

Friday 3rd May 2024

Dear Parents/Carers,

I do not write many letters about staffing, finance and class structures but I want to update you on our financial position/pupil numbers/teaching ratios.

This letter is about the future, about the number-based facts and about the gross under-funding of schools/education (which sees every school leader I speak to in the same or worse position than us 😊).

Our school can enrol 436 children at capacity - but we tend to operate at about 380 children on average. It has been as high as 400 in my time here, and as low as 350. Current numbers are 360. *In September 2024 we are likely to see Number on Roll at 350. In September 2025 probably 330 children across the whole school.*

For years we have sustained a 2 form entry primary school, despite the fact that the total number on roll divided by 30 has not supported a 14 class model ($360/30 = 12!$ for instance). This means in general we have had smaller classes - often (but not always) well below 30 per class.

Despite preserving a contingency and carry forward of £10,000s each year (and this year £130, 000) the school's funding and related budgeting sees this financial year with a **deficit of £60, 000** and April 2025-March 2026 a **deficit of £190, 000** if we continue on our current trajectory. Sadly, this includes spending our hard-earned carry forward!

With this in mind we have no choice but to match our school structure and classes to the current and future numbers on roll. **This means from September 2024 we will be looking to run with 13 classes, and very likely 12 classes at most for September 2025.**

I will add very quickly that **we are not currently re-structuring staffing nor looking at redundancies as a school.** We hope that natural progression and changes by individual's choice will fall in line with our needed set-up. We are conversing with Dorset Council about our funding, budget and staffing and seeking advice about how to sustain the school in the best possible ways. Unfortunately, a low birth rate (nationally and particularly in Dorset/BCP) and smaller cohorts into Reception the past 2 years do not help. Our funding is entirely linked to the number of children in school in October each year.

The situation we find ourselves in means we are planning to 'mix' our 2 smallest cohorts (Year 1 and Year 2) from September 2024 into 3 mixed age classes whilst keeping Reception/Saplings and KS2 single age, 2 form, for now. It is highly likely that the following year (September 2025) we would need to reduce by one more class (across Year 3/Year 4). The tables below show how and why this works.



Sandford St. Martin's

September 2024-July 2025 (350 children)

Year Group	Likely Numbers of children	Class set up
Saplings/Reception/EYFS	Circa 46	2 Classes (23 children in each)
Year 1	Circa 36	78 children = 3 Classes (26 mixed age Y1/Y2 in each)
Year 2	Circa 42	
Year 3	Circa 54	2 Classes (27 children in each)
Year 4	Circa 56	2 Classes (28 children in each)
Year 5	Circa 52	2 Classes (26 children in each)
Year 6	Circa 64	2 Classes (32 children in each)

September 2025-July 2026 (330 children)

Year Group	Predicted Numbers of children	Possible Class set up
Saplings/Reception/EYFS	Circa 46?	2 Classes (23 children in each)
Year 1	Circa 46	82 children = 3 Classes (27 mixed age Y1/Y2 in each)
Year 2	Circa 36	
Year 3	Circa 42	96 children = 3 Classes (32 mixed age Y3/Y4 in each)
Year 4	Circa 54	
Year 5	Circa 56	2 Classes (28 children in each)
Year 6	Circa 52	2 Classes (26 children in each)

With my thanks for your commitment and understanding on these essential school matters,

Paul Beveridge
Headteacher