



Composite Class Policy

St. Oliver Plunkett's Primary School,
Ballyhegan.



NAME:	ROLE:
Mr. Seamus Galvin	Principal
Mr. Micheal Lee	Chair of Board of Governors

Date Ratified:	June 2023
Date of Review:	Annually

Composite Class Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a consistent and transparent process for the establishment of composite classes in St. Oliver Plunkett's Primary School, Ballyhegan.

*(Note that this policy does not cover the Retention of pupils for an additional year in a given year group. The completion of an Over Age Retention form DENI Circular 1996/24 covers those situations).

Background information

- a composite class is one where children from two or more year groups are taught together
- Many schools in Northern Ireland have composite classes as enrolment numbers often mean it is not possible to have straight classes for individual year groups
- Composite classes are formed to make efficient use of teaching resources across the whole school
- The number of teachers in a school is based upon the total school roll, not on the numbers in any single year group
- It is the responsibility of the principal, in consultation with teaching staff, to decide the optimum class structure and numbers based on the number of pupils in school, taking into account the specific needs of each key stage. The principal will also liaise with all relevant parties in discussions regarding the allocation of pupils to classrooms.
- The board of governors will ensure that the policy is applied consistently and fairly in the context of each year-group.
- All of our teachers are trained to work with mixed ability classes whether in a single year group or a composite class. In all primary classes there are a wide range of abilities and all children will learn in different ways, responding to a variety of methods and resources.

Composite class policy- Principles and procedures

The principles behind the policy are:

- delivering the best educational experience for all pupils in a given year-group is paramount
- Whatever the composition of a class, it is the responsibility of the class teacher to encourage and support every child in reaching their full potential.

- The school will prioritise support for class teachers working with composite classes and mitigations will be put in place for all composite classes to ensure that pupils are enabled to maintain and continue to build their friendship and social connections
- The number of pupils allocated to classrooms throughout the school will be shared as equally as possible across year-groups ensuring a fair and equitable balance of pupil numbers in every classroom
- Where circumstances allow, the number of pupils in a Foundation Stage class will be kept to a minimum.
- The teachers and principal will establish a composite class using the prioritised criteria set out below. These criteria will be applied fairly and consistently in relation to each individual year-group in the school.
- The school will employ mitigations and strategies to ensure that pupils maintain and continue to develop their friendships within their year groups. A suggested list of strategies is provided below.
- The school will not engage in negotiation of any form regarding the placement of pupils in classes either prior to or after the placements have been announced.
- Parents/guardians should not attempt to pre-empt or otherwise influence the placement of pupils either by direct communication with the school or through unsolicited contact with members of the Board of Governors or any other school staff.
- The final decision on the placement of pupils will rest with the principal having liaised with the class teachers.
- At all stages of this process, the needs of all the pupils in a given year group will be considered equally.

The allocation of pupils to composite classes will be made following the priority order set out below:

1. In the first instance, and in the majority of cases, chronological age of pupils in a given year-group will determine the allocation of pupils to a composite class.
2. Composite classes will be balanced in terms of gender. Therefore, where a gender in-balance exists in class arrangements, the principal will have the discretion to change the chronological allocations to rectify this gender in-balance.
3. The placement of siblings (including twins, triplets etc.) in a composite class will be discussed with the relevant parents/guardians and discretion may be applied in this scenario; and finally

4. The school reserves the right to apply discretion to individual circumstances where the specific needs of a pupil may be met in a different class, such as but not limited to, SEN pupils.

Where Criterion 4 is applied above, the professional judgement of the teachers will be used to determine such cases and they will not be as a result of pressure or undue influence from parents/guardians. The parents/guardians of pupils in this category will be consulted prior to the class placements being announced and this consultation will be initiated by the school only. The school will never enter into any discussions with parents/guardians regarding the placement of pupils other than their own son/daughter in a given class.

It must also be noted that the placement of pupils in a class is determined on a year group basis and any previous class compositions in earlier years do not apply e.g. the decisions are made on a year to year basis determined by the numbers of pupils that will form a composite class.

Handling of parental concerns

If a parent/carer wishes to discuss the class arrangements made for their child, they should contact the principal in the first instance. He/she will provide them with the rationale for her/his decision.

