



Community Services: Education

Argyll House
Alexandra Parade
Dunoon PA23 8AJ

To: Heads of all Educational Establishments

Dear Colleague

Guidance and information on composite classes

1 Introduction

Staffing requirements for primary schools are issued on the basis of the number of children against an agreed formula to decide the number of full time equivalent teachers to be appointed to the school. Primary 1 classes have a maximum of 25 pupils. Primary 2 and Primary 3 classes have a maximum of 30 pupils. Classes at Primary 4, 5, 6 and 7 have a maximum of 33 children. In defining the classification for their schools, heads of establishment may require to put one or more year groups together to facilitate the making up of classes. Where one or more year groups form a class, ie a composite class, the total number of children in that class may not exceed 25.

It is for the head of establishment to ensure that the classification formed with the complement of teachers provided by the authority should ensure the efficient running of the school. In some very small schools, however, it may not be possible to form classes without including the head teacher as class committed. Where heads of establishment have difficulty in forming a classification they should contact the link quality improvement officer.

2 Criteria for the formation of composite classes

The authority subscribes to the view that a number of professional considerations should be borne in mind when considering the classification of classes. In allocating children to composite classes head teachers should bear in mind the levels and the progress which children have made in mathematics and language. Where possible a group of children working at broadly the same pace should be recognised in terms of

allocating children to particular classes. Where possible, in the case of two-stage composite classes, there should be a minimum of 6 children from any single stage.

Heads of establishment should also be aware of the social needs of individual children, where to split them from particular friends would cause difficulties for relationship with other children. Such a decision will be taken for a very small number of individuals and only where heads of establishment are aware of particular difficulties for children.

3 Liaison with parents/carers

It is important that parents/carers are informed at an early stage of the requirement for the formation of a composite class. In many small schools parents/carers may have become accustomed to a composite class arrangement as the norm rather than the exception. It is still important, however, that they are informed in good time prior to the start of a session so that any concerns which they may have can be addressed. Appendix 1 is a suggested sample letter which heads of establishment may wish to adapt to suit their own school situation. Appendix 2 is a leaflet which has been prepared by the authority and which should be issued to any parent/carer who requests further information on the formation of composite classes.

Where it is felt by the head of establishment that it would be helpful, a meeting of parents/carers affected by the formation of a composite class should be held.

Where the composite class has to include Primary 1 children, the parents/carers should be informed at the time of registering their child for education, where information is available, of the possibility of the formation of a composite class. Heads of establishment may find it useful at the time of enrolment to issue a copy of the authority's *A Guide for Parents on Composite Classes* along with other relevant documentation such as the school handbook.

4 Naming of composite classes

Single stage classes are known as Primary 1, Primary 2 etc. Where a composite class has to be formed it is advised that the older stage is named first, eg P2/1, P6/5. Parents/carers often feel that their children are being held back if they are included in a composite class and such a nomenclature may help to dispel this concern.

Heads of establishment of small schools may have to alter the composition of composite classes on an annual basis. Where difficulties arise in the formation of these classes, or concerns about continual restructuring of classes arise, this should be raised with the link quality improvement officer prior to such a classification being agreed.

5 The timing of the formation of a composite class

Heads of establishment should ensure that their classification for a forthcoming session is made well in advance, in the summer term of the previous session, to allow discussion with parents/carers. This classification should ensure that the likelihood of a composite class being formed throughout the session is reduced. It is important, where any change in classification is required during a school session, that this is discussed firstly with the Head of Pre-school and Primary Education.

This guidance on composite classes is given to assist heads of establishment in the classification of their schools. Further information and discussion on any points should be raised with the Head of Pre-school and Primary Education.

Yours sincerely

Executive Director of Community Services

June 2011

Appendix 1: sample letter

Dear

Formation of composite classes

Due to changes in the number of children on the school roll it will be necessary to form a composite class at your child's stage. This will be a small class of 25 children or fewer. The smaller number of children will mean that children will benefit from an increase in teacher interaction. Your child may be one of the people selected to form the composite class.

Your child will be working at an appropriate and challenging level with a number of their peers.

Please feel free to come and talk to me about any concerns which you have. Later in the session I will talk in more detail to parents/carers about the organisation of the class.

A leaflet explaining the reasons for forming composite classes is attached.

When will a composite class be formed?

- Normally such classes will be formed before the start of a new school session so that all involved know what class structures exist for the new school session.
- In certain circumstances class restructuring may have to take place during the summer break or after the session has started. However such occurrences will be very exceptional

Consultation with Parents/Carers

- Parents/Carers will be kept informed of annual class review arrangements.
- If you are concerned about decisions being made, your child's Head Teacher will be happy to meet with you to answer questions regarding class information and how it might affect your child. You may consider asking:-
- Why Classes have been formed;
- About your child's progress;
- About the sort of work programme your child will follow.

More Information

- **If you require any more information about class structures in your child's school or about composite classes generally please contact the person named in the box below**

Head Teacher

School

School Address

School Phone Number



A Guide for Parents on Composite Classes

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A Guide for Parents on Composite Classes



Your child in a composite class

- Some children are never part of a composite class whilst others, particularly in rural schools, never experience anything else. You should be confident that the professionalism of the staff in your school will ensure that your child will always work within a programme appropriate for his/her age, ability and aptitude. At both school and education authority level assessment procedures exist to ensure that your child is making good progress within the nationally agreed curriculum guidelines.
- The national guidelines on the curriculum indicate that children should proceed through learning experiences tailored to fit their personal level of attainment. This means that children in all classes will follow programmes designed to help them progress at their own level. This applies to all children regardless of whether or not they are in a composite or single year stage class.

- In addition the school will make every effort to involve children of any one year group in activities which bring the whole year group together. In this way children will be able to continue to identify with children of the same age especially at important times such as transfer to secondary school. At the same time day to day activities ensure that the natural identity of each primary class group is maintained.

What is a composite class?

- Primary schools have children at seven broad year stages, Primary 1 to Primary 7. A year stage is defined as a group of children entering primary education at a common date.
- Composite classes are those where children of more than one year stage are grouped together to form a class.

Why are composite classes formed?

- Schools are staffed to agreed standards based on the total number of children, however the numbers of children at each year stage will vary. This means that Headteachers are required to take management decisions to organize classes to make best use of available staff, resources and space. Balancing up the various factors involves both educational and organizational considerations.

How are composite classes formed?

- According to the teachers' contract the maximum number of children in any composite class is 25.
- The Headteacher will structure classes based on advice given by the education authority.
- In Argyll and Bute composite classes are normally formed on the basis of language and/or mathematics working groups. This means that children working at broadly the same pace and level in language and/or mathematics are grouped together.

Such an arrangement is made for the most efficient use of teaching resources and to cause least upset to children.

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