

# Scoil Mhuire U.R. 11894 I

## Policy on Splitting Classes

### Introduction

This policy was the product of whole-staff collaboration in tandem with the Parents and Board of Management of Scoil Mhuire, Sandymount.

### 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, and this will depend on the number of children validly enrolled which may not always fit into neat packages each year. In schools such as Scoil Mhuire, which do not have 8 classes (or multiples of 8), it may be necessary to have a mixture of straight classes and split classes.

It is very difficult to explain to Parents at any time how the allocation of classes works and how it is the sole responsibility of the Principal. The Principal is considered in this regard much like a team captain in sport or a conductor of an orchestra – picking his or her team for the year or allocating particular roles to achieve harmony.

The number of teachers for a Primary School is decided on the 30<sup>th</sup> September each year and the number of pupils on that day dictates the number of teachers for the following September.

The number of pupils in a school depends also on the enrolment policy.

*It is of no concern to the Department of Education if the school has 152 ten year olds, 4 nine year olds and 65 children ranging in age from 4 -8 years.*

*It is up to the Principal to allocate the teachers in the best possible way so as to deliver the curriculum with integrity on behalf of the Board of Management of the school. Clearly, this example is not very realistic.*

*The pupil body in a school can however, change dramatically in a very short space of time, leaving the Principal with difficult decisions to make, while trying to keep parents, pupils and teachers happy!*

A greater number of schools in Ireland have split classes – more than those that do not. Our population is scattered and although large towns and cities may not be used to split classes, this is something that teachers are trained to manage.

The Curriculum and indeed text books are designed to be used in a rotation system and this is part of planning for the Principal and the teaching staff as a whole.

Even within a 'straight' class, children are grouped for various subjects, especially literacy and numeracy. Booklists may be differentiated to allow the child/ren to access the curriculum in the most effective way.

### 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 try to share or rotate the various cohorts within the school to provide a fair experience for all involved.
- To set out the supports which may be used to ensure the best learning outcomes for all children in mixed classes
- The most important aim of this policy is to provide as much information to parents and teachers at the meetings required when splitting a class and these are held well in advance of September. The Board of Management on the advice of the Principal, agrees that parents will be happier participants in the splitting of a class if they have all the information communicated to them and the opportunity to ask questions, express concerns, or make suggestions.

## Research

There is a great deal of research on splitting classes and of course you will find papers which cite the advantages and those which cite the disadvantages.

There are 5 main criteria used: **Gender, Ability, Rotation (so that children get a similar experience of straight/split classes), Friendship Groups and Age.**

**Gender** *This does not apply in an all girls school such as Scoil Mhuire.*

**Ability** as a determining criterion is 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 are seen as difficult to operate and subject to change from year to year in the population of a Primary school, considering their young age.

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

**Rotation and Age** are the criteria used here in Scoil Mhuire.

### Example 1

Cohort for Junior Infants is 42

Cohort for Senior Infants is 44

### Example 2

Cohort for 2nd Class next year, which was 2 classes, has now dropped to 40 in total, 18. and 22.

Cohort in 3<sup>rd</sup> Class is 33

Cohort in 1<sup>st</sup> Class is 26

### Example 3

Cohorts in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> started at 42 and 44 respectively.

In 3<sup>rd</sup>, there are now 51 pupils.

### Example 1

- The children will be ranked according to age in each cohort.
- Each class will be divided into 3 groups in the following manner: Starting with the oldest child, the first child is in **Group A**, the second child in **Group B**, the third child in **Group C** and so on.
- The class is therefore divided into 3 groups and each group is a mixed age group.
- The same process is applied to the second cohort.

- We now have 3 mixed age groups in each class.
  - **JI – A JI – B JI – C**
  - **SI – A SI – B SI - C**
- Children will be in the mixed class every third year and in a straight class for the other years.
- **Year 1-** there will be a
  - **Straight Junior Infants; Groups A+B,**
  - **Mixed Junior and Senior Infants; Groups C in both classes,**
  - **Straight Senior Infants, Group A+B**
- **Year 2 -** there will be a
  - **straight Senior Infants; Groups B+C,**
  - **mixed Senior Infants and First Class; Groups A in both classes,**
  - **straight First Class; Groups B+C.**
- **Year 3 -** there will be a
  - **straight First Class; Group A+C**
  - **a mixed First and Second Class Group B in both classes**
  - **a straight Second Class; Group A+C**

### **Example 2**

A cohort starts off in Junior Infants with 2 viable classes, but as the years go by the numbers drop due to families moving out of the area.

