**Policy on Mixed Classes**

**Introduction**

This policy was the product of whole-staff collaboration in tandem with the Parents and Board of Management of Scoil Mhuire Naofa.

**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.

**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 mixed classes, subject to Section 29 of the Education Act.

**Framework for the mixing 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**

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
* 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

**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 enrolment of new children into these classes is to be avoided as much as possible.

**The allocation of teachers to mixed classes**

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

**Mixed Classroom Management**

Multi-Class Teaching

Multi-class teaching refers to the practice of placing pupils of different classes under the care of a single teacher. It generally refers to the teaching of students of different ages, classes and abilities in the same group.

As a developing school we can expect there may be a number of multi-grade classes in the early and coming years of expansion. Multi-grade classes may also be introduced because of the ratio of teachers to pupil numbers.

There are many challenges for teachers in relation to teaching in multi-grade classrooms. Class organisation, instruction and management are demanding and complicated. Teaching different courses at different grade levels to pupils at different developmental levels and keeping all students engaged in meaningful work at all times, is a challenge. It requires a high degree of organisation and also requires that the teacher be willing to allow students to take responsibility for their own learning.

We endeavour to make multi-grade teaching meaningful and successful for our students through:

* Effective classroom organisation with careful consideration given to instructional resources and the physical environment to facilitate learning.
* Effective classroom management and discipline through classroom schedules and routines that promote clear, predictable instructional patterns, especially those that enhance student responsibility for their own learning.
* Instructional organisation and curriculum: Instructional strategies and routines for a maximum of co-operative and self-directed student learning based on diagnosed student needs. Also includes the effective use of time.
* Instructional delivery and grouping: Methods that improve the quality of instruction, including strategies for organising group learning activities across and within group levels.
* Self-directed learning: Students' skills and strategies for a high level of independence and efficiency in learning individually or in combination with other students.
* Peer tutoring: Classroom routines and students' skills in serving as "teachers" to other students within and across the differing grade levels.

Curriculum planning is key especially for the children being re-mixed with their classmates of similar levels the following year.