



# St. John Fisher

CATHOLIC COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

## SETTING POLICY

**(To be read alongside the Grammar Stream Policy)**

The Mission Statement:

**'St. John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School inspires students, spiritually and educationally, forming them through Faith so they can achieve their aspirations and contribute to their community.'**

Date of Policy: March 2023

Date of Ratification: 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Date of Review: March 2025

**Owner: Ms V Walker**

## **Introduction**

Ensuring students are placed in appropriately academically challenging and supportive groups is crucial to enabling students to excel.

The policy below outlines our approach to ability groupings and gives information regarding how groups are constructed, arranged and when movement between groups can occur.

## **Policy Aims**

- To ensure students receive the best possible learning opportunities in an environment where they are inspired to excel.
- To ensure teaching and support staff are able to plan the best possible learning experiences for all students taking good account of their ability and prior attainment.

## **Teaching Groups**

In Key Stage 3:

- Students in the grammar stream (which consists of one class out of six in each of the two Key Stage 3 year groups) are streamed for all their teaching.
- Elsewhere, the majority of teaching groups are mixed ability, with the exception of English and Maths. These classes are mixed ability for the first half term, while students settle in; they are then moved into setted groups.
- In English and Maths, there are two year group 'halves' created, purely for the purposes of timetabling, as this allows for more flexibility of staffing. There are three groups within each half: a top ability group (set 1), a middle ability group (set 2) and a lower ability group (set 3).

In Key Stage 4:

- Students in the grammar stream (which consists of one class out of six in Year 9 2022-23) are streamed for their core curriculum: English Language and Literature, Triple Science, Mathematics (including Statistics GCSE), Religious Education and Citizenship. For the remainder of their classes, they are in Options subjects.
- Most Options subjects, with the exception of Computer Science and Triple Science, are mixed ability. Computer Science and Triple Science only admit students who are middle or higher ability in those subjects due to the academic demands involved.
- All core subjects (English Language and Literature, RE, Science and Maths) are setted in six groups: set 1 being the most able (or grammar stream group in Year 9) and set 6 the least able.

In Key Stage 5:

- There are entry requirements for all courses except Core RE, English GCSE retake and Maths GCSE retake.

- Core RE is taught in mixed ability groups.
- English and Maths GCSE retake groups are usually setted into a higher ability group (who are expected to pass in November of Year 12) and a lower ability group who may require a longer period of preparation before reaching Grade 4 standard.

### **Ability Grouping for Setted Classes**

Ability groups are constructed carefully and in consultation with the Curriculum Leader / Head of Department. Staff involved in creating the groups will use the following information:

1. Prior attainment data, including SAT results
2. Recommendations from primary colleagues
3. Performance data from in-school assessments and end of year examinations
4. Students' end of KS4 targets
5. Professional judgement

Class teachers will make recommendations to their Curriculum Leader, who will consider these recommendations across the cohort before producing a final list of recommendations to be quality assured by the Deputy Headteacher Curriculum.

However, the underlying principle is that the class teacher is both *responsible* for students' learning being appropriately challenge and there being effective differentiation, and also *accountable* for students' outcomes.

### **Prior Ability Quality Assurance**

Prior attainment is an extremely important factor in setting, in part because it should inform teachers' expectations of students, but also because it is a key factor in value added progress judgements. To this end, the normal expectation would be as follows:

- High prior attaining pupils should normally be placed in a top or middle set, and never the bottom (i.e. Should be in set 1 or 2 of a three setted cohort, or in sets 1, 2 and 3 of a six setted cohort).
- Middle attaining pupils should normally be placed at least in the middle sets, and not in the bottom (i.e. should normally be in set 1 or 2 of a three setted cohort, or in sets 1-5 of a six setted cohort)
- Lower attaining pupils would normally be placed in the lower sets (i.e. set 2 or 3 of a three setted cohort, or in sets 4-6 of a six setted cohort).

