October 2012

PRIORITIES FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION?

Report on responses to 'Have your say'

NCCA

primary
developments
foráis sa bhunscolaíocht

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1. Context

The invitation to 'have your say' about curriculum priorities for primary education was published online in April, 2011 and remained live until June 2012. Respondents were invited to share their views in 100 words or less and to indicate their role (e.g., parent, principal, teacher, etc.). The open invitation was promoted via websites, presentations, tweets, newsletters and publications of NCCA and partner organisations.

2. Respondents

In total, 960 responses were received. By adding the second and last columns in Table i, we can see that teachers and principals represented three-quarters of all respondents. In total, parents represented 23% of all respondents.

Table i. Respondent groups

	Teacher		Parent		Other		Parent/ Teacher	
Respondents	677	**71%**	180	**19%**	61	**6%**	42	**4%**

n= 960

3. Findings

Six priorities for primary education were identified across the 960 responses, using 25% of respondents as a cut-off. These are listed in Table ii.

Table ii. Primary priorities listed in order of total respondents

Rank	*Primary education should…*	Total	
1	help children to develop **life skills through a broad curriculum.**	370	39%
2	help children to **be good communicators.**	358	37%
3	help children **to be well.**	347	36%
4	help children to develop **literacy and numeracy skills.**	346	36%
5	**motivate and engage** children.	249	26%
6	help children to develop a sense of **identity and belonging.**	237	25%

n= 960

Respondents highlighted two or three main ideas in each priority and these are listed in bold font in Table iii. Additional ideas noted are listed in regular font in Table iii.

Table iii. Main ideas noted in the top six priorities

Rank	Priority	Ideas
1	Life-skills through a broad education	▪ **Life-skills**, thinking skills, learning skills, ICT skills ▪ **Broad education**, dimensions of learning, reaching potential
2	Communication	▪ **Communication skills** ▪ **Language**, oral language, Gaeilge, third language ▪ **Child's voice,** self-expression, creativity, ICT
3	Well-being	▪ **Psychological well-being**, happiness and confidence, emotional well-being, spiritual well-being, challenges and resilience ▪ **Physical well-being**, benefits, time for physical education, curriculum resources
4	Literacy and numeracy	▪ **Foundational skills**, competence and confidence ▪ **Integration and balance**
5	Motivation and engagement	▪ **Learning environment**, other learning spaces, ICT ▪ **Child-centred learning**, hands-on learning, play, active learning ▪ **Love of learning**, life-long learning
6	Identity and belonging	▪ **Positive self-concept**, self-as-child, self-as-learner ▪ **Sense of belonging**, affirmation, belonging to a group, citizenship

Responses were also analysed to see the extent to which curriculum areas/subjects featured among priorities. While it is important to note the limitation of this analysis—respondents were not asked to prioritise curriculum areas/subjects—one finding warrants mention. While only 51 (5%) of respondents prioritised SPHE, at least one of the three elements of SPHE (social, personal and/or health) were listed by 203 additional respondents. When we include these responses, we see that 264 (28% of all) respondents noted SPHE (the subject, or elements of it in their responses.

The need to address curriculum overload, to support curriculum integration and to ensure clarity in curriculum messages were also highlighted among the priorities.

4. What strikes us as significant across the priorities?

- There's a recognition that skills learned in the primary school years are related to one-another and that **many skills have a hierarchical quality**—some are significant in the learning of others. For example, foundational literacy and numeracy skills were considered essential for more sophisticated learning and for enabling children to engage more fully with society now and in the future.

- Looking across the priorities, its striking that **curriculum areas and subjects seem to take a back-seat to the development of important dispositions and life-skills**. While educational policy has, in the past, taken a sectoral approach to developments, these findings remind us that children themselves do not live in sectors nor do our priorities for them vary significantly from one sector to the next.

- There's something of a mismatch between the high ranking for elements of SPHE and the low-ranking for the subject. There's a sense that primary education is expected to engage with issues which may have their origin in the home and in children's lives outside of school; **children's well-being is described as a starting point for learning**.

5. Implications

- Respondents' calls for a prioritisation of dispositions and skills, a reduction in content, and greater clarity in curriculum aims and outcomes, signal that the **primary developments must aim for a leaner, more relevant and helpful curriculum for teachers and children** (Table iv).

- Engagement with adults and especially children about their priorities will continue to be a key focus of the primary developments, given the valuable feedback from this online invitation. **Our next steps will be to ask children themselves (and boys, in particular), to what extent the primary curriculum works for them** (Carr-Chellman, 2012; McCoy, McCoy et al, 2011) and how it can be improved.

Table iv. Primary developments

Aspect of primary developments	Completion date(s)
New integrated **language curriculum** for English and Gaeilge	Junior infants to second class – 2014 Third to sixth class - 2016
Revised **mathematics curriculum**	Junior infants to second class – 2014 Third to sixth class – 2018
Revised **infant curriculum** (2014, 2018)	Language and Mathematics – 2014 All other elements - 2018

1. Context

We're familiar with the phrase, *the whole is greater than the sum of its parts* and as adults we have a sense that the memory of any significant experience often overshadows the pieces of it. In the same way, a child's experience of primary school is much more than the sum of his/her learning in eleven curriculum subjects. This is one reason why we extended an invitation to anyone with an interest, to tell us what should matter most in our primary education.

The invitation to 'have your say' about priorities for primary education went live in April, 2011, a month before NCCA co-hosted a conference on *Children their lives, their learning* with the Marino Institute of Education (May 4th, 2011). The conference was inspired, in part, by the Cambridge Primary Review and its Director, Professor Robin Alexander, provided the opening keynote address at the conference entitled, *Standards, Entitlement and Quality in Primary Education.*

At the time of the conference, we had identified three particular issues in primary education, drawing on findings from our curriculum reviews (NCCA, 2005, 2008) and our work with schools in the primary school network (NCCA, 2010) and our experience developing the new *Framework for Early Learning* (NCCA, 2009). The issues were not about parts of the curriculum, but the sum of a child's primary school experience - how to realize the child-centred curriculum in practice, how to ensure the influence of *Aistear* on the primary curriculum and how to make the curriculum more meaningful and relevant by reducing overload, beginning with infant classes.

The conference and the invitation to 'have your say' were also inspired by *A Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools* (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2010) and a national consultation on the proposals, which was launched in November, 2011. The Draft Plan acknowledged the curriculum overload issue and called for a prioritisation of aims for primary education:

> *We have to be very clear about the priorities that guide our decisions about the content of curricula. The issues and concerns that we consider to be important or relevant change over time and it is natural for curricula to evolve to reflect changing circumstances…. [However]…Including a broader range of issues, topics and subjects in school curricula inevitably has meant that the time available for the acquisition and consolidation of critical core skills has been eroded. (DES, 2010, Page 25)*

The May 4th conference provided a forum to take stock of primary education—to discuss these and other issues with over eighty leaders in education, prompted by Professor Robin Alexander's Keynote address and inspired more generally by learning points from the Cambridge Primary Review and in particular its robust discussion on the purpose of primary education. The (then) President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, highlighted the significance of the event in her own keynote address to the conference:

> *It's an important time in our country's educational history for debates are afoot which have the capacity to radically change the structure and the experience of primary education… Days like this allow us to take the time to think about what has been achieved, to understand the wisdom gleaned from things that work well and things that need to be looked at anew. (President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, 2011)*

Professor Joe Dunne was invited to tease our some of the main ideas from the two keynote speeches, the panel discussion and the podcasts in a philosopher's reflection on the conference. Drawing on the affirmation of childhood as a distinct phase of the human life-span in the Cambridge Primary Review, he asked, *'…wherein lies this distinctiveness and how is it to be treated – to be honoured or overcome – in education?'* [1]

The conference website hosted a number of podcasts on primary education from different perspectives which were intended to prompt discussion and reflection. Podcasters were asked to think about the 21st century child, the purpose and aims of primary education and priorities for our primary school curriculum today. They were encouraged to view the TED Talks[2] and to limit their podcast to 5 minutes. Primary school children were also invited to create a podcast by sharing their school experiences. These were compiled and published in one podcast which was also used at the conference itself.

The invitation to 'have your say' on the purpose(s) of primary education was posted on the conference website for anyone who was interested to share their views.

Table 1. Invitation to 'Have your say' (Published online, April 2011)

Have your say about the purpose of a primary education.
What do you think it's for?
In 100 words or less tell us what you think.
Contributions welcome in Irish or English.

