



**Item: 8**

**Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 5 February 2025.**

**Composite Class Policy.**

**Report by Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.**

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## **1. Overview**

- 1.1. In 2015, the Council wrote guidance for parents and carers on composite classes in Orkney. This was guidance only and covered a wider range of options for composite classes.
- 1.2. Class sizes are set nationally by the Scottish Government and locally Orkney Islands Council has in place its own Primary Staffing Policy which was approved in 2016. The allocation of teaching staff to a primary school is determined by the total school roll. Therefore, there are many occasions within schools across Orkney where composite classes are used.
- 1.3. In June every year, the Service Manager (Primary Education) receives a number of concerns raised by parents/carers about the class their child is placed in. The Composite Class Policy, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, was developed in order to make it clear and explicit to schools and parents/carers how schools will make decisions around composite classes.
- 1.4. The Composite Class Policy will support school staff and parents/carers in understanding the criteria to be used when considering class make up in primary schools where there needs to be more than one age group in a class, thus creating composite classes.
- 1.5. The criteria to be used is as follows:
  - i. Each composite class shall have a maximum of 25 children as per national guidance.
  - ii. The lead factor in determining the population of the composite class will be the date of birth of the child, for example the oldest children from the younger stage join with the youngest children from the older stage.
  - iii. A reasonable balance in terms of gender, where possible.
  - iv. The range of Additional Support Needs spread reasonably across classes.

- 1.6. Across the school, headteachers are asked to ensure that they keep a small number of 'spaces' for each year group in the event that new families move into the catchment area of the school during the school session. Where possible, it is recommended that at least 2 spaces for each year group should be kept. This forms part of the whole school class structure. It may not always be possible to keep 2 spaces, but as a minimum 1 space should, where possible, be kept. Schools will not usually be able to organise classes where 1 year group is full, if there are alternative composite arrangements that can be made across the school. On a very occasional basis, a school may have to open with one year group full. Where this happens, this will be with the agreement of the local authority.
- 1.7. In schools where the school roll is 25 children or less, the challenge of teaching a multi-stage composite of up to 25 children in one class, covering all age groups from P1-P7 is recognised. As a result, the 'OIC primary staffing policy' will determine the number of children required before two classes are established. For schools of this size, the local staffing policy will apply in determining the number of classes in the school and not the national composite class size of 25.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. It is recommended that members of the Committee:
  - i. approve the Composite Class Policy, attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

## **3. Policy Highlights**

- 3.1. When engaging with parents and carers, headteachers should make it clear that they are not consulting parents/carers on the formation or population of the composite class. They are informing parents/carers about the educational and management basis for the decision and seeking to reassure parents/carers if they have anxieties in relation to their own child(ren) or on a wider basis.
- 3.2. If a child with additional support needs is placed in a class outwith the age criteria, this should be shared with the parent/carer and the benefits to the child for that placement.
- 3.3. All parents/carers of children involved in the creation of composite classes should be informed of the class their child(ren) will be placed in. If a parent or carer has a concern about the class allocation and the learning needs for their child, they should share that concern with the school's headteacher. The headteacher will explain how the school will organise teaching and learning to meet the needs of that child in the coming session.

- 3.4. Social groupings and friendships are not criteria for creating composite classes.
- 3.5. The Council will only over-rule a head teacher's decision if the criteria for class organisation does not comply with this policy.

## 4. Consultation

- 4.1. The updated policy was developed following staffing conversations with head teachers in June 2024. All head teachers were consulted on the new policy from September/October 2024 and feedback was invited. All Parent Council Chairs have been consulted. They were taken through the draft policy in September 2024 with open consultation for feedback invited by the end of November 2024. As a result of both consultations, some changes were made.

### For Further Information please contact:

Morag Miller, Service Manager (Primary Education), extension 2438, Email: [morag.miller@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:morag.miller@orkney.gov.uk).

