

Class sizes at Key Stage 2

1. The purpose of this paper is to propose that the class size policy for KS2 in East Sussex should be amended, to reduce the maximum class size from 35 to 30, in line with the KS1 policy.
2. The introduction of a national class size policy at Key Stage 1 means that there are very few classes over 30 in this Key Stage, and normally where this number is exceeded there are two teachers working with the class. However the average class size in Key Stage 2 in East Sussex is one of the highest in England.
3. Currently the County Council policy at Key Stage 2 is that the following maximum class size policy applies: -
 - Single age classes 35 children
 - Two age classes 32 children
 - Three age classes 29 children

This policy has applied since the late 70s. There are very few classes which exceed 35 children but it has to be recognised that where all schools are full in an area or there is no other school available within a reasonable distance of the home it is occasionally necessary for schools to exceed the policy.

4. When the KS1 class size law was introduced, LEAs were required to draw up plans for ensuring that these class sizes should not exceed 30 pupils. In East Sussex this resulted in a change of policy from class sizes of 32 to 30. The policy of smaller classes for mixed age groups continues to apply but is difficult to maintain given the law does not differentiate between single age and mixed age classes.
5. Given the change in law which means that no Key Stage 1 class exceeds 30 pupils and the projected reduction in the primary school roll over the next five years in most parts of the county, we believe the time is right to discuss with schools the issues of class sizes at Key Stage 2. We believe that there could be significant benefits for the quality of teaching and learning if the class size policy was consistent throughout the primary age range.

Proposal - that from 2005/06 a class size limit of 30 be adopted for KS2 classes in East Sussex

It is recognised that it will not be possible to achieve this at all schools, and that many classes in older age groups will continue to operate above this new limit until existing classes have moved on to secondary school.

6. The School Admissions Forum is asked to comment on the following important issues which need to be considered in determining whether a new class size policy at Key Stage 2 should be introduced:
 - Class sizes at Key Stage 1 now generally do not exceed 30 pupils. In most cases it should be possible to 'roll forward' most of these classes in multiples of 30.
 - There would be a general reduction in class sizes in East Sussex, and the pupil/teacher ratio would over time be significantly improved: a new policy would address concerns expressed by parents and schools about the size of Key Stage 2 classes
 - Some schools with larger classes argue that they are able to maintain high standards because the additional formula funding enables them to appoint additional teaching assistants and maintain a higher adult/pupil ratio
 - There would be a reduction of income to schools used to operating with classes of 35 pupils. In current circumstances, it is unlikely that additional resources could be made available to compensate for a perceived loss of funding under a new class size policy. However schools would have time to prepare for a lower income which would begin in 2005/06 and develop progressively until 2008/09

- Because pupil numbers overall will continue to decline throughout the rest of the decade, it should be possible to introduce a change of policy without the need to provide additional classrooms – it would be much more difficult to change the class size policy when pupil numbers were rising
- There would be some reduction in some schools in the authority's ability to meet parental preference, but against the background of reducing primary numbers this may not be as marked as might otherwise be the case
- Appeals may increase. It may be difficult to defend a new class size policy based on 'prejudicial to efficient education' given that the County Council has always held that this occurs at 35 children to a class. However, as the new policy became embedded we would expect that the strength of this argument would diminish
- It needs to be recognised that there are some areas of the county where a new class size policy could not be introduced because of accommodation restrictions. This will occur where it is expected that the number of admissions will remain at current levels and where there are no surplus classrooms - and possibly no room to provide new ones. Where such circumstances exist there will need to be discussions with that individual school as to how a class size policy at Key Stage 2 might be introduced
- Casual admissions and the need to find places at a school within a reasonable distance may mean that the LEA has to reach decisions resulting in the new class size limit being exceeded. However, a new class size policy could assist the authority in refusing out of area applications where class sizes already exceed 30
- Some aided schools which are the admissions authority already hold Key Stage 2 classes at 30 pupils. A change in policy would bring community and voluntary controlled schools in line with those aided schools
- Standard numbers cease for 2004/05 onwards and new limits will be determined by reference to the new capacity formula. The capacity formula assumes 30 pupils to all primary classes. Thus it should be possible to reset admission limits at most junior schools without publishing notices. At all through primary schools the relevant number is the intake figure at 4+ - there are one or two schools where the admission number may need to be changed to ensure KS2 classes do not exceed 30 pupils

7. Although the considerations above demonstrate that there would be transitional issues for some schools, and a small number of instances where implementing the policy would be very difficult, we believe that the time is now right to consider a change of policy. Views on introducing a class size policy of 30 at Key Stage 2 are sought.