

What is a composite class?

A composite class contains children from more than one stage - for instance a class with some Primary 2 pupils and some Primary 3 pupils.

The school makes every effort to involve pupils in any one year group in activities which bring the whole year group together. In this way, pupils 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, the school ensures that the natural identity of each primary class group is maintained.

You should be confident that the professionalism of the staff in your school will ensure that your child will always work within a learning programme appropriate for his/her age, ability and aptitude. At both school level and education authority level quality assurance procedures exist to ensure that your child is making good progress within the nationally agreed curriculum guidelines.

Why are composite classes formed?

Schools are staffed to agreed standards, mainly based on the number of pupils in the school. However, the number of children in each stage will vary. For example, there may be 17 Primary 2 pupils and 39 Primary 3 pupils. National agreements on class sizes mean that it would not be possible to form a

Primary 2 class of 17 and a Primary 3 class of 39. Instead the school might form a composite class containing 17 Primary 2 pupils and 8 Primary 3 pupils with one teacher and the remaining 31 pupils would become a Primary 3 class with another teacher. This means that Head Teachers are making decisions to organise the classes to make best use of available staff, resources and space to deliver learning to all pupils.

Some children are never part of a composite class during their primary school life. Others, particularly in small schools around the country, may never experience anything else.

Throughout Scotland, composite classes have been in place in schools for over thirty years. Most schools in Dundee have composite classes.

How do schools ensure that each pupil is working at an appropriate level?

Curriculum for Excellence guidelines require that every pupil should have learning experiences which are appropriate to their own level of development. Every pupil follows a planned programme of learning that aims to help them progress and achieve their potential. This applies whether your child is in a composite class or a single year group class.

The school will also provide opportunities for pupils from the same stage to work together. In this way pupils will continue to identify with

their own year group, especially at important times such as transfer to secondary school.

You should know that research commissioned by the Scottish Executive concluded that "there is no evidence to show that composite classes affect pupils adversely. It is possible that pupils may gain socially from the experience." This is borne out by the findings of HMI inspections in schools.

How many pupils are in a composite class?

The conditions of service for teachers set a maximum class size for a composite class of 25 pupils. For single stage classes, the legal maximum is -

Primary 1 - 25 pupils
Primary 2 & 3 - 30 pupils
Primary 4, 5, 6 & 7 - 33 pupils

In all classes single stage or composite, pupils working at broadly the same pace and level in language and/or mathematics are grouped together. This arrangement uses teaching resources most effectively and supports continuity for pupils.

How are composite classes formed?

In forming new classes, full account must be taken of existing successful learning groupings of pupils. Schools should use language and/or mathematics groupings as the basis for allocating children to classes. In addition we will take into account social factors that will support children's continuous development, gender balance and creation of future learning groups.

You should be reassured that Head Teachers will consider friendship groups when deciding how to form a composite class, however there is no guarantee that friends will be in the same class.

Children, and particularly young children, usually make new friendships very quickly and can cope far better with change than adults imagine!

In addition it should be remembered that children do not spend all of their time in school as a class unit - they spend time in the playground mixing with all of the school's other pupils. As well as this, different classes and teachers work together on a number of learning contexts throughout the school year - and this is particularly encouraged where composite classes are formed.

When will we know what class my son or daughter will be in?

Normally, classes will be formed before the start of a new school year 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 a school session has started. Parents will be informed of annual class structuring arrangements, as soon as possible by the school.

Across the school, class structures may be changed from one session to another due to a number of factors including:

- the whole school roll for the new session and the number of teachers allocated to the school;
- children joining or leaving the school at each stage;
- classroom capacities;
- the known needs of individual learners;
- creating learning groups.

More information

If you require any more information about class structures in your child's school or about composite classes in general, please contact your child's school in the first instance. Your child's Head Teacher will be happy to meet with you to discuss class structure and your child's progress.

This leaflet is issued by

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