### Implications of Report

1. **Financial** – There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.
2. **Legal** – There are no legal implication arising from this report.
3. **Corporate Governance** - Not applicable.
4. **Human Resources** – Not applicable.
5. **Equalities** - An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 2.
6. **Island Communities Impact** - An Island Communities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 3.
7. **Links to Council Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Council Plan strategic priorities:
  - Growing our economy.
  - Strengthening our Communities.
  - Developing our Infrastructure.
  - Transforming our Council.
8. **Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities:
  - Cost of Living.
  - Sustainable Development.
  - Local Equality.
9. **Environmental and Climate Risk** – Not applicable.

10. **Risk** – Not applicable.
11. **Procurement** – Not applicable.
12. **Health and Safety** – Not applicable.
13. **Property and Assets** – Not applicable.
14. **Information Technology** – Not applicable.
15. **Cost of Living** – Not applicable.

### **List of Background Papers**

The Education (Lower Primary Class Sizes) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2010 and the Education (Lower Primary Class Sizes) (Scotland) Regulations 1999.  
Education, Leisure and Housing Staffing Policy – Primary schools, 2016.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Composite Class Policy.  
Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment.  
Appendix 3: Island Communities Impact Assessment.



**Education Leisure and Housing**

**Composite Class Policy**

**Version Control**

<b>Document Reference.</b>	<b>Revision.</b>	<b>Issue Date.</b>	<b>Reason for Issue.</b>	<b>Reviewer.</b>	<b>Sign.</b>
ELH032.	00.	December 2024	New Policy – Previously Guidance Notes.	Service Manager (Primary Education)	

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## **Composite classes in primary schools in Orkney**

This policy is intended to support primary schools in Orkney in the structuring of Primary School classes. It outlines the process which should be followed as part of the annual exercise to review class make up and staffing in line with Orkney Islands Council's staffing policy.

Each academic session, a staffing exercise is used to identify the number of teachers allocated to each primary school for the following academic session, based on the total number of children on the roll for each school and the number of primary classes required. It is then the responsibility of the headteacher to group children into classes to make the best use of the available teachers and classrooms in meeting the needs of all learners across the school. This may have to include the formation of composite classes.

To engage and challenge children, allowing them to attain and achieve in line with their potential, schools will organise their children in a range of groupings for various purposes. Staff in school will ensure that children will work within a learning programme appropriate for their age, ability and aptitude. Curriculum for Excellence guidelines require that every pupil should have learning experiences which are appropriate to their own level of development. This applies whether children are in a composite class or a single year group class.

### **Criteria for composite classes**

Orkney Islands Council recognises that the Head Teacher and staff of each school are best placed to make decisions about the most appropriate class arrangements in their schools, taking into account the needs of all children. It is therefore the responsibility of the Head Teacher to manage the class organisation for their school. In reaching decisions about the allocation of children to classes, Head Teachers will consult with all relevant and directly involved staff. They will also communicate with parents and the Parent Council.

The headteacher will make the decision on how best to organise classes applying the following criteria:

- Each composite class shall have a maximum of 25 children as per national guidance.
- The lead factor in determining the population of the composite class will be the date of birth of the child, ie the oldest children from the younger stage join with the youngest children from the older stage.
- A reasonable balance in terms of gender, where possible.
- The range of Additional Support Needs spread reasonably across classes.
- Across the school, headteachers are asked to ensure that they keep a small number of 'spaces' for each year group in the event that new families move into the catchment area of the school during the school session. Where possible, it is recommended that at least 2 spaces for each year group should be kept. This forms part of the whole school class structure. It may not always be possible to keep 2 spaces, but as a minimum 1 space should, where possible, be kept.



- Schools will not usually be able to organise classes where 1 year group is full, if there are alternative composite arrangements that can be made across the school. On a very occasional basis, a school may have to open with one year group full. Where this happens, this will be with the agreement of the local authority.

This criterion of age is used because it is unambiguous and transparent: for the purposes of school provision, age is not a 'protected characteristic' in the Equality Act 2010. This means that in relation to the provision of education, schools may lawfully use the criteria of age to organise classes.