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[1] The three keynote speeches are available on the conference website at: www.childrentheirlivestheirlearing.ie .

[2] See TED at: www.ted.com .

This invitation was revised at the end of November 2011 to reflect the prioritisation of literacy and numeracy in primary schools in the National Strategy (DES, 2011a) and the corresponding circular to primary schools (DES, 2011b) in November 2011.

Table 2. Invitation to 'Have your say' (Revised online, November 2011)

Have your say about priorities for the primary curriculum. In addition to Literacy and Numeracy, what should our curriculum priorities be at primary? In 100 words or less tell us what you think. Contributions welcome in Irish or English.	Labhair amach agus inis dúinn faoi thosaíochtaí churaclam na bunscoile mar a fheictear duitse iad. Mar aon le litearthacht agus uimhearthacht, cad iad na tosaíochtaí ar cheart dúinn díriú orthu sa bhunscolaíocht? I gcéad focal nó níos lú roinn do thuairimí linn. Fáilteofar roimh chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge nó i mBéarla.

In both cases, respondents were asked to complete an open text-box with the following information:

Table 3. Respondents

I am responding as a … (e.g., Parent, Principal, Teacher, Student)	Tá mé ag teacht i dteagmháil mar … (Tuismitheoir, Príomhoide, Múinteoir, Dalta/MacLéinn/Scoláire)

From January 2012, the invitation to 'Have your say' and the URL for the conference website were promoted in educational publications (e.g., INTO's InTouch, IPPN's Leadership Plus), in NCCA presentations to a range of audiences which included pre-service teachers, primary teachers, parents, principals, early childhood practitioners, etc. and on the websites of partner organisations.

A flyer with details of the invitation was included in delegates' packs at the National Parents' Council conference on June 16th, 2012 and copies of the flyer were distributed to members of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) at their National Meeting on June 20th and to all full-time Education Centres at their monthly meeting on June 21st. An e-invitation to 'have your say' was circulated to summer course providers for primary school teachers including Colleges of Education, INTO and IPPN, and a group text was circulated to the 32 Aistear Tutors who facilitated summer courses.

By the closing date of Friday, June 13th, a total of 960 responses had been received. The different respondent groups are outlined in the next section, based on identities provided by respondents (see Table 3, above).

It's worth noting, at the beginning of this report, that the non-representative nature of the respondent group and the focus on just one question (priorities for primary education) are important limitations of the initiative. Nonetheless, this report provides the basis for further engagement and discussion on the question of what matters in primary education for a range of NCCA early childhood and primary (EP) reference groups (e.g., the expert Advisory Group for language and the representative committees for Language and for all EP developments), for meetings with education partners (e.g., DES Inspectorate, support services, etc.) and for interested members of the public. Our next work will focus on gathering children's views and using relevant research literature to contextualise the findings and to understand key points of significance. This initiative will inform the shape of the primary curriculum to better-support teachers and ultimately to bring about improved outcomes for children in the years ahead.

2. Overview of respondents

2.1 Who responded?

Four respondent groups were identified and these are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. Respondent groups

	Teacher		Parent		Other		Parent/ Teacher	
Respondents per group	677	71%	180	19%	61	6%	42	4%

n= 960

When we add the numbers in the first and last columns, we see that teachers (719) represented three-quarters (75%) of all respondents. In contrast, the total number of parents who responded (n=222) was less than one quarter (23%) of all respondents.

Some respondents provided further detail about their identities. For example, one respondent identified himself/herself as a, *parent and a member of a Board of Management,* another identified himself/herself as a, *Special Education Needs teacher,* while another identified himself as a, *Student, Adult Literacy Teacher and uncle.* Appendix A provides further information on respondents' identities.

Although two responses were received from primary school children, it is important to note that children themselves were not targeted to respond to this invitation. This is because we intend to develop other instruments including surveys and focus groups to help us learn about children's perspectives on primary education. We plan to keep live the question of what matters in primary education and to seek inputs from a range of perspectives in the course of our work to develop the language curriculum.

We also intend to engage more parents in discussion about what matters in primary education and about their vision for their children and to further consult with teachers, school leaders, members of the public and others on their priorities for primary education.

2.2 How were responses analysed?

Responses were first checked for language and word length. Of the 960 email submissions analysed for content and meaning, 935 submissions were in English, 21 submissions were in Irish, and 4 submissions were bilingual (i.e. English and Irish). The invitation specified that respondents should identify their purpose/priority for primary education in 100 words or less. On average submissions ranged from 85-110 words, with the shortest submission being a one word/acronym (i.e. SPHE) while the longest submission was 557 words long.

To ensure online access to tools for analysis, and to guarantee the physical security of the responses and the analysis, an online survey tool was used[3]. Responses were coded by identifying and naming the main ideas for priorities in primary education. 850 (89%) of responses included more than one main idea; Table 5 provides an example of one response and the four main ideas identified.

Table 5: Example of respondent quotes which were assigned multiple categories

Ideas	Response
Happiness Social skills Self-identity Engagement	*The child has the right to be happy in his/herself, with a clear idea as to how to behave responsibly in society (immediately the family, school, clubs, and with friends). Primary education should have this as its main aim. Curricular activities, while having their own integrity, should seek to foster the individual self and social self and enable the child to find fulfilment through engagement with curricular activities* (Parent/Teacher)

The two analysts each read and assigned codes (main ideas) to all responses, coding separately to avoid bias. When all responses had been coded twice by the analysts, over 50 main ideas had been identified for the full set of responses and these are listed in Appendix B.

The online analysis tool enabled the analysts to sort responses by category (main idea) and to see the number and percentage of responses coded for each one. Categories (main ideas) were combined into priorities for primary education only when all responses had been coded (at least once). The main priorities for primary education included in the 960 responses are outlined in the next section.

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[3] See Surveymonkey: www.surveymonkey.com .

3. Priorities for primary education

Six priorities for primary education were identified across the 960 responses, using 25% of respondents as a cut-off. Many of the ideas noted across the six priorities relate to one-another and a full list of main ideas is provided in Appendix B. Table 6 shows the number of respondents who included each priority in their responses. Looking at Table 6 we see a cluster of priorities at the top; the first four priorities each have a similar number of respondents. 36% to 39% of all respondents included at least one of these priorities in their responses. The second cluster of priorities—in fifth and sixth place—were noted by approximately 10% fewer respondents. These were included because at least one-quarter of all respondents noted these priorities in their responses. The next most frequently cited priority (in seventh place) was ICT, which was noted by 17% respondents. We decided not to include this as a seventh priority because the ICT responses, when coded, included a range of priorities for ICT (i.e., skills, equipment and communication) and these responses were included in the top six priorities. The next most frequently cited priority was to address curriculum overload which was noted by 10% of respondents. Responses for this priority are outlined in section 4.2.

Table 6. Primary priorities in order of total respondents

Rank	Priority *Primary education should…*	Total **n=960**	
1	Help children to develop **life skills through a broad curriculum.**	370	39%
2	Help children to **be good communicators.**	358	37%
3	Help children **to be well.**	347	36%
4	Help children to develop **literacy and numeracy skills.**	346	36%
5	**Motivate and engage** children.	249	26%
6	Help children to develop a sense of **identity and belonging.**	237	25%

For each priority, respondents' ideas are presented using their own words. Spelling errors and typos have been corrected, and bold font is used to highlight key phrases and words in each quotation. Many of the quotations begin with an action, e.g., *develop, educate, embrace, help, share, support, teach*, etc. This is because the invitation itself asked respondents to complete the sentence, *In addition to literacy and numeracy… priorities for primary education are to…,* and most respondents began with an action.

For this reason, it may be helpful to keep the preamble in mind, *priorities for primary education are to…,* while reading.

Findings for each priority begin with a table which shows the main ideas in bold font and additional ideas noted, in regular font. The total number of responses is shown for each group of main ideas and the last row lists the total number of respondents (not responses) for the priority. As a majority of respondents identified more than one main idea, the total (number of respondents) in the last row in each table is less than the sum of all responses.

Priorities for primary education are noted below, in order of importance, based on the number of respondents who included the priority in their response. The priorities are all related to one-another, given the focus of the invitation on a child's primary education, rather than on one element of it. Each priority could be considered an element of the first one, to help children to develop life skills through a broad education.

