

# **ELM GROVE PRIMARY SCHOOL Twins and Multiples POLICY 2021**



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## **Early Years Foundation Stage Policy on placing twins [and children from multiple births] into registration classes**

At Elm Grove Primary School, we believe that children thrive when given plenty of praise and when thought of as brilliant in their own right. As such, on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage we believe that, in the long term, twins are best served by beginning school in separate classes. However, this is not a set rule, we will take into consideration each individual's circumstances and work with families to find the best solution for all parties.

Our policy is based on the following principles:

**To avoid comparison.** Twins are constantly compared and contrasted, "She crawled first, but he walked sooner." Most of the time, the comparative statements are tolerated and accepted, but once twins enter school, this may become distressing, especially if one twin consistently outperforms the other. Even if no one vocalises the differences in achievement, children are sensitive to them because when you have a twin you have a benchmark to compare yourself against. It must be very hard to be presented with "a better version of yourself" who is in your class with you (and with you almost every moment of every day). Sometimes twins find that they always compare themselves to each other (not necessarily favourably). It may be that one twin is particularly gifted in, for example, mental maths and the co-twin, although on track and performing to his/her full potential, may assume that they are not good at maths because s/he is not as quick as his/her co-twin at solving a problem. When twins are not in the same class, they are able to develop at their own pace and gain confidence in their own abilities.

**To suppress harmful competition.** Out of comparison grows competition. Twins are constantly in competition for even the most basic resources; from before birth they compete for nutrients and space in the womb. After birth they compete for parental attention, affection, toys, and to be "first" in every conceivable way. Some competition is certainly healthy; it drives ambition, encourages achievement, and spurs enthusiasm. But constant competition can be detrimental to twins in an educational setting, replacing the joy of learning with a pressure to outperform a sibling. Parents of twins recognise that the competitive dynamic between their children exists on every level, from who gets to get on the school bus first to who has more pencils to who has the better best friend. Children who rush through schoolwork simply to finish before their twin, or so that they can go and play with their twin, won't have as much academic success as a child who is not in competition.

**To decrease dependency.** Every relationship between twins is unique. By the very nature of being a twin, they will have spent most of their time together. This can make some twins very co-dependent ("they need each other"). In the longer term twins will NEED to be able to cope individually, rather than simply relying on their twin. In addition, twins can need some time apart. Although they may miss each other at first, it will soon become second nature to them to have some time apart. Some carers of twins may find that petty squabbling will lessen when the children have time apart each day and it will give the children something to talk about, "I did this in my class" or "My teacher said..." By each twin going into a different classroom, but having the security of playing together in the shared area and outside area and knowing that their twin is just in the class room next door, they can begin to become more independent.

In some situations, one twin may be established as a leader and the other as the follower. In the case of fraternal opposite-sex twins, females tend to be the more dominant of the two and more critical of their twin brothers; the female "over-mothers" her male co-twin. This is something that needs to be addressed as in some cases a type of stereotyping can occur and the twins end up following roles ("the dominant one" or the "weaker one" and they find it

hard to stop being the leader / the less confident one). By going into separate classrooms, the leader has time to just be themselves without having to lead all the time, and the quieter more passive twin will learn to cope without the more dominant one leading the way all the time and this will help them to gain confidence when faced with new situations. Both children will have opportunities to do things in their own way and to develop their own tastes and interests.

Some twins are fairly equally matched in terms of personality, have a good sense of themselves as individuals and feel fairly confident in doing their own thing. In this instance, going into separate classes will continue to enhance their individuality.

**To avoid distraction.** Twins have a unique dynamic. Unlike the relationship between fellow classmates, these children are siblings. They share a great deal. Young children cannot be expected to leave their family "baggage" at the door of the classroom when their co-twin/classmate provides a constant reminder of their home situation. Thus, the twins themselves may find each other a distraction in class. And if the teacher has to get involved to settle their disputes or control their shared antics, it's disruptive to the entire class.

**To ensure the success of both twins.** As the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum places a strong emphasis on play, all children within our setting are encouraged to self-initiate their own learning through play opportunities. Although each twin would experience adult led and adult directed activities, it is primarily through play that learning concepts become embedded. A passive twin who follows their more dominant sibling may not be fully engaging in learning, as the activities/experiences selected by the dominant twin may not be at the pace and level needed for the passive twin. They would therefore not be reaching their full potential.

