

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



Education Services

Policy: Composite Classes

Author: Ann Durnian
Service: Education Services

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1. Introduction

Class sizes in Scottish primary schools are set by government regulation as follows:

- P1 25
- P2 30
- P3 30
- P4-7 33

Schools aim to deliver a high quality education, whilst making efficient use of resources. Schools must put in place a class organisation that supports these two objectives, and this may include forming composite classes, which have existed in Scottish schools since schools were first established.

Composite classes are classes where children from two or more stages are grouped together and can be found in schools of all sizes. In small schools multi-stage composites are common. Composite classes have a class size maximum of 25.

Classes at P1-P3 of 18 or less may be formed where this is possible, to comply with Scottish Government aspirations to reduce class sizes at P1-3.

A composite class may be formed in a variety of situations including:-

- where a small number of children at a particular stage in the school cannot be accommodated within class size limits
- where it is possible to combine children from two or more stages, as the numbers at these stages is not high enough to justify forming separate classes
- where it is necessary to combine children from two or more stages in order to be able to educate all of the children within the resource allocation of the school.

2. Class Organisation

Head teachers will plan class organisations based on the numbers of pupils expected to attend the school, and the staff allocated to the school. Schools will normally be informed of anticipated pupil numbers and staffing allocations by the end of April. However, there are often changes in pupil numbers, which may give rise to changes in staffing allocation and class organisation between April and the summer. This is because children will continue to move into, out of and within West Lothian and parents will change their choice of school. For this reason, parents may not be informed of class organisation until just before the summer holidays and this may indeed alter before the start of the school session.

3. Formation of Composite Classes

Composite classes are restricted to a maximum of 25. Where possible schools will try to have a **minimum** of 3 pupils at a stage within a composite class.

The authority and its schools are obliged to consider certain factors in any educational provision made for children. These are:

- Continuous, progressive education relevant to individual children's attainment, aptitude and ability.
- Health, safety, care and welfare of children.
- Social inclusion.
- Placing request legislation.
- Class size reduction at P1-3.
- Agreement through the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers
- Effective use of resources and best practice.
- West Lothian Council policy to retain 2-3 places at each stage for catchment children who may move into the area during the session, where possible.

Schools are expected to have rigorous monitoring and tracking systems in place to ensure all pupils are making appropriate progress and that their needs are being effectively met. Traditionally teachers have grouped pupils of similar ability for learning and teaching purposes within straight classes. Teachers have always been expected to organise learning in a way which meets the needs of the individual who have a range of ability levels within any one class.

The authority recognises that the Head Teacher and staff of each school are best placed to make decisions about the most appropriate class arrangements in their establishments. It is therefore the **responsibility of the Head Teacher** to manage class organisation supported by advice from the education authority.

In reaching decisions about the allocation of pupils to classes Head Teachers are required to consult with all relevant / directly involved staff and to communicate with parents and the Parent Council. All schools are obliged to include a brief section in their handbooks about class organisation, including composite classes. This policy is accompanied by a leaflet for parents answering those questions that schools and the authority are most commonly asked.

A child placed in any class will not necessarily progress through school with the same group of pupils, as the class organisation may change. This can result from pupil numbers changing at particular stages, or from the different maximum class sizes that can be formed at different stages.

Considerations

The Head Teacher will consider the organisation of composite classes, according to individual needs to ensure the best teaching and learning experience for every pupil.

In forming such classes the Head teacher will take account of:

Academic Ability

Assessment information contained in the Learners' Journey, standardised tests as well as continuous assessments will all contribute to informing class composition. This will maximise attainment and ensure skills progression through high quality teaching and learning and allow the individual needs of pupils to be met.

Personal and Social Development

Consideration will be given to promoting self esteem, confidence and the development of interpersonal skills. Children and young people require development and support in making positive relationships with others and in extending friendships beyond a core group.

Chronological Age

Consideration will be given to the age of pupils as a factor in the organisation of classes within a school.

Gender Mix

Consideration will be given to gender balance as a factor in class organisation.

4. Learning and Teaching

Each individual child's learning progresses from what he/she has already learned and the child will follow the experiences and outcomes at the appropriate level from Curriculum for Excellence.

As with any class, the curriculum will be planned to take account of the range of ability levels within it.

The focus in planning learning is to develop skills as well as knowledge and understanding and this will be done through a range of different contexts. These contexts may be different in different classes, for example in social subjects and religious and moral education, to avoid repetition and ensure progression of experiences and skills.

Grouping

Pupils will be grouped across the stages in the composite class according to ability levels in reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. The number of groups will be kept as few as possible. Groupings will be flexible to meet the needs of the individual child. Groupings within classes, whether composite or single stage, will reflect a range of ability levels.

Opportunities will be given for children at the same stage but in different classes to work and play together so that they have opportunities to become members of the wider school community. Educational outings, expressive arts experiences and extra-curricular activities where relevant will allow for this.

Monitoring Progress

Class teachers will monitor progress through informal and formal assessment and groups will be re-arranged if necessary.

The Head Teacher or Senior Management Team will check that appropriate progress is being made by using a variety of monitoring strategies eg class observations, monitoring forward plans, sampling jotters or pupil work, talking with pupils, checking assessment, liaising with other appropriate agencies.

Clear guidance will be given to teachers through school policies to ensure a consistent whole school approach to learning and teaching, assessment and reporting.

A variety of teaching methods will be used to support the wide range of ages, ability levels and maturity of the children in the class.

5. Conclusion

Teachers are trained to provide for a range of ability, maturity and personal and social development needs within any one class. Education Scotland (Inspectorate of Schools) and West Lothian Council school review processes confirm that effective learning and teaching takes place in composite and single stage classes across West Lothian.

Head Teachers and their staff are best placed to make decisions about allocation of children to groups or classes to ensure continuity and progress in their learning through the 3-18 curriculum and for that reason class organisation is devolved to the Head Teacher. The allocation of pupils to classes must involve good communication with parents.

This document has been produced to assist schools in their management of composite classes and in informing parents of considerations.