3.1. Help children to develop life skills through a broad education

The most frequently cited priority was to help children to develop skills for life, *to teach them about life and teach them things to help them in life.* In the words of one teacher, *priorities should be on general life skills… and should focus on skills rather than content.* Responses highlighted the need for primary education to be relevant to children and their world today:

> *… add to the process of equipping our children with the **skills to enter the world outside the family**. (Parent)*

> *… teach the basic skills they [children] will need to build on in order **to flourish in complex modern society**. (Parent)*

> *… prepare our children for their **role as citizens in the 21st Century** by providing a universally useful foundation … and the **fundamental life principles**. (Teacher/Parent)*

> *…teach **living skills**...organising self, budget, cooking, technology, **how to survive independently in modern environment**. (Teacher)*

Table 7 shows the main ideas included in this priority and the total number of respondents (n=370, 39%).

Table 7. Help children develop life skills through a broad education

	Main ideas	n	%
3.1.1	**Life skills,** thinking skills, learning skills, ICT skills	225	23%
3.1.2	**Broad education,** dimensions of learning, reach potential	197	21%
	Total respondents	**370**	**39%**

3.1.1 A range of life skills

Life skills
Respondents referred to a range of skills, in some cases drawing a contrast between traditional skills, such as the basic skills, and the range of skills needed for today's world:

> *… provide a broad education defined by a range of learning experiences where the **traditional core skills, while important, do not over shadow wider learning in all dimensions of life** including the spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical (Teacher)*

> *… teach children a variety of skills which allow them to participate in life and society fully. To this end, it [the curriculum] should introduce them to a **wide range of topics** about their world, hopefully **inspiring them to investigate topics further and to discover new areas of interest** for themselves. (Parent)*

> *… focus on **social skills, life skills, general knowledge, making and maintaining friendships, decision making, reasoning, problem solving, ICT skills and how to have a healthy lifestyle**. (Teacher)*

Respondents described a range of practical life skills which should be prioritised in primary education:

> *… help children with **practical life skills: growing plants, preparing food, cleaning**… (Teacher)*

> *… take on a new subject in line with the present **Home Economics** course at second level… Students leave home to attend college or work with no idea of **budgeting, cooking skills, paying bills, coping with situations,** … **protecting the environment**… a core subject is a necessity for life skills from primary school and upwards. (Parent)*

> *… teach **craft skills** such as sewing and knitting (Parent, Retired Teacher, Grandparent)*

> *… develop… **life and safety skills** for our pupils pertinent to today's world (Teacher)*

Thinking skills
Respondents wrote that primary education should; *…give children the tools to make sense of their world*. A range of thinking skills was identified including skills of application and analysis:

*…developing and creating **independent thinkers** capable of being able to practically apply what they have learned to real life situations. (Teacher)*

The higher-order-thinking skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation were identified as important priorities for developing children's life skills:

*Children often come to schools knowing only 'how' to access information. Teachers need to help them to an **understanding of how to use this information**. (Teacher)*

*… help children **to question, to analyse, to investigate, to think critically, to solve problems, to apply learning and to develop flexibility and creativity** … are important factors in the success of the child's life (Teacher)*

*… [develop] life skills such as … learning how to research and use the internet… the **skills of research or how to approach project work**, e.g., what to look for, to see if contents are suitable… parents [often] end up really doing the work and kids think its ok to cut and paste without reading the context. These are skills for their future lives. (Parent)*

Decision-making skills were identified as being important, as was a child's frame-of-reference for decision-making. The complexity of these skills was highlighted.

*Life skills such as decision making tend to be neglected and the **ability to make good informed decisions** is a skill they will need all their lives… Children often lack the ability to make independent decisions [and] for this we need to give them the courage to question and the confidence to decide for themselves and not succumb to peer pressure. (Teacher)*

*… use **reason, religion and kindness** as a means of **naming, reflecting and dealing with issues**. (Teacher)*

Learning skills

Learning skills were also included in the range of life skills highlighted by respondents; …*to form learners who know how to learn throughout their lives,* and in the words of another respondent, …*learners who can learn to learn for themselves.* One respondent explained that primary education should; …*teach children about metacognition as they will have to learn unlearn and relearn throughout their lives.* Respondents wrote that primary education should:

*… [help children] **learn how to learn rather than learn how to memorise**. (Teacher)*

*… move away from learning by rote and more towards teaching children **HOW to learn and HOW to think** (Please note I don't mean tell them what to think).(Parent)*

> *… develop children that can **think for themselves**, **organise their thoughts,** be flexible, show commitment and understanding and have acquired a love of learning, truth and knowledge. (Teacher, Parent, Principal)*

> *… help children to **learn about their abilities and challenges as learners and as people**. (Teacher)*

> *The world is changing so fast that **knowing how to learn new concepts/skills/technical items would be a great skill**. (Parent)*

Learning skills identified by respondents included learning how to; *…make their own learning plans; …assess and evaluate their own work;… reflect on their learning; … set their own learning goals;* and, *develop the skills to answer their own questions*. Some respondents noted the potential of technology to *facilitate* children in learning-to-learn while others noted its potential to *limit* a child's ability to learn (or think) independently:

> *Throughout all primary level the children should also feel that they are **taking ownership of their learning** and I think **ICT has an effective role to play** in this. (Teacher)*

> *… enable children to **use the technology that is available to allow them to develop … real life skills**… to their full potential. (Teacher)*

> *… equip the child to be an independent learner and to understand that **technology is only a tool and not to be too dependent on it**. (Teacher)*

ICT

The importance of developing children's ICT skills was considered a priority by 65 (7% of) respondents. The contrast between the significant role of ICT in our world today, and its limited role in many classrooms was highlighted; *everything we do in our world today is based on computers, from home entertainment to manufacturing processes to the way we communicate;* and, *there should be adequate resources in every school to allow the children to be able to move with these times.*

> *... [teach] **good ICT** skills to enable our children to develop as well rounded people to live in **the world they grow up in**. (Parent)*

> *… **teach** literacy and numeracy in an exciting, hands-on, and **up-to-date fashion using ICT, and online games**. (Parent)*

> *Children are **using touchscreen phones, iPads and computers every day** in their own lives and **I feel we need to respond to this by teaching lessons in "their language"**. (Teacher)*

> *… [keep] pace with technological advances, including **broadband, white boards and iPads. All subjects within the curriculum can benefit** from utilising these resources … and technological advancements. (Policy officer, Barnardos)*

*Many kids are ready to **engage in a digital education** and already at primary level far surpass the desktop publishing exercises they may or may not be introduced to in post primary. Our primary school now has **broadband** - please make them use it. (Parent)*

3.1.2 A broad primary education

A *broad education* was considered key to developing children's life skills (n=152). Many respondents used the phrases, *holistic development,* and, *the whole child,* to describe a broad education, the purpose of which is to:

*… take a **holistic approach** and ensure a child receives a **rounded education**. (Teacher)*

*… encourage them to grow into **decent, well-rounded, educated individuals**. (Parent)*

*… educate **the whole person** in the fullest sense. (Teacher)*

*… help pupils achieve to their greatest potential in **as wide a variety of areas of living as possible**. (Principal)*

Dimensions of learning

Some respondents included subjects in their definition of a broad curriculum:

*… introduce children to **as wide a curriculum as possible** - including an introduction to **science, history, geography, civics, with a good grounding in oral Irish, also a European language… PE and swimming, art and music, Irish culture and home economics**. (Parent)*

However, the majority of responses focused on dimensions or aspects of children's learning and development (rather than subjects) to develop children's life skills in primary school:

*… develop our children **academically, socially**. (Parent)*

*… provide for the **academic education** and **emotional development** of the child. (Teacher)*

*… help develop… **social** and **physical** skills as well as **literacy and numeracy** skills. (Parent)*

*… bring about the **physical, mental** and **social** development of a child. (Parent)*

*… develop… all facets of the child - **linguistically, emotionally, physically, intellectually, socially, academically and spiritually**. (Teacher)*

*… teach children life skills like **happiness, personal development, reading and writing skills, IT skills, presentation, social skills and meditation**. (Teacher)*

> *… develop a well-rounded, **flexible**, competent individual who **can adapt to changing circumstances** in today's world. (Teacher)*

Respondents flagged that primary education should pass on values and morals as part of developing children's skills for life:

> *… pass on the **values, morals and culture of a society, which are deemed most beneficial** to the next generation. (Principal)*

> *… focus on **skills, attitudes, morals and values** as well as curriculum objectives to help the children develop into good human beings. (Teacher)*

> *… lead to a sense of achievement which **links hand, heart and mind, and involves a moral engagement** shaping the future. (Teacher)*

Reaching potential

Helping children to reach their potential was cited a priority for 69 respondents. In the words of one teacher, primary education should; …*support children of higher and lower ability to allow them to reach their potential in this world*. Responses included a focus on helping children to form opinions and to have a say in matters which affect them through their lives.

