

Rathbeggan N.S. Policy on Class Division



Policy on Splitting Classes

Introduction

This policy is an amendment and revision of policies on class allocation and division. The rights, needs and best educational interests of the pupils will be the overriding primary concern in allocation of teaching staff and selection of children for classes. This policy was the product of whole-staff collaboration in tandem with the Parents and Board of Management of Rathbeggan NS.

Background (Circular 20/07)

The number of mainstream class teachers appropriate to a school shall be determined by reference to the school's valid enrolment on 30 September, of the previous school year. The staffing schedule is structured to ensure that all primary schools will operate to an average mainstream class size of pupils as indicated by the most recent DES guidelines. Posts allocated on the basis of this schedule are specifically for mainstream classes and should be deployed accordingly. School authorities are requested to ensure that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible, taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment). In particular, school authorities should ensure that there is an equitable distribution of pupils in mainstream classes and that the differential between the largest and smallest classes is kept to a minimum.

Circular 16/73 number 13: ...he/she should arrange a fair distribution of teaching duties among the staff, taking into account the needs of the pupils and the abilities, experience, personality and preference of each teacher. He/she should utilise the services of staff with special qualifications or aptitudes in an organising or advisory capacity (Board of Management Handbook, p.52)

Explaining to parents why their child is in a split class.

The ideal situation for teacher and pupil would be a single stream class at all class levels. However, sometimes the system does not allow for this and the principal has overall responsibility for grouping or splitting the classes. The pupil-teacher ratio is dictated annually by the government budget and schools have no control over this. However, the teacher will ensure that each pupil in each class will be working on the set of skills from the national curriculum for the correct class.

The allocation of teachers to mixed classes

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

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.

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 mixed or straight classes
- To outline the criteria for placing children in particular mixed-class groups
- To set out the supports which may be used to ensure the best learning outcomes for all children in mixed classes
- To limit the enrolment of new children into multi-grade classes, subject to Section 29 of the Education Act.

Framework for the splitting of classes

At the time of planning the classes for the coming year, the Principal and Deputy Principal will look at the overall numbers in each year group, the number of teachers available to teach them and the accommodation available. They will decide how best to organise classes with a view to providing the best educational opportunities for all children.

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 and special education teachers of the classes involved, lists of possible groups are drawn up.

Criteria for placing children in particular class groups – Criteria are not weighted in order of priority.

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:

- It is considered best to form mixed-ability groups.
- Distribution of boys/girls in classes (where possible).
- Children with special learning needs, at either end of the learning spectrum, will be considered on an individual case basis.
- Age, ability and maturity.
- 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.
- Family considerations e.g. twins, siblings, cousins etc.
- 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.
- The decision will lie ultimately with the Principal, who must consider the needs of every child in the class.

It is not always possible to keep friends together but the teachers of each class to be split are consulted on the above issues and much work goes into the preparatory stage of the arrangement prior to the summer holidays. Sometimes pupils move to or from the school without informing the school in advance. This is outside the control of the principal.

Classes that have been split reunite daily to play together on the yard 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.

Parents will be notified in June about the division of classes. No parent will receive special consideration outside the school's stated procedures otherwise all parents would be entitled to the same consideration leaving the task of dividing the group impossible.

Why does one half of the class have a different booklist to the other?

Classroom teaching is based on the curricular objectives for each class level. Pupil textbooks are used merely as a guide by the teacher. The primary curriculum (www.curriculumonline.ie) is primarily *skills-based* rather than *content-based*. In Mathematics there is a separate set of content and skills for each individual class.

For other 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.

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.

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

The Principal, the Class Teacher and Special Education Team will consult on how best to organise the learning support for the mixed class. In some cases, the Special Education Teacher may work in the classroom with the Class Teacher, in a team-teaching arrangement. It is possible that the Special Education Teacher may work in the classroom supporting one child or a small group of children, with the Class Teacher doing the main teaching of the lesson (In class support). Another arrangement for Learning Support which may suit the class is for either the Class Teacher or the Special Education Teacher to withdraw groups of children. Occasionally it may suit the classes better, if the teaching of certain core subjects are taught using a Team Teaching approach. All of these arrangements must be considered on a class by class basis, from year to year.

Review

This policy will be reviewed as necessary.