Clonmoney N.S.
Policy on Multi-Grade Classes

Introduction
This policy was the product of whole-staff collaboration in tandem with the Parents and Board of Management of Clonmoney N.S.

Rationale
In the interest of providing the best education for all students, it may from time to time be necessary to divide and combine class groups into mixed classes, which are smaller in size and offer a better 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 will decide how best to organise classes with a view to providing the best educational opportunities for all children.

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. Children who have special learning needs, at either end of the learning spectrum are generally deemed to be better left in a straight class, all other things being equal.

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 groupings
- The process of forming new friendships is a life skill which is important to develop. A positive and supportive attitude from parents is a key element in achieving a successful outcome in the new groups
- It will seldom be possible to satisfy all demands for groups of friends to be kept together. This decision will lie ultimately with the Principal, who must consider the needs of every child in the class
- It would be the intention that once a new class is formed, every effort would be made to keep that class together going forward
- At Infant level and up to 1st Class, the criteria used will be the age of the pupils. (This is a stage of development where age is significant).
- **From 1st class on students will be divided alphabetically start with A as well as taking into consideration keeping a gender balance within the**

split group. Should it be necessary to split a class for a second time in the duration of school life of a particular class, the alphabet will be used again but this time starting with z and working back and maintaining the gender balance.

- Children who have special learning needs, at either end of the learning spectrum, will be discussed and will be placed where their needs are best served.
- The process of forming new friendships is a life skill which is important to develop. A positive and supportive attitude from parents is a key element in achieving a successful outcome in the new groups.

This means 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.

Explaining to parents why their child is in a split class.

The DES allots one teacher to each group of 27 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.

Why does one half of the class have a different booklist to the other?

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.

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

The Principal, the Class Teacher and Learning Support team will consult on how best to organise the learning support for the mixed class. In some cases, the Learning Support Teacher may work in the classroom with the Class Teacher, in a team-teaching arrangement. It is possible that the Learning 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 Learning Support which may suit the class is for either the Class Teacher or the Learning Support Teacher to withdraw small groups of children. Occasionally, especially in the case of Senior Infants/1st, 2nd/3rd, 4th/5th it may suit the classes better, if the teaching of Mathematics is taken separately by the Class Teacher for one class and the Learning Support Teacher for the other class.
All of these arrangements must be considered on a class by class basis, from year to year.

Enrolment of new children into split classes
The rationale behind this policy is for the formation of smaller classes within the recommended pupil-teacher ratio. The enrolment of new children into these classes is to be avoided as much as possible. In this case, due regard must be given to the school's enrolment policy, and the terms of Section 29 of the Education Act. However it should be borne in mind that the recommended maximum number of pupils in mixed classes is 25.

The allocation of teachers to mixed classes
It is the duty of the Principal as per Circular 16/73 to assign teaching duties.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management in March 2019

Signed: George O'Carroll Date: 7th March 2019
Chairman

Signed: David McCormack Date: 7th March 2019
Principal

Review
This policy will be reviewed in 2023