



GUIDELINES ON STRUCTURING CLASSES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Guideline issued by: Head of Education

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 When consideration is being given to the projected structure of classes Head Teachers may have to consider the formation of composite classes. The following guidance has been updated to take account of new class size legislation.
- 1.2 When composite classes are to be formed or classes are to be reconfigured then the Head Teacher should inform and reassure parents as part of the process relevant to the management of the school and working in partnership with parents. HGIOS Quality Indicator 2.2 refers.

Where parents and pupils have little or no experience of composite classes difficulties can arise if they are not fully informed and reassured that a composite class can provide the same level and quality of educational experience as a single stage class. Where a positive and supportive approach is taken by a school when communicating and working with parents regarding class formation then the opportunities for parents to be dissatisfied with the school's plans for class formation are significantly reduced.

2. THE STRUCTURE OF CLASSES

- 2.1 Primary schools have pupils at seven year stages, P1 to P7. A year stage can therefore be defined as a group of pupils entering primary education at a common date and will comprise an age range of about 1½ years. For example a P1 class could have pupils aged between 4½ and 6 years old at the start of the school session.
- 2.2 Composite classes occur where children from two or more year stages are grouped together.
- 2.3 Schools receive a basic complement of teaching staff in accordance with the total number of pupils on the school roll and as manager of the school it is the Head Teacher's responsibility to structure the classes making the most effective use of staffing resources. This is a fundamental professional responsibility and should ensure that effective use of made of the resources devolved for management at school level. The deployment of staff is also a key indication of the 'Best Value' use of available resources.

- 2.4 The national conditions of service for teachers set a normal maximum number of:
- 25 pupils in a P1 class
 - 30 pupils in P2 & 3 classes
 - 33 pupils in P4-7 classes
 - 25 pupils in composite classes
- 2.5 It is therefore normally possible to form single year stage classes when the number of pupils at each year stage is slightly less than the contractual class maximum of 25/30/33 or a multiple of 25/30/33. Where numbers are very small or where they are slightly greater than 25/30/33, it is usually necessary to form composite classes, perhaps involving several year stages throughout a school.
- 2.6 It is the Education and Children's Services Division's view that a number of professional considerations should be borne in mind when considering the structuring of classes - the needs of pupils, effective deployment of promoted and teaching staff together with effective use of resources and space as appropriate. It is acknowledged that circumstances will vary from school to school and from academic year to year.

3. THE SELECTION OF PUPILS FOR A COMPOSITE CLASS

- 3.1 Composite classes are normally formed on the basis of age. This ensures that the age range within a composite class is normally no wider than that of a single year class. For example, a school has 40 pupils at P3 and 40 pupils at P4. The numbers are too large to form two single stage classes. Three classes must be formed, P3, P3/4 and P4. P3/4 is the composite class and will be formed with the oldest P3 pupils and the youngest P4 pupils. The resulting classes are illustrated below.

<u>P3</u>	<u>P3/4</u>	<u>P4</u>
28		28
	12 + 12	
	24	

Where more than one single year class is formed within a primary stage then again the classes should be formed to ensure an appropriate and balanced group of pupils across the age range for the stage. An appropriate gender balance should also be considered for each class.

- 3.2 The formation of a composite class on the basis of age should therefore be considered as the first option, but head teachers must weigh up other relevant considerations, e.g. pupils with ASN in making decisions about class formations.
- 3.3 Exceptions to class formation on the basis of age should be discussed fully with the Schools Group Manager prior to approval by the Head of Education

4. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF CLASS ORGANISATION

- 4.1 Responsibility for decisions regarding class organisation rests with the Head Teacher who must be able to produce documented educational and organisational evidence to support class structure plans. This may be required when responding to any enquiries by parents and/or elected members.
- 4.2 Head Teachers should consult with teaching staff when planning the formation of classes and stage structure for the school. Class teachers should abide by any decisions made by the Head Teacher, following consultation, relating to organisational arrangements and the timing and content of any information released to parents.

5. GOOD PRACTICE – LEARNING AND TEACHING

- 5.1 The delivery of the curriculum is similar in single year classes to that in composite classes. It is possible to have as wide a spread of ability and attainment levels in a single year class as in a composite class.

Planning at school, class and group levels should seek to ensure that the needs of learners are met.

- 5.2 Throughout the school, staff are encouraged to liaise with one another, as appropriate, in order to achieve continuity and progression for all pupils. In classes of a single year stage and in composite classes pupils will work in social groups, mixed ability groups and ability groups according to the tasks in which they are involved and the teaching methodologies employed.
- 5.3 Effective management of personnel, resources and teaching space are critical in the final decisions on class organisation. In particular Head Teachers should ensure that promoted staff are deployed to the benefit of the whole school and that teachers with particular skills are made available for the benefit of as many pupils as possible.

6. COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 Openness with parents is vital to ensure their understanding and support. Parents should be informed of the need to form composite classes as soon as is possible and the Head Teacher should explain how this affects their child. When pupils enrol in Primary 1, parents should be given information about composite classes so that there is an understanding of these.
- 6.2 When a Head Teacher provides staff, parents and pupils with information about class formation, where appropriate, the criteria used for the allocation of pupils to classes should also be provided.
- 6.3 When a projected school session's class structure is communicated to parents, it must be accompanied by a statement which should explain that further reorganisation may become necessary if the distribution of pupils changes significantly.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Head Teachers should:

- 7.1 Incorporate the criteria for structuring classes in the school handbook.
- 7.2 Make available the Education and Children's Services Division's guidelines to staff as required, including the attached advice leaflet for parents, on the structuring and formation of classes.
- 7.3 Inform parents of likely reconfiguration of classes or the creation of composite classes at the earliest possible opportunity to allow for appropriate discussion to take place.
- 7.4 Inform the Parent Council of decisions made regarding class structure and formation.

COLIN TAYLOR
Head of Education

4 May 2011

Contact Person: Sheena Dawe 0131 271 3723 sheena.dawe@midlothian.gov.uk

Associated Papers: 1 Information/Advice leaflet for parents "The Formation of Classes in Midlothian Primary Schools"

Paper Circulated to: All Nursery and Primary Head Teachers, Education Officers, Teacher Unions, HMIE District Inspector

The Formation of Composite and Single Stage Classes in Midlothian Primary Schools

1.Q *How many classes are there in primary schools in Midlothian and how many of these are composite classes?*

A Each year there are around 270 classes in Midlothian primary schools, and around 70 of these are composite classes.

Most of the composite classes include pupils from 2 year groups but in some of our smallest schools there may be pupils from 3 or more year groups.

2.Q *Why are composite classes necessary?*

A Composite classes are formed in order to make best use of available resources while ensuring that pupils get an appropriate education. Each school receives an allocation of teachers related to the number of pupils in the school. Headteachers are required to organise the pupils into classes, according to the staffing allocation. At times the number of pupils in a year group may vary significantly, and classes may need to be formed from pupils in more than one year group. For example, a school might have 18 pupils in the P5 year group and 36 pupils in the P6 year group. As there are national agreements regulating class sizes, it would not be possible for a Headteacher simply to make a P5 of 18 pupils and a P6 of 36. Instead he or she would require to create a composite class of say, 18 P5s and 6 P6s together with one teacher and the remaining 30 P6 pupils forming another class with a different teacher.

3.Q *Are composite classes detrimental to the progress of children?*

A No. Composite classes have always been a feature of education in Scottish schools and contribute to the 'family' atmosphere with older pupils working alongside younger ones.

Reports from Her Majesty's Inspectorate have demonstrated that the level of education attained through composite classes is at least equal to that of single year groups. It should also be recognised that there could be less of an age range between the oldest and the youngest pupils in these classes than in a single year group.

The national agreement regulating class sizes is that the maximum class size for a single stage class is 25 for P1, 30 for P2-3, 33 for P4-7 and the maximum class size for a composite class is 25.

Every class is made up of a number of individuals whose particular needs should be addressed, whether the class is composite or not.

4.Q *When will I know what class my child has been allocated to?*

A You will be notified in writing by the Headteacher about this before the end of the summer term. This may be tentative and subject to further clarification in terms of possible changes to the school roll or staffing allocation.

5.Q *How are children allocated to classes?*

A The allocation of pupils to classes will be carried in accordance with Education and Children's Services Division policy. Experience suggests that this is best achieved by the application of age as the main criterion. However, the Education and Children's Services Division is committed to a policy of decision making at local level within a clear policy framework. In recommending age as the key criterion to be adopted in forming composite classes, sufficient flexibility is allowed to Headteachers to respond to specific circumstances in their own schools.

6.Q *What if I have concerns about the fact that, for example, my child is separated from his or her friends through changes in class allocations?*

A Children, and particularly young children, usually make new friendships and can cope with changes.

Additionally, however the school will usually provide a range of opportunities for social interaction within year groups ranging from informal contacts in the playground to team games and shared learning activities.

The Headteacher will explain fully the policy and practice which is operated in your child's school and will meet with you, if necessary, to discuss any specific concerns which you may have. An explanation from the Headteacher could include the following:

- (a) how the allocation of classes is consistent with the school's assessment of pupils in terms of abilities or social groupings;
- (b) how social contacts within year groups are maintained;
- (c) any other relevant factors, such as building design, which influence the formation of classes.

7.Q *Who decides on the formation of classes in schools?*

A Headteachers are responsible for the management of their schools within a framework of guidance provided by the Education Authority. This extends to the formation of classes and the Education Authority would only be involved where the policy framework is being questioned.

8.Q *How can I check on my child's progress?*

A All Headteachers should ensure that parents have information about the curriculum and about the target levels to which children are working.

Teachers assess pupils' progress and achievement in relation to experiences and outcomes specified in the curriculum guidelines. The major purpose of assessment is to identify strengths and next steps in learning to ensure effective progress. Teachers record progress and report on this to parents via parent consultation meetings and annual reports.

At any time, parents can ask to discuss their child's progress with teachers and/or promoted staff. A child's progress should not be influenced by being in either a composite or a single stage class.

Donald MacKay
Director, Education and Children's Services
Midlothian Council
Fairfield House
8 Lothian Road
DALKEITH
EH22 3ZG

**Midlothian Council
Education & Children's Services
Division**



The Formation of Classes in Midlothian Primary Schools

This leaflet is designed to help parents understand why children are sometimes placed in a class which has in it children who may have started school in different years.