

Brannoxtown CNS

Class Progression Policy

Brannoxtown Community National School (CNS) is a primary school of the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB). Brannoxtown CNS opened in September 2018 with Principal, Dr. Sarah FitzPatrick. Brannoxtown CNS operates within the regulations laid down by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and follows the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) which may be amended from time to time, in accordance with Sections 9 and 30 of the Education Act (1998). The Principal and the Board of Management fully subscribe to the principles of partnership, accountability, inclusion, respect for diversity, parental choice and equality, in developing and implementing all school policies.

1. Introduction and Rationale

This policy on Class Progression has been developed to inform decision making for staff and parents concerning a child's progression from one class year to the next class year at Brannoxtown CNS. In this policy, *Progression* refers to advancement to the subsequent class year and *Retention* refers to remaining in the same class for a second year. This policy was informed by:

- Department of Education and Skills (DES) Circular Letters advising on retention of primary school children.
- National guidelines for the development of Primary Schools Admissions Policies and specifically, the *Brannoxtown CNS Admissions Policy*.
- Information about the free Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme, available to all children in the two years before starting primary school.
- Research and guidelines on managing positive transitions for young children.

2. Children's Learning and Development

Children's wellbeing is always at the heart of all we do at Brannoxtown CNS. At our school, wellbeing is defined broadly and includes a focus on supporting children to be:

- Psychologically and socially strong
- Healthy and fit, as much as they can be
- Creative and spiritual, and
- Positive in their outlooks on learning and on life.

This is an important starting point for any discussion on children's progress at school because it recognises that significant academic achievements (e.g., in literacy/language and numeracy/maths) are not the only considerations when concerns arise concerning the progression of an individual child to the next class year. Aistear (NCCA, 2009) reminds us that for all children, important developmental milestones include a focus on Wellbeing and also on:

- Communicating
- Identity and belonging, and
- Exploring and thinking.

3. Policy Aims

This policy provides a whole school approach to class progression at Brannoxtown CNS. Specifically, it addresses concerns regarding progression for children at the beginning and ending years of primary school (Junior Infants and Sixth Class) as well as for children in any class year who experience learning difficulties or who have English as an Additional Language (EAL). It provides a framework for communications

between school and home regarding a child's progress, particularly when concerns arise.

4. Primary School Years and Stages

There are eight primary school years in Ireland – a two year Infant Cycle, followed by six class years. The national Primary School Curriculum (1999) presents children's learning across the eight years in four Stages (2020) with two school years in each stage:

Curriculum	School Years/Classes	
Stage 1	Junior Infants	Senior Infants
Stage 2	First Class	Second Class
Stage 3	Third Class	Fourth Class
Stage 4	Fifth Class	Sixth Class

It is expected that each child progresses to the next class at the beginning of a new school year. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) Circular on 'Retention' (Circular Letter 32/03) provides advice on considering a repeat-year for a primary school child at any time during his/her eight-year primary education. In line with the circular, no pupil will repeat a school year/class more than once at Brannoxtown CNS.

5. Evidence-based Decisions

Under the Department's policy, children should only be allowed to repeat a year for *educational reasons*. Evidence about a child's progress relative to expectations for learning and development, is key to investigating whether progression or retention is in the child's best interests. Retention is considered when there is evidence that the potential benefits outweigh any risks to the child and his/her overall wellbeing, i.e., when assessments by staff provide evidence that a child would benefit educationally by being retained for a second year in their current class.

Children can transfer to Brannoxtown CNS from a different school at any time, subject to school policy. As part of the Admissions process, parents are asked to provide evidence of children's learning and development from their previous school (e.g., school reports). When transfer to Brannoxtown CNS is confirmed by parents, the Principal requests transfer of the child's records. This is especially important in the case of children with Special Educational Needs (NCSE, 2016). Children who transfer *during* the school year, will continue at the same class year at Brannoxtown CNS. For children who transfer during the summer period, it is assumed that they will continue to the next class year. For some children who transfer to Brannoxtown CNS for a new school year, parents and/or the transferring school may have concerns about their progression to the next class level. In this case, the Principal of Brannoxtown CNS will request evidence that this issue has been under discussion at the transferring school and will meet with parents to ascertain the most appropriate class level for their child.

Teacher-led assessments (including screening and standardised testing) are carried out in all classes annually and further diagnostic testing is carried out with individual children, as necessary. Information gathered from these assessments is used to inform decisions for support and is also used to inform decisions about class retention or progression for a specific child.

6. Procedures and Record Keeping

In the first instance, the Class Teacher and Special Education Teacher (SET) review and discuss evidence gathered. When there is significant concern for the child's wellbeing if he/she progresses to the next class year, the Principal becomes involved

in the review and discussion of evidence and concerns are noted in a first conversation with parents, no later than the November Parent Teacher Meeting.

Monitoring of the child's progress and evidence-gathering continue through the year. In the course of a normal school year, discussions with parents are planned for Term 2 and Term 3, to ensure that the focus remains on the child's wellbeing and that the parents and school can effectively plan and prepare for retention/progression for the following school year.

