



Policy on Class Division and Multi Grade Classes

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.

The attention of the Department has been drawn to the existence of very large classes in a limited number of schools. Given the level of staffing which the schedules allow, the Department considers that apart, perhaps, from exceptional accommodation constraints, there is no reason for the existence of very large classes in any particular school.

The allocation of teaching duties within the school is a matter for the principal.

The Education Act (1998) Section 22 (2) (d) (i) states that ... *subject to the terms of any applicable collective agreement and their contract of employment [teachers shall] carry out those duties that... are assigned to them by or at the discretion of the principal...*

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)

Understanding of Multi-grade Classes

- Division of a class grouping so as to keep the class average size as small as possible while operating within the staffing granted by the Dept. of Education
- Multi-grade classes are created for the duration of the school year.

People Affected

Pupils

Teaching staff

Parents – e.g. their concerns as to which classes will be split/the learning of the child in such situations/the time at which parents will be notified about such groupings etc

Rewards of Multi-grade Classes

- Younger children learn a lot from older ones even without it being planned.
- Older children get constant reinforcement of what they have learned in previous year(s).
- Children become independent learners by the nature of the classroom needs.
- Co-operative discipline evolves through necessity as children learn personal and group responsibility from early on.
- Children's social skills mature earlier in multi-grade classes.
- The multi-grade classroom, by its very make up, is more receptive and suitable to the essential tenets of the 'new curriculum', i.e. child centred, activity based, discovery methods, group work, thematic approach, integrated curriculum etc.
- The multi-grade classroom is a natural extension from the child's experience at home - multiple ages, needs and abilities.



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Difficulties of Multi-grade Classes

- Teacher must plan for teaching two curricula.
- Pupils are expected to become independent workers and self disciplined
- A wide variety of ability levels in two classes can increase the difficulty for the teacher

Procedures

1. A class division becomes necessary either because of large individual classes or because of teacher numbers assigned by the DES to the school.
2. In some instances the division creates two full classes at the same grade. In other instances it is necessary to divide a class for the purpose of multi grade teaching.
3. The process of class division for the following Sept. will commence in May each year.
4. The division of a class will be based on age, keeping a balance between male and female pupils in each class, with the oldest pupil going to class A, the second eldest to class B and this pattern repeating until all the pupils have been divided into the classes. Research indicates that, when placed in separate classes, twins or triplets are given more room to develop as individuals, away from the pressure of sibling comparisons. If this possibility exists, a discussion with parents will take place before the pupils are assigned a class/classes. In a situation where a multi-grade class is being created from two class levels (e.g. junior and senior infants), the division will be on the same basis, with the older pupils (boys and girls) of the lower class level (e.g. junior infants) combining with the youngest pupils of the older class level (e.g. senior infants).
5. Combining of all other classes for multi grade teaching will also be based on the above criteria of age, again keeping a balance between boys and girls.
6. Division of a class into two classes at the same level will also be based on creating two mixed ability, mixed gender classes divided by age as above.
7. The number of pupils in each combination, for multi grade teaching, will be decided by the numbers of pupils in the grades above and below and the gender mix of those groups.
8. Where a combined class between two class levels exists for more than one year, the children in the combined class (from both class levels) will rotate, so as to give all pupils the opportunity to be in the combined class group and the single class group, therefore consolidating the class level dynamic among the pupils. Pupils of both genders in both classes will be numbered from 1-3, beginning with the oldest pupil of both genders in both classes. In Year 1 all pupils with the number one will be combined, in year two all pupils numbered two and in year three all pupils numbered three. This will continue on a three year rotating basis for the duration of the combination between the class levels. Point 9 in these procedures will also apply.
9. Learning Support /Resource: Children with Resource or Assessed Specific Learning Difficulties may be considered separately.
10. Parents will be notified in June about the division of classes. No parent will receive special consideration outside the schools stated procedures otherwise all parents would be entitled to the same consideration leaving the task of dividing the group impossible.

Signed on Behalf of the Board of Management

Chairperson: _____

Date: _____



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