**To foster individuality.** Fostering individuality in twins is certainly an important goal for parents, and one that can be served well by separating the children in school. No matter how alike twins are, they may get on with quite different types of people. If twins are in the same class they may gravitate towards playing with the same children. However, by being in separate classes they will have to work with other children. In later life they will have to form relationships one to one with other people, from colleagues to partners, and this gives them a good grounding for forming friendships and relationships outside of the twin-set. Having twins in separate classrooms allows each child to grow as an individual, without having the twin around for every moment of every day. Each child will have an opportunity to develop their own friendships, accomplish their own goals, pursue their own interests and establish their own identity.

At Elm Grove Primary School we recognise that whilst this policy ensures that each child's needs are met in their social development, as well as in all other areas of learning. We also need to ensure that each child's emotional development is met. The bond between twins is powerful. The layout of our Early Years Foundation Stage setting ensures that although twins are in separate registration classrooms they will have many opportunities throughout each day to share experiences in the shared area and outside play area. Where this does not fully meet each twin's emotional needs we would facilitate this through enabling the twins to go into each other's' classroom for parts of the day.

At Elm Grove Primary School, we understand that having twins starting school can be an anxious time for parents/carers (see 'Diary of a Primary School Mum' article – The Independent 2008). We empathise that this worry may be compounded when their twins are in separate classes, especially with regard to supporting their children through the induction process and with our Early Morning Tasks. To help alleviate this we will work closely with the

parents/carers with regard to the start dates, both part-time and full-time, for each of their children. During Early Morning Task time, the Early Years Foundation Stage teachers will happily accommodate both children completing the tasks in the same room, or the shared area if this is more preferable to the parents/carers.

Where we know that twins are due to start in our school (either through knowing the family due to siblings already in the school, or through our links with our feeder playgroups) we will liaise with the parents/carers from an early date. We will share our policy with the parents/carers and work towards making the twins' start to school life a positive start for all concerned. We will advise parents/carers to contact their pre-school(s) to ask how their twins interact with playmates and each other when their parents/carers are not around. Are they sociable? Do they play only with each other and exclude others? Is one child more shy or outgoing?

At Elm Grove Primary School, we acknowledge that if there are health concerns for one or both twins, separation may place unnecessary stress on twins and therefore both children will be placed in the same class.

In the case of triplets, quads or larger family multiples we will work with the parents/carers and pre-school[s] to determine how best to meet the needs of each child.

*Article from 'The Independent' newspaper, June 2008*

## **Diary of a Primary School Mum: 'I'm split over the twins being separated at school**

To separate or not to separate, that, for me, is the question. My five-year-old twins Claire and Oliver have spent approximately 99.9 per cent of their lives together, and they're not even conjoined. They were in the same class at nursery, they are in the same class at school, and they share a bedroom. The most open-minded of psychologists would doubtless be concerned. "Not good for promoting individualism," I hear them cry. "They need to find their own way."

I ask the twins what they'd prefer. "I want to be in the same class as Oliver," says Claire. Her brother stays quiet. "And what do you want?" I turn to him. "I want to be in a class by myself," he whispers.

It feels like someone has pole-vaulted through my stomach. Whichever path is taken, one of the twins will be hurt. Anxiety is followed by panic attacks, which segue into clumps of hair being parted from my scalp.

The evidence presents itself. Personality-wise, they're complete opposites. Claire's a social butterfly while Oliver's more solitary. There's not a competitive bone in Claire's body, but Oliver likes to be top of the class. "You would never guess they were brother and sister even," says Miss Perry, "because at pre-school they never play together."

They never play together, yet sensitive Claire clearly finds her brother's very presence reassuring.

"What do you think?" I ask my husband. He sits on the fence: "I don't think it makes a difference. Whatever you decide is fine by me." The policy at the twins' school is to separate. I ask my best friend who is a primary school teacher for her opinion. "It matters more for same-sex twins," she says. "But they spend all that time together at home, why not split them up?"

Why not? Because I don't want to upset Claire; and because I have a gut feeling and mother knows best. Doubting my own instincts, I phone the twin society's helpline. "There's no hard-and-fast rule," a lovely lady says, "but there will come a point in their lives when they have to be separated, and the later you leave it, the harder it becomes. Maybe now is the time to make them more independent."

The direction of the conversation is displeasing. I'd called looking for corroboration and my needs are not being met. Miss Perry will know what to do, she understands my daughter. At pick-up time I ask if she has five minutes. Miss Perry tells me she's been thinking about separating the twins a lot and that she's not certain Claire is up to it. "She's only five, it could just be too traumatic for her," she says.

Hallelujah, corroboration! I'm about to relax when Miss Perry continues, "But on balance, it would probably be for the best. Of course, we won't do anything without your say-so." She looks at me, expectantly. I take a deep breath. "Do it," I say