

CLASS SIZES

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

There is no statutory limit on the size of general classes. The only reference to class sizes in Primary Schools is in DENI Circular 1990/27 (paragraph 4):

"This (i.e. appropriate learning experience) is difficult to achieve when classes consisting entirely of mainly four-year-old children exceeds 25".

Paragraph 8a recommends a reception class should not exceed 25.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The 1973 Secondary Schools (Grant Conditions) Regulations stipulate in Regulation 15 that the maximum limit for a general class is 35 pupils, and for a practical class, 20 pupils except where approved by the Department of Education including Craft, Design and Technology, Art and Design, Domestic Science, Physical Education and the Sciences.

This DENI Circular defines a class size of 20 as the strict maximum for CDT and Home Economics. The Circular states (paragraph 3):

"In some practical subjects approval to organise classes containing more than 20 pupils will not be given. It is the Department's view that the hazards associated with Craft, Design and Technology, Domestic Science and some activities in Physical Education are such that adequate and safe supervision of pupils is not possible if more than 20 pupils are present. Indeed, for some specialised activities in outdoor pursuits a much lower pupil:staff ratio than 20:1 is necessary".

The Department's Circular permits up to 26 pupils in the Sciences, Art and Design and Physical Education:

Science

In the Science class sizes may exceed 20 in certain circumstances and schools may expect approval to be given where: -

- (a) the class is conducted in a standard size laboratory (at least 83 square metres);
- (b) the class consists of not more than 26 pupils in the first 3 years of secondary education;
- (c) the class consists of not more than 24 pupils in years 4 and 5; and
- (d) practical work by pupils is not carried on in any class exceeding 26.

The Department of Education expects that the number of pupils will be reduced proportionally for laboratories of less than standard size. The Department of Education also assumes that sixth form practical classes in Science subjects will always consist of fewer than 20 pupils.

Art and Design

- (a) up to 26 pupils in the first 3 years of secondary education; and
- (b) not more than 20 pupils in classes beyond Form 3.

Physical Education

- (a) up to 26 pupils in the first 4 years of secondary education; and
- (b) not more than 20 pupils in Form 5 or above.

DISABLED PUPILS AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS

The Handicapped Pupils and Special Schools Regulations 1973 specify the following maximum class sizes:

- (a) for a class of Deaf or Partially-Deaf pupils or of pupils suffering from speech defect - 10 pupils;
- (b) for a class of Blind, Partially-Sighted or Maladjusted pupils - 15 pupils;
- (c) for a class of Educationally Sub-Normal, Epileptic or Physically Handicapped pupils - 20 pupils;
- (d) for a class of Delicate pupils - 30 pupils

Definitions

1. **Delicate** pupils, i.e. pupils not falling under any other category of the 1973 Handicapped Pupils and Special Schools Regulations, who, by reason of impaired physical condition need a change of environment or cannot, without risk to their health or educational development, be educated under the normal regime of ordinary schools.
2. **Pupils suffering from Speech Defect**, i.e. pupils who on account of defect or lack of speech not due to deafness, require special educational treatment.
3. **Maladjusted pupils**, i.e. pupils who show evidence of emotional instability or psychological disturbance and require special educational treatment in order to effect their personal, social or educational readjustment.
4. **Partially Hearing** pupils, i.e. pupils with impaired hearing whose development of speech and language, even if retarded, is following a normal pattern, and who require for their education special arrangements or facilities, though not necessarily all the educational methods used for deaf pupils.
5. **Deaf** pupils, i.e. pupils with impaired hearing who require educational methods suitable for pupils with little or no naturally acquired speech or language.
6. **Partially Sighted** pupils, i.e. pupils who by reason of defective vision cannot follow the normal regime of ordinary schools without detriment to their sight or to their educational development, but can be educated by special methods involving the use of sight.
7. **Blind** pupils, i.e. pupils who have no sight or whose sight is likely to become so defective that they require special education by methods not involving the use of sight.

INTO STRATEGY

INTO believes that the 1978 DENI Circular on Class Sizes and Practical Subjects is totally out of date. It needs complete redrafting to take account of the Health and Safety at Work Order 1978 and subsequent Health and Safety Regulations, the introduction of a practical element of all subjects in primary and secondary schools arising from the introduction of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and the necessity to provide a high quality educational service to pupils in Northern Ireland.

INTO is seeking the following objectives on class sizes:

1. All nursery classes and Key Stage 1 classes to be limited to a maximum of 20 children;
2. A maximum class size in primary schools of 25 pupils in single-age classes, of 20 pupils in two-age group classes and of 15 pupils in classes consisting of three or more age groups;
3. A maximum limit of 16 pupils for all practical subjects in all classes in primary and secondary schools;
4. The provisions for class sizes in practical subjects in Department Circular 1978/36 to be updated to take account of curricular changes in recent years and to provide adequate and safe supervision of pupils in all subjects with which hazards are associated.