

Gaelscoil Uí Drisceoil

Policy on Multi-Grade Classes

Introduction

A third of primary school students in Ireland attend multi-grade classes and research shows that there are very positive benefits for pupils in these groups. Multi-grade classes afford pupils an excellent opportunity to become more independent and to make new friends, while established friendships can easily be maintained at breaktimes and during group activities such as swimming or class tours. This policy is the product of staff collaboration in consultation with the Board of Management.

Rationale

In the interest of providing the best education for all pupils, it may from time to time be necessary to divide and combine class groups into multi-grade groups where numbers would otherwise be too big or too small in one class. All pupils will be treated equally whether they are in multi-grade or single class groupings.

The decision to organise multi-grade classes will be based on:

- current Department of Education staffing schedules and retention figures
- making optimum use of teaching resources
- providing the best educational opportunities for all pupils

Aims

This policy aims to be simple, fair and transparent as far as is practicable.

- To provide a framework for the organisation of multi-grade classes
- To outline the criteria by which pupils are selected to be placed in multi-grade classes
- To set out the arrangements for curriculum content for multi-grade classes
- To set out the supports which may be used to ensure the best learning outcomes for all pupils in mixed classes
- To allow for effective communication of the policy with staff and parents

Framework for organising multi-grade classes

At the time of planning classes for the next school year, the school principal will look at the overall numbers in each class group and the number of mainstream class teachers available to teach them as outlined in the Dept. of Education staffing schedule.

Decisions on how best to organise classes will be taken with a view to providing the best educational opportunities for all pupils throughout the school. Children will be grouped in such a way as to maximise the learning outcomes for *each child*. Decisions regarding multi-grade classes will be taken in consultation with teaching staff.

General points

- Multi-grade class groupings provide excellent opportunities for pupils to develop independence and social skills and in some cases to revisit topics previously taught

- It is not always possible to keep groups of friends together but class teachers will be consulted about this when classes are being organised
- The process of forming new friendships is an important life skill. A positive and supportive attitude from staff and parents is a key element in achieving a successful outcome in multi-grade class groupings
- Classes that have been divided will unite at breaktimes so they can maintain existing friendships as well as making new friends in the new group
- It is best practice to form mixed-ability class groupings
- The final decision regarding the organisation of multi-grade classes rests with the principal

Criteria for placement into a multi-grade class

When organising multi-grade classes, the factors listed below may be taken into consideration (in no particular order):

- the number of pupils in relevant classes
- the chronological age of the pupils in the class to be divided
- the distribution of boys/girls in both the class to be divided and that to be combined
- class dynamics - emotional, behavioural and social factors may impact on multi-grade class dynamics
- prior placement in a multi-grade class
- classroom size and accommodation

Curriculum and Booklists

- Teachers working with multi-grade classes will plan for teaching and learning collaboratively to ensure a consistent approach for all pupils
- For the three **core subjects** – Gaeilge, English & Mathematics – pupils will follow the curriculum content **at their own class level**. There will, however, be certain areas of each curriculum that allow for integration between the two classes
- **Non-core subjects** will be taught to the **whole class** in an integrated manner
- Booklists will be decided annually by class teachers to reflect their particular preferences and may differ slightly for non-core subjects. Books for core subjects will be the same

Supports for students in a multi-grade class

The school principal, class teacher(s) and special education team within the school will consult on how best to organise support in multi-grade class situations. In line with our *Special Education Policy*, our school offers a combination of in-class, small group and individual support.

Forms of support that may suit the class are as follows:

- A special education teacher (SET) may work in the classroom with the class teacher in a team-teaching or a station-teaching arrangement
- An SET may work in the classroom supporting a small group of children, with the class teacher undertaking the main teaching of the lesson
- The SET or class teacher may withdraw a small group of pupils
- The class teacher and SET may undertake the teaching of a particular subject separately e.g. for Mathematics, the class teacher teaches one class, while the SET teaches the other class

Such arrangements will be considered on a **class by class basis, from year to year** to best cater for the unique needs of the individual students in each class group.

Communication

The Department of Education allocates one teacher to per 23 pupils at present. This pupil-teacher ratio is dictated annually by the government budget and schools have no control over this. Each year, the Dept. publishes a staffing schedule to school which outlines how many mainstream class teachers a school is entitled to based on current enrolments.

When class groupings have been decided, the school principal will inform parents of the class group organisation for the following school year. Booklists will also be circulated outlining which books will be needed by each class grouping.

A positive and supportive attitude from parents is a key element in achieving a successful outcome in the new class groups formed by this policy. Each arrangement is for one school year.

Implementation and review

All staff share in the co-ordination and implementation of this policy and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and amendments made as necessary.

Approval

This policy was presented to and ratified by the Board of Management. Following ratification, it was made available to the wider school community on the school website.

Síniú / Signed:

Cathaoirleach

Príomhoide

Dáta: