

East Renfrewshire Council: Education Department

Draft Policy on Class Organisation in Primary Schools

1. Introduction

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 full potential. Curriculum for Excellence and a range of other national and local guidance, together with the authority's robust programme of tracking, assessment and moderation, provide an effective framework to ensure all children progress in their learning.

Scottish Government advice, based on legislation, 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 does not provide any further national advice on organisation of classes and advises that it is up to each local authority to create its own policy on class organisation, and where necessary the formation of composite classes. Currently (as of January 2024) class size maxima in Scottish primary schools are set by SNCT as follows:

- Primary 1: 25
- Primary 2-3: 30
- Primary 4-7: 33
- Composite Class: 25

Between September 2023 and January 2024, a review of class organisation in East Renfrewshire primary schools took place. The review included:

- An audit of other Scottish Local Authority class organisation policies;
- Consultation with a range of stakeholders including learners, parents / carers and Head Teachers;
- A review of complaints received by the Education Department over the last two years in relation to the organisation of classes.

Information from the above review has informed this policy. The aim of the policy is to ensure a consistent, transparent and supportive approach to class organisation across our primary schools which aligns with the Education Department's vision of *Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences*.

2. Learning and Teaching

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 all learners, as well as ensuring progression and application of learning.

The ways in which learning and teaching are organised in primary schools are aimed at providing excellent learning experiences and meeting the learning needs of all learners. In all primary classes there will be wide ranges of abilities and all children will learn in different ways, responding to a variety of methods and resources. All our teachers provide learning experiences for mixed ability classes - they adapt to the different needs within any class and plan accordingly. Much of the learning and teaching in our primary schools is in groups and teachers plan in such a way to ensure that all pupils are progressing. The guiding principle is

to ensure that the individual learning needs of every child are met. Head Teachers monitor and track progress and attainment to ensure all pupils are making appropriate progress through Curriculum for Excellence levels.

All of the above applies equally in single stage classes, composite classes or team-taught classes.

3. Organising Classes

Each academic session, the Education Department's staffing exercise identifies the number of teachers required by each primary school, based on a number of factors including a projection number of pupils on the roll of each school. In forming classes Head Teachers and the Education Department must also consider legislation on placing requests given the high demand for places at our schools.

Following a full public consultation in 2016, the Council enacted its current school admissions¹ and placing request² policies, coming into effect in January 2017. These policies are set in alignment with national legislation, guidance and local policies and so must be adhered to by the Council and Education Authority at all times.

It is the responsibility of Head Teachers to group children into classes to make the best use of the available teachers and teaching spaces to meet the needs of all learners. In forming classes Head Teachers should consider a number of factors:

- The need for continuous, progressive learning and teaching which will build on the attainment and achievement of all children;
- Class size maxima at each stage of the school;
- Social factors which support children's continuous development;
- Effective use of resources including staffing and accommodation.

This may include the formation of composite classes, team teaching classes or additional classes within a stage for a year or more. The need for such classes will in most instances be identified by the education department and implemented by head teachers. It is important to note that the provision of high quality learning experiences is not dependent on class organisation.

Composite classes

Composite classes are those which consist of children from more than one year stage. Composite classes have been a feature of class organisation in East Renfrewshire primary schools and across the country for many years, not only in small rural schools, and are a common place and well-established practice. Composite classes are generally created where there are imbalances in pupil numbers across stages; for example, if one stage has too many pupils to form a single class and an adjacent stage conversely has a smaller roll, a composite class will be considered. Whilst composite classes allow for more efficient use of staff and the school estate, they may also allow for better organisation to support learners at similar stages in their learning, but who are in two different year stages. The maximum class size for a composite class is 25 pupils.

¹ <https://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/media/264/School-admissions-policy/pdf/school-admissions-policy.pdf>

² https://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/media/4895/Placing-request-guidelines/pdf/Placing_request_guidelines.pdf

Team teaching classes

A head teacher may consider for one year or longer, following advice from the Education Department, a structure where two teachers teach a class that has more than the legal class size maxima. The teachers are both in the class at the same time and are jointly responsible for planning, teaching, assessment and liaising with parents. Formation of team teaching classes is less likely to involve significant class reorganisation, but relies on having sufficient staff and teaching spaces with the capacity for a larger number of pupils.

