Class Organisation in Primary Schools – Frequently Asked Questions

This information is intended to answer the questions that parents/carers often ask about how classes are organised in primary schools. It is also important to know that staff from your child's school will be happy to meet with you to answer any questions you may have.

Who decides how the classes in my child's school are organised?

For each new session, the Head Teacher and the Communities and Families Department work together to decide the class organisation in the school according to the expected pupil roll. The number of classes is based on the number of pupils at each year stage, P2 to P6 and the expected P1 intake. Primary 1 intakes are managed across the city to ensure consistency and to comply with legislation. This allows priority to be given to catchment pupils and then, where possible, enrolment of pupils whose parents have made a placing request.
Although schools are usually able to tell parents by the middle of June which class their child will be in for the following session, class organisation may change because of alterations to the roll e.g. following placing appeal outcomes or due to other factors within the school. It is sometimes necessary to change the class organisation during the summer break or, occasionally, between August and the October break.

Can I choose my child's class?

No, it is not possible to cater for individual requests. Head Teachers and their staff will decide which class a child will join. This will be in line with the Department's procedures.

Can I appeal the Head Teacher's decision?

No, there is no appeals process. Provided the Department's procedures have been followed, the Head Teacher's decision will be final.

What is the maximum number of pupils allowed in my child's class?

Maximum class sizes are set by the Scottish Government. The maximum class size at P1 is 25, for P2–P3 classes the maximum is 30 and for pupils in P4–P7 it is 33. For composite classes, including at P1/2, the maximum is 25.

Will there be situations where my child's class can go over these numbers?

Where space is limited and forming another class would be physically impossible, a team teaching arrangement may be used, the pupil numbers in team teaching classes will exceed the maximum numbers above. There are a few exceptional situations, covered by legislation, that can mean the numbers in a class may be higher than the maximum numbers above, in these cases there would not be a second teacher in the class.

What is team teaching?

Team teaching is where two teachers teach a class that has more than the maximum number of pupils, for example a P1 group of around 40 might be taught by 2 teachers. The teachers are both in the class at the same time and are jointly responsible for planning, teaching, assessment and liaising with parents.

How are children selected for a class?

Regardless of the type of class, the same selection criteria must be used for all classes in school. Head Teachers will use a range of criteria. The selection criteria include:

- Meeting learners needs
- Age (stage appropriate)
- Friendships
- Gender balance
- Exceptional circumstances

Not all the above criteria need to be used but more than one criterion must be used. The specific criteria chosen will vary across schools, and professional judgment will be used to best meet the needs of learners in individual schools.

What is a composite class and why is it formed?

A composite class is formed with children from two or more different year groups, for example, a P3/4 class. This might happen when the numbers at year stage are too large or too small to form a class but not large enough to form two classes in a year group.

How common are composite classes?

Many of our schools will have a composite class or classes at some stage and many children will be taught in a composite class at some point in their school career. Legislation on reduced class sizes at the early stages (P1–P3) of primary school has also tended to lead to more composite classes at these stages.

How are children selected for a composite class?

Head Teachers will use the same criteria for selecting pupils for a composite class as they would for a class that is not a composite, see the criteria outlined above. Whatever the composition of a class, it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that every pupil is making good progress.

How is the curriculum taught in composite classes?

As with all classes the key requirement is for teachers to meet the needs of individuals and groups pupils within a generally approved curricular framework.

Composite classes follow the same curriculum with the same assessments. Children are taught at their own level and assessments are carried out when a pupil reaches a particular level rather than a

particular age. Teachers are trained to teach all abilities and to carefully plan all areas of the curriculum with their stage and Curriculum for Excellence level partners. This training, along with input from other teachers and agencies, allows for a full programme for all abilities.

Why does my child's class have more than one teacher?

Nearly all classes are now taught by more than one teacher at some time during the school week. This happens because conditions of service for teachers mean that teachers have a maximum of 22 ½ hours of class contact each week although pupils have a school week of up to 25 hours.

Visiting specialists or other teachers may be used to enrich the curriculum. Typically, they may take the class for Music, Art, Modern Languages, PE, and a range of other subjects. There are other reasons why your child may be taught by more than one teacher, including where teachers opt to work part time or to job share or when your child is taught by a newly qualified teacher who has a reduced number of hours in the classroom.

Whatever form of organisation, the teachers agree on the learning activities, how children will be assessed and how the children's progress will be shared with others. Teachers say that pupils enjoy and benefit from being taught by more than one teacher. This experience is also very helpful for older primary pupils as they prepare to move on to secondary school as it helps children build resilience.

What happens in school to help my child adjust to new class arrangements?

Where possible, pupils are introduced to their new teacher(s) and classmates before the end of the previous session.

We are very aware of the importance of your child's social contact while at school, there are opportunities in school and at playtime for children to interact with friends from other classes. Our experience is that children adapt well and that their social skills generally allow them to make new friendships as well as maintain old ones. If your child is changing classes this will give them the opportunity to make a wider circle of friends within the school which can benefit their own personal development.

What can parents/carers do to help support children through the transition to a new class?

Much of friendship building happens outside the classroom. Invite classmates old and new to play sessions and parties, this will help reinforce existing friendships and help build new ones. When a new child joins the school, encouraging children to befriend their new classmate and extending invitations will make their transition to a new school easier.

More Information

If you would like to discuss any of these issues further, please contact your child's school.
Further information on P1 enrolment is available in a 'Placing in Schools Information Leaflet'.