

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL CLASS COMPOSITION POLICY

1. Purpose

The policy is intended to provide a consistent and transparent process for the arrangement of classes in primary schools in Scottish Borders. It is designed to accommodate the differing circumstances of both large and small schools, and to provide Headteachers with a guidance framework within which to manage their staffing resources to best meet the educational needs of all the children within their school(s).

2. Context

The Headteacher has responsibility for the arrangement of classes within his/her school to make the most efficient use of teaching staff, to ensure the best possible learning outcomes for all children in the school whatever their individual needs.

Teachers are allocated to each school according to the total number of children on the school roll, and not on the number of children in any individual class.

In order to maintain some capacity to accept pupils who move into a school catchment area during the school year, reserved places are established for each primary school based on projected rolls. Reserved places are created by reducing the capacity of each school. For primary schools reserved places are calculated on the basis of one pupil per class.

There are national agreements on maximum class sizes, as follows:

P1	25 children
P2 & P3	30 children
P4 – P7	33 children
Composite class	25 children

It may be, therefore, that in a large school with, for example, 58 children in one year group, two **parallel classes** will be required.

In some schools, there may be fewer teachers than would be needed to teach all children in single year group classes, and so children from more than one year group will need to be taught in the same class. This is a **composite class**.

Most primary schools in Scottish Borders will have some composite classes, and most children will experience being in a composite class at some time during their primary school education. In smaller schools, children will be in composite classes throughout their time in primary school.

In Scotland, single year group classes are mixed ability and are determined by age, with children being allocated to a year group if their birthday falls between 1 March of one year and 28/29 February of the following year. If a child's birthday falls in January or February, the parents may choose to defer entry to school for a year beyond the normal start date. Other children may start school a year later on professional advice. In very exceptional circumstances, a child may start school in the year before their normal entry to school.

Scottish primary schools, including all those in Scottish Borders, teach to the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. This has been designed to ensure that all children, no matter which school they attend, have experiences in school which will lead to the same learning outcomes. Teachers are trained to teach in mixed ability classes whether these are composed of children from one or more year groups, treating each child as an individual and catering for their individual learning needs. Therefore the learning experience of any individual child should not be affected whether they are in a single year group class, a composite class composed of children from two year groups, or a composite class made up of children from three or more year groups. However, it is accepted that the *experience* of children in different classes, whether parallel single year group classes or in composite classes, and across different schools, will vary because of differences in teachers, in the class cohort, in the physical environment of the classroom etc. It is the responsibility of Headteachers and teaching staff to ensure that these different experiences are equally valid and positive for the children in all classes in their school.

Despite this, it is recognised that many parents prefer to see single year group classes and the policy does not propose that composite classes should be created in preference to single year group classes. The policy is designed to assist Headteachers in those situations where one single year group class for each year group is not possible due to pupil numbers.

3. Principles of class composition policy

- 3.1 The Headteacher will allocate the available teaching resources in a way which will, in his/her professional judgement, deliver the best educational experiences for all the children in the school.
- 3.2 It is the responsibility of the class teacher to treat all pupils as individual learners, and make sure that every child is making good progress, no matter what the composition of the class.
- 3.3 When it is necessary to divide a year group, the Headteacher will take into account the principles set out in the framework below. However, the responsibility to make decisions on class arrangements remains with the Headteacher at all times.

4. Framework for class composition arrangements

Separate guidance for the formation of parallel classes from a single year group, and composite classes with children from two or more year groups, are set out below.

Parallel Classes

- 4.1 Parallel classes are created when there are more children in a year group than can be taught in a single class, and there are sufficient teachers to allow the children to be taught in two or more single year group classes. For example, a school with 62 children in P5 could have two parallel P5 classes of 31 children each.
- 4.2 When it is necessary to create parallel classes, the over-riding principle will be to ensure each class includes an age spread and gender balance which is reflective of the whole year group.

- 4.3 If children are joining the school from a number of nursery settings, or from other primary schools, the Headteacher will endeavour to ensure that no child is put in a class without another child from their previous setting. Advice will also be taken from the professionals working with the child in the previous setting to help inform the allocation of such places.
- 4.4 *Exceptional factors:* The Headteacher will take into account the specific needs of individual children with Additional Support Needs or social, emotional or behavioural considerations, in consultation with their parents. Friendship groups will not, on their own, be considered as an exceptional factor but may be taken into account alongside specific needs.
- 4.5 The placement of siblings within the year group will be discussed with parents and their views will be taken into account.
- 4.6 Where it is necessary to continue the parallel classes from one year to the next, the expectation will be that the class composition will remain unchanged, unless there are exceptional reasons why this cannot be done.

