

Education Directorate

Calculating Primary School Capacities

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 There is a vast array of Primary School buildings across the estate in Fife, with some dating over 150 years and others just over 10 years old.
- 1.2 Despite the physical differences in the available space, and the unique context of all our schools in Fife, all pupils attending have an entitlement to experience the Broad General Education. As part of their learning journey, all children and young people in Scotland are entitled to experience a coherent curriculum from 3-18, in order that they have opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to adapt, think critically and flourish in today's world.
- 1.3 Curriculum is defined as the totality of all that is planned for children and young people from early learning and childcare, through school and beyond. The totality that can be planned for and experienced by learners across four contexts:



- 1.4 Our school buildings require appropriate learning spaces to allow the curriculum to be delivered effectively, both inside and out. In addition, our school buildings require ancillary spaces to allow them to perform all the operational functions required, as well as additional space to meet learners needs.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In October 2014 the Scottish Government published new guidelines entitled, [Determining Primary School Capacity Guidance 2014](#). While this guidance supports the decisions made by the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland, it is up to each one to calculate school capacity figures. This is a complex issue, and the decision not to impose national standards, which would be restrictive, reflects the many factors to be considered in each context. However, the methodology used within each local authority must be consistent.
- 2.2 The provision and delivery of education at a local level in Scotland is the statutory responsibility of Local Authorities under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. This includes effective management of their school estate, which involves determining the maximum number of children who may be suitably accommodated in every room in a school (under the Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975), and the administration of the placing request system in their area.
- 2.3 The [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1980](#) requires Education Authorities to secure the provision of adequate and efficient education for their area. Section 1(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 provides for the duty of each education authority to “secure that there is made for their area adequate and efficient provision of school education”.
- 2.4 As outlined in the [Determining Primary School Capacity Guidance 2014](#) Guidance, Primary School Capacity is calculated for:
1. **Forward Planning**
To allow assessment of the capacity and future requirements of the primary school estate and other changes in school provision, taking account of factors such as population trends and new housing.
 2. **Curricular and Organisational Needs**
To establish the number of children for whom the school can provide the desired curriculum and to allow assessment of the implications of any new staffing standards, class size maxima, changing methodologies and new resources.
 3. **Placing Requests**
To establish a clear and consistent basis for determining whether placing requests should be granted or refused and identifying schools which are currently over capacity or may exceed capacity in the future.
 4. **Informing Consultations on Proposed Changes to the Primary School Estate**
To meet legal requirements to provide clear, accurate information in consultations on changes to the primary school estate, e.g. school closures, catchment area changes, that the public has confidence in.
 5. **Scottish Government Policy**
To take account of the priorities and objectives set by the Scottish Government.

3.0 The need for continuous review of capacity calculations

3.1 Since the Scottish Government Determining Primary School Capacities publication in 2014, there have been changes to national policy which impact on the use of space in our schools.

- Introduction of 1140 expansion for Early Learning and Childcare
- Under 3 Nursery provision
- Continuation of the delivery of 2 hours PE
- Phased introduction of free school meal entitlement for all pupils in primary 1 -5 in Scotland as well as those children in Primary 6 and 7 who's Parent / Carer is in receipt of Scottish Child Payment (or a range of other benefits [Free school meals - mygov.scot](#))
- Scottish Attainment Challenge (including PEF)
- Impact of the pandemic on Attainment, Attendance, Engagement, resulting in an increased focus on Wellbeing.

3.2 As well as National policy changes, there have been other local considerations that have impacted on the use of capacity.

- Removal of temporary accommodation that has life expired to support the under one roof principle.
- Advances with Digital Infrastructure and Technology to support learning and teaching.
- Agencies working in school directly with children, for example Occupational Therapy or Speech and Language Therapy.

3.3 Meeting the varied needs of young people in Scotland has changed over recent years with reported levels of Additional Support for Learning (ASL) rising to 40% in the February 2025 Audit Scotland publication, [Additional support for learning](#).

- **40%** of pupils in publicly funded schools receive ASL.
- **768%** growth in pupils receiving ASL since the ASL Act was introduced in 2004.
- **93%** of pupils receiving ASL spent all their time in mainstream classes in 2023.

