

# Using flexible grouping

How to group pupils is one of the many decisions you will need to make. Sometimes pupils may be grouped by attainment. For example, in primary schools, pupils may be grouped within class by the tables they sit on and in secondary schools, pupils may be set or streamed into different classes. This is often done so teachers can pitch the lesson to meet the needs of all pupils.

However, research shows that attainment grouping can be detrimental to learners, particularly low attaining pupils. Some research suggests that being placed in a low attaining group may negatively impact pupils' confidence and attitudes towards school and learning as they may develop a belief that their attainment is fixed (EEF, 2018). Therefore, care should be taken to monitor the impact of groupings on pupil attainment, behaviour and motivation.

A flexible approach to grouping pupils within class can be used as an effective way to provide tailored support. This means grouping pupils based on their learning needs, which will be dependent on the subject-specific material being taught.

## Grouping pupils effectively

You might group pupils in advance of a topic you teach or during the lesson based on your assessment of their progress. You will most likely use both approaches to ensure you provide tailored support to pupils. In order to group pupils effectively, you should:

- Make sure any attainment groupings are subject or topic specific. For example, one pupil may be a high attainer in the respiration system but a low attainer in animal digestion, and so should be grouped accordingly.
- Monitor the impact of groupings on pupil attainment, behaviour and motivation, especially for low attaining pupils.
- Change groups regularly to avoid the perception that groups are fixed.
- Hold high expectations for all groups, ensuring all pupils have access to a rich curriculum by ensuring you don't simplify content taught but instead scaffold pupils' ability to access the content. This can be done in many ways such as providing partially completed examples or checklists to direct and prompt thinking.

Intervening within lessons with individuals and small groups can sometimes be more efficient and effective than planning different lessons for different groups of pupils, but this will depend on the extent of the learning needs you are responding to. You need to carefully consider which approaches will be most beneficial for the pupils you teach. This is likely to differ for different individuals in different topics, subjects and contexts.

## Hear from a teacher

Choose one of the videos below to listen to a teacher talk through an example of when they used flexible grouping to provide targeted support. When listening, consider the following questions and record your notes in the [notes tab](#) (or your own notebook):

- How do they assess pupils' understanding?
- How do they adapt their lesson as a result?

## Primary



Direct link: [Flexible grouping - Primary](#)

Transcript: [Flexible Grouping - Primary](#)

[\(this link opens in a new window/tab\)](#)

## Secondary History



Direct Link: [Flexible grouping - Secondary history](#)

Transcript: [Flexible Grouping - Secondary history](#)

[\(this link opens in a new window/tab\)](#)

## **Secondary R.E.**

Direct Link: [Flexible grouping - Secondary R.E.](#)

Transcript: [Flexible grouping - Secondary R.E.](#)

[\(this link opens in a new window/tab\)](#)

In the examples above, all of the teachers were able to respond to the needs of their pupils within the lesson by using a flexible approach to grouping. However, sometimes providing additional support or time to practise within a lesson is not enough and pupils require additional practice after the lesson. [\(this link opens in a new window/tab\)](#)