



Brumby Junior  
School

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Headteacher: Mr P Foster

## **Moving from SET teaching to Class Teaching**

Dear Parent/Carer,

Since the move to the new, much-harder, higher expected-standards for primary-aged pupils, schools have had to re-examine a great deal of the systems which they use. Our results in each year group between June 2015 and June 2016 had dipped in reading and mathematical reasoning, mostly due to the higher expectations. Teachers needed time to adjust to teaching much harder subject-matter, and pupils needed time and support with work which was now much more difficult.

During this time, we could see that pupils were finding it hard – we had many, many less pupils achieving the new “higher” standards (known as working at greater depth), whilst other pupils found it very hard to achieve age-related expectations in their year group. In short, more than half of our pupils were below the new national standards last year. In the past, 85%+ of our pupils were regularly meeting age-related expectations (level 4) and around 30-50% were working above that standard (level 5 or level 6).

Since June 2016, we have acted upon solid educational research to stop our pupils underachieving. The biggest changes have been moving to class literacy (June 2016) and class maths (trialled since December 2016). This educational research states clearly that mixed attainment teaching benefits all pupils, but especially benefits lower attaining pupils and those who the government classes as disadvantaged.

Whilst there are many benefits, there are concerns too. One fear is that the highest-attaining pupils begin to underachieve. This is a real concern for parents, teachers and school leaders, as it also is for pupils. There have been valid concerns from parents that pupils have been asked to help others, rather than continue their own learning. This should not happen. We are very clear on this matter: pupils are expected to work together, challenge one- another and support one another, but never at the expense of their own progress.

In lessons, every day, we frequently hear conversations in classes between pupils of different attainment levels which benefit both children equally: one learns from the explanation given to them by the other, who in turn benefits from having to clarify their own thinking, express themselves clearly and check that their audience understands their message. Children sometimes don't see this as "learning", yet the whole class improves as a result.

Overall, we have been very pleased by the pupils' response to what has been a very major change: parents can rest-assured that all pupils are able to work on challenging materials which are appropriate to them.

Interestingly, we have found that the change to class-teaching has shown pupils that they are often better than they thought they were – choosing the "harder" task has given them lots of success. Inversely, some pupils from higher sets have found that they have been challenged by work which pupils from "lower sets" have had success with, and upped-their-game as a result. The quality of work in pupils' books across the school is the highest it has ever been right now.

The trial-system is working, yet we have more improvements planned too – especially to enable our pupils who have secured key skills and knowledge to extend themselves even further.

Whilst we trial many systems at Brumby, all with the goal of improving matters for pupils, we have not traditionally informed parents of all such trials. I feel that this is a mistake on my part as Headteacher, and one that I plan to address. Please accept my apologies, and be confident that all trials which effect pupils and families will be better publicised in future – both on the school website and in letters to parents. Your views shape our school, so please continue to make contact with us through the usual channels – the gate in the morning is a brilliant time to catch us!

Yours Sincerely

Mr P Foster

Headteacher