3.4 A mainstream classroom environment can be challenging due to the level of visual stimulation and auditory interactions that take place throughout the day. As a result, this is not always the most appropriate place for a young person to learn all day. For those pupils receiving ASL within a mainstream primary school, the need to spend time outwith the classroom environment may be even greater. Careful consideration should be given in all schools to create an inclusive environment, referring to the Circle Framework ([Primary-CIRCLE-Resource-2021.pdf](#)). These spaces may be labelled Nurture base, Sensory Room, Breakout space, Quiet / safe spaces but are often named by the children using them.

4.0 Calculating Capacities

4.1 There is a need for increased flexibility in the use of space within our primary schools in Fife. This needs to be balanced with a consistent methodology applied to assess the available pupil capacity within each school.

4.2 When calculating the capacity (planning and working) of each school, the following factors must be considered:

1. Space Metric per pupil

While there is no legal requirement regarding space metric, in Fife 1.7sqm is allocated per pupil in determining the capacity of a closed classroom, open plan or semi open plan space. This should be measured wall to wall. This should not include circulation routes in our open plan settings. For example, our new build primary specification requires all classroom areas to be 57sqm or above to allow up to 33 pupils to use the space. In our existing buildings some classrooms cannot accommodate up to 33 pupils and an adjustment to the maximum capacity of that space is made.

2. Space to deliver the totality of the Curriculum

In addition to classroom / open plan / semi open plan learning spaces, the availability of multipurpose spaces (areas greater than 45 / 55sqm) that support the weekly delivery of music and drama, as well as spaces large enough to allow pupils to safely undertake PE activities, will impact on the determination of a school's capacity. Multipurpose and spaces to deliver PE often double up for planned weekly activities, such as large school assembly gatherings, as well as daily school lunches. In addition, they will also be used for events such as seasonal performances, school fayres, visiting speakers, parent groups, as well as the delivery of activities from Active Schools and other agencies.

As the number of classes in a school increases there is also a requirement to increase the multipurpose spaces. The table below outlines the number of spaces required to allow all classes the opportunity to experience the totality of the curriculum.

Type of Spaces	< 5 class	5 to 7 classes	7 class	8 to 9 classes	11 class	10 to 13 classes	14 class	15 to 20 classes	21 classes and >
Number of Pupils (planning capacity)			217		317		434		651
Classrooms			7		11		14		21
MP rooms	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Gym/Dining (with associated storage)	1	1	1 (210)	1	1 (210)	1	1 (240)	1 (240)	1 (240)
Hall (with associated storage for PE)	0	0	0	0	1 (180)	1	1 (180)	1 (180)	2 (180)

3. Taking account of individual circumstances

Not all our schools have the range of learning spaces that would be defined in our Primary School standard specification. This requires a significant degree of flexibility across our existing estate, where the hire of a local hall may be the solution to multipurpose space.

4. Spaces within our mainstream schools designated to meet the needs of individual learners from within the school or from across the local geographical area

The Supporting Learners continuum of support strategy in Fife includes the use of Primary Enhanced Provision and Pupil Support Service within our mainstream **primary settings**. These will not be accounted for in the planning capacity. However, the children who attend the setting also require access to a range of spaces both inside and out, including multipurpose and PE spaces. This will be reflected in the published planning capacity.

5. Emerging needs and policy changes

Population, policy and strategy changes, at both local and national levels, mean that the Education Service needs a degree of flexibility to be able to respond to changing needs as they emerge. It is essential therefore that there is awareness, wherever possible, of such needs and that these are factored into any calculations of school capacity.

6. Building considerations (including building regulations / standards)

It is essential to ensure that the stated number of building occupants does not breach the School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967, for example: in relation to size of site; sanitary accommodation etc.; relevant aspects of the 1980 Act which relate to school accommodation; child safety etc.; as well as relevant building standards.

7. Site Considerations (Health and Safety)

All schools require a Traffic Management plan to ensure the safety of all site users' accessing and departing the site as pedestrians or vehicle users. Each plan is unique and takes account of the site layout, usage and constraints. For example, if additional transport were to be required to increase pupil capacity, but could not be safely accommodated within the site, the capacity could not be increased.

8. Class Size Maximum

The table below illustrates how the class size maximum differs for different primary year groups:

Stage	Maximum number of pupils
Primary 1	25
Primary 2 and 3	30
Primary 4 – 7	33
Composite Classes	25

Where not all classrooms can accommodate 33 pupils in a school, the smallest spaces should be used by the stage(s) containing the smallest number of pupils.

- 4.3 There are several spaces that are excluded when determining school capacity. These include meeting rooms, tutorial rooms, offices, storage, reception, changing, toilets, sensory spaces, breakout and staff rooms. This list is not exhaustive, and others may be exempt from the capacity calculation to meet the needs of the children attending the school.

