

Organisation of Classes Policy



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Introduction

Between March 2019 and December 2019, a review took place of the Policy for the Organisation of Classes, including composite classes, operating in Stirling Schools, Learning and Education. The review reconsidered relevant existing policies from across Scotland, considered national requirements and advice, and included feedback from primary headteachers, school staff, pupils and parents/carers.

Information from the above review has informed this revised Organisation of Classes Policy.

Background

In general terms, the Standards in Scottish Schools Act 2000 places a responsibility on councils to deliver education to support children and young people to develop their fullest potential.

Curriculum for Excellence and a range of other documentation such as Assessment is for Learning and How Good is Our School, together with the authority's robust programme of tracking, assessment and moderation, provide an effective framework to ensure all children progress in their learning. The planning and organisation of learning throughout Curriculum for Excellence is designed to provide challenge and enjoyment, breadth and depth, relevance and coherence, personalisation and choice for the learners, as well as ensuring progression and application of learning.

Each academic session, Stirling Council's staffing exercise is used to identify the number of teachers allocated to each primary school, based on the total number of pupils on the roll for each school. It is then the responsibility of the headteacher to group children into registration classes to make the best use of the available teachers and classrooms in meeting the needs of all learners. This may include the formation of composite classes.

Scottish Government advice is to follow the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT), Salaries and Conditions of Service agreement (August 2007), regarding maximum numbers of children in classes. Scottish Government provide no national advice on organisation of classes and advise that it is up to each local authority to create its own policy on class organisation, and where necessary the formation of composite classes.

It is important to note that the provision of high quality learning experiences is not dependent on registration class structures.

The Context for Stirling

Across Stirling schools, teachers engage and challenge children, enabling them to attain and achieve in a variety of ways. Schools will organise their pupils in a range of groupings for various purposes. Teachers will deliver a wide range of opportunities for children to learn independently and in small or large groups, based on a growing understanding of the children as learners and the importance of collaborative as well as peer learning.

To support effective learning and teaching of children as individuals and within groups, careful consideration is given to:

- the organisation of children into classes;
- the quality and range of learning and teaching methods and relevance of the curriculum;
- the organisation of learning areas and spaces including classrooms, shared areas, halls and outdoor spaces;
- learning and teaching resources.

Across Stirling, schools plan, implement, monitor and review practice annually in response to the National Improvement Framework, local authority priorities and a range of self-evaluation and assessment data. Annual preparation of school improvement plans, monitored and evaluated across the authority, ensures that relevant objectives for the school are set and delivered upon.

The headteacher, who is responsible for the leadership and organisation of learning in the school, will make the decision on how best to organise classes.

At present, the majority of Stirling schools organise learning in multi age/composite groups at some stage in the school. Moving to and from multi age/composite groups to single age groups is common. Across Stirling schools in 2019-20, 87 classes out of 292 classes were composite – this represents 30% of the council's primary classes.

A range of methods to track and monitor individual children's progress enables staff to differentiate learning appropriately for individuals and groups, regardless of whether learners are in a single or multi stage class.

When there is a move from a single age group to a multi age/composite group, or vice versa, clear and consistent criteria are applied, to support the effective management of change.

Stirling Council recognises that parents/carers may have anxiety about class changes, and have prepared a leaflet to support them, which is available via the following link: [How Classes are Organised](#).

Some children may be anxious about changes to classes, for example around how friendships will continue to be recognised, supported and valued. It is important that parents and staff are able to share with children how the organisation of learning provides opportunities to mix as learners, form new friendships and maintain existing ones. A leaflet for children is also available to support any changes via the following link: [Moving Classes](#).

Therefore, it is necessary to continue to have clear criteria and guidance on changes to the organisation of learning in relation to class organisation.

Feedback in relation to the Organisation of Classes

A review of the Organisation of Classes Policy was carried out between March 2019 and December 2019. A group, made up of education officers and experienced headteachers, was formed to carry out the review process.

Steps within the review process included:

- audit of Scottish local authority class organisation policies;
- feedback from Parent Council focus groups from a range of Stirling primary schools;
- feedback from the wider parent body via the Stirling forum for Parent Councils;
- feedback from Stirling's primary headteachers;
- feedback from focus groups of staff from a range of Stirling primary schools;
- feedback from learner focus groups from a range of Stirling primary schools;
- production of updated support materials for schools, parents and learners.

The feedback showed that:

- the current criteria for populating composite classes was clear;
- any initial anxiety for parents, about restructuring or composite classes, was usually relieved by their children's positive experiences;
- clear communication from the school, to share reasons for restructure, criteria for population of classes, and their plans to support children, helped to relieve parental anxiety;
- a well planned and thorough transition programme is necessary to support children in making a smooth transition;
- it is important to keep the Parent Council informed of possible changes and the reasons for them, in order that they can also support parental queries;
- the consistency of learning and teaching experiences across year groups is important in providing equity for all learners;
- conversations between individual parents and senior managers were helpful in answering parental questions and worries;
- some children fed back that they would like to choose friends to be with in their new class whilst some children fed back that they felt it was good to get 'mixed up' as they made more friends. Some children commented that they enjoyed working in different 'teams', and they valued the 'getting to know you' activities which they were involved in;
- some children fed back that they would like to choose their new teacher. (However, headteachers have a duty to deploy their staff both in line with union agreements and in consideration of all children, individual staff and the school as a whole).