This expectation is not designed to limit progress: should a lower ability student, for example, progress to the point where they are attaining in line with high ability

peers, that student should be promoted to a middle or top set. It is, however, designed to prevent middle or high ability students from being relegated to a class where the level of teaching they receive prevents them from making expected progress.

When the Deputy Headteacher (Curriculum) considers a set change, they will consider the prior ability of that student. The move of an HPA student into a set 4 group, for example, is unlikely to be approved, as are any moves down outside the expectations described above.

If a HPA or MPA student is at risk of being dropped into a set that will not allow them to meet their target grade, the following process is to be followed:

- At the start of the Data Window: the Curriculum Leader / Head of Department reviews the data to check for any students potentially in this position.
- The Curriculum Leader / Head of Department writes a letter to the parent or carer of the student(s) concerned, informing them of this possibility, and copies in the Deputy Headteacher.
- The Curriculum Leader / Head of Department meets with the SENCO or 2i/c SENCO to check whether the student has any additional needs not being met which prevent them accessing the curriculum.
- The Curriculum Leader / Head of Department meets with the student to agree a programme of intervention over the remaining weeks of the data window. This may be in-class targeted support or extracurricular sessions either delivered in-department or with the previously agreed support of the SEND team.
- At the end of the data window: if the student has improved, no further action is taken. If the student's progress continues to suggest a move down sets if appropriate, the Curriculum Leader would request this of the Deputy Headteacher in the usual way. If agreed, the student and their parent / carer would be made aware of the change by letter. If the request is denied, the student would continue learning in their current set with a revised programme of intervention in place.

### **Procedures and timings for set changes outside the Grammar Stream:**

During the year, students are assessed by their subject teachers. These assessments help teachers make judgements about the progress students are making. They are also used to help make decisions about changes in groupings. There are two possible opportunities for changes in **sets** during the academic year, and these are after the 'Data Windows' when Current Grades are entered.

If a teacher feels that a student should move groups, then they first discuss it with their Head of Department. If in agreement, the Head of Department then seeks agreement from the Deputy Headteacher (Curriculum). If granted, they will liaise with the Data Manager, so that students' timetables and class lists can be amended.

Please refer to the separate Grammar Stream Policy for information on how set changes will be made in this group.

### **Casual Admission Students**

On entry to SJF, casual admission students will be asked to complete school-set tests in English and Mathematics. Based on the outcome of these tests, the Curriculum Leader for the subject will nominate a set for the student. Their setting in Religious Education / Citizenship and Science will parallel the setting of Maths and English.

By nature, the tests are generic assessments of skills. If it becomes apparent upon joining their new setted class that the student is of a higher or lower ability than the set in which they have been placed, the class teacher will discuss this with their Curriculum Leader who will then make a recommendation to be approved by the Deputy Headteacher Curriculum.

### **Extraordinary Set Moves**

Outside the biannual set move window, there may be extraordinary occasions in which set moves are required (for example, if a number of casual admissions have been added to the same set and made it larger than is practicable to teach.)

Should this be the case, the same process should be followed as described above:

1. The class teacher considers the range of prior attainment data and the students' targets, and makes any recommendations for set moves to their Curriculum Leader / Head of Department
2. The Curriculum Leader / Head of Department will consider these recommendations, considering the size and ability of each setted group
3. The Curriculum Leader / Head of Department will then send a list of set change recommendations to the Deputy Headteacher Curriculum
4. The Deputy Headteacher Curriculum will quality assure the requested set moves before organising changes to be made to students' timetables.

### **Informing Parents and Carers**

At the start of each academic year, parents and carers will be sent a letter informing them which sets their child has been placed in for the coming year. (For students in Years 8-11, this letter will be sent during the summer holidays preceding the academic year; for Year 7 students, this letter will be sent during the first half-term, after students' settling-in period is completed and they move from mixed ability to setted groups).

Should there be any changes to a child's setting throughout the year, parents and carers will receive additional letters informing them of this. All letters sent regarding

setting will provide the contact information for the Curriculum Leader involved so that parents and carers have a contact point if they wish to discuss the reasons behind a set change.