



Student Grouping Policy

At Isaac Newton Academy our aim is to equip every student with the knowledge, learning power and character necessary for success at university and beyond. Careful consideration as to the optimal student grouping arrangements for learning is central to achieving our ambitious goals.

What research tells us about the impact of mixed groupings v setting

Academic research suggests that while 'mixed ability' teaching is undoubtedly harder for teachers (due to the attainment range within the class), it boosts achievement for lower and middle performing students. Conversely, research by James Kulik and Chen-Lin Kulik of Michigan University found that 'gifted and talented' pupils achieved significantly more when grouped with like-scoring peers, but only when they were provided with programmes to specifically meet their needs. The same study found that pupils who were grouped by performance for a specific subject had a better attitude towards that subject.

The Sutton Trust concluded from an extensive study in 2011 that "The evidence is consistent that though there may be some benefits for higher attainment pupils in some circumstances of setting, these are largely outweighed by the negative effects on attitudes for middle and lower performing learners, with an average effect size of about 0.12 (one month over an academic year)... although some reviews suggest the overall impact on learners is negative (-.06)

Our challenge at Isaac Newton Academy is to ensure that students performing at all levels are challenged and supported appropriately, whatever the grouping arrangement.

Mixed groups enable children to develop socially and avoid the psychological damage and feelings of inadequacy that setting can reinforce. Professors Boaler and Hallam, in separate studies (1997 and 2002 respectively), have found that setting compounds a historical cycle of poor performance among children from low socio-economic backgrounds and reinforces the notion of boys as slow achievers. Boaler says research on attainment grouping has persistently shown a high correlation between social class and setting, with social class acting as a filter that results in the over-representation of working class children in lower sets. "The best predictors of a child being in the bottom set were being a boy, being born in the spring or summer, being born into a lone-parent family and having a low cognitive ability score." Hallam, S. and Parsons, S.: *Prevalence of streaming in UK Primary Schools, 2011.*

Our challenge at Isaac Newton Academy is to ensure that there is a healthy mix of criteria used to determine student grouping arrangements, not just academic performance levels. Tutor groups will be created in such a way as to ensure a complete mix in terms of prior attainment, gender, socio-economic, background, ethnicity, SEN, EAL and month of birth. In any given year students will study some lessons in mixed classes and others in setted groups. The make-up of all classes will be monitored closely to avoid an over or under-representation of particular groups.

Research has shown that typically, after a child has been placed in a set, he or she is unlikely to move to a different one: a 2002 report noted that 88% of children organised into sets at the age of 4 remained in the same group until they left school.

Our challenge at Isaac Newton Academy is to review group arrangements at the end of each term (half term in core) and to move students from one group to another if their performance level in relation to their peers has changed or, for other educational reasons, a move is desirable.

Boaler argues that it is harder for teachers to motivate students in a lower set. However Hallam says that "Research has shown that if children are encouraged to think outside of their own beliefs of themselves, and to believe that anything can happen, their performance improves." She continues: "The quality of teaching is crucial and attitudes of high aspiration of a teacher with all their students, whatever their ability, can help setting be successful."

Our challenge at Isaac Newton Academy is to ensure that all in the school community have and communicate the highest aspirations of all students, whatever their current performance level.

Student Grouping at Isaac Newton Academy

At Isaac Newton Academy we believe that, in determining how to group students in each curriculum area, the key question has to be *What grouping arrangement will best enable us to meet our aims?*

Thus we will consider

- whether students are most likely to acquire knowledge and understanding and make the most rapid progress in classes where there is fine setting, loose setting or mixed prior performance grouping
- which type of grouping is most likely to lead to the highest examination outcomes for students and best chances of progression to a top university
- which type of grouping is most likely to support the development of the BRIDGES learning dispositions and characteristics
- which type of grouping is most supportive of our ethos and values.

However we recognise that often budgetary and timetabling constrictions will limit the viable options available to us regarding the grouping of students.

Decisions about how to group students within a subject area will always be taken in consultation and following dialogue with the subject leader. Once a grouping arrangement has been decided on, the

subject leader will produce details of how all students will be supported and challenged. At the end of each term the relative progress of students in each group will be compared within each subject area by the subject leader. Any variance that is a cause for concern will be discussed with the subject team and line manager and monitored for patterns. If concerns persist, the options, including changes to the grouping arrangements, will be discussed with the senior team and an action plan formulated.

The prior attainment profile of a cohort of students will always be used as the starting point in considering the optimal grouping arrangements for them.

Every effort will be made to ensure that there is a healthy gender, ethnicity, SEN, EAL, month of birth and socio-economic mix in each teaching group. This will be monitored and tracked carefully by the head of subject and leadership team.

Optimal grouping arrangements will be reviewed and reconsidered on an annual basis, with reference to student progress and attainment data.

Where classes are set according to prior attainment, they will never be referred to as top or bottom sets, or higher ability and lower ability, as this directly contravenes what we know about ability and our brains' capacity for growth. We will, however, be straight and open with students about how they are grouped and which classes are attaining which levels. The criteria for selection for each class will be made clear and transparent to parents and students. Movement between sets will be determined by student performance, as measured by half termly/termly tests and on-going formative assessment. Changes will be made at the end of each term (or, in special circumstances, mid-term) and communicated to parents/carers. Higher performing sets will contain more students than less high performing sets to enable students performing at lower levels to get more individual attention.

All teachers and LAs will have and communicate the highest expectations of the potential of all students, whatever their current performance level and regardless of which set or group they are currently in.

Learning Assistants will be deployed to support class teachers in teaching the students performing at the lower levels. However it is important that students performing at lower levels get 1:1 attention from the class teacher, not just the LA.

All lessons, regardless of whether they are being planned for a mixed or setted group, will be planned in the knowledge that there is a spread of prior attainment within the group. Every class will require differentiated learning objectives, resources and learning activities to meet the full range of needs within it.

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