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Gaelscoil Bheannttraí

An Seisceann, Beannttraí

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Policy on Splitting Classes

Introduction

This policy was the product of whole-staff collaboration in tandem with the Parents and Board of Management of Gaelscoil Bheannttraí. The policy was reviewed during the school year 2020/2021 and again in 2021/2022, following input from the Board of Management, parents, children and staff.

Rationale

The Department of Education and Skills sanction 6 mainstream classroom teachers to Gaelscoil Bheannttraí based on the number of children enrolled in the school. It is necessary to divide and combine class groups in to mixed classes in line with the recommended pupil-teacher ratio.

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 set out the supports which may be used to ensure the best learning outcomes for all children in mixed classes
- To limit the enrolment of new children into split classes, subject to Section 29 of the Education Act.

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. She/He will decide how best to organise classes with a view to providing the best educational opportunities for all children. The splitting of each class will be reviewed on an annual basis.

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

In consultation with the class teacher, and if necessary, with previous teachers of the classes involved, lists of possible groups are drawn up. Children who to date have

shown an ability to work independently are considered able to cope better in a mixed class, where from time to time the classes are taught separately.

Criteria for placing children in particular class groups

We group the children in such a way so as to maximise the learning outcomes for each child. 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
- Distribution of boys/girls in classes
- The dynamics of the class must be considered. Emotional, behavioural and social factors which could upset the dynamic of the new class should be taken into consideration when forming new grouping
- The needs of children with SNA access will be considered.
- Classes may also be split in an open and transparent manner such as alphabetically, by age, picking names from a hat. In the latter instance, this will happen at a Board of Management meeting.
- This decision will lie ultimately with the Principal, who must consider the needs of every child in the class.

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. A positive and supportive attitude from parents is a key element in achieving a successful outcome in the new groups.

Parents will be consulted prior to siblings being placed in mixed classes and parental feedback will be welcomed.

It is not always possible to keep friends together but the teachers of each class to be split are consulted on the above issues and much work goes into the preparatory stage of the arrangement prior to the summer holidays. Sometimes pupils move to or from the school without informing the school in advance. This is outside the control of the principal.

Classes that have been split reunite daily to play together on the playground/sports field 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. The schools plans for class level groups and teachers plan collaboratively at each class level. There will be opportunity for station teaching at particular class levels, and for classes to come together for lessons across the curriculum.

Explaining to parents why their child is in a split class

The DES allots one teacher to each group of 25 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 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.

Parents will be informed of their child's class at least one week before the end of the school year. Teacher allocation will be shared on the last day of the school year (when possible).

Will all pupils in a split class work from the same curriculum?

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.curriculumonline.ie) is primarily 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 to be taught.

Teachers plan collaboratively to ensure that all children at each class level are covering the same content at the same time.

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

The Principal, the Class Teacher and Support team will consult on how best to organise the learning support for the mixed class. In some cases, the Support Teacher may work in the classroom with the Class Teacher, in a team-teaching arrangement. It is possible that the 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 support which may suit the class is for either the Class Teacher or the Support Teacher to withdraw small groups of children. All of these arrangements must be considered on a class-by-class basis, from year to year.

Requests to the Board of Management by parents to move their child from one split class to the other split class

The Board of Management will consider this request prior to the beginning of the new school year. They will allow the change only in the circumstances where another child is willing to swap classes with them.

Enrolment of new children into split classes

Children can be enrolled in the school at any class level should a place be available.

The allocation of teachers to mixed classes

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

Review

This policy will be reviewed in May 2023

Síniú an Chathaoirligh _____

Síniú an Phríomhoide _____

Dáta _____