> ***Responsibility should be given to children*** *(whether it is SESE, SPHE, the arts, languages, mathematics, PE, RE) by **actively involving them** in the learning or running of the lesson or school day. (No profile given)*

> *They [children] should enjoy a learning environment that **respects their rights to have a say** and they should learn the **benefits of taking responsibility and being listened to**. (Parent)*

Support for parents was highlighted as part of the process of supporting children:

> *… provide children with **life skills [through] supporting and educating parents**, particularly those parents who are less able to support their children. (Teacher)*

3.2 Help children to be good communicators

358 respondents (37%) wrote that primary education should help children to develop their communication skills. Table 8 shows the number of responses for the three sets of main ideas in this priority.

Table 8. Help children to be good communicators

		n	%
3.2.1	**Communication skills**	221	23%
3.2.2	**Language,** oral language - Gaeilge, a third language	164	17%
3.2.3	**Child's voice,** self-expression, creativity, ICT	78	8%
	Total respondents	**358**	**37%**

Responses included for this priority, are related to findings for the priority to help children to develop literacy and numeracy skills. As the headings in Table 8 show, a number of dimensions of communication are included in this priority, ranging from the child's ability to express him/herself to the child's ability to communicate with others, using a range of media. In contrast, responses coded for the literacy and numeracy priority, focus mainly on developing foundational skills in reading and writing.

3.2.1 Communication skills

The importance of communication skills in primary education and to prepare for life was one feature of responses; *it is often the intangible skills like social skills that matter the most to the success of the child in the long term*. Respondents noted that primary education should; *help children to learn some necessary life skills by working as an individual, in a group and as a pair*.

> *… help… children to **acquire and refine [their] socialisation skills.*** (Parent/Teacher)

> *… equip… our children with the **skills to enter the world outside the family** through assisting the child's **social development**.* (Parent)

> *… [develop children's] social skills - **conflict resolution, negotiation, compromise, empathy, compassion**… [these are] even **more important for adult success than any academic skill**.* (Parent)

Responses focused on the importance of teaching children to communicate effectively verbally and in writing, with peers and adults; *interacting with peers and adults* and *working effectively in groups.* Social skills identified included relating effectively to peers and understanding; *norms and conventions* for, *getting along* such as, *listening and turn-*

taking. The challenge for schools and the key role of the teacher in developing children's social skills were highlighted.

> *… [develop children's] social awareness… as **some children have a hard time adapting to society, making friends and realising what are acceptable and unacceptable** ways to behave and to be treated.* (Teacher)

> *… [help children] to learn **basic interpersonal skills** as they **seem to be lacking these due to modern lifestyles**.* (Principal)

> *… **model good behaviour in our schools** as children are becoming **increasingly socialised through technology** as opposed to play and conflict resolution. As a result collaborative learning has never been as necessary from both an educational and social perspective.* (Teacher)

The primary classroom was described by respondents as a key, *social setting,* for children to practice and refine their social skills. Respondents noted that in the classroom environment, children are required to develop a range of social skills to enable them to interact with others, forge and sustain friendships, and work collaboratively in pairs and small groups.

> *It (school) is as much **for the friendships that are formed and the social learning attached** as the academia.* (Parent)

> *It (school) also is **a forum for learning the suite of social skills we all need to get along, turn taking, fairness, respect for difference.*** (Parent, Teacher)

3.2.2 Language

Oral language - Gaeilge

Children's understanding and use of language was noted as key to their ability to communicate. Many responses included a focus on developing children's oral language and literacy skills. In addition, respondents wrote about the need to think about a different approach to teaching Gaeilge. Respondents expressed concern regarding the current approach to teaching Gaeilge and they emphasised the need to focus on oral proficiency, and the standard of Irish among primary teachers. 12% of responses focused on the role of Gaeilge in the primary curriculum, with most advocating that it would be clarified.

> *It is most unfortunate now that the teachers who have less ability in the language have to rely on **commercial text books**. (Teacher)*

> *… **proper teaching of the Irish language** through **conversational Irish** and developing these skills into foreign languages. (Parent)*

> *… **use Irish as a spoken language** and as an introduction to other languages including the roots of English words. (Parent)*

> *… **teach Irish well** at primary level and introduce other European and world languages. (Parent)*

> *… **integrate Irish… more into other subjects**, for example: P.E could be taught through Irish. (Teacher)*

Additional findings concerning the curriculum for Gaeilge are outlined in Section 4.1.

A third language

Respondents wrote about the benefit of integrating additional languages with children's learning in primary school, in particular, languages already spoken by children in the school. 8% (n=78) of the total number of respondents wrote about the benefits of bringing these additional languages into the primary classroom.

> *… [help children to]… have a good command of the **Irish language**… also **learn another language, e.g., one already spoken by children**, in primary school. (Teacher)*

> *… start at least **one other European language in junior infants**, taught through play and activities as young children **pick up languages** very easily. (Parent)*

3.2.3 Child's voice

Helping children to; *find their voices,* and creating opportunities for them to; *share their feelings and thoughts in a respectful and caring manner,* was one focus of the Communication priority and the importance of listening to children's voices was noted.

> *… **give children a voice** … we need to **listen to what they are saying**, not merely pay them lip service. (Early Childhood Practitioner)*

> *… **listen to their experience** and **scaffold their learning** at social, political, intellectual, imaginative, physical and spiritual levels (Teacher, Parent)*

> … enable the pupils to **communicate effectively** and **strive towards independence**. (Teacher)

Self-expression

Respondents noted the importance of teachers providing a range of opportunities for children to express themselves and the area of Arts Education was mentioned as important in helping children to develop their sense of identity and their communication skills; *arts and drama to build children's voice and self-expression,* and, *creativity and self-expression in digital formats.* Respondents noted the importance of teachers and

other adults in primary school listening to children and of children themselves learning to listen to one-another.

> *… allow children… to be **free to express themselves through their interests** and not only through a dictated curriculum. (Parent)*

> *… encourage… children **to express their feelings** and **to appreciate** their parents, grandparents etc. (Parent and Principal)*

> *… [help them] to **express themselves freely** and **to develop a sense of self-worth and respect for themselves** (Teacher)*

> *… enable children to **express their feelings and thoughts** … these skills would then transfer to collaborative learning ,social skills.(Teacher)*

> *At second level, we find the [children's] **ability to express themselves either in writing or orally is poor** - they may benefit from some form of programme on communication skills [in primary school]. (Parent)*

Creativity

Some features of learning experiences which encourage children to express themselves creatively were noted including, an acceptance of different forms of expression, an openness to the different ways children communicate, and sufficient time for children to express themselves.

> *… **support and foster creativity**, no matter what form it takes. (Teacher)*

> *… give **a young child a confidence** that can only emerge from **knowing that his/her creative expressions matter** and count for something. (Teacher, Parent)*

> *… allow them access to **worthwhile arts education** so that they can be **expressive and creative**. (Teacher, Deputy Principal, Parent)*

ICT

Although 162 (17% of) respondents wrote about prioritising ICT, most of these responses focused on developing children's skill using ICT in general, … *computer skills, … IT skills, … ICT skills, … computing skills*. Specific ICT skills noted by participants included, keyboard skills and word processing skills. A small number of respondents prioritised the use of ICT to help children to communicate.

> *… more opportunities where children can develop **confidence and self-expression**, i.e., more emphasis on drama and role play through **use of different media, e**.g. digital cameras etc. (Teacher)*

> *… cherish… **childhood**… as it now **a shorter period in children's lives** as they are **strongly influenced by the media and social networking sites**. (Teacher)*

3.3 Help children to be well

The third priority identified for primary education focused on children's well-being. Table 9 shows the number of responses received which focused on the two main ideas—developing children's psychological well-being and developing children's physical well-being.