Additional classes within a stage

Where the number of pupils in one stage has increased and has resulted in additional staffing, a head teacher, in conjunction with the education department, can consider allocating an additional class within a stage. Before allocating an additional class within a stage, a head teacher must seek permission from the Head of Education Services – Provision.

In all cases where class reorganisation is being implemented, good communication with learners and parents / carers is vital to ensure their understanding and support. Stakeholders should be informed of likely reorganisation of classes at the earliest possible opportunity to allow for appropriate, high quality communication to take place. When communicating with parents, Head teachers should consider the National Improvement Framework (NIF) parent communication principles:

- simplicity and clarity
- transparency
- relevance
- partnership
- flexibility and adaptation
- timeliness

Head teachers should consider sharing a leaflet for parents and carers. A sample leaflet can be found in appendix 1.

This policy should also be made available for parents and carers. The Parent Council should be kept informed of ongoing developments in relation to the organisation of classes.

When considering class reorganisation, head teachers should engage with class teachers about the optimal groupings of pupils. They may wish to consider using literacy and or mathematics attainment groups, which will help to ensure continuity in planning to meet learning needs. Assessment information should be carefully considered, as should be the case with the formation of all classes. In the case of Primary 1 classes, information from ELC establishments should be used. The additional support needs of children should also be considered.

Head teachers, in consultation with class teachers, should consider social factors such as close friendships. They may invite pupils to discretely indicate a number of peers that they would want to be in class with, while making it clear that this is one of a number of factors to consider and that not all listed peers will be placed together in classes. However, the need to ensure progression in learning, attainment and achievement should be the major consideration.

In order to promote a consistent and transparent approach to class organisation, a suggested sequence of actions is summarised in the timeline below:

Date	Action	Personnel	Notes
May (week 1)	Provisional class organisation set for next session.	Head Teacher HR Staffing Officer	This will follow provisional confirmation of P1 intake, staff retirement and requests being made (but not confirmed) for Newly Qualified Teachers. Class organisation is provisional at this stage as further admissions requests will be received and further changes to teaching staff may occur.
From May (week 2)	Engagement with children and staff, and communication with parents, over likely organisation of classes.	Head Teacher Senior Leadership Team Class Teachers	Communication over likely organisation of classes. Arrangements will be put in place for universal and targeted support of transitions. Particular attention will be given to support children affected by changes to class organisation, including composite classes and team <i>teaching classes</i> . A leaflet (see appendix 1) will be shared with families.
May / June	Communication with Parent Council.	Head Teacher	Head teacher shares information about class organisation for next session. Head Teacher stresses that the position is changeable and that pupils will be advised of their class before the end of session.
June (week 2)	Confirmation of staff allocation.	HR Staffing Officer	Confirmation of staff allocation includes the allocation of Newly Qualified Teachers. Head teachers can allocate teachers to classes based on this allocation. Only in exceptional circumstances should further changes to staffing allocation result in a further change to the class organisation.
June (week 3)	Share classes with parents.	Head Teacher	This will include details about which teacher children will be taught by next session.
June (week 3)	Meet the teacher.	Senior Leadership Team Class Teachers	An opportunity will be given to experience a “bump up” event where children meet their new teacher (where possible – the new teacher may not start in the school until August) in their new classroom.
August	Review class organisation.	Head Teacher	Class organisation, including teachers allocated to each class, is confirmed once any changes over the summer holiday to staffing and pupil numbers have been confirmed.

There may be rare occasions when a re-classification of classes has to take place during the course of a school session, for example, where the roll of the school has markedly risen or decreased unexpectedly. In these unusual circumstances, the head teacher will work closely with their school community to plan into these changes and ensure they are communicated to families in a timeous manner.