There may be occasions where class sizes across the school are almost at their maximum. On these occasions, placing requests from parents outwith the catchment area are likely to be refused, as the local authority would possibly have to put in additional staffing to meet the increased school roll.

When children join during the year, it may be that a class year group may have already become full. When this happens, a child may be placed in a different class, or a new composite may be created, until the school year is finished and the opportunity to review all classes happens again. This should then be reviewed to follow the criteria contained in this policy for the class composition in the new academic year.

In schools where the school roll is 25 children or less, the challenge of teaching a multi-stage composite of up to 25 children in one class, covering all age groups from P1-P7 is recognised. As a result, the 'OIC primary staffing policy' will determine the number of children required before two classes are established. For schools of this size, the local staffing policy will apply in determining the number of classes in the school and not the national composite class size of 25.

## **Parental Engagement**

Whilst it is a common occurrence, changing classes can sometimes be a source of anxiety for parents/carers and children.

Parents/carers should be made aware of the organisation of the structure of classes and the real possibility of composite classes from first enrolling in school eg. through the school handbook. They should be made aware of the reasons why a composite class would be required, and that teaching and learning approaches will ensure the class structure does not impact adversely on learning.

There are many forms of parental engagement. In addition to working through Parent Councils, schools may choose to communicate via newsletters and other opportunities for communicating information about composite classes.

When engaging with parents and carers, headteachers should make it clear that they are not consulting parents/carers on the formation or population of the composite class. They are informing parents/carers about the educational and management basis for the decision and seeking to reassure parents/carers if they have anxieties in relation to their own child(ren) or on a wider basis.

If a child with additional support needs is placed in a class outwith the age criteria, this should be shared with the parent/carer and the benefits to the child for that placement.

All parents/carers of children involved in the creation of composite classes should be informed of the class their child(ren) will be placed in. If a parent or carer has a concern about the class allocation and the learning needs for their child, they should share that concern with the school's headteacher. The headteacher will explain how the school will organise teaching and learning to meet the needs of that child in the coming session.

The headteacher should also listen to parents/carers' concerns about specific matters, for example their children's friendships within previous and the prospective new cohorts and reassure them about how this will be monitored within the new arrangements.

Social groupings and friendships are not a criteria for creating composite classes.

Parents have a key role in positively supporting their children through the change of classes. Parents can support children by using this as an opportunity for children to make new friends and work with a wider range of children. Children are more adaptable than adults often give them credit for.

## **Support for Children**

Headteachers recognise that change can be unsettling for some children, and they will work with class teachers and other staff to talk to children about moving classes, providing reassurance and addressing any concerns that children may have.

Where possible, schools should arrange an opportunity for 'new' classes to get together in some way prior to the summer break. This is especially relevant where classes are having to change across the school. Commonly, schools organise a 'moving up' time towards the end of term 4. This is not always possible.

Children will be supported through the transition process with wellbeing check-ins during the first few weeks of the new term. Throughout the year, there are opportunities for whole year groups to be together for example, at break and lunch times. This allows for the retention of existing friendships along with the formation of new relationships.

Families of children with additional support needs will have the opportunity to discuss and prepare for any changes that may affect them through the Child/Young Person Planning Process.

## **Parent/carer concerns about class organisation and allocation**

In the event of a disagreement between parents/carers and the school about class allocation, parents/carers can raise this with Orkney Islands Council through the complaints process. Before raising this with Orkney Islands Council, parents/carers must first have raised the issue with the headteacher.

If having done all of the above, a parent or carer continues to be of the view that a headteacher has not followed the appropriate policy in structuring the classes in the school, this will be reviewed through the Orkney Islands Council complaints policy and procedures.