Table 9. Help children to be well

		n	%
3.3.1	**Psychological well-being,** happiness and confidence, emotional well-being, spiritual well-being, challenges and resilience	209	22%
3.3.2	**Physical well-being,** benefits, time for physical education, curriculum resources	193	20%
	Total respondents	**312**	**33%**

3.3.1 Psychological well-being

Happiness and confidence

Respondents noted the importance of providing opportunities for children to; *… feel well about themselves;* and, *to enjoy learning.* A positive experience of primary school was considered key to developing children's psychological well-being:

> *… enable children **to be happy**, caring and confident. (Parent)*

> *… give them a **positive experience of learning.** (Teacher)*

> *… give a much higher priority to **personal development and self-esteem**. (Parent)*

> *…provide children with a **healthy self-esteem, confidence** and **values**. (Parent)*

> *… **self-confidence is an essential requirement for learning**. (Parent, Retired Teacher, Grandparent)*

> *… promote **positive mental health** and develop **healthy attitudes** to **mind and soul.** (Teacher, Deputy Principal, Parent)*

Responses suggested that happiness was a precursor to self-confidence and to success in life and many respondents referred to *happiness* and *success* in the same phrase; *lead happy and successful lives.* Respondents noted the important and challenging role of the teacher in continually attending to children's well-being and to; *help children to flourish,* through engaging, *…their senses*, in learning:

> *… develop in children a sense of **self-esteem** as something that has an ebb and flow and that **needs on-going nurturing** both in themselves and others around them. (Principal)*

> *...**open the minds, hearts, eyes, feelings and all the faculties of children** to the vast possibilities in the world and how to make them relevant to their own lives. (Other: Lecturer)*

Many responses noted the need to ensure children feel affirmed in primary school through the way the teacher engages with children and the learning environment he/she creates. These responses, which relate to children's well-being are discussed in the priority concerning children's Identity and belonging.

Emotional well-being

Respondents noted that emotional well-being is an important dimension of children's psychological development in primary school. The image created by respondents was one of an emotionally stable, mature child who uses a range of strategies to deal with his/her own and others emotions.

> *… attend to other **literacies, such as emotional**, if children are to become **the best they can be**. (Education Lecturer)*

> *… focus on the **social and emotional development of the child** as well as their educational performance. (Barnardos Policy Officer)*

> *… [help] children … to be **emotionally stable**. (Parent)*

> *… acknowledge the importance of developing…**emotional maturity.** (Parent)*

> *… give children… **techniques for dealing with overwhelming emotions.** (Parent, Grandparent)*

Spiritual well-being

The spiritual dimension of children's learning and development in primary school was noted as a priority by a small number of respondents who connected it with children's happiness. Responses did not link spirituality with the teaching of any one religion.

> *The **development of the whole child, spiritually,** is very important for life. (Teacher, Parent)*

> *There are lots of studies which show that **individuals who have a well-developed sense of spirituality have happier and more successful lives**. If the Celtic tiger years, the boom and the bust has taught us anything is that the pursuit of money and materials things do not bring with them happy lives. (Teacher)*

> *… learn **more about spirituality** and civics and **not necessarily a particular religion**. (Teacher)*

*I would like to see the **spiritual dimension of the child**, **its ontological presence, (its inherent presence, its essential nature, its intrinsic nature** which are the buried treasures at the core of each child, the inner child) **developed commensurate with cognitive levels** as part of a whole and holistic education. I am not suggesting this in relation to any religion but rather more related to **moral development, general development and well-being** of each child… I feel **SPHE is not addressing this element** of development in the child. (Parent)*

*… Introduce children to **mindfulness**, basic S.P.H.E. (Parent)*

Challenges and resilience

Happiness and confidence were described as important and necessary, *life skills,* and *dispositions,* to; *…deal with uncertainties and challenges in life.* Responses noted the need for children to be resilient and for primary education to develop children's capacity to understand and to respond to challenges.

*… teach [children] how to be happy, **how to handle life, stress, to look after [their] mental health and develop emotional intelligence**. (Teacher)*

*… [develop children's] **coping skills** to enable them **to overcome stress and deal with day to day problems**… children often leave school with huge difficulties and an inability to manage their **mental health**. Perhaps if we taught them some vital 'life skills' from a younger age they would be better enabled to learn and have **more meaningful lives**. (Teacher)*

*"It is as it is", the world, to use the current phrase, so children need to be **equipped to deal with the world and its structures**… Primary education should strive to fill our children with the possibilities within their future lives, having mastered the skills to deal with the world … and **to face that world with confidence and hope**. (Parent, Other: Lecturer)*

*… **develop a positive outlook on life** as well as a curiosity and a **'give it a go' attitude**… (Parent and Principal)*

Responses flagged the need for primary education to help children; *simply to be.* As one respondent noted; *…some children have so many extra-curricular activities that they don't have 'down time' and can't relax. This is a critical life skill and good habits are formed now.*

3.3.2 Physical well-being

The need to prioritise children's physical education and fitness; *to enrich children's lives physically;* and, *their understanding of health and nutrition in primary school*; was highlighted by one-fifth (n=193) of all respondents. These aspects of primary education were considered important for children to be well.

*… help children **see the link between physical activity and diet** to the **quality of their lives** both **physically and mentally**. (Teacher)*

*A focus on **positive attitudes towards physical activity** has the **potential to enhance the child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual well-being**. (Other: Lecturer)*

*P.E. is very important to me. PE will help me **to be fit and healthy**. (Primary school pupil)*

*Sport should be **for everyone to enjoy**, with competition or participation at different levels for enjoyment, physical, development, character building and personal satisfaction (Teacher, Principal)*

Responses which included a focus on physical education/fitness also included a focus on children's own health; *…health education; …healthy eating;* and*, lifestyle.* Respondents noted that as part of physical education, children should become; *… more aware of how to take care of their bodies and to eat healthily.*

Benefits

There were calls for a, *greater emphasis,* on children's health and physical fitness in primary schools. Many respondents used childhood obesity as an important rationale for this prioritisation.

*… **childhood obesity** is continuing to grow at a frightening rate. Levels of childhood obesity in Ireland have reached epidemic proportions with over 300,000 Irish children considered to be obese. In our school I can think of at least two children who are morbidly obese and many, many others who are obviously over weight. (Teacher)*

*An unhealthy diet, lack of exercise and each child's socio-economic background all play a role in Ireland's **childhood obesity levels** – which are now among the highest in the world. What has this got to do with teachers? The **teaching** of a **healthy diet and exercise** can be promoted by the school. (Teacher)*

***Sitting at computers and learning about advanced concepts in primary seems wrong if the pupils are unfit, overweight** and kept indoors due to our weather. (Teacher)*

Respondents noted the many benefits of physical education in contributing to healthy bodies and minds. They explained that physical education promotes teamwork and that it can be a counterpoint to stress and to sedentary classroom activities that don't involve physical activity, such as using Information Technology (IT) and electronic devices.

*The World Health Organizations (WHO) **Global Recommendations on Physical Activity** for Health, (2010) are relevant for health outcomes on **cardio-respiratory health** (coronary heart disease, cardiovascular disease, stroke and hypertension), as well as **metabolic health** (diabetes and obesity), **musculoskeletal health***

*(bone health, osteoporosis), **cancer** (breast and colon cancer), **functional health** and **prevention of falls as well as depression**. (Teacher, Parent, College student)*

*… so many children badly need physical activity to learn to **work in teams**, **build team skills**, learn **co-operation** and of course to keep active and fit. (Teacher)*

*Secondary and Third level will be intense and full of academic work/stress/exams. Pupils need to **enjoy sports and develop healthy bodies while they are young for their lives ahead**. (Teacher)*

*… involve children in physical activities to **get them away from xbox, dvd, computer games**. More P.E would benefit here. (Parent)*

*… prioritise PE … not just to combat obesity in children but also because of the **cognitive gains associated with physical exercise**. (Principal)*

Time for physical education

Respondents called for increased time for physical education in primary school, including the need to embed physical education into the school day/culture:

*I think that the **hours set aside for Physical Education** in primary school should be increased. (Teacher)*

*…increase the amount of **time given to physical education** owing to **decreased fitness levels in children** as well as **expanding waistlines** and **increasing incidence of diabetes 2**. (Teacher)*

*… have **daily physical education** built in to the syllabus. (Parent)*

*… do PE **every day for about 20 minutes**. This will **keep them active** which will **help with their concentration levels** during the day. They do this in Australia! (Teacher)*

*An **hour a week for infants** is way **too inadequate to promote improved coordination, agility, strength, balance and an experience of positivity and fun**. (Teacher)*

*Children **should not sit all day** - it's detrimental to their physical, social and mental health. A longer school day, with more and longer breaks would facilitate free play and more physical activity. (Parent)*

Curriculum

Different ways in which the curriculum for physical education could improve to meet the needs of primary school children today, were identified, though different views were expressed about the range of content to be included.