Composite Classes

- 4.7 A composite class is a class which includes children from more than one year group, as set out in Section 2 of this policy.
- 4.8 When it is necessary to make changes to the way classes are normally arranged (eg if composite classes are required when this would not normally be the case) the Headteacher will ensure that parents are provided with information and/or opportunities to discuss the likely arrangement of classes *before* decisions are taken, in order that parents are clear about the reasons for compositing, and what the criteria will be, before class allocations are announced.
- 4.9 Where possible, whole year groups will be included in the same class. In small schools it may be possible to include more than two whole year groups within one composite class eg P4/P5/P6.
- 4.10 When it is necessary to divide a year group to make one or more composite classes, the first consideration will be to allocating places based on **Age**. For example, if a school had 40 children in P3 and 45 children in P4, the oldest 11 children from P3 would be put into a composite class with the youngest 13 children from P4 to give a P3 class of 29 children, and P3/4 composite of 24 children and a P4 class of 32 children.

The reasons for using Age are:

- It allows a Headteacher to create classes which most closely resemble those of single year groups.
 - It is a clear and transparent criteria which can be easily understood
 - It is objective
- 4.11 If children are joining the school from a number of nursery settings, or from other primary schools, the Headteacher will endeavour to ensure that no child is put in a class without another child from their previous setting. Advice will also be taken from the professionals working with the child in the previous setting to help inform

the allocation of such places. This may require exceptions to be made to the strict age order.

- 4.12 *Exceptional factors:* The Headteacher will take into account the specific needs of individual children with Additional Support Needs or social, emotional or behavioural considerations, in consultation with their parents. Friendship groups will not, on their own, be considered as an exceptional factor but may be taken into account alongside specific needs.
- 4.13 The placement of siblings within the year group will be discussed with parents and their views will be taken into account where possible. In smaller schools in particular, it may be necessary for siblings to be in the same composite class.
- 4.14 Schools will be expected to provide opportunities for children to develop relationships with their year group as well as with their composite class. Further guidance is provided in Appendix 1 to this policy.
- 4.15 *Small numbers in a composite class* - at times it may be necessary for a small group of children from one year group to be separated from their year group and to join a composite class with children from one or more other year groups. When this is necessary, the Headteacher will consider the **gender balance** in addition to other specific needs. No fewer than 2 boys or 2 girls from a single year group will be put into a composite class, unless there is only 1 girl or 1 boy in the year group.
- 4.16 *Continuing composite class* – where it is necessary to continue a composite class from one year to another, there will be a general presumption that the same cohort of children will continue in the composite. This is because these children will have already spent at least one year together as a class and will have built a class identity and working relationships. However, the Headteacher has the discretion to make different arrangements depending on the specific local circumstances, eg if a very small group of children have been separated from their peer group, or if some children have only had experience of a composite class when there is also a single year group class. In these circumstances it is likely that the Headteacher would :
- Meet with parents of all those children in the composite class or who may potentially be in the composite class, *before* any final decisions are taken to discuss the requirement for the composite to continue, and hear parents' views.
 - Consider any factors which parents put forward as specific needs for their own child.
 - If changes are to be made, be clear about the criteria used unless this would breach an individual child's confidentiality.

5. Procedures

Information sharing with parents

- 5.1 Both Headteachers and parents have identified that composite class arrangements work most smoothly in schools where parents understand the reasons why the composite classes are required, the rationale for their formation and the way in which children will be taught within the composite class. Appendix 2 contains good practice examples of information sharing and consultation which takes place in Scottish Borders Council's schools in relation to composite classes.

- 5.2 Headteachers will provide parents with information about composite classes, how they work and how children are taught in a composite setting, prior to the time when class arrangements are being made. It is likely that this will be in the form of parent leaflets and through the school handbook.
- 5.3 Class structures should be published as early as possible, once teaching allocations have been received. This will allow time for discussion with parents as required.
- 5.4 Plans for the management of classes such as the location of classrooms, the allocation of teachers and planned opportunities for year group activities will be shared with parents as part of the process.
- 5.5 Throughout the information sharing process, it is important that parents are continually reminded that class arrangements may need to be changed at short notice if circumstances change, eg if more children are enrolled at the school, or children leave. If this happens, Headteachers will :
- Inform parents as quickly as possible that changes have become necessary – this may be by text message / email / letter or phone call depending on the number of parents who need to be contacted and their preferred method of contact, and the urgency of the situation
 - Provide an opportunity for parents to discuss the implications of any such changes

