



Scoil Mhuire Allenwood
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Policy on Splitting Classes

Introduction

This policy was the product of whole-staff collaboration in tandem with the Board of Management of Scoil Mhuire Allenwood.

Rationale

In the interest of providing the best education for all students, it may from time to time be necessary to divide and combine class groups into mixed classes or to split classes into groups. These classes would be smaller in size and offer a better pupil-teacher ratio.

Aims and Objectives of this Policy

- To provide a framework for the splitting of classes
- To outline the criteria on which children are selected to be placed in multi-grade or straight split classes
- To set out the supports which may be used to ensure the best learning outcomes for all children in multi-grade classes

Framework for the splitting of classes

At the time of planning the classes for the coming year, the Principal will look at the overall numbers in each year group and the number of teachers available to teach them, with a view to having a balanced pupil teacher ratio in each classroom. S/He will decide how best to organise classes with a view to providing the best educational opportunities for all children.

Decisions regarding multi-grade classes will be taken in consultation with teaching staff and with the approval of the Board of Management.

The arrangement of classes will differ from year to year; in some cases there may be no need to split any class in an academic year. A class split is put in place for one school year, numbers and staffing arrangements will dictate the arrangement in subsequent years. In short, a class may be split once, more than once during their time in primary school or perhaps not at all. These arrangements are made year to year.

Some general points

- It is considered best practice to form mixed-ability groups
- The process of forming new friendships is a life skill which is important to develop. A positive and supportive attitude from parents is a key element in achieving a successful outcome in the new groups
- Classes that have been split reunite daily to play together on the playground during breaks so they can maintain existing friendships as well as make new friends in the new group. This increases their circle of friends and their abilities to form new friendships

- It will seldom be possible to satisfy all demands for groups of friends to be kept together. This decision will lie ultimately with the Principal, who must consider the needs of every child in the class. While it is not always possible to keep all friends together, the teachers of each class to be split are consulted on relevant issues and much work goes into the preparatory stage of the arrangement prior to the summer holidays. There are other factors outside of the control of the Principal which could impact class splits, such as immigration during the summer months.
- Class divisions will be made known to parents and pupils at least 3 weeks before the summer holidays.
- Parents of twins and siblings will be given the option of splitting their children or keeping them in the same group.

Criteria on which children are selected to be placed in mixed or straight classes

In consultation with the class teacher, and if necessary, with previous teachers of the classes involved, lists of possible groups are drawn up. Children who to date have shown an ability to work independently are considered able to cope better in a mixed class, where from time to time the classes are taught separately. Children who have special learning needs, at either end of the learning spectrum are generally deemed to be better left in a straight class, all other things being equal, although this may not always be possible.

When organising multi-grade classes, the factors listed below may be taken into consideration (in no particular order):

- The number of pupils in relevant classes;
- The chronological age of the pupils in the class to be divided;
- The distribution of boys/girls in both the class to be divided and that to be combined;
- Prior placement in a multi-grade class;
- Classroom size and accommodation.

Criteria for placing children in particular class groups

We group the children in such a way so as to maximise the learning outcomes for *each child*. When dividing a class into groups, to be placed in separate classes, there are certain criteria to be taken into consideration (in no particular order):

- The dynamics of the class must be considered. Emotional, behavioural and social factors which could upset the dynamic of the new class should be taken into consideration when forming new groupings
- We will take friendships into account. Children will have a chance to write 3 close friends' names and we will ensure that they are in a group with at least one close friend.
- For a multi-grade, a class may be split on the basis of the oldest boy and then the oldest girl being selected until the required number of pupils in each room has reached an equitable spread of pupils between the relevant teachers. For example, at Junior Infant level, classes would be split with the older children going into the mixed Junior and Senior Infant class.

Curriculum Content and Books

Classroom teaching is based on the curricular objectives for each class level. Pupil textbooks are used merely as a guide by the teacher. The new primary curriculum (www.curriculumonline.ie) is primarily skills-based rather than content-based.

For most subjects, the content is menu-based and teachers can choose content suitable to their class. The teacher is a professional who is trained to tailor the curriculum and differentiate the content and expected outcomes to cater for the needs of each individual pupil. The smaller the class group, the more effectively the teacher will be able to do this.

Although the class may be using a textbook as a guide, the teacher is dealing with each child as an individual learner. Pupils are not aware of this as it is carried out in a seamless manner by a skilled professional. Teachers choose the books and adapt them. Publishers sometimes put numbers or names of classes on books as a guide. This may be misleading for parents, as the teacher, as the professional, decides the content and skills to be taught. Teachers working with multi-grade classes will plan for teaching and learning collaboratively to ensure a consistent approach for all pupils. Booklists will be decided annually by class teachers to reflect

their particular preferences and may differ slightly for non-core subjects. Books for core subjects (English, Irish and Maths) will be the same.

Sacramental preparation will be undertaken with **individual classes** if they are organised in multi-grade classes.

Why your child may be in a split class

The DES allots one teacher to each group of 23 pupils at present. This is known as the *pupil-teacher ratio*. The ideal situation for teacher and pupil would be a single stream class at all class levels with no more than 23 pupils per class. However, the current system does not allow for this, and the principal has overall responsibility for grouping or splitting the classes where numbers would otherwise be too big or too small in one class. The DES' objective is that class size should be as equitable as possible across all class levels. The pupil-teacher ratio is dictated annually by the government budget and schools have no control over this.

The supports which could be made available to children and teachers in mixed classes

The Principal, the Class Teacher and SETs (Special Education Teachers) will consult on how best to organise support for the split/multi grade class. In some cases, the SET may work in the classroom with the Class Teacher, in a team-teaching arrangement.

All of these arrangements must be considered on a class by class basis, from year to year, and depending on the SET allocation and the assessed needs of the school.

Enrolment of new children into split classes

The rationale behind this policy is for the formation of smaller classes within the recommended pupil-teacher ratio. The enrolment of new children into these classes is to be avoided as much as possible. In this case, due regard must be given to the school's enrolment policy, and the terms of Section 29 of the Education Act. Each year the Board of Management will introduce a cap on the size of all classes, including mixed classes.

Reviewing multi-grade and split classes

Multi grade classes and straight split classes are reviewed annually.

The allocation of teachers to classes

It is the duty of the Principal as per Circular 16/73 and the Class Allocation Policy to assign teaching duties.

Ratified by the Board of Management on _____.

Signed: _____

Chairperson of B.O.M

Signed: _____

Principal

Date: _____

Date: _____