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POLICY ON SPLITTING CLASSES

A. Introduction

This Policy is the product of whole Staff collaboration in tandem with the Board of Management of Portlaw National School. This Policy has been followed since the year 2000.

B. 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, which are smaller in size and offer a better pupil-teacher ratio.

C. Aims and Objectives

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.

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

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

- (i) Class list formulated in chronological order.

- (ii) Initial Class split begins with oldest children on list.
- (iii) No such Class grouping shall be less than 6 in number.
- (iv) Gender equity will be considered in that in such a group of 6, there will be a minimum combination of 2:4. In a larger grouping, ratio shall also be given consideration.
- (v) Subsequent class splits will continue onwards from original grouping: i.e. in continuous chronological order.

F. Social Factors

The placing of Children in a particular Class group on the basis of the criteria outlined above means that it is not possible to satisfy demands for groups of friends to be kept together. Classes that have been split re-unite daily to play together in the playground during breaks so that 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. Split Classes also may re-unite to eat lunch together.

G. Explaining to Parents why their Child is in a split class.

The DES allots one Teacher to each group of 28 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 not 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 DES 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.

H. Why does one half of the Class have a different booklist to the other?

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.curriculum.ie) is primary *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 be taught.

I. The supports which could be made available to Children and Teachers in mixed Classes

The Principal, the Class Teacher and Learning Support team will consult on how best to organise the learning support for the mixed class. In some cases, the Learning Support Teacher may work in the classroom with the Class Teacher, in a team-teaching arrangement. It is possible that the Learning Support 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 Learning Support which may suit the Class is for either the Class Teacher or the Learning Support Teacher to withdraw small groups of Children. Occasionally, especially in the case of Senior Infants / 1st, 2nd / 3rd, 4th / 5th, it may suit the Classes better, if the teaching of Mathematics is taken separately by the Class Teacher for one class and the Learning Support Teacher for the other class.

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

J. The allocation of Teachers to mixed classes

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

K. Amendment to Policy - Junior Infants 2013/14

Class Splits 2013-14

Due to unprecedented Junior Infant enrolment figures for September 2013 it has been necessary to revise and adjust policy re class splits as applied to heretofore.

Revised Criteria – Junior Infants only 2013/14:

- (1) Class list formulated in alphabetical order.
- (2) Class split to proceed from above.
- (3) Consideration of gender balance.
- (4) Consideration of the need for inclusion and integration of Children with special educational needs.

L. Criteria for other Classes:

As outlined in Policy on Splitting Classes.

M. Criteria for Class Splits 2014/15

Criteria as outlined in Policy.

Infant Classes: With a Junior Infant intake this year of 34 (2014), in the interest of equity, and in light of each year bringing different groupings, the Senior Infants of September 2014 are being divided chronologically. This will continue onwards in future years depending on circumstances. The Pupils in the combined classes will be the eldest in both groups.