The Formation of Composite and Single Stage Classes in Midlothian Primary Schools

1.Q *How many classes are there in primary schools in Midlothian and how many of these are composite classes?*

A Each year there are around 270 classes in Midlothian primary schools, and around 70 of these are composite classes.

Most of the composite classes include pupils from 2 year groups but in some of our smallest schools there may be pupils from 3 or more year groups.

2.Q *Why are composite classes necessary?*

A Composite classes are formed in order to make best use of available resources while ensuring that pupils get an appropriate education. Each school receives an allocation of teachers related to the number of pupils in the school. Headteachers are required to organise the pupils into classes, according to the staffing allocation. At times the number of pupils in a year group may vary significantly, and classes may need to be formed from pupils in more than one year group. For example, a school might have 18 pupils in the P5 year group and 36 pupils in the P6 year group. As there are national agreements regulating class sizes, it would not be possible for a Headteacher simply to make a P5 of 18 pupils and a P6 of 36. Instead he or she would require to create a composite class of say, 18 P5s and 6 P6s together with one teacher and the remaining 30 P6 pupils forming another class with a different teacher.

3.Q *Are composite classes detrimental to the progress of children?*

A No. Composite classes have always been a feature of education in Scottish schools and contribute to the 'family' atmosphere with older pupils working alongside younger ones.

Reports from Her Majesty's Inspectorate have demonstrated that the level of education attained through composite classes is at least equal to that of single year groups. It should also be recognised that there could be less of an age range between the oldest and the youngest pupils in these classes than in a single year group.

The national agreement regulating class sizes is that the maximum class size for a single stage class is 25 for P1, 30 for P2-3, 33 for P4-7 and the maximum class size for a composite class is 25.

Every class is made up of a number of individuals whose particular needs should be addressed, whether the class is composite or not.

4.Q *When will I know what class my child has been allocated to?*

A You will be notified in writing by the Headteacher about this before the end of the summer term. This may be tentative and subject to further clarification in terms of possible changes to the school roll or staffing allocation.

5.Q *How are children allocated to classes?*

A The allocation of pupils to classes will be carried in accordance with Education, Communities and Economy policy. Experience suggests that this is best achieved by the application of age as the main criterion. However, Education, Communities and Economy is committed to a policy of decision making at local level within a clear policy framework. In recommending age as the key criterion to be adopted in forming composite classes, sufficient flexibility is allowed to Headteachers to respond to specific circumstances in their own schools.

6.Q *What if I have concerns about the fact that, for example, my child is separated from his or her friends through changes in class allocations?*

A Children, and particularly young children, usually make new friendships and can cope with changes.

Additionally, however the school will usually provide a range of opportunities for social interaction within year groups ranging from informal contacts in the playground to team games and shared learning activities.

The Headteacher will explain fully the policy and practice which is operated in your child's school and will meet with you, if necessary, to discuss any specific concerns which you may have. An explanation from the Headteacher could include the following:

(a) how the allocation of classes is consistent with the school's assessment of pupils in terms of abilities or social groupings;

(b) how social contacts within year groups are maintained;

(c) any other relevant factors, such as building design, which influence the formation of classes.

7.Q *Who decides on the formation of classes in schools?*

A Headteachers are responsible for the management of their schools within a framework of guidance provided by the Education Authority. This extends to the formation of classes and the Education Authority would only be involved where the policy framework is being questioned.

8.Q *How can I check on my child's progress?*

A All Headteachers should ensure that parents have information about the curriculum and about the target levels to which children are working.

Teachers assess pupils' progress and achievement in relation to experiences and outcomes specified in the curriculum guidelines. The major purpose of assessment is to identify strengths and next steps in learning to ensure effective progress. Teachers record progress and report on this to parents via parent consultation meetings and annual reports.

At any time, parents can ask to discuss their child's progress with teachers and/or promoted staff. A child's progress should not be influenced by being in either a composite or a single stage class.

Mary Smith
Director, Education, Communities and Economy
Midlothian Council
Fairfield House
8 Lothian Road
DALKEITH
EH22 3ZG

Midlothian Council
Education, Communities and Economy

Midlothian

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This leaflet is designed to help parents understand why children are sometimes placed in a class which has in it children who may have started school in different years.