Orkney Islands Council will only over-rule a head teacher's decision if the criteria for class organisation does not comply with this policy.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What learning opportunities will my child experience?**

Children in all classes will follow programmes constructed to help them progress at their own level, regardless of whether or not they are in a composite or single stage class. Teachers often group pupils of similar learning ability for some elements of learning and teaching purposes in classes and are trained to adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of all pupils. Every class contains pupils of a wide range of different abilities.

### **My child has been put into a composite class with pupils from the stage below. Is he/she being kept back?**

No, this is certainly not the case. Children will progress through learning experiences tailored to fit their personal level of attainment.

### **What if my child's friends are in another class?**

You should be assured that your child's teacher will be sensitive to the needs of all children in his/her class and will be encouraging the pupils to develop good working relationships and friendships. Children usually make new friends very quickly and can cope far better with change than adults imagine. Pupils will also spend time in the playground mixing with all of the school's other pupils.

### **Will my child always be in a composite class?**

Not necessarily. The need for composite classes changes as the roll of the school fluctuates. Scottish Government guidance sets maximum registration class sizes for P1 at 25 children, for P2 and P3 at 30 children, and for P4-P7 at 33 children. Each year staffing and class formations are reviewed by the head teacher and the Council. In some schools there are no single stage classes and pupils will move through the whole primary school in composite classes. Sometimes, these classes have to be changed as the pupils will have to change classes from year to year.

A child placed in any class will not necessarily progress through school with the same group of pupils, as the class organisation may change. This can result from pupil numbers changing at particular stages, or from the different maximum class sizes that can be formed at different stages.

There is no evidence to support the view that composite classes affect attainment adversely.

### **Can I refuse to have my child taught in a composite class?**

No. The management of class organisation in schools is the responsibility of the head teacher. Where there are specific concerns about a child's learning or progress, schools have systems for consulting and communicating with individual parents on a regular basis as necessary.

### **Can I ask for my child to be placed in a different class?**

No. The management of class organisation in schools is the responsibility of the head teacher. The authority will only over-rule a head teacher's decision if the criteria for class organisation does not comply with this policy.



## Equality Impact Assessment

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is to improve the work of Orkney Islands Council by making sure it promotes equality and does not discriminate. This assessment records the likely impact of any changes to a function, policy or plan by anticipating the consequences, and making sure that any negative impacts are eliminated or minimised and positive impacts are maximised.

<b>1. Identification of Function, Policy or Plan</b>	
Name of function / policy / plan to be assessed.	Composite class policy
Service / service area responsible.	Education
Name of person carrying out the assessment and contact details.	Morag Miller
Date of assessment.	28/11/24
Is the function / policy / plan new or existing? (Please indicate also if the service is to be deleted, reduced or changed significantly).	Update to existing guidance for schools

<b>2. Initial Screening</b>	
What are the intended outcomes of the function / policy / plan?	To provide clarity for schools and parents on the structuring of classes where the need for composite classes arise.
Is the function / policy / plan strategically important?	No.
State who is, or may be affected by this function / policy / plan, and how.	Children in the primary school where classes have to have more than one age group in them due to the total number of children across the school.
How have stakeholders been involved in the development of this function / policy / plan?	Updated policy developed following staffing conversations with head teachers in June 2024. All head teachers were consulted on the new policy from Sept/Oct 2024 and feedback was

