

Split-Class Policy

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Introduction:

This policy was the product of whole-staff collaboration in tandem with the Board of Management of Kilbonane National School.

Rationale:

In a rural school such as this, it is usual to work in multigrade settings where two or more class levels are taught by one teacher. This is a difficult task which requires skills and experience and will ultimately improve the quality and ability of the individual teachers that experience it. Kilbonane National School has plenty of experience with multigrade classes as it is the norm. Multigrade classes are most often arranged in such a way that the curriculum is common to both grades.

In the interest of providing the best education for all students, it may be necessary, from time to time, to divide and combine one single class level to be split between the class levels above and below. This will be to facilitate growing numbers and to ensure no class increases in size too far beyond the pupil teacher ratio (currently at 26/1 as of 2018 Department of Education figures).

Aims and Objectives of this Policy:

- To provide a framework for the splitting of year groups/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. The Principal, in consultation with staff members, will decide how best to organise classes with a view to providing the best educational opportunities for all children in Kilbonane National School.

Explaining to parents why their child is in a split class:

The Department of Education allocates 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 the ratio suggests. 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 in one class. **The Department's objective is that class size should be as equitable as possible across all class levels.** 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. A positive and supportive attitude from parents is a key element in achieving a successful outcome in new groups/classes.

Criteria for placing children in particular class groups:

Splitting the class, while ensuring the best possible learning outcomes for each child, is a very complex challenge. Much work goes into the preparatory stage of the arrangements prior to June. There are a number of issues outside the control of the Principal, such as pupils leaving or enrolling in the school during the summer holidays.

The decision must not be bound by statistics but must be based on the experience and expertise of the Professional Teaching Staff. The final say, after consultation between staff, must rest with the Principal who must consider the needs of every child in the class, using professional judgement.

This means that a class might not have an equal amount of girls and boys. It might not have younger children split into the lower grade and older ones into the older grade. It might not have a perfect balance of academic ability. The teachers will decide the right balance of all of these things. They will consider ages, genders and scores. But they will also consider the unquantifiable: personalities, behaviours, socialisation, and stages of physical and emotional development, special educational needs, special personal development needs, discipline, temperament, humour, sensitivity, creativity and much more.

We group the children in such a way so as to maximise the learning outcomes for *each child*. Before the process begins certain considerations will be discussed by the staff:

- It is considered best to form mixed-ability groups where possible
- Distribution of boys/girls in classes
- The process of forming new friendships is a life skill which is important to develop. It will seldom be possible to satisfy all demands for groups of friends to be kept together.
- Class dynamics must be also considered. Emotional, behavioural & social factors which could upset the dynamic of the new group will be discussed when forming new class groupings.

Classes that have been split, reunite daily to play together on the playground 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.

Curriculum and books:

Teachers choose content and books suitable to their mixed 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. The teacher may choose one textbook to use for both groups in a mixed class. This may be misleading for parents but the teacher, as the professional, decides how the content and skills are to be taught.

The supports which could be made available to children and teachers in split classes:

The Principal, the Class Teacher and Special Education Teachers (SET's) will consult on how best to organise the learning support for each class. In some cases, the SET may work in the classroom with the Class Teacher, in a team-teaching arrangement. It is possible that the SET 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 Learning Support which may suit the class is for either the Class Teacher or the SET to withdraw individuals/small groups of children or a part of the class grouping to teach certain subject areas or topics.

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

The allocation of teachers to split classes:

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

This policy was discussed and ratified by the Board of Management on 26/11/2018 and will be reviewed as necessary.

Signed: _____ Signed: _____
Chairman, Board of Management Principal, Board of Management