Dealing with disagreements

- 5.6 If a parent wishes to discuss the class arrangements made for their child, they should speak to the Headteacher in the first instance, who will provide them with the rationale for his/her decision.
- 5.7 If a parent believes that their child has specific needs which have not been taken into account, they should discuss these with the Headteacher. If the Headteacher agrees with the parent's views, he/she will discuss with the parent how these specific needs can be addressed in the class to which the child has been allocated. The Headteacher would not necessarily be expected to move the child to another class.
- 5.8 If a parent believes a Headteacher has not adhered to this policy in allocating their child to a particular class, they should raise this concern with the Headteacher in the first instance, who will provide them with the rationale for his/her decision.
- 5.9 It is expected that the Headteacher will have spoken to or met with the parent concerned within one week of a request for such a discussion.
- 5.10 If a parent is still not satisfied following discussion with the Headteacher, they should raise their concerns to the appropriate Senior Education Officer (SEO) in the Education and Lifelong Learning Department of Scottish Borders Council. The SEO will consider whether the Headteacher's rationale meets the principles of the Class Composition Policy, and whether any actions are required to address the parent's concern. The SEO would not necessarily seek to have the child moved to another class.

5.11 If the parent remains unhappy with the class arrangements made for their child and any adjustments made to address their concerns, they may follow the official Scottish Borders Council complaints procedure.

6. Implementation of the policy

6.1 This policy will be implemented by all primary schools in the Borders with effect from 16 April 2012.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed, and identified areas of impact have been addressed within the policy.

8. Consultation on development of this policy

8.1 In developing the policy the following groups have been consulted:

- Headteachers and Deputy Heads from all primary schools (online survey and workshop)
- Parents from all primary schools (online survey) and locality based workshops)

8.2 All responses received and views put forward at workshops have been taken into account.

9. Policy monitoring and review

9.1 The implementation of this policy by schools will be monitored by the appropriate Senior Education Officer.

9.2 The policy will be reviewed on a three yearly cycle and an education officer will be appointed by the Director of Education to facilitate the review. It is expected that such a review will involve widespread consultation with stakeholders.

Appendix 1 – Good practice guide on building a year group identity

Appendix 2 – Good practice guide on consultation with parents on class composition

Version control

Name of policy: Class Composition Policy	Version Number: Final Draft
	Date: 12 January 2012

Class Composition Policy

Appendix 1 – Developing a Year Group Identity – Good Practice Guide

Children in a Scottish Borders primary school may not be in a class consisting only of the other children from their year group for many reasons – they may be in a small school where their class consists of children from other year groups as well as their own; or they may be in a year group which has been divided so that some children are in another class. While the practicalities of managing the whole school has to take priority, it is important that consideration is given to providing opportunities for children to develop a year group identity

The following considerations and activities are not a definitive list, but are examples of some of the ways in which schools approach this and they may provide ideas which would work for other schools.

1. **Opportunities for social time together - Break / lunch time / playgrounds**

In many schools, all the children will have break and lunch at the same time, and will play in a single playground, making it easy for children from a single year group to sit with their friends and play with their friends even if they aren't with those same friends during lesson time. However, where this isn't the case the Headteacher should consider with staff how those opportunities could be provided some of the time.

Example 1: in a school where P5-6 have a later lunch sitting, it may not be possible for the P5 children in a P4/5 composite to eat lunch with their P5 peers every day. But there can be special "P5 year group lunches" weekly or monthly to foster that sense of belonging to the same group.

Example 2: where there are separate doors / toilets / playgrounds used by children in certain years, children from a composite class should be allowed to use the same doors / toilets / playgrounds which are the norm for their year group unless there is a significant management reason for this not to happen (eg the P5-7 toilets are too far away from the P4/5 classroom). Even then, compromises should be explored such as the children using the same playground and toilets at lunchtime / break.

2. **Privileges and responsibilities**

In some schools, children are given certain responsibilities and privileges when they go into a certain year – particularly in P7, when children may be able to wear different coloured sweatshirts to those in the rest of the school, and may be given duties as playground buddies or dining room monitors.

These opportunities should be available to all the children from a year group, whether they are in a composite class or not.

In a smaller school where several year groups may be in a single class, privileges which go with a particular year should remain the privilege of only

the children in that year group unless that is actually unmanageable. For example, if the P7 children are allowed to wear a different coloured sweatshirt then only the P7 children should be allowed to wear that sweatshirt even if they are in a P6/7 composite class – the privilege should not be extended to the P6s in the class unless there is a good reason to do so (for example, there are not enough P7s to act as playground buddies), and in that case the reason should be explained to the children.