	invited. Changes were made as a result. All Parent Council Chairs have been consulted and have been taken through the policy and changes in Sept 2024 with open consultation for feedback by the end of Nov 2024. Changes made as a result.
<p>Is there any existing data and / or research relating to equalities issues in this policy area? Please summarise.</p> <p>E.g. consultations, national surveys, performance data, complaints, service user feedback, academic / consultants' reports, benchmarking (see equalities resources on OIC information portal).</p>	<p>Composite Classes, Class Size and Human Capital Accumulation by Daniel Borbely, Markus Gehrsitz, Stuart McIntyre, Gennaro Rossi, Graeme Roy; March 2021</p> <p>Key findings:</p> <p>“We find no evidence that achievement of older pupils is adversely affected by the classroom presence of younger peers. We also found that class size is not driving these effects and found no effect of class size in general. Our results have several important implications. First, we show that peer effects matter and can be consciously generated by way of composite classes. This may help alleviate parental concerns about composite classes, at least as far as attainment is concerned. It will also be reassuring for Scottish local authorities that the cost savings that composite classes can provide, do not appear to come at the expense of lower instructional quality.”</p>
<p>Is there any existing evidence relating to socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome in this policy area? Please summarise.</p> <p>E.g. For people living in poverty or for people of low income. See <a href="#">The Fairer Scotland Duty Guidance for Public Bodies</a> for further information.</p>	No.
<p>Could the function / policy have a differential impact on any of the following equality areas?</p>	(Please provide any evidence – positive impacts / benefits, negative impacts and reasons).
<p>1. Race: this includes ethnic or national groups, colour and nationality.</p>	No.

2. Sex: a man or a woman.	No.
3. Sexual Orientation: whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.	No.
4. Gender Reassignment: the process of transitioning from one gender to another.	No.
5. Pregnancy and maternity.	No.
6. Age: people of different ages.	This criterion of age is the main criteria used because it is unambiguous and transparent.
7. Religion or beliefs or none (atheists).	No.
8. Caring responsibilities.	No.
9. Care experienced.	No.
10. Marriage and Civil Partnerships.	No.
11. Disability: people with disabilities (whether registered or not).	Additional support for learning needs of children can be taken into consideration as part of this policy. If it was more beneficial for a child with additional support needs to be placed in a different class outwith the criteria of age, then this is allowed for in the policy. Head teachers will communicate this to parents when creating classes.
12. Socio-economic disadvantage.	No.

### 3. Impact Assessment

Does the analysis above identify any differential impacts which need to be addressed?	No.
How could you minimise or remove any potential negative impacts?	Not applicable.
Do you have enough information to make a judgement? If no, what information do you require?	Yes.

<b>4. Conclusions and Planned Action</b>	
Is further work required?	No.
What action is to be taken?	Not applicable.
Who will undertake it?	Not applicable.
When will it be done?	Not applicable.
How will it be monitored? (e.g. through service plans).	Through usual policy review.

Signature:   
Name: MORAG MILLER

Date: 28/11/24  
(BLOCK CAPITALS).

Please sign and date this form, keep one copy and send a copy to HR and Performance. A Word version should also be emailed to HR and Performance at [hrsupport@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:hrsupport@orkney.gov.uk)



## Island Communities Impact Assessment

## Composite Class Policy

Preliminary Considerations	Response
Please provide a brief description or summary of the policy, strategy or service under review for the purposes of this assessment.	This policy is intended to support primary schools in Orkney in the structuring of Primary School classes.
Step 1 – Develop a clear understanding of your objectives	Response
What are the objectives of the policy, strategy or service?	To provide clarity for schools and parents on the structuring of classes where the need for composite classes arise.
Do you need to consult?	All head teachers were consulted on the new policy from Sept/Oct 2024 and feedback was invited. Changes were made as a result. All Parent Council Chairs have been consulted and have been taken through the policy and changes in Sept 2024 with open consultation for feedback by the end of Nov 2024.
How are islands identified for the purpose of the policy, strategy or service?	Not applicable
What are the intended impacts/outcomes and how do these potentially differ in the islands?	Not applicable
Is the policy, strategy or service new?	Yes
Step 2 – Gather your data and identify your stakeholders	Response
What data is available about the current situation in the islands?	Not applicable
Do you need to consult?	Not applicable
How does any existing data differ between islands?	Not applicable
Are there any existing design features or mitigations in place?	Not applicable
Step 3 – Consultation	Response