In the case of a child who is to be retained, a record outlining the educational basis for the decision is added to the child's file – both his/her Aladdin profile and his/her Student File. **This record includes significant evidence to show that he/she would benefit educationally in specific aspects of his/her learning and development by repeating a class year.** A clear programme is outlined for the pupil which records the specific concerns/challenges and expectations/outcomes as a result of being retained in the class year. In addition, the child should be placed on a *Classroom Support Plan* outlining what new approach will be used for her/him and what its expected benefit will be.

7. Transition to/from Primary School

In addition to the concerns for retention/progression that may arise for any child who experiences difficulty in any aspect of his/her learning and development, issues can arise also at the beginning/ending points of primary school, i.e., Junior Infants and Sixth Class.

a. Retention/Progression: Junior Infants

The age specified in the Admissions Policy for Brannoxtown CNS, is in line with the national guidelines for primary school admissions policies. It recognises the benefits of accessing early childhood care and education via the national Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The scheme is offered in a range of early years settings (including pre-school, Montessori, creche and playgroup) for 3 hours a day, 5 days a week, 38 weeks of the year. **All children are entitled to 2 full academic years of preschool by participating in the ECCE scheme before starting primary school.** Children are eligible to start the ECCE scheme in the September of the year that they turn 3 years old. For example, a child turning 3 years old in 2020 can be registered on the ECCE scheme in September 2020 for two years. He/she would then begin Junior Infants in September 2022 at age 5. Brannoxtown CNS recognises the importance of children's participation in the ECCE scheme for two years as a valuable time for children's learning and development and an important preparation for starting primary school. Parents are strongly encouraged to ensure children have participated in the scheme before enrolment in Junior Infants. From September 2021, the ECCE scheme is provided on-site at Brannoxtown CNS, managed by Busy Fingers Creche, Corbally. The Admissions Policy for Brannoxtown CNS specifies the starting school age for Junior Infant enrolments:

Applicants must be at least four years of age before the first day of January of the year in which they apply. Compulsory attendance at school in Ireland does not apply until the age of 6 years.

(Brannoxtown CNS Admissions Policy, page 2)

In exceptional circumstances, a child may be enrolled at Brannoxtown CNS, before reaching this 'age milestone' of four and a half years, if:

- Junior Infant places are available at Brannoxtown CNS
- Parents are confident and can provide assurances that that (they believe) their child is ready for school. A 'School Readiness Checklist' (Appendix A) has been



- developed to help parents determine if/when their child is ready to start primary school and enrol in Junior Infants.
- Parents understand that the school is responsible for carefully monitoring their child's progress and development toward expectations for Junior Infants using a range of assessment tools.
 - Parents agree to follow the school's advice regarding retention/progression of their child at the end of Junior Infants, based on assessment data gathered.

Parents of a child who begins Junior Infants before he/she reaches the 'age milestone' of four and a half years are aware that their child's progress will be monitored by his/her child's Class Teacher through the year to assess his/her progress toward expectations for learning and development in Junior Infants. The Junior Infant Class Teacher is responsible for monitoring if the expectations for Junior Infants are reasonable for the child who began school before reaching the specified 'age milestone'. This is because each child must be supported to develop at his/her own pace and in line with reasonable expectations for his/her age. It is also to avoid an 'acceleration' of a child's learning in one or two areas (e.g., literacy – sight vocabulary) to the detriment of his/her learning or development in other areas (e.g., communication – reciprocity or personal care – toileting).

A range of assessments are used to support teacher judgement and to inform key decisions regarding children's learning at Brannoxtown CNS. Informal assessments which inform discussions on class progression for children who did not reach the 'age milestone' before starting Junior Infants, include observations, checklists, the *Ready Set Go Assessment* and the *Marie Clay Observation Survey*. Additional assessments with selected children may include the Belfield Infant Assessment Profile and the Primary School Assessment Interview (with children with English as an Additional Language, EAL).

For Junior Infant children who began school without yet reaching the 'age milestone', conversations about class progression will be scheduled with parents:

- In the Term 1 Parent-Teacher Meeting (typically in November)
- At the end of Term 2
- In a Term 3 final Review Meeting in preparation for the next academic year.

b. Retention/Progression: Sixth Class

The question of retention or progression for 6th Class children is identified as a specific concern in DES Circular Letter 11/01 (DES, 2001). The DES clarifies that schools cannot support the transfer of children to/from another primary school to repeat sixth class:

Pupils who have completed sixth class must not transfer to another primary school to repeat sixth class. In the event that a school were to enrol pupils from another school to repeat sixth class the pupils shall not be included as eligible pupils for staffing and other purposes. Capitation and other grants in respect of such pupils shall not be paid.