The responsibility for the allocation of pupils to classrooms is a decision for the principal in consultation with class teachers. There is no formal right to appeal against a decision on a child's placement in a composite class.

If a parent remains dissatisfied with the principal's decision, or feels the school has not adhered to this policy in any way, then they should refer to the School's Complaints Procedure available on the website. Parents/guardians are once again reminded that the needs of all pupils in any given year-group will be considered equally at all times.

Under no circumstances should parents/guardians attempt to contact school staff or members of the Board of Governors in relation to composite class arrangements outside of the accepted policies and procedures in school. The School Complaints Procedure should be followed explicitly at all times.

Policy monitoring and review

The policy will be reviewed regularly after consultation with the Board of Governors at St. Oliver Plunkett's Primary School,

Mitigations to ensure pupils continue to maintain and foster year group friendships;

The Board of Governors and staff at St. Oliver Plunkett's Primary School are fully committed to overcoming the challenges that may arise from our composite class structure. Our teaching staff team are highly experienced in developing learning within composite classes and with pupils of varying levels of attainment. Our recruitment procedures also promote the appointment of teachers who have experience of teaching pupils in composite classes. Our induction programme offers support and training for new members of staff and our transition programme ensures pupil's needs are shared and monitored as they move through the key stages.

Our teachers differentiate learning to match pupils' individual levels of attainment and provide challenges to ensure all pupils have the opportunity to extend their learning. Assessments of pupils understanding is continuous through observations, focus groups, self and peer assessment, as well as weekly tests. These allow teachers to track and review progress of all pupils regularly. Any pupils who require intervention are identified and supported quickly. Provision to support pupils may take the form of teachers adapting tasks, additional small group directed sessions or individualised support programmes.

More specifically, the school may implement and regularly review the following additional mitigations to help pupils transition into new composite classes;

1. Pupils of the same year-group are timetabled for morning, break and lunch play at the same time;
2. P.E. timetable slots with external coaches are allocated on a year-group basis;
3. Year-groups are brought together for external service providers and visitors to the school such as in Fire Safety, PDMU, World Around Us and various other talks/presentations etc.
4. Roles and responsibilities will be shared equally between year-groups such as school council elections, eco-council elections etc.
5. Class teachers liaise regularly and coordinate their teaching plans for all year-groups.
6. Class teachers align their weekly class timetables to avail of opportunities to teach pupils in their respective year-groups e.g. rotating P5, P6 and P7 pupils around to cover teaching of P.E., Using ICT and WAU etc.
7. Pupils come together in year-groups for external trips such as whole school trips, weekly swimming lessons, WAU trips and other such events.

This list is not exhaustive but identifies just a few of the mitigations that are offered in school to help alleviate and ease pupil concerns/anxieties regarding composite classes.

The Wider Context

The Research and Information Service Briefing Paper 1 Paper 05/17, published on 11th January 2017 by Caroline Perry, Barbara Love and Keara McKay on Composite classes found that in 2015/16, more than half of primary schools (59%) in Northern Ireland had composite classes. There were a total of 1,326 composite classes in primaries, of which the majority (87%) were made up of two year groupings. As might be expected, most (89%) of the schools with composite classes comprising more than two year groups are situated in rural areas, and these are widely spread geographically across Northern Ireland.

These findings show that St. Oliver Plunkett Primary School's composite class structure is common practice for rural primary schools in Northern Ireland.

Benefits of Composite Classes

The report also highlighted the benefits in relation to educational outcomes to include;

- Gains for low-achieving children through factors such as continuity of education and smaller class sizes;
- Gains for younger children through exposure to more advanced materials, role models to emulate and through social support from older peers;
- Gains for older children through revising subject content, leadership skills and independent learning skills; and
- Gains for high-achieving children through more challenging, independent learning.

Teachers at St. Oliver Plunkett's Primary School work hard to promote all of these benefits within our classrooms and throughout the school. The nature of St. Oliver Plunkett's Primary School, with a child-centred ethos encourages all pupils to feel that they are part of a learning family and that they will be treated equally. Pupils are encouraged to learn with and from each other. Older pupils are given opportunities to assume the role of coach to develop their leadership and independent learning skills, whilst younger pupils are exposed regularly to higher level thinking and learning beyond their expected levels of attainment.