

# Organisation of Classes Policy



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# Introduction

**Between September 2022 and December 2022, a review took place of the Policy for the Organisation of Classes, including composite classes, operating in Stirling schools. The review included:**

- An audit of Scottish Local Authority class organisation policies;
- Consultation with a range of stakeholders through focus groups of parents/carers, learners, school staff and headteachers;
- An online consultation via the Engage platform;
- A review of complaints received by Stirling Council over the last 3 years in relation to the organisation of classes.

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 full potential.**

Curriculum for Excellence and a range of other guidance 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 all learners, as well as ensuring progression and application of learning.

Each academic session, Stirling Council's staffing exercise identifies 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 learners 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 2022/23, 92 classes out of 281 classes were composite – this represents 33% 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.

Stirling Council recognises that some parents/carers may have questions about class changes, and have prepared a leaflet to support them, which is available entitled: How Classes are Organised. A PowerPoint presentation is also available for schools to share with parents/carers.

Some children may have questions about changes to classes, for example around how friendships will continue to be recognised, supported and valued. It is important that parents/carers 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 entitled: Moving Classes.



# Feedback in relation to the Organisation of Classes

A review of the Organisation of Classes Policy was carried out between September 2022 and December 2022. A group made up of education officers, experienced headteachers and parents/carers was formed to carry out the review process.

## **The views of stakeholders were sought in a range of ways, across all Learning Communities, including:**

- Stirling Parent Council Network;
- Parent/carer focus groups;
- Stirling's primary headteachers;
- Stirling school staff focus groups;
- Learner focus groups;
- An online survey via the Engage platform open to parents, carers, members of staff and others.

The consultation ensured a balance of representation across learning communities, in addition to a range of sizes and contexts of schools. All primary schools were represented in the course of the consultation.

## **Feedback from the consultation showed that:**

- All children involved in the focus groups agreed with the current criteria.
- Almost all headteachers agreed with the current criteria.
- The majority of school staff agreed with the current criteria.
- More parents/carers agreed or strongly agreed with current criteria than disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- Of those who disagreed with the current criteria and indicated an alternative, learning groups/ability was highest rated. There were polarised views on whether this was positive or negative.
- Some parents/carers felt that friendship groups should be considered when classes were organised. This had the lowest score of alternative criteria suggested through the online survey.
- There was inconsistent understanding from parents/carers of how learning and teaching is organised in primary classes, including composite classes.
- Exceptional individual circumstances related to additional support needs could be considered by the headteacher when organising classes.

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- Clear communication from the school at as early a stage as possible helped to relieve parental anxiety. This included reasons for restructure, criteria for populating classes, how learning would be organised and plans to support children.
- Parents/carers and children appreciated well-planned and thorough transition experiences to support children in making a smooth transition to a new class group.
- Any initial anxiety for parents/carers, about restructuring or composite classes, was usually relieved by their children's positive experiences.
- Keeping the Parent Council informed of possible changes and the reasons for them helps them to support parental queries.
- The consistency of learning and teaching experiences across year groups and continuing opportunities to mix across year groups is important.
- Conversations between individual parents/carers and senior managers were helpful in answering parental questions and worries.
- A small number of parents/carers felt the same children should not repeatedly be in composite classes, and that there should be a rotation of children in composite classes.
- A small group of parents/carers felt that there should not be composite classes involving children in Primary 7.





# 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 a 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.

### **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, evidenced through the Staged Intervention process.

- Sensitivity should be given to exceptional individual circumstances related to additional support needs, with opportunities for discussion between home and school in relation to Additional Support Needs.
- The overall decision should be made in line with policy and criteria, with the final decision resting with the headteacher, who has knowledge of all children and families in the school.

## Effective Communication with Parents/Carers

**Feedback from parents/carers and learners indicates that effective communication at as early a stage as possible is key.**

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 share how learning and teaching approaches apply across all classes.

It is advised that headteachers keep parents/carers 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.

Parent/carer 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/carers, either collectively or individually, headteachers should make it clear that they are not being consulted on the formation or population of the composite class. They are informing parents/carers about the educational and management basis for the decision, and seeking to provide reassurance if they have anxieties in relation to their own children or on a wider basis.

As soon as feasible, parents/carers 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/carers 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 with them and discuss 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.