(DES Circular Letter 11/01, page 2, section 4.1)

Questions and concerns can also come from parents regarding whether a child should continue a second 6th class year or progress to first year. In line with DES advice, Brannoxtown CNS must carefully consider if the benefits of progression to first year are greater than any gain from a repeat 6th class year at BCNS. The procedures to be followed are outlined in Section 6 (page 2). In addition, for children who reach the end of primary school, the following considerations are key:



- **Developmental/learning needs:** For children with specific difficulties, placed on the Continuum of Support at Brannoxtown CNS, the Principal must determine if the school can adequately meet the child's learning needs. The Principal liaises closely with staff at the child's transferring second-level school, (e.g., the Learning Support Coordinator). The timely transfer of information from our school to the child's second-level school enables staff there to plan and provide support.
- **Self-esteem:** Children frequently see 'repeating' as a consequence of 'not doing well' but many children who experience difficulties have done their very best in 6th class. Children with an assessed learning need (SEN), are often best supported by moving on with appropriate supports in place. With the support of the SET at Brannoxtown CNS, pupils can develop strategies to compensate for and overcome many of the challenges he/she encountered in the earlier primary years.
- **The right to be placed in class groupings with peers of a similar age and stage of development:** The school must consider if a child's age is typical of a student starting first year in September. Retaining a student in 6th class for a second year is not advisable if he/she is subsequently older than 13 starting secondary school. Returning to the prioritisation of children's wellbeing, there may be strong evidence that while a child has experienced some learning difficulties, he/she has expressed interests and social skills which are in line with expectations for a child transferring to post-primary school, i.e., they reflect the development/maturity expected of a child progressing to second-level.

8. BCNS Class Progression Policy: Monitoring and Reviewing

a. Success Criteria

The effectiveness of this school policy in its present form is measured by its careful and considered implementation. In the case of any child for whom teachers/parents are concerned about progression/retention, the procedures outlined in this policy provide a road-map to ensure that the final decision is always in the child's best interests.

b. Implementation and Timetable for Review

Following approval by the Board of Management, this policy will apply with immediate effect at Brannoxtown CNS. This policy will be reviewed annually or in line with a change in Department legislation.

c. Ratification and Communication

Following feedback from members of the Brannoxtown CNS Board of Management, this Class Progression Policy will be finalised and posted on the school's website. Hardcopies of the policy are available to parents on request. This policy was adopted by the Board of Management of Brannoxtown CNS in April, 2021.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Ms. Deirdre O'Donovan
Chairperson

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Dr. Sarah FitzPatrick
Principal

References

Department of Education and Science, DES (2001). Circular Letter 11/01. Retention of Pupils in Primary Schools. Available: <https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/Retention-of-Pupils-in-Primary-Schools.pdf>

Department of Education and Skills, DES (2003). Circular Letter 32/03. Retention of Pupils in Same Grade in Primary Schools. Available: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/pc32_03.pdf

Early Childhood Ireland (2021). Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Guide for Parents, 2021. Available: <https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ECCEGuideforParents2021.pdf>

Mary O' Kane (2016). Transition from pre-school to primary. NCCA Commissioned Research Report. Available: https://ncca.ie/media/1504/transition_to_primary_research_report_19.pdf

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA (2009). Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Available: <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/>

National Council for Special Education, NCSE (2016). Supporting Students with Special Education Needs (SEN) to make Successful Transitions: Guidelines for Schools. Available: <https://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/inline-files/5-NCSE-2016-Supporting-Students-final-web-27.01.16.pdf>

Appendix 1

Starting Primary School: Note for Parents

Is my child ready?

Starting school is a very big step for your small boy or girl. You may wonder if he/she is ready for 'big school'. Once your child has reached four years of age, age matters less you're your child's development. A child is ready for school when he/she can do most of the actions below. As yourself if your child can:

Communication:

- ...speak clearly and be understood by strangers?
- ...express their needs, e.g. ask to go to the toilet?
- ...play happily and share with other children/adults?

Identity and Belonging:

- ...recognise his/her name and respond when called?
- ...recognise and put on/take off his/her coat independently?
- ...take turns at an activity or game without becoming upset?

Wellbeing:

- ...manage a lunch box, open a yoghurt carton or pour a drink?
- ...go to the toilet and wash his/her hands?
- ...wait patiently a few minutes before or after an activity?

Exploring and Thinking:

- ...sit quietly and listen to a story?
- ...sort and match objects?
- ...ask questions about the world and listen to the answers?

What really matters?

A child who can take turns, express their needs clearly and interact well with adults and other children, is much more prepared for school than a child who can sing the alphabet and count to 20, but who becomes very upset easily or who needs help to recognise or put on his/her coat.

Children are not expected to be able to read and write, spell or count before starting school; they will learn all these things at school. If you feel your child is probably ready to start Junior Infants, then you can help him/her to prepare for the transition to Brannoxtown CNS by reading to your child as much as you can, chatting about the world around us, completing simple jigsaws and puzzle activities and talking about the new friends your child will make in Junior Infants!

Parents will find additional guides/tips for your child starting 'big school' at these links:

www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/TipsforParents/2018_Tips_Eng.pdf

www.smarteducation.ie/is-my-child-ready-for-school.php