**Kilconly N.S.**

**Split Class Policy September 2016**

**Introduction**

This policy was the product of whole-staff collaboration in consultation with the Board of Management of St. Conleth’s NS.

**Rationale**

Smaller, rural schools often have to work in multigrade settings where two or more class levels are taught by one teacher. This is a difficult task which requires skills and experience and will ultimately improve the quality and ability of the individual teachers that experience it. St. Conleth’s NS has plenty of experience with multigrade classes. Multigrade classes are most often arranged in such a way that the curriculum is common to both grades. The curriculum itself was designed with multigrade settings in mind as up to 70per cent of children in Irish classrooms are in some form of split or multigrade class. The curriculum for Junior and Senior infants is banded together, as are First and Second classes, Third and Fourth classes and Fifth and Sixth classes.

In the interest of providing the best education for all students, it may from time to time be necessary to divide and one single class level to be split between the class levels above and below. This will be to facilitate growing numbers and to ensure no class increases in size too far beyond the pupil teacher ratio (currently at 28/1 as of 2016).

**Aims and Objectives of this Policy**

* To provide a framework for the splitting of year groups/classes
* To outline the criteria on which children are selected to be placed in 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

**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. The Principal, in consultation with staff members, will decide how best to organise classes with a view to providing the best educational opportunities for all children.

**Criteria for placing children in particular class groups**

Splitting the class, while ensuring the best possible learning outcomes for each child, is a very complex challenge.

**We believe that using quantitative analysis alone is not sufficient and will not result in the best balance to ensure maximum learning outcomes. Therefore a class should not be split on the basis of age profiles, gender balances and academic scores even though these must be considered useful in the overall process. Instead, it is the qualitative analysis of teaching staff which is best placed, when used in conjunction with such quantitative statistics, to determine the best balance for class splits.**

**In short, the decision must not be bound by statistics but must be based on the experience and expertise of the Professional Teaching Staff. The final say, after consultation between staff, must rest with the Principal.**

This means that a class might not have an equal amount of girls and boys. It might not have younger children split into the lower grade and older ones into the older grade. It might not have a perfect balance of academic ability.

The teachers will decide the right balance of all of these things. They will consider ages, genders and scores. But they will also consider the unquantifiable: personalities, behaviours, socialisation, and stages of physical and emotional development, special educational needs, special personal development needs, discipline, temperament, humour, sensitivity, creativity and much more.

We group the children in such a way so as to maximise the learning outcomes for *each child*. Before the process begins certain considerations will be noted by the staff:

* It is considered best to form mixed-ability groups where possible,
* 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 decision for splitting the class will lie ultimately with the Principal, who must consider the needs of every child in the class.
* In cases where overcrowding in schools is necessitating split classes or groups every care must be taken to ensure infant classes are not overcrowded. This does not mean that infants are exempt from possible splits.

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 28 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 the ratio suggests. 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 in one class. 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.

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

The Principal, the Class Teacher and Learning Support team will consult on how best to organise the learning support for the each 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.

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.

**The allocation of teachers to split classes**

It is the duty of the Principal, as per Circular 16/73, to assign teaching duties.

Ratified by the Board of Management

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Chairman, Board of Management