5.0 Defining the Primary School Capacity

- 5.1 There are 2 measures for defining primary school capacity: Planning Capacity and Working Capacity.

5.2 Planning Capacity

- 5.2.2 Planning Capacity is a theoretical measure of the total number of children which could be accommodated in a school, based on an optimisation of the total number of teaching spaces, the size of those spaces, the class size maxima, and a realistic distribution of children within each primary stage.

- 5.2.3 The Planning Capacity is a static figure and will only change if a school building is re-compartmentalised, extended, or physically adjusted in some other way (including the addition or removal of temporary accommodation).
- 5.2.4 Planning Capacity is rarely achieved, and therefore planning capacity should be used for broad strategic issues relating to school provision, e.g. for forward planning for the school estate, to assess the impact of new government policies, etc.
- 5.2.5 This figure will be returned to The Scottish Government in the annual School Estate Core Facts Statistical return.

5.3 Calculating Planning Capacity

There are four steps to calculating Planning Capacity:

1. Determine which teaching spaces will be included in the calculation
 2. Determine the physical size/dimensions of the teaching spaces identified
 3. Determine the maximum number of pupils which could be accommodated in each class base
 4. Prepare an optimised theoretical classification based on the maximum use of each class base
- 5.4 If all classes were full to the class size maximum and all class spaces could accommodate the maximum number of pupils; the table below illustrates the published planning capacity.

Number of Classes	Planning Capacity	Number of Classes	Planning Capacity	Number of Classes	Planning Capacity
1	25	9	267	17	509
2	50	10	292	18	534
3	75	11	317	19	559
4	100	12	342	20	584
5	125	13	367	21	609
6	150	14	392	22	634
7	175	15	417	23	659
8	200	16	442	24	684

5.5 Working Capacity

- 5.5.1 The working capacity may exceed or fall below the published planning capacity each year, for several reasons but primarily because of the class size maximum which determines the annual class organisation. This is a more realistic measure of the available space in an academic year.
- 5.5.2 The Working Capacity should be used to determine the number of places available in a particular academic year. When considering placing requests and other issues relating to a specific school session it is important to assess the implications for future years' classifications as well as the current year's classification. **Appendix 1** illustrates several worked examples which highlights the need to cap the intake at P1 to ensure there is sufficient space to accommodate children throughout all primary stages.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 Calculating the capacity of a school requires careful application of the agreed criteria.

- 6.2 A transparent methodology to calculate the capacity of a school considers many factors.
- 6.3 The annual publication of core facts contains school capacity; however, this is a retrospective reported capacity based on the annual September census figure.
- 6.4 The Scottish Government recognises that capacity is an important practical measure for Local Authorities which has many uses. It should however be borne in mind that capacity is only one of many measures of the school estate, and that it should only ever be considered alongside other qualitative measures such as educational issues and geography.

Appendix 1

Planning and **Working** Capacity examples based on a typical single stream, 2 stream, 3 stream school.

The examples present a maximum planning example for a 7, 14 or 21 class school, as well as realistic working capacity examples showing fluctuations in class numbers and occupancy levels.

In practice it is unlikely the maximum stated Planning Capacity could be achieved unless every class was full at every stage and cohorts increase between P1 and P7.

Planning Capacity: Single stream:

7 classes all at class size maximum – Core Facts published at 217 pupils

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2		30						30
3			30					30
4				33				33
5					33			33
6						33		33
7							33	33
Total								217
							Occupancy	100%

Working Capacity: 25 P1 intake example:

P1 intake of **25** cohort remains consistent - (7 classes)

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2		25						25
3			25					25
4				25				25
5					25			25
6						25		25
7							25	25
Total								175
							Occupancy	81%

Working Capacity: > 25 P1 intake example

P1 intake of **30** and cohort remains consistent - (8 classes)

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	15							15
2	15							15
3		30						30
4			30					30
5				30				30
6					30			30
7						30		30
8							30	30
Total	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	210
							Occupancy	97%

Planning Capacity: 2 stream:

14 classes all at class size maximum – Core Facts published at 434 pupils

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3		30						30
4		30						30
5			30					30
6			30					30
7				33				33
8				33				33
9					33			33
10					33			33
11						33		33
12						33		33
13							33	33
14							33	33
Total	50	60	60	66	66	66	66	434
							Occupancy	100%