## 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. Learners said that it helps to have information at as early a stage as possible if there are changes to class organisation. They also said that spending time with their peers in the same year group is important. "You get to make new friends and you still get to see your old friends in the playground and for some learning." (*pupil*)

### 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/carers;
- be given an opportunity to ask questions;
- allocated time to spend with their 'new' classmates;
- familiarised with the information leaflet 'Moving Classes';
- reminded of who they can talk to if they are unsure about anything ;
- Reassured about opportunities to continue to mix with others in their year group. 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 and maintain relationships with the wider year group can include:**

- Structuring lunch sittings so that, for example, all P4 children go at the same time.
- Allocating playground areas to stages rather than classes;
- 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.



# Frequently Asked Questions for Parents/Carers

## Why can't class structures stay the same from year to year?

- Each year for a variety of reasons, children move in and out of schools.
- This, together with numbers of P1 enrolments, determines the roll of the school, and in turn the number of staff and classes the school is allocated.
- This number can fluctuate year on year, and so the number of classes in school can change regularly.

## Why is a composite class necessary?

- P1 classes have a maximum number of 25, P2 and P3 can have up to 30, and P4-7 have a maximum of 33.
- Schools are allocated staff based on the total school roll, not on numbers at any particular stage.
- When the number of children at a stage is too many for one class, and not enough for another single year class, a composite class may need to be formed.
- A headteacher is responsible for making strategic decisions about class formation across the school as a whole to make most effective use of available staffing and learning spaces.
- Composite classes have a maximum number of 25 children.

## Why is my child in a composite class?

- Stirling Council's policy on the Organisation of Classes outlines that composite classes will be primarily set up according to date of birth i.e. the oldest children in one stage together with the youngest children in the stage above.
- Headteachers may need to make adjustments to class lists to ensure a suitable gender balance; a balance of additional support needs across classes; and to consider any exceptional individual circumstances related to additional support needs.

## How do you teach two different stages in the one class?

- All classes are composite classes – all with very varying levels of ability/needs – composite classes are taught in the same way single stage classes are taught with a mix of individual, group and whole class lessons.
- Teachers are experienced professionals, used to managing this variety.
- Teachers are trained and experienced in planning, teaching and assessing individual, group and class lessons as appropriate. They ensure differentiation in planning, input, outcome, support etc. to meet the needs of all the children in their class.

- In order to support effective learning and teaching of children as individuals and within groups consideration is given to the following:
  - The quality and range of learning and teaching methods and relevance of the curriculum and consistency of teaching and learning.
  - The organisation of learning areas and spaces including classrooms, shared areas, halls and outdoor spaces.
  - Learning and teaching resources, including new ways of learning, such as digital learning.

### **How can I be sure my child's learning will not be affected by being in a composite class?**

- Curriculum and assessment guidelines provide a framework for pupil centred learning and all children experience a curriculum suited to their age, ability and stage. Each child will progress at their level of ability regardless of class structure.
- Progress in learning for all children in school is monitored through quality assurance processes, with tracking of progress for learners being carefully monitored.

### **Can children be placed in composite classes based on their ability?**

#### **Feedback from consultation across Stirling Council noted that:**

- Children's ability is not fixed and can change over time.
- Children all have strengths and development needs in different areas of the curriculum, so organising by ability may require one curricular area to be prioritised over another.
- Organising children in classes by ability at primary school could affect children's confidence and self-esteem.

### **Will my child miss out socially in a composite class?**

- Schools make every effort to both encourage new friendships and support children to keep old ones.
- Opportunities are built into the school week for children to work and socialise across classes.
- As parents and carers, you can also help by supporting your child to maintain previous relationships and encourage new ones out of school time.

### Will my child be in a composite class again?

- Classes cannot be predicted and can only be constructed each year as the new intake enrol.
- Many children can be in a number of composite classes, and in some cases are in composite classes for their whole time at primary school.

### What if I am concerned about any aspect of how learning is organised in my child's school?

- Parents/carers should be informed about any changes in the way that learning is organised within their child's school and will have the opportunity to discuss this with the school if they have any concerns.
- If you have concerns, share them with your headteacher, who will be able to give you further information and reassurance about how learning is organised in your child's school.

### Where can I find out more?

Further information is available in the form of:

- Parent/Carer Leaflet, '[How classes are organised](#)'
- Education Leaflet for and by children, '[Moving Classes](#)'



### Review of Organisation of Classes Policy

|                 | Date          | Lead Officers(s)  |
|-----------------|---------------|---|
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| <b>Updated</b>  | February 2023 | Gillian Robertson, Team Leader<br>Kay Robertson, Lead Officer |
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