Who do you need to consult with?	All head teachers were consulted on the new policy from Sept/Oct 2024 and feedback was invited. Changes were made as a result. All Parent Council Chairs have been consulted and have been taken through the policy and changes in Sept 2024 with open consultation for feedback by the end of Nov 2024.
How will you carry out your consultation and in what timescales?	All head teachers were consulted on the new policy from Sept/Oct 2024 and feedback was invited. Changes were made as a result. All Parent Council Chairs have been consulted and have been taken through the policy and changes in Sept 2024 with open consultation for feedback by the end of Nov 2024.
What questions will you ask when considering how to address island realities?	Not applicable
What information has already been gathered through consultations and what concerns have been raised previously by island communities?	Not applicable
Is your consultation robust and meaningful and sufficient to comply with the Section 7 duty?	Not applicable
<b>Step 4 – Assessment</b>	<b>Response</b>
Does your assessment identify any unique impacts on island communities?	Other than in 1 teacher schools, there are no other unique impacts. Most of our 1 teacher schools are on the very small islands. This has been taken account of in the policy. A full ICIA is not required.
Does your assessment identify any potential barriers or wider impacts?	The feedback from the consultation raised concerns about a 1 teacher school having the maximum class size of 25 children. As a result an additional paragraph explaining the situation in those contexts was written and added to the policy. See below.
How will you address these?	In schools where the school roll is 25 children or less, the challenge of teaching a multi-stage composite of up to 25 children in one class, covering all age groups from P1-P7 is recognised. As a result, the

'OIC primary staffing policy' will determine the number of children required before two classes are established. For schools of this size, the local staffing policy will apply in determining the number of classes in the school and not the national composite class size of 25.

**You must now determine whether in your opinion your policy, strategy or service is likely to have an effect on an island community, which is significantly different from its effect on other communities (including other island communities).**

If your answer is **No** to the above question, a full ICIA will NOT be required and **you can process to Step 6.**

If the answer is **Yes**, an ICIA must be prepared and **you should proceed to Step 5.**

To form your opinion, the following questions should be considered:

- Does the evidence show different circumstances or different expectations or needs, or different experiences or outcomes (such as different levels of satisfaction, or different rates of participation)?
- Are these different effects likely?
- Are these effects significantly different?
- Could the effect amount to a disadvantage for an island community compared to the Scottish mainland or between island groups?

Step 5 – Preparing your ICIA	Response
In Step 5, you should describe the likely significantly different effect of the policy, strategy or service:	Not applicable
Assess the extent to which you consider that the policy, strategy or service can be developed or delivered in such a manner as to improve or mitigate, for island communities, the outcomes resulting from it.	Not applicable
Consider alternative delivery mechanisms and whether further consultation is required.	Not applicable

Describe how these alternative delivery mechanisms will improve or mitigate outcomes for island communities.	Not applicable
Identify resources required to improve or mitigate outcomes for island communities.	Not applicable
<b>Stage 6 – Making adjustments to your work</b>	<b>Response</b>
Should delivery mechanisms/mitigations vary in different communities?	Not applicable
Do you need to consult with island communities in respect of mechanisms or mitigations?	Not applicable
Have island circumstances been factored into the evaluation process?	Not applicable
Have any island-specific indicators/targets been identified that require monitoring?	Not applicable
How will outcomes be measured on the islands?	Not applicable
How has the policy, strategy or service affected island communities?	Not applicable
How will lessons learned in this ICIA inform future policy making and service delivery?	Not applicable
<b>Step 7 – Publishing your ICIA</b>	<b>Response</b>
Have you presented your ICIA in an Easy Read format?	
Does it need to be presented in Gaelic or any other language?	Not applicable
Where will you publish your ICIA and will relevant stakeholders be able to easily access it?	
Who will sign off your final ICIA and why?	Peter Diamond, Head of Education as per guidance.

ICIA completed by:	Morag Miller
Position:	Service Manager (Primary Education)
Signature:	[REDACTED]
Date complete:	7/1/25

ICIA approved by:	Peter Diamond
Position:	Head of Education
Signature:	[REDACTED]
Date complete:	20.1.25