Working Capacity: x2 25 P1 intake example:

P1 intake of **50** cohort remains consistent - (**13 classes**)

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3		30						30
4		20	5					25
5			30					30
6			15	10				25
7				33				33
8				7	18			25
9					32			32
10						25		25
11						25		25
12							25	25
13							25	25
Total	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	350 / 367
							Occupancy	95%

Working Capacity P1 intake maximum 54 example:

P1 intake of **54** cohort remains consistent - (**14 classes**)

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3	4	21						25
4		29						29
5		4	21					25
6			29					29
7			4	21				25
8				33				33
9					27			27
10					27			27
11						27		27
12						27		27
13							27	27
14							27	27
Total	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	378 / 434
							Occupancy	87%

Working Capacity P1 intake 55 example:

P1 intake of **55** cohort remains consistent - (**15 classes**)

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3	5	21						25
4		29						29
5		5	20					25
6			30					30
7			5	20				25
8				31				31
9				4	21			25
10					29			29
11					5	20		25
12						20		20
13						15	10	25
14							23	23
15							22	22
Total	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	385/ 459
							Occupancy	84%

This cohort comparison between 54 and 55 shows 1 increased pupil at P1 requires an additional class.

Working Capacity P1 intake 60 example:P1 intake of **60** cohort remains consistent - (15 classes)

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3	10	15						25
4		30						30
5		15	10					25
6			25					25
7			25					25
8				30				30
9				30				30
10					30			30
11					30			30
12						30		30
13						30		30
14							30	30
15							30	30
Total	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	420 / 459
							Occupancy	92%

Higher occupancy achieved with 60 at P1 than 55. Same number of classes required.**Working Capacity Comparison and cohort remaining consistent**

50 P1 intake – 13 classes required

54 P1 intake – 14 classes required

55 P1 Intake – 15 classes required

60 P1 intake – 15 classes required

Planning Capacity 3 stream:

21 classes all at class size maximum – Core Facts published at 651 pupils

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3	25							25
4		30						30
5		30						30
6		30						30
7			30					30
8			30					30
9			30					30
10				33				33
11				33				33
12				33				33
13					33			33
14					33			33
15					33			33
16						33		33
17						33		33
18						33		33
19							33	33
20							33	33
21							33	33
Total	75	90	90	99	99	99	99	651
							Occupancy	100%

Working Capacity x3 25 P1 intake example:

P1 intake of 3 x 25, **75** cohort remains consistent - (19 classes)

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3	25							25
4		30						30
5		30						30
6		15	10					25
7			30					30
8			30					30
9			5	20				25
10				33				33
11				22				22
12					30			30
13					30			30
14					15	10		25
15						32		32
16						33		33
17							25	25
18							25	25
19							25	25
Total	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	525 / 559
							Occupancy	94%

Working Capacity P1 intake of 80 example:

P1 intake of **80** cohort remains consistent - (20 classes)

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3	25							25
4	5	20						25
5		30						30
6		30						30
7			30					30
8			30					30
9			20	5				25
10				33				33
11				33				33
12				9	16			25
13					32			32
14					32			32
15						27		27
16						27		27
17						26		26
18							27	27
19							27	27
20							26	26
Total	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	560 / 584
							Occupancy	96%

Working Capacity P1 intake of 85 example:

P1 intake of 85 cohort remains consistent - (21 classes)

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3	25							25
4	10	15						25
5		30						30
6		30						30
7		10	5					25
8			30					30
9			30					30
10			20	5				25
11				33				33
12				33				33
13				14	11			25
14					33			33
15					33			33
16					8	17		25
17						33		33
18						30		30
19						5	19	24
20							33	33
21							33	33
Total	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	595 / 651
							Occupancy	91.4%

Working Capacity P1 intake of 90 example:

P1 intake of 90 cohort remains consistent - (22 classes)

Room	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	25							25
2	25							25
3	25							25
4	15	10						25
5		30						30
6		30						30
7		20	5					25
8			30					30
9			30					30
10			25					25
11				30				30
12				30				30
13				30				30
14					30			30
15					30			30
16					30			30
17						30		30
18						30		30
19						30		30
20							30	30
21							30	30
22							30	30
Total	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	630 / 676
							Occupancy	93%

Cohort Comparison and remaining consistent

75 P1 intake – 19 classes required

80 P1 intake – 20 classes required

85 P1 Intake – 21 classes required

90 P1 intake – 22 classes required