



Scoil Naomh Molaise

Grange, Co. Sligo.

Class Division Policy

Introduction

This policy was the product of whole-staff collaboration in tandem with the Board of Management of Scoil Naomh Molaise. It was shared with all parents of pupils attending Scoil Naomh Molaise during the school year 2020/2021. Feedback was sought from the parent body.

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/split classes, which are smaller in size and offer a better pupil-teacher ratio.

The Department of Education and Skills currently allocates teachers based on a maximum class size of 25 children. Scoil Naomh Molaise currently has 12 class teachers catering for 12 classes of various sizes (Junior Infants – 6th class). As a result of uneven class numbers, there must be mixed class groupings.

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

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. The Principal 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 straight or mixed/split classes

1. Maximum class size of 25 will not be exceeded except in exceptional circumstances (i.e. where no other possibility exists).
2. In selecting a group of children to be placed in a mixed class group/ split class, a number of factors will be taken into consideration:

- a. The age of the children
 - b. Presence of brothers or sisters in classes
 - c. Children with Specific Needs
 - d. Health and Safety Issues
 - e. Rotation of 'split'
3. Normally a group (within a split class) will consist of at least 4 children and will be gender balanced.
 4. Placement of pupils in mixed/split and straight classes will normally be finalised towards the end of the final term.
 5. Class teachers will be consulted as part of the process of assigning pupils to classes.
 6. The Principal will place children taking all relevant factors into account.

Criteria for placing children in a split class

When dividing a class into groups, to be placed in separate classes, there are certain criteria to be taken into consideration:

- Classes are split by age (normally from oldest to youngest except in exceptional circumstances).
- Gender balance is desirable.
- Placement in a split class is rotated so no child is continuously placed in the split class, i.e. if class splits are unavoidable, all children at a given level will in turn be placed in the split class before any child is placed for the second time in a split class group.
- The presence of siblings at different class levels in the same classroom is avoided. If this cannot be avoided, the matter is discussed with the parent(s).
- Exceptions to the above may include children with Special Educational Needs. The Principal in collaboration with the class teacher and the SEN team will determine the best setting for children with SEN.
- In exceptional circumstances there may be Health and Safety issues to be considered in allocating pupils to a class grouping. The Principal in collaboration with the class teacher and the SEN team will determine the most appropriate solution depending on the circumstances.
- 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. The decision will lie ultimately with the Principal, who must consider the needs of every child in the class. 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/ sports field 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. Similarly throughout the year, opportunities are provided for classes to reunite for a variety of learning experiences such as physical education, performances, school trips and tours etc. Unfortunately, this was not possible during the school year 2020-2021, due to each classroom being designated a separate Covid-19 bubble.
- New pupils joining the school (senior infants – 6th class) will be assigned to a class grouping according to their age, i.e. they will be placed with other pupils of a similar age. Where new pupils are concerned, the Principal has the discretion to make an exception to the 'rotation of split' criteria (see above) so that no child will be placed in a mixed/split class in consecutive years.
- Once class groupings have been decided upon it will not be possible to change or alter them. Scoil Naomh Molaise will adhere to this constraint strictly, and without exception, as any changes would undermine the whole policy.

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

The DES allots one teacher to each group of 25 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 20 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. 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.

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. 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 how 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/split 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 SET 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. Another arrangement for support teaching which may suit the class is for either the Class Teacher or the SET to withdraw small groups of children. Occasionally, especially in the case of Senior Infants/1st, 2nd/3rd, 4th/5th it may suit the classes better, if the teaching of some areas of the Mathematics Curriculum (e.g. the number strand) is taken separately by the Class Teacher for one class and the Special Education Teacher for the other class.

All of these arrangements must be considered on a class by class basis, from year to year.

The allocation of teachers to mixed/split classes

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

Review

This policy will be reviewed on a three year cycle, unless it is deemed necessary to conduct a review before that date.

This policy was reviewed by the Board of Management in May 2008.

This policy was reviewed by the Board of Management in May 2019.

This policy was reviewed by the Board of Management on 30th September 2021

Signed: *Fr Christy McHugh*

Date: 30.09.2021

Chairperson

Signed: *Louise O'Connor*

Date: 30.09.2021

Principal