It should also be noted that in ASN settings, including Isobel Mair School, different circumstances and timelines for class organisations may apply. Class size maxima set out in section 1 do not apply and class organisation will be based on the very individualised needs of the children and young people attending Isobel Mair School. Suggested class size maxima for ASN schools and units, which are based on guidance rather than legislation, are:

Additional Support Needs arising from:	Number of pupils
Moderate learning difficulties	10
Profound learning difficulties	10 *
Severe physical impairment	8
Severe learning difficulties	8
Significant hearing impairment	6
Significant visual impairment	6
Language and communication difficulties	6
Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties	6

* This figure applies where teachers are complemented by support staff and councils are recommended to apply an adult/pupil ratio of 1:2.5.

Please see <https://www.snct.org.uk/library/1886/SNCT1449%20app.pdf> for more information.

Extended transitions will be planned where required and implemented to ensure that the needs of all children are met. The principles around clear communication and timelines with families will be followed. As noted in the table above, and as within any setting, the school will review class organisation including teachers and young people allocated to classes as there can be movement and changes over summer period and throughout the year. At all times parents will be kept fully informed of any changes or potential changes.

4. Transitions

Head teachers plan transition activities to ensure that children have the opportunity to prepare for changes associated with moving from one year stage to another. This may involve extended transitions for children with additional support needs. In pupil focus groups, children gave positive feedback around the arrangements that their schools put in place to support transitions, whether the transition involves a re-organisation of their class or not. Parents and head teachers were also consulted about activities that support these transitions. Stakeholders identified the following as helpful activities:

- “Bump up” days. Children find it helpful and reassuring to spend time in June in the classroom they will move to in the next school session, and where possible with their “new” teacher. If their classes are being reorganised they would also like to spend time with their new classmates.
- Buddies. Children spoke about the benefits of being supported through transitions by older pupils who talked about their experiences and gave good advice. Children also spoke about enjoying taking on the role of buddies.

- Preparation for transition from P7 to S1. Children mentioned that experiencing a reorganisation of classes, learning to work with different peers and make new friends, was good preparation for the bigger transition to secondary school where they will be placed in a number of different class groups for different subjects.
- Having views sought and taken into account where class reorganisation is happening e.g. about friendship groups. Children also valued being given information as early as possible and having the opportunity to ask questions.
- Where composite classes are being formed, reassurance that there would be opportunities for shared learning experiences during the course of the following year (e.g. trips, school shows, liturgical events) are helpful.

A few children and parents stated in focus groups that transition activities should happen earlier if possible, and not in the last day or two of the summer term. We aim to minimise the possibility of communicating one set of classes early in June and then having to rearrange classes later in the month due to further changes in staffing. The Education Department will endeavour to ensure final classifications are completed by the second week in June in order for schools to be able to notify parents of classes in the third week of June. It is however acknowledged that staffing for the following school year may change at short and late notice. Changes to class organisation, again due to unplanned changes in staffing, can also be required in August. In these circumstances, head teachers in partnership with the Education Department will need to make decisions quickly with little time to engage with stakeholders.

Where reorganisation takes place, and in particular where composite classes are formed, it is important that opportunities are created for year groups to have shared learning experiences, in order to maintain and develop relationships. These may include:

- Structuring lunch sittings so that all children in the same year group eat at the same time in the same area.
- Allocating playground areas to stages rather than classes;
- Forming groups from across classes for various aspects of learning and teaching;
- Planning excursions and events by year stage;
- Lunchtime clubs, after school clubs and community activities, where year groups have the opportunity to socialise and develop friendships beyond their class.

5. Responsibility for decisions on class organisation

Classification is the responsibility of the Education Department. The Head Teacher is responsible for managing staff, children and teaching spaces in line with this classification and supported by policy and advice from the Education Department. The organisation of classes is discussed between Head Teachers and the Education Department as part of the annual staffing exercise, and Head Teachers would only deviate from the advised classification following further discussion with the Education Department.

Where any organisational difficulty arises head teachers may consult with their link member of the Quality Improvement Team.