

# Brannoxtown CNS

## Class Size and Class Progression Policy

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Brannoxtown Community National School (CNS) is a primary school under Patronage 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 Size and Class Progression* has been developed:

- to ensure class size is in line with the school's ethos as a small, Community National School (CNS), the available space and the pupil/teacher ratio, which is currently 24:1, and will be further reduced in September 2023 to 23:1.<sup>1</sup>
- to inform decision making for staff and parents concerning a child's progression from one class year to the next. This is relevant at points of transfer to/from the school as well as transfer within the school.

In this policy, *Class Size* refers to the number of children in a classroom with a mainstream class teacher. *Progression* refers to advancement to the subsequent class year and *Retention* refers to remaining in the same class for a second year. The parts of this policy related to *progression* were 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.

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.

This is an important starting point for any discussion on class size and on children's progression at school.

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<sup>1</sup> Budget 2023, Key Education Measures: ...funding will be provided to reduce class sizes by reducing the school staffing schedules by 1 point for all primary schools. The staffing schedule will now be 23:1 in mainstream schools [from 2023]. [Available online.](#)

### 3. Policy Aims

This policy provides a whole school approach to class size and class progression at Brannoxtown CNS. Specifically, it addresses the process of enrolment of children in any of the eight primary school years, to ensure class size is optimal for children and staff. This policy also relates to class 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 significant difficulties with their learning and development. 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 Curriculum 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

#### a. Class Size

The student-teacher ratio has continued to improve at primary level in Ireland in recent years with a further reduction, 23:1, announced in budget 2023. However, Ireland's ratio still remains above the OECD average of 20:1. The benefits of smaller classes are generally accepted as follows:

- allowing teachers to focus more on the **needs of individual students**
- reducing the amount of class time needed to deal with **disruptions**.
- contributing to a **better learning environment for students**
- **improving working conditions** for teachers and staff.

The OECD has explained that, although related, class size and student-teacher ratios are not the same:

*...schools with large special education programmes tend to have many teachers, but the size of regular classes is not reduced by the school's low student-teacher ratio. These two indicators are calculated differently. Class size is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled by the number of classes. The student-teacher ratio is obtained by dividing the number of full-time equivalent pupils at a given level of education by the number of full-time equivalent teachers at that level and in similar types of institutions... similar student-teacher ratios between countries can result in different class sizes. (OECD, Education GPS).<sup>2</sup>*

There is wide agreement that smaller classes benefit children, assuming that classes are not too small to deny children sufficient social interaction with peers. In addition, it is accepted that younger children need more time and interaction with teachers for

<sup>2</sup> OECD, Education GPS. [Available online](#).

a quality education, supporting a lower student-teacher ratio in the early primary years, i.e., Stage 1, Junior and Senior Infants.

In the process of enrolment and admissions, families may request enrolment for children across any classes. In most cases, it is preferable for siblings to attend the same school. However, Brannoxtown CNS (or any school) may have small or large classes for one or more siblings. For this reason, it may not be realistic for schools to remain within the official student-teacher ratio, across classes. The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for management and families to guide enrolment at Brannoxtown CNS and ultimately, to avoid any classroom becoming 'supersized' for the students and teacher therein.

At Brannoxtown CNS, it is envisaged that from September 2023:

- **Each of four classrooms will have two classes.** Each classroom will include children at one of the four Stages outlined in the Primary Curriculum (and on page 2 of this policy).
- Ideally, the number of **children at Stage 1 (Junior and Senior Infants) should be lower than the other Stages.** Ideally, this classroom should not exceed 23, i.e. an intake of up to 16 new Junior Infants in 2023, in addition to the 7 Junior Infants enrolled in September 2022.
- **Ideally, the number of children at Stages 2, 3 and 4, should not exceed 25.**
- Ultimately, decisions on class size will take account of the **collective needs of children in each classroom** to ensure that the quality of care and education remains a priority for each child, in each classroom, at Brannoxtown CNS.

As noted earlier, it may be necessary to increase the size of one Stage to accommodate families and to ensure that four mainstream class teachers (one per Stage) are retained, i.e., that the school does not lose a teacher. In this instance, the larger classroom will be prioritised for additional support in the Special Education Teacher (SET) schedule. This policy on class size will be implemented from the 2022/2023 school year. As a small school in a rural area, enrolment will be continually monitored and this policy will be reviewed for edits and improvements to ensure an optimal learning environment across all four mainstream classrooms.

### ***b. Class Progression***

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 report). Unless parents raise serious concerns regarding a child's progression to the next class and the transferring school can provide evidence, it is assumed that all children who transfer to Brannoxtown CNS continue to the next class year.

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. Progression: Evidence & Procedures

When concerns arise about a child's ability to manage progression to the next class year, when all available supports have been accessed, the Class Teacher and Special Education Teacher (SET) review and discuss the 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 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.

Communication with parents is key. Where concerns about progression arise, these are discussed with the child's parents during three meetings over the course of the year:

- Term 1: In a special, scheduled Parent-Teacher Meeting
- Term 2: In the regular Mid-Year Parent-Teacher Meeting
- Term 3: In a final Review Meeting in preparation for the next academic year.

## 7. Progression Concerns

Concerns for retention/progression may arise for any child who experiences difficulty in any aspect of his/her learning and development. Issues can arise for children at the point of enrolment/transfer to the school, i.e., Junior Infants, as a child progresses to the next class within the school or the end of primary school, i.e., Sixth Class. Here we discuss specific concerns at the point of transition to/from Brannoxtown CNS.

### 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 The Learning Tree. 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.**

(Brannoxtown CNS Admissions Policy, page 2)

In very exceptional circumstances, a child may be enrolled at Brannoxtown CNS, before reaching this 'age milestone' of four years and eight months, if (places are available and) parents can provide assurances that 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 of a child who begins Junior Infants before he/she reaches the 'age milestone' of four years and eight months 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. For example, 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).

### **b. Retention/Progression: Sixth Class**

The question of retention or progression for 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> class year at BCNS. The procedures to be followed are outlined in Section 8 (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. Class Size and 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. All enrolment queries will be reviewed in light of agreed class sizes. 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 immediately regarding class progression concerns. It will apply from September 2023, regarding class sizes 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 Size and Class Progression Policy was adopted by the Board on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2022. The policy is posted on the school's website. Hardcopies of the policy are available to parents, on request.

Signed: 

Date: 20 October 2022

Ms. Deirdre O'Donovan  
Chairperson

Signed: 

Date: 20 October 2022

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](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>

**Government of Ireland Press Release (2022).** Budget 2023 – Key Education Measures. Available online: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/8ba6b-ministers-foley-and-madigan-announce-details-of-96-billion-education-funding-in-budget-2023/#budget-2023-key-education-measures>

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

**Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022).** Education GPS. Available online: <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41720&filter=all>

## Appendix 1

# Starting Primary School: Note for Parents

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## 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](http://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/TipsforParents/2018_Tips_Eng.pdf)

[www.smarteducation.ie/is-my-child-ready-for-school.php](http://www.smarteducation.ie/is-my-child-ready-for-school.php)