With the numbers falling like this the school may be in danger of losing a teacher and so if there is a demand in the Junior Infant age group, it is important for the school to accept those children according to the enrolment policy.

The time may come however, when it is no longer viable to continue with this cohort as 2 separate classes.

The Principal may have to split the classes –

Option A – 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> together gives a total of 73 pupils.

Option B – 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> together gives a total of 66 pupils.

The splitting of the groups here is a little different.

We can use the same approach as above but as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Class cohort were already divided according to age, it is possible to leave them as they are.

The First Class Cohort, will be divided into two groups. The class List is always ranked in age, and so the first child is in Group A and the second child in Group B and so on.

We therefore have two groups of mixed age.

Each 1<sup>st</sup> Class group is assigned to one of the two 2<sup>nd</sup> Class groups.

In consultation with parents, we will decide if these groups are to be rotated in any way.

A group like this (and indeed all groups) will be monitored very carefully and should the numbers change to allow for a better pupil teacher ratio arrangements will be changed to reflect this.

### **Example 3**

If the numbers in a given cohort increase to over 50 we will look at trying to suspend the split class situation and provide 2 separate classes.

In order to share the load fairly, the Principal must watch the numbers in each cohort for every coming year and allow all children the best possible learning experience.

### **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. S/he will decide how best to organise classes with a view to providing the best educational opportunities for all children.

It is vital too that the Principal looks also at the longer picture with a view to knowing the possible options that may arise if various circumstances should prevail.

### **Criteria for placing children in particular class groups**

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 based on age and the groups in the split class will be rotated.
- The dynamics of the class must be considered and the only situations which may be considered very deliberately would be
  - Twins: it may be considered necessary to keep twins together or indeed to separate them.
  - There may be sisters: a year apart and again it may be fairer to avoid having them in the same group.
- The process of forming new friendships is a life skill which is important to develop. A positive and supportive attitude from parents and teachers is a key element in achieving a successful outcome in the new groups.

### **The supports which could be made available to children and teachers in mixed classes**

One of the greatest developments of the Board of management in Scoil Mhuire is the provision of Classroom Assistants (CA). These are funded through the Ancillary Services Grant and the Voluntary Contribution. Where we have split classes, those classes take first priority with our Classroom Assistants.

They are timetabled to where they are most needed and a split class is one of the priorities. A CA may not be needed all the time, e.g. during P.E., perhaps art in the older classes, Religion time, and so they are allocated to the classes where we feel they can be of most benefit.

In a large mixed class they are certainly required for English and Maths, SESE and this is a huge support to the teacher, pupils, and parents.

A child in a mixed or split class who requires Learning Support of a specific nature will receive it according to our Learning Support Policy and the guidelines set down by the Department of Education.

Learning Support is a continuum and is the responsibility in the first place of the class teacher, but it is a priority in Scoil Mhuire and something that we allocate to every child according to need. This may be for a long time or just a short time.

It is always done in conjunction with parents and when in a split class, the process of assessment and allocation is exactly the same as in a straight class.

Teachers may consider changes to the booklists to best suit a straight or a split class especially now with the increased use of ICT and online supports.

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 within the recommended pupil-teacher ratio. The enrolment of new

**The allocation of teachers to mixed classes**

It is the duty of the Principal as per Circular 16/73 to assign teaching duties. We have a Policy on Class Allocation and Rooms.

In Scoil Mhuire, we encourage teachers to work to their strengths and this often means that teachers swap for certain subjects.

**This policy was introduced and ratified by the Board of Management in January 2011 and will be reviewed as required and in the light of any new guidelines or legislation.**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
B. Fitzpatrick  
Chairperson.

Date: 17 January 2011