3. Curriculum

Opportunities for working across classes and with those from the same and other year groups will vary according to circumstances in any individual school. However, some working arrangements which take place in some schools include:

- Maths / Literacy working groups across classes
- Class topic work and year group topic work
- PE opportunities for whole year group – this may include PE lessons, or trips to events such as rugby festivals, swimming or curling lessons etc
- Music opportunities for whole year group – including whole year group classes, or opportunities for all the children from one year group to learn an instrument / take part in a performance / go on a visit whether or not they are in the same class
- Residential or other trips – whole year group trips where possible

In small schools, there may be fewer opportunities for children to do things as a year group rather than as part of a bigger class, but those opportunities which do exist should be embraced to ensure children do have a sense of their own year group, however small it may be.

4. Extra-curricular activities

These may include the promotion of out of school activities such as cycling proficiency, Rainbows, Brownies, Beavers, Cubs, swimming clubs, dance classes etc where children will have the opportunity to socialise with their own year group.

In addition, schools may consider how parental volunteers could be used to allow school trips or activities to be offered to a whole year group rather than only to those children in one particular class.

Class Composition Policy

Appendix 2 – Communicating with Parents about Composite Classes – Good Practice Guide

Both Headteachers and parents have reported that the more information parents have about how composite classes work, why they are required and how children will be taught within the composite class, the fewer problems arise.

In schools where most or all classes are composite classes, information is provided as part of the initial enrolment pack, often in the school handbook. However, even in these schools parents have said they would appreciate having more information about how teaching and learning works.

Even in schools where composite classes are less common or where there are changes to the make-up of composites (eg three year groups in a composite where previously there had been two), Headteachers and parents report that there is less anxiety if parents are well-informed about the reasons why the composite is required and how it will be managed.

The following are examples of how different issues relating to composite classes are managed in some schools. It is not expected that any school will do all of these, but that they may provide ideas for approaching a change in previous class arrangements:

1. General information

- *Leaflets for parents* – Scottish Borders Council provides a leaflet for parents about composite classes, which will be updated to reflect the changes introduced by the class composition policy
- *School handbook* – many schools include information about composite classes and how they work in their school handbook
- *Newsletters* – general information about composite classes could be included in a school newsletter a month or more before class arrangements are made, particularly if the Headteacher thinks it is likely that composites will be part of the class make-up for the following school session.

2. When composite classes are required

In schools where composite classes are the norm, it is unlikely that this stage will be needed.

- *Newsletters* – could be used to outline the expected overall class arrangements before detailed arrangements are made, for example: “*Due to the number of children joining the school in P1 in August, we expect to have two composite classes covering P1, P2 and P3. Details of exactly how these classes will be arranged will not be available until we receive our teacher allocation in June. However, if you would like a copy of the SBC leaflet on composite classes, or to discuss how individual children’s needs are met in composite classes, please contact xxxx*”.

- *Letters home* – these might be sent to those parents whose children are in a year group which is likely to be part of a composite class or which may need to be split, and would explain the reasons why this is necessary and the criteria which will be used to determine the allocation of places
- *Meetings* – some Headteachers may prefer to invite parents to a meeting to discuss likely class arrangements, allowing questions to be answered
- *Class lists without names* – some Headteachers issue class lists without names, so that parents and staff can discuss the principles of the arrangements without any individual concerns of specific parents becoming involved
- *One to one meetings* – some Headteachers offer to meet with individual parents on a one-to-one basis to discuss any anxieties they may have

Good practice suggests that it is best to provide opportunities for parents to discuss composite classes before allocating places in the classes, as this allows parents to raise any concerns they have under “exceptional factors” and have those taken into consideration before class lists are finalised. This does not mean that parental wishes for their own child override the Headteacher’s decisions taken in consideration of the best arrangements for all children in the school.

3. When class allocations have been made

- *Individual children*
There is no expectation that a Headteacher will change a decision made when making class arrangements for their school. However, parents have the right to request a meeting to discuss their child’s allocation and to raise any “exceptional factors” which they believe have not been taken into consideration. Any actions taken to mitigate the parents’ concerns are likely to be within the context of the child remaining in their allocated class.

Parents who remain dissatisfied have the right to raise their concerns first with a Senior Education Officer, and then through the Scottish Borders Council complaints process.

- *Late changes to class composition*
Sometimes late changes to school numbers when people leave or join the school leave the Headteacher with no alternative but to make changes to class arrangements after the class lists have been issued. When this is necessary the Headteacher should:
 - Inform parents as soon as possible by the most practical means, depending on the numbers concerned
 - Provide as much information about the reasons for the changes as possible without breaching confidentiality
 - Provide an opportunity for anyone with concerns to discuss those as soon as is practical