Organisation of Classes within Schools, Learning and Education

Decisions to Restructure Classes

Organising classes requires careful and effective planning. In reaching an initial decision to restructure classes and/or form a composite class, headteachers are required to staff the school following Stirling Council Schools, Learning and Education's annual staffing exercise.

The staffing exercise looks at roll analysis alongside other information about movement of children in and out of the school over the course of a school year, patterns of late enrolments and placing requests into and out of the school, as well as any planned new building in the catchment area of the school.

Following this staffing exercise there is an analysis of teaching staff, and headteachers are then allocated the appropriate number of teaching staff.

The national requirements for the organisation of classes are maximum of 25 learners in P1; 30 learners for each single stage class in P2 and P3, and 33 in P4-P7. The maximum number for any composite class is 25 learners.

Where there is a change in pupil roll, class sizes or staffing levels, a restructuring of classes, including the formation of composite classes, may be required. It is also likely, when composite classes are formed, that the population of single stage classes may also require to change. It may also be necessary for stages to be split across classes e.g. P1-3 and P3-5 etc.

In deciding how to populate composite classes, headteachers will apply the following criteria:

- each composite class shall have a maximum of 25 pupils as per national requirements;
- the lead factor in determining the population of the class shall be the date of birth of the child, i.e. the oldest children from the younger stage join with the youngest children from the older stage. This criterion shall be used because it is unambiguous and transparent: for the purposes of school provision, age is not a 'protected characteristic' in the Equality Act 2010. This means that in relation to the provision of education, schools may lawfully use the criteria of age to organise classes;
- a reasonable balance in terms of gender, where possible;
- the range of Additional Support Needs spread reasonably across classes - these needs should be significant and evidenced through the Staged Intervention process.

Engagement with Parents

Changing classes can sometimes be a source of anxiety for parents/carers and pupils.

Parents/carers should be made aware of the organisation of learning groupings and structure of classes and the real possibility of change from first enrolling in school i.e. through the school handbook and as part of P1 induction meetings. They should be made aware of the reasons why a composite class would be required, and that teaching and learning approaches will ensure the class structure does not impact adversely on learning.

It is advised that headteachers keep parents informed of anticipated changes to the school population e.g. a smaller or larger enrolment than usual into P1, or other matters as appropriate that may lead to the formation of composite classes and/or the restructuring of others.

There are many forms of parental engagement. In addition to working through Parent Councils, schools may choose to communicate via newsletters, informal chat sessions, and other opportunities for communicating information and responding to enquiries.

Parents' information sessions may include (among other items) presentations about changes or likely changes to the organisation of learning, the context to such changes and how they will be delivered in the school. It may also be helpful to deliver such presentations to the Parent Council. An example of a presentation can be accessed by schools via the Council's Source pages.

When engaging with parents, either collectively or individually, headteachers should make it clear that they are not consulting parents on the formation or population of the composite class. They are informing parents about the educational and management basis for the decision, and seeking to reassure parents if they have anxieties in relation to their own children or on a wider basis.

As soon as feasible, parents of children affected by the creation of composite classes should be informed of the reasons for the formation of the class and the class their child(ren) will be placed in.

It is recognised that pupil numbers are fluid and whilst headteachers may distribute a class structure, changes in numbers can inevitably lead to a requirement to change the class structures at short notice, including during the summer holidays or part way through a school session.

If parents raise concerns about their child being placed in a particular class, the headteacher, class teacher or member of the senior leadership team in school, should meet and discuss with the parents how their child's learning will be undertaken, monitored and evaluated. Staff should also listen to parents' concerns about specific matters, for example their children's friendships within previous and the prospective new cohorts, and reassure them about how this will be monitored within the new arrangements. Social groupings and friendships are not criteria for populating classes.

Information and Transition Arrangements for Children

Where feasible, headteachers should put in place appropriate transition arrangements to ensure that children have the opportunity to prepare for change.

Children should be:

- informed of the arrangements and reasons for them – where feasible, on the same day that individual letters are being issued to parents;
- be given an opportunity to ask questions or discuss matters that concern them;
- allocated time to spend with their 'new' classmates;
- familiarised with the information leaflet 'Moving Classes' – available via this link: [Moving Classes](#);
- reminded of who they can talk to if they have a concern;
- It is also important to provide opportunities for all children of one stage to develop relationships and form a year group identity. It is likely to be the case that at some point in their primary schooling, classes will be restructured, and they will join up as classmates with other children from their year group.

Opportunities to develop relationships with the wider year group may include:

- structuring lunch sittings so that, for example, all P4 children go at the same time;
- allocating playground areas to stages rather than classes;
- designating cloakroom areas for stage rather than class use;
- forming groups from across classes for various aspects of learning;
- planning visits and events by year group;
- lunchtime clubs, after school clubs and community activities, where year groups have the opportunity to socialise and develop friendships beyond their class.

Monitoring and Evaluation

All children's progress will continue to be monitored as part of the normal tracking and monitoring and quality assurance procedures within the school.

Review of Organisation of Classes Policy

	Date	Lead Officers(s)
Produced	2013	Joan Hutchison
Updated	January 2017	Sally Kennedy, Lead Officer
Updated	February 2020	Kay Robertson, Lead Officer
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