*I think there is a huge need for the **expansion of the physical education programme** in primary education. (Parent)*

*The present curriculum is **very broad** (orienteering, gymnastics, games, aquatics, movement, athletics) and [is] not giving children life-long skills for a healthy and active life. (Teacher)*

*… create a **solid platform of basic skills relevant to as many sports as possible**… by using an **integrated programme of study** which meets all of the demands of our P.E. curriculum. (Teacher, Principal)*

*Physical education in terms of **fitness** and **basic movement skills** (not necessarily sport) needs to be addressed. (Teacher)*

*… give children the opportunity to **explore their movement potential**, be supported to learn a **range of fundamental movement skills** and experience a broad and balanced range of activities. (Other: Education Lecturer)*

*… develop a **subject which incorporates sport and health.** (College student, not teaching)*

*The [physical education] **progress** of the students **must be recorded** individually... One of the main skills to be developed is that of **peer and self-assessment**… a skill for life-long learning. Teachers can also use this tool effectively to **monitor their own performance** and … to identify areas that they might want to improve. (Pre-service teacher)*

Respondents noted that the curriculum should ensure physical activity is, *developmentally appropriate*, for primary school children:

Motor development *should be **age-appropriate**. (Parent)*

*In the **early years the emphasis should be on play** and development of **fundamental movement skills** so that the child develops the **skills and positive attitudes** to engagement in sport and physical activity. (Parent, Lecturer)*

Resources

Some respondents wrote that primary school teachers needed; *further professional development to teach physical education*, while others suggested that a; *specialized teacher should be employed to teach PE*. Limited or no access to suitable space for physical education was noted as an impediment by respondents.

*Most primary schools have **no facilities** at their disposal for implementing strands such as athletics. (Parent)*

*… the lack of **gym and hall facilities** within some schools would have to be looked at [to increase time for PE] … I **do not agree that car parks of schools are suitable**. (Teacher)*

*Living over 20 miles from a **swimming pool** makes it very expensive to make trips to the pool. Schools would need a lot of financial support to implement a proper PE curriculum. (Teacher, Principal)*

*… teachers need a **safe, tidy space** to conduct enjoyable PE lessons. (Teacher)*

3.4 Help children to develop literacy and numeracy skills

346 respondents (36%) wrote that primary education should prioritise helping children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Table 10 shows the number of responses for the main ideas in this priority.

Table 10. Help children to develop literacy and numeracy skills

		n	%
3.4.1	**Foundational skills,** competence and confidence	290	31%
3.4.2	**Integration and balance**	57	6%
	Total respondents	**346**	**36%**

A majority of respondents referred to both literacy and numeracy in their responses. Only 2% emphasised literacy solely and 1% emphasised numeracy solely.

3.4.1 Foundational skills

Most respondents who identified literacy and numeracy as priorities for primary education, highlighted the need to develop the child's, *…basic skills in literacy and numeracy.*

> *… focus… on the* **core subjects of arithmetic, reading and writing.** *(Parent)*

> *… enable most children to* **read and write** *(Teacher)*

> *…[help children to]… gain a* **really good grasp of the basic skills***, like reading, writing, maths and nowadays computers. (Teacher)*

> *All children should leave primary school with a* **sound basic knowledge of the main concepts in literacy and numeracy.** *(Principal)*

> *…concentrate on the* **core adaptable skills** *of dealing with the words and numbers. (Parent, Academic)*

Some respondents noted the need to achieve high standards in literacy and numeracy; *learn the three Rs to a high standard*, though little information was given on what this might mean. Many responses highlighted the value of ultimately being able to use literacy and numeracy as life skills and noted the importance of having; …a*dequate ability to carry out basic day to day transactions*. Foundational literacy and numeracy skills were seen by many respondents as essential for more sophisticated learning and for enabling children to engage fully with society now and in the future.

*..to enable the child to **develop literacy, numeracy** and scientific skills so that they can **function in society**. (Teacher)*

*…equip pupils with **the necessary skills to avail of further educational opportunities** as a life-long engagement and necessity….**Literacy and numeracy skills** are essential to the realisation of the above purpose. (Principal)*

*…provide them with the **numeracy and literacy skills** required to continue in **secondary education**. (Teacher, Parent)*

*…**Literacy and numeracy** are the **chief building blocks** to scaffold all other aspects of learning. (Teacher)*

Some specific literacy and numeracy skills were considered important. These focused mainly on reading and writing skills:

*A **firm basis in reading and writing is essential** and the older children should be taught to analyse and question what they read. (Teacher)*

*... enable children to become as literate, and as numerate as possible. This includes **spelling, grammar, penmanship and tables**. (Parent, Grandparent, Retired Teacher)*

*…learn about the basics of **writing, reading and understanding/analysing** (of course learn to **spell**, **count in the head** correctly from the start. (Parent, Visiting French Teacher)*

*…emphasise careful **handwriting both print and joined writing**. Emphasis on **good spelling.** In mathematics, focus on **tables as a recall for future maths,** showing rough-work so children can see the solution develop and be solved. (Parent)*

Competence and confidence

Respondents noted the need to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills while fostering the child's enjoyment, confidence and self-esteem:

*…develop skills- **oral, aural, reading and writing, mathematical literacy** to increase, not diminish, each child's sense of capability, and lovability and provide a secure base for all children. (Teacher)*

*…equip every child with **skills in literacy and numeracy** that allow them to **move forward with confidence.** (Principal)*

*…using **reading, writing and recording skills** to reinforce the **joys of being literate and numerate** when pursuing these subject areas. (Parent, Grandparent, Retired Teacher)*

*Is cinnte go bhfuil tábhacht ar leith ag baint le bunscileanna liteartha agus uimhreas **a mhúineadh go crí-ochnúil/tomhaiste agus iad a chaomhnú go cumasach.** (Múinteoir)*	*It's clear that there's a particular importance attached to basic literacy and numeracy skills and that these **must be explicitly/well taught and consolidated**. (Teacher)*

3.4.2 Integration and balance

The majority of respondents who identified literacy and numeracy as priorities for primary education wrote about the importance of teaching *fundamental*, skills in these areas. A minority of all respondents (6%) cautioned against an overemphasis on literacy and numeracy. They advocated an integrated approach to developing children's literacy and numeracy skills in primary school.

> *… **encapsulate all areas of study** for future career prospects, not just understanding numeracy and literature.* (Parent)

> *… ensure the **focus on literacy and numeracy is through all curricular subjects** and not solely on more maths, writing and reading which can have a negative effect on children's love of these subjects and of school.* (Parent)

> *… provide **guidelines for teachers on how to integrate SESE and literacy**, or how to **meet objectives in both curricula within an SESE lesson**. It would be helpful overall to provide **opportunities for cross-curricular integration between literacy/numeracy**, Arts Education, P.E… (Teacher)*

> *While literacy and numeracy have since time immemorial been the priorities of education, beginning with the counting and recitation on a mother's lap, we now [need to]… turn out children who fully and authentically **engage with their world** in an **integrated manner*** (parent/teacher)

> *Literacy and numeracy are clearly important skills but **to overemphasise them to the detriment of curricular balance** would be a retrograde step.* (Teacher)

3.5 Motivate and engage children

249 respondents (26%) wrote that primary education should motivate and engage children. Table 11 shows the number of responses for the three sets of main ideas in this priority.

Table 11. Motivate and engage children

	Main ideas	n	%
3.5.1	**Learning environment**, other learning spaces, ICT	124	13%
3.5.2	**Child-centred learning,** hands-on-learning, play, active learning	100	10%
3.5.3	**Love-of-learning**, lifelong learning	92	10%
	Total respondents	**249**	**26%**

3.5.1 A positive classroom environment

Respondents wrote that learning environment in primary school should be child-friendly and inviting and stimulating at an appropriate developmental level.

