



Killoughteen National Splitting Classes

Policy on Splitting Classes

Introduction

This policy was the product of whole-staff collaboration in tandem with Board of Management of Killoughteen NS during the month of June 2018.

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 classes, as numbers sometimes don't allow for straight single streams or straight multi-grade mixes.

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. He will decide how best to organise classes with a view to providing the best educational opportunities for all children.

Research

The staff of Killoughteen NS have researched the various options in use in other schools to split classes. There were 5 main criteria being used: **Gender, Ability, Rotation (so that children get a similar experience of straight/split classes), Friendship Groups and Age**. Each option was discussed and together we agreed on the following observations.

Gender should be kept in mind but should not be a deciding factor as from year to year the gender make-up of classes will vary.

Ability as a determining criterion was not considered appropriate as performance will vary from year to year and this may be seen to put pressure on children to "earn" a place in either a straight or split class.

Friendship groups were seen as difficult to operate and subject to change from year to year.

Rotation was considered to be the fairest method for splitting the classes and **Age** was considered the fairest and most transparent way to divide the pupils to form class groups.



Killoughteen National Splitting Classes

Criteria on which children are selected to be placed in mixed or straight classes

In consultation with the class teacher, and if necessary, with previous teachers of the classes involved, some considerations may need to be taken into account. Some children may have special educational needs and it would be more beneficial to have these children in different classes, to help maximise the help that they can attain from their class teachers.

Criteria for placing children in particular class groups

We group the children in such a way so as to maximise the learning outcomes for *each child*. When dividing a class into groups, to be placed in separate classes, there are certain criteria to be taken into consideration:

- It is considered best to form mixed-ability groups
- Distribution of boys/girls in classes
- 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
- It is impossible to satisfy all demands for groups of friends to be kept together.
- Where possible, classes that have been split in the current school year will not be split in the next school year. Specific numbers of boys and girls will be placed into classes in an effort to try and keep class sizes equitable. This will be done using children's DOB. (mixed age groups, not oldest youngest)
- Parents will then be informed of the split and what classes their children will be placed into.

Sometimes pupils move to or from the school without informing the school in advance. This is outside the control of the principal. 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.

Explaining to parents why their child is in a split class

The DES allots one teacher to each group of 26 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 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?



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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

Every effort will be made to avoid unnatural class splits such as seniors /first, second/ third, and 4th/5th. The Principal, the Class Teacher and Special Education Teachers team will consult on how best to organise the extra learning support for the mixed 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 Special Education Teacher 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 Special Education Teacher which may suit the class is for either the Class Teacher or the Special Education Teacher to withdraw small groups of children.

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

Enrolment of new children into split classes

The rationale behind this policy is for the formation of smaller classes/ suitable class groupings within the recommended pupil-teacher ratio. The enrolment of new children into these classes is to be avoided as much as possible especially if the groupings exceed the current pupil teacher ratio.

The allocation of teachers to mixed classes

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

Review

This policy will be reviewed in April 2020.