the core subjects about grouping strategies and how these are being used to meet the needs of all students.
- As the new curriculum develops this will require even more careful monitoring as there is a clear bonus with the Progress 8 measure when students get into the top grades 7 to 9 or A to A** but it also rewards students that have made good progress and attained a D.

- If the current grouping strategies do not deliver the appropriate grade distributions that we need as a school then we might have to review the situation and ask departments to be more explicit in how they use student groupings to meet the needs of all students but with specific reference to the needs of the most able cohort.

Principles:

- e) We believe that unless there is a strong reason that leads to better progress for all, students should be taught in mixed ability groups as this leads to better social cohesion and personal development.
- f) Disadvantaged students will be proportionately spread across sets; this will be linked to their target grades
- g) No disadvantaged student can be demoted into a lower set than their target grade would warrant
- h) All involved with creating sets must ensure that disadvantaged students' progress must be favoured within any setting criteria.
- i) Middle sets should normally be taught by the most experienced staff in the department
- j) Intervention groups should normally not be taught by NQT's

Setting

- a) We also recognise that some subjects practice is based on setting.
 - a. The reasons for this could include:
 - i. Reducing the range of learning skills in the class to help teachers to plan more effectively to meet the needs of individuals and groups of students and to provide suitably challenging work for all
 - ii. Allows teachers to plan more effectively at GCSE for different content in Higher and Foundation papers where these will exist.
 - iii. It allows teachers to use different types of teaching styles better suited to different learner skilled and understanding groups.
 - iv. Students at the very bottom of the learning skills range can get more targeted and specialist help to catch up.
- b) Seating plans should always be used and should mix students in terms of gender, ethnicity, PPI, Non-PPI and ability. Disadvantaged students are expected to be sat at the front or middle of the class – not the back.
- c) Where setting exists in subjects it is understood that subject ability is not fixed but a reflection of the students current learning skills within a subject.
- d) Learners mature at different speeds
- e) Good well planned teaching and learning allows students to make progress beyond their initial targets.
- f) Setted groups still need to have differentiated teaching resources and class practice as setted groups are still mixed in their ability.
- g) We understand that poor behaviour can negatively affect student progress but it should not be the determining factor in students being put into sets.
 - a. Where a student is in at risk of being moved down a set, a meeting must be held with parents to explain why the change is being made and the reasons for it e.g. lack of homework.
 - i. We would expect to see an evidence trail of intervention and contact with parents and carers. Disadvantaged students may not be moved down sets below their target grade.

- b. Departments must have a six week period to remedy this before the student is moved
 - i. Additional homework
 - ii. After school support in the department
- h) Behavioural needs, as identified by the SEN team, will be a factor in making up groups. Unless this is clearly identified supported learning group we will aim to have no more than 20% of students on the SEN register for behavioural linked needs in any standard grouping.
- i) Where possible, all sets are parallel to allow the maximum number of students to access higher level work.
- j) When sets become unbalanced with target group representation the departments will put additional support in place to enhance the progress of underrepresented students such as PPI boys, specifically TKC, BCR or white boys.
- k) We ensure that lower ability setted groups still have challenge and aspiration by appropriate use of materials, aspirational visits, celebrations. Etc.
- l) If there is any doubt as to priorities, the students who are disadvantaged are to be favoured by school actions, including at times, receiving a class size bonus when classes are being set up

Mixed ability groupings

Mixed ability groupings such as tutor groups or practical groups need to be created with a great degree of care and attention to make them work and we should monitor these just as much as setted groups to make sure that they work for all children

1. Groups need to have an agreed number of children that fall into a specific group
 - a. Students with previous record of low attainment
 - b. Students with previous record of high attainment
 - c. Balanced by gender
 - d. Students with statements or EHCP that include Behaviour or Social and Emotional needs as an identified group need to be balanced across classes.
 - e. Students that have English as an Additional Language
 - f. PPI
 - g. Ethnicity
2. Where groups do not work we need to be prepared to intervene quickly to ensure students are being properly supported
 - a. We need to be prepared to make evidence based change
 - i. HOY learning walks
 - ii. SLT learning walks

Responsibilities:

The headteacher in consultation with the appropriate SLT members will have a termly review of school implementation of this policy and initiate any necessary actions.

Appendix:

Definitions:

Banding putting students into broad ability bands normally for **all** of their teaching from year 7 with an expectation of little movement between bands.

This was very much the old model of 3 Bands A, B and C. There are many fundamental flaws with banding and it becomes very much a self-fulfilling prophesy, if students are only being taught the subject content for their band, how do they move from one band to another? Then if they are promoted from band B to band A they will start with a big subject knowledge deficit to overcome.

Setting is a more precise grouping of students based on subject ability groups and can happen in a number of ways:

Strict setting, the model used in maths teaching, breaks students into relatively narrow ability groups from highest set 1 to lowest set 5 or 6. (Although they may not be called that) A well-managed setting regime relies on regular testing of students to monitor their progress and regular resetting of groups to make sure that students are always in appropriate sets. Where this regular testing and movement does not happen effectively you end up with a group that becomes fixed just like a banding. You also have the issue of students not being taught the higher level material so potentially if they are moved up, they have to overcome a curriculum knowledge deficit.

In practice sets will vary depending on the numbers of students in each ability group.

Each set will still be mixed ability to a degree and teachers still have to plan to meet the needs of individual students within that set e.g. even if it is a top set 1, there will be students that should be getting a grade 9 and others who will get a grade 7.

As the ability groupings coming into the school change the number of sets in different ability group's change. Recently this has meant many more students being in the higher and middle sets and many fewer students being in the lower and bottom ability sets.

Leadership have also challenged the setting based on behaviour rather than ability. Sometimes parents complain about mixed ability classes when they are really complaining about some poor behaviour.

Mixed ability classes require appropriate teaching – with significant differentiation.

We also have made provision for a very small number of young people who come to us below NCL2.

Top sets	4	7,8,9
Middle Sets	4	4,5,6,7
Lower Middle Sets	2	3,4,5
Supported groups	1	1,2,3

Current arrangements March 2018

There is currently very little ability grouping in years 7 and 8 with none of the core subjects English, Maths or Science setting. There are some small intervention supported study groups in Maths and English.

Maths set from year 9 through to year 11.

English set in Year 10 and 11.

Science is more complicated because we allow students a choice of doing Triple Science or Double Science, many students in the Double Science groups will have targets of an 7+ . This does mean that the Double Science groups tend to have a full spread of ability in them and Triple Science a much narrower spread of ability and this tends to be reflected in the Triple and Double Science results.

1. In principle this requires stronger teachers in the double science groups and more planned differentiated work to address the needs of all students in the double science groups.

Students Views about Groupings

It would be true to say that the students in the student voice group held quite strong views about grouping with the majority feeling that in maths and English, they should be set so that students of the same ability could work together.

Students in the meeting who were in lower sets felt that they were more able to do the work and that they could aim to get into the higher sets was motivational. They also said that it was motivational to see students moving up sets and this opportunity needed to be genuine. There was a clear view that they felt more able to participate in the lessons because they did not have to worry about people being “cleverer than them”

There was one very firm dissenting voice that felt very strongly that dividing students up was wrong and helped create barriers between students rather than making them come together as a community. The student also felt that in areas where there was no setting students were more able to learn from each other and were encouraged to do this.