> *… make learning **fun, alive, interesting**. (Teacher)*

> *… deliver each child a **varied and exciting** eight years. (Teacher)*

> *… provide a **safe, comfortable and child-centred environment** which is conducive to learning…. it is vital to successful implementation of a curriculum. (Parent)*

> *… [create] a positive and **developmentally appropriate** learning environment where all children of all abilities are **accepted, welcomed and valued**. (Other: Lecturer)*

Other learning spaces

The potential of the local environment to support children's learning was highlighted:

> *The **school and home environment** could easily be used for **maths, geography and science**. (Parent)*

> *… **get them outdoors more**… [for] better learning, problem solving abilities...nature is a massive resource… teach them **methods to be outside**. Places like the Burren provide ultimate learning experiences that they won't forget. (Teacher)*

> *…**go outside and explore** the rain; **we live in Ireland what better place to explore**! My afterschool children come in and say, 'oh we didn't get out today it*

was wet! **Children love being outdoors in all weather***… **waterproof clothing/welly boots***! (Early Childhood Practitioner).*

ICT

The motivational value of ICT was highlighted by respondents who suggested that primary education should:

> *… provide a stimulus to facilitate learning in an **interesting and varied** fashion. Children have an **intrinsic interest in technology**, as teachers we must harness this interest and use it as a teaching tool in order to provide teaching that meets the needs of the 21st century. (Teacher)*

> *… develop… a child centred approach to **learning in a fun and interesting way**. **Pupils are so digital-minded and technology-driven nowadays** that this way is really the best way forward when it comes to our teaching. (Teacher)*

> *… [provide] greater input into ICT resources within the schools to allow for each child to have access to the hardware and software that is available e.g. one set of iPads for each school. These resources could be used to enhance literacy and numeracy in a **fun and exciting way**. (Teacher)*

Some respondents flagged that use of ICT should not displace hands-on, active learning methods, nor should it be used to limit children's communication skills.

> *… [take] care… **not to lose sight of the importance of play** and **'hands on' use of materials** especially in at Infant level in all subject areas …[given] the advances in technology, e.g., Interactive whiteboards. (Parent)*

Respondents also noted that children growing up today have a natural affinity with ICT. Further information is provided within the priority to develop children's life skills through a broad curriculum.

3.5.2 Child-centred learning

Respondents pointed to children's need to be involved in a range of child-centred learning activities in primary school.

> *… **provide a wide and diverse range of learning contexts** and **opportunities** to nurture young children's sense of wonder, curiosity, empathy, play/fun and, most of all, their imaginations! (Parent, Teacher Educator)*

> *… use **teaching and assessment methods** that support children's **different learning styles** (Other: Member of a County Childcare Committee)*

Hands-on-learning

There were calls for children to be; *more like children,* in primary school classrooms, and to be given the freedom to use a range of materials to support hands-on learning.

*… [ensure] learning [is] fun and even **messy! Why can't they get covered in paint, gloop, play dough**? (Pre-school practitioner)*

*… emphasise the **importance of practical maths** especially in the infant classrooms. It is **easier and clearer for children when working with concrete objects**. (Teacher)*

*…allow… them **hands-on experiences**; they will be **more involved in their own learning** and therefore **more engaged and less likely to be bored and disruptive** in class. (Early Childhood Practitioner)*

*… provide **materials to support hands-on** methodologies particularly in the area of **science, maths**. (Teacher)*

Play

Respondents described play as a method or means of learning, rather than an add-on to the curriculum and they called for more regular use of play for learning in primary school.

*… **embrace play** as a **powerful tool**… for learning. (Parent)*

*… [give] play adequate time and… **[teach] literacy and numeracy through play** and **oral language** as much as possible.(Teacher)*

*… **follow the same principles of Siolta and Aistear** making a definite link with play… the whole curriculum should be based on the **principle that children learn best by doing** and by **being active learners and learn through play**. (Early Childhood Practitioner)*

Active learning

Responses included under this heading conveyed an image of the primary school *'child as an active learner, capable of co-constructing their own learning'*, with the focus mainly on an 'active mind' (rather than a physically active child).

*… ensure they experience the **thrill of discovery** through **active learning in an integrated way**. (Teacher)*

*… give children the opportunities to experience the **many ways of learning** and accessing information by giving children **experiences of many subjects in an integrated way** to help them make sense of the world around them. (Parent)*

*… be **interactive, participant-based**, and most of all **interesting to the child** at each level they progress through. (Parent)*

*… **give children responsibility**, whether it is SESE, SPHE, the arts, languages, mathematics, PE, RE, **by actively involving them** in the **learning or running of the lesson/school day**. (Teacher)*

Respondents contrasted active learning with rote learning and the use of workbooks and textbooks in primary school. Respondents' image of the 'inactive child' focused on lower-order thinking, and routine activities of questionable value to children themselves.

> *…should **not be about rote learning** and should be focussed on **active participation rather than passive absorption**. (Parent)*
>
> *… give my children a love of books… I'm disappointed that by using **booklists and workbooks, reading about and investigating subjects is limited** in their educational environment [in primary school]. (Parent)*
>
> *… [use] **more thought-provoking exercises**… the **workbooks seem unchallenging** in their attempt to make the topic child-friendly. (Parent)*
>
> *This is the type of learning I want most for my daughter when she comes to school. I do not want her to spend her entire day **at age four or five filling in workbooks** and **copying from the board**. (Teacher, Parent)*
>
> *… encourage her, **foster her curiosity and interest in the world** and learning about it - **not kill it with workbook after workbook**. (Parent)*

Respondents noted that active learning can be a challenge for teachers.

> *Methodologies such as **play** are looked at as **suspect**. Irish **teachers** are very **uncomfortable** in situations where the child - and not the teacher - leads the learning, and where the **activity might veer away from the learning objective the teacher had intended** and into a different one. (Teacher, Parent)*
>
> *… Irish school children spend their days completing workbooks, **working steadily and boringly through textbooks** and **colouring in pictures**… nowhere in the curriculum does it mention [these]… Somehow many Irish teachers seem to have got lost, and now treat the textbooks as though they ARE the curriculum. (Teacher: Learning Support)*

3.5.3 Love of learning

Respondents noted the need for primary education to, *teach children life skills like happiness and engagement,* because, in the words of one teacher, *happy, engaged children learn more and do better in the long run.* Engaging and motivating children was flagged as important, e.g., for learning to be, *a fun filled, enjoyable, rewarding experience,* and to develop, *duine fiosrach, neamhspleách… a bhfuil spéis agus dúil sa bhfoghlaim aici/aige/ a person who is curious and inquiring… and who has interest in and love of learning.*

Lifelong learning

A love-of-learning was considered an important outcome for children's primary school years and for the years of learning afterwards.

> *… create an **enthusiasm for learning**. (Parent)*
>
> *… instil a **love of learning** in children and a **curiosity** in the world around them. (Teacher)*

*… [develop]… a curiosity and **hunger for learning**. (Teacher)*

*… foster a love of and **dedication to life-long learning**. (Teacher)*

*… encourage [children]… to develop a **love of learning and reading** in a child friendly environment, (Teacher)*

*… **keep their curiosity alive** and support proactive **interest in what goes on around them**. (Teacher).*

3.6 Nurture children's sense of identity and belonging

Children's concept of themselves and their sense of belonging to various groups was considered a priority by 237 (25% of) respondents. Table 12 shows the number of responses for these ideas.

Table 12. Nurture children's sense of identity and belonging

	Main ideas	n	%
3.6.1	**Positive self-concept,** self as child, self as learner	172	18%
3.6.2	**Sense of belonging,** affirmation, belonging to a group, citizenship	104	11%
	Total respondents	**237**	**25%**

Respondents noted the importance of developing children's sense of identity and belonging as skills for life:

*Children need life skills. They need to have a sense of their past, their environment, themselves, and **their place in the world**… [they] need some rooting in their past and to have **links in local or family history**. (Teacher)*

*Primary education should foster physical, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive competencies in children to **enable the child** to take their **first steps** towards becoming **citizens of their families, their communities, their country and the world**. (Principal)*

3.6.1 Positive self-concept

Self as child

These responses focused more on, *developing children,* than teaching subjects. In the words of one teacher, primary school education should,… *aim to develop children's characters socially, physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.* Responses highlighted the importance of children developing knowledge and awareness of themselves and their abilities and talents in primary school:

*… know themselves and be **comfortable in their own skin**. (Teacher)*

*… be given an opportunity to **discover where his/her chief abilities lie**. (Parent)*

*… give [the child] a window into their many and varied **gifts/talents.** (Teacher)*

*… teach each child **how important he/she is**. (Parent)*

*… help children to **value themselves**. (Teacher)*

Respondents noted the need to help children develop their self-concept and identity. For children with special needs, respondents highlighted the importance of helping them to develop self-awareness through early diagnosis and intervention.

*… **find any special needs early** so there is **early intervention** and these children can go **forward with confidence** with a good ethic for work in the future **instead of** not finding out and causing **low self-esteem** and perhaps a feeling of **frustration** in their lives. (Parent)*

Responses which focus on helping children to develop their own voice and to express themselves (related to the above discussion) are included within the Communication priority.

Learner identity

Children's view of themselves as learners was also considered an important aspect of their self-identity.

*… equip the child to be **an independent learner**. (Teacher)*

*… promote **independent learners** who **know how to learn throughout their lives**. (Teacher)*

*… enable the child to **take the initiative in learning** so that learning becomes a part of each life, **not dependent** on being 'delivered' by an education system. (Lecturer - Education)*

Responses included under this heading noted the need for children to develop a, *positive concept of themselves as children and as young learners,* and to know their learning strengths; *nurture their passions and gifts.* The ideas here relate to the first priority concerning life skills, and in particular, children's learning skills.

3.6.2 Sense of belonging

Affirmation

The primary school teacher was noted to have a critical role in affirming children and thus helping them to develop a positive sense of identity.

*Primary education is so much more than literacy and numeracy. After all **they may forget the things you taught them but will never forget how you made them feel**. (Teacher)*

*… **educate children in a positive, confident manner** where they can reach their full potential in an academic and personal level without any negativity from teacher or indeed fellow classmates. (Parent)*

*… **increase, not diminish**, each child's sense of capability and lovability and provide a secure base for all children - especially those at risk of harm or neglect in their home lives. (Teacher)*

Respondents highlighted the need for children to experience a positive learning environment in primary school, one which is, *welcoming for all children*, and which is, *safe and secure*.

*… encourage a love of learning in **a happy and interactive environment**. To teach a child in a way that **encourages them to feel they are able** and that their **contribution is worthwhile no matter how small**. (Parent)*

*…introduce each child to an **inclusive and accepting school community**. To develop each unique child to their capacity level whilst simultaneously taking cognisance of, and not dwarfing, personality, choice or **the spirit of the child**. (Other: Health Service Executive - Pre-school Employee)*

Belonging to a group

An inclusive learning environment was identified as a priority by 48 respondents (5%). They noted that a primary education should cater for *all* children; …*keep the curriculum broad and inclusive*; …*many children are not academic and yet their education should enable them to reach their full potential*. Respondents noted the importance of helping children with different abilities and interests to learn from one-another; …*educate children with disabilities to survive in primary school*; …*develop an acceptance of, and an empathy for difference;* and also, … *educate neurotypical children about children with disabilities*. Responses included here focused on the importance of children having a positive self-identity in order to engage with and contribute to one another and to develop a positive identity as part of the classroom and the school community.

*… [help children] to gain an understanding of their talents and to begin to develop them for their own benefit and **for the benefit of others**. (Parent, Principal)*

*… help produce happy and socially well-adjusted pupils who are **capable of sharing love** and care in their lives and who are **sensitive to the needs of others**. (Teacher, Parent)*

*… teach children to **accept and respect their teachers and peers, regardless of race, gender, religion, or disabilities**. (Parent)*

… learn … to love their neighbour as themselves. To learn the importance of service to others and honesty and integrity (Parent)

*… develop a sense of justice, empathy, respect for others and a **duty-of-care** to the world around them (Teacher)*

Citizenship

Responses focused on children developing a sense of belonging to, and a responsibility toward, their community – at a local, national and global level. It was considered important for children to learn about their country; *the history and geography and politics of Ireland,* in order to, *learn about being a good citizen,* and to, *develop as a functioning member of society,* and, *a caring member of society.* Responses included under this heading also included helping children to develop, *an appreciation of the environment and how to respect the Earth.*

*… help children to become **more aware of, and in touch with, their 'place'** (parish, town land, suburb) and also of their **role in looking after it**… more place-based learning using the school surrounds as an outdoor classroom. (Parent)*

*..encourage… **appreciation of the child's surrounding environment**: natural, cultural, social, seasonal - and how these can be unique to each child's locality. (Parent, Schools Outreach Officer - 3rd Level)*

*… develop… a **strong sense of community** and an awareness of the **role each person must play** as a citizen **to help others** and **to preserve and protect the environment**… to have a **real sense of place** and an appreciation of **Irish language and culture**. (Principal)*

*… bring out their sense of **being part of a wider family** than the nuclear or school or even local 'family' **so that they learn how to participate in and how to effect change** in decision-making **processes happening throughout the world** that will affect their lives as grown-ups. (Teacher)*

*… [help children] to become a **well-rounded citizen**, showing respect and tolerance and displaying an **understanding of civic duty**. (Principal)*

***Morals and ethics** should be taught through **civic behaviour**, **good citizenship**, and possibly philosophy. (Parent)*

Looking back over the six priorities identified for primary education, it's striking that the seven curriculum areas and eleven subjects seem to take a back-seat to the development of important dispositions and life skills. The next section looks at the prioritisation of curriculum subjects/areas, and curriculum features in the 960 responses.

4. Priorities and the primary curriculum

In the previous section we saw that a majority of respondents highlighted the importance of providing a broad education in primary school. This section examines the extent to which curriculum areas and subjects featured among respondents' priorities, and looks at some overall messages about the curriculum.

4.1 Priorities for curriculum areas and subjects

Table 13, shows the total number of responses and respondents who focused on each of the seven areas and 12 subjects in the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999). These are listed in the order in which they are presented in the Introduction to the curriculum (DES, 1999, p. 40).

Table 13. Curriculum areas and subjects, number of responses

Curriculum Area	Subjects	Total responses		Total respondents	
		n	%	n	%
Language		165	17%	233	24%
	English	74	7%		
	Gaeilge	71	7%		
Mathematics		112	12%	112	12%
Social, environmental, scientific education (SESE)		40	4%	171	18%
	History	51	5%		
	Geography	39	4%		
	Science	110	11%		
Arts education		103	11%	165	17%
	Visual arts	71	7%		
	Music	86	9%		
	Drama	67	7%		
Physical education (PE)		91	9%	91	9%
Social, personal and health education (SPHE)		51	5%	51	5%
Religious education		29	3%	29	3%

In the previous section, we saw that respondents prioritised the development of children's literacy and/or numeracy skills (Section 3.4, Table 10). 'Developing children's Literacy and Numeracy' ranked fourth place as a priority. The majority of those

responses did not refer to the impact of prioritising literacy on the *English Curriculum* or *Curaclam na Gaeilge*. It's worth recalling that 6% of all respondents (n=59) cautioned against an overemphasis on literacy and numeracy and/or an exclusive focus on the language and/or mathematics areas to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills. For these reasons, the analysts have avoided speculation on whether, or to what extent, the responses which included a focus on literacy, but not on English, Gaeilge, or the language curriculum area (and likewise, the responses which included a focus on numeracy but not on mathematics) should be included in the total number of responses for these curriculum areas. Therefore, Table 14 (below) which lists the curriculum areas in order of priority, does not include literacy or numeracy in the total number of respondents for Language and Mathematics, respectively.

Table 14. Curriculum areas and number of responses, in order of priority

Rank	Curriculum area	n	%
1	Language (excluding 'literacy only' responses)[4]	233	24%
2	Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE)	171	18%
3	Arts education	165	17%
4	Physical education (PE)	149	16%
5	Mathematics (excluding 'numeracy only' responses)[5]	112	12%
6	Social, personal and health education (SPHE)	51	5%
7	Religious education	29	3%

It is important to note the limitation of this analysis of curriculum areas and subjects included in priorities and the peculiar findings for SPHE. While only 51 (5%) of the total number of respondents noted the value of '*Social, personal and health education'* or *SPHE* in primary education, a significant number of additional respondents (203), listed at least one of the three elements of SPHE (social; personal and/or health education) in their responses. When we include these three elements of SPHE, we see that 264 (28% of) all respondents noted social, personal and/or health education as priorities in their responses.

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[4] If the number of respondents who prioritised literacy was also included here, the total number of respondents would be 413 (43%).
[5] If the number of respondents who prioritised numeracy was also included here, the total number of respondents would be 308 (32%).

4.1.1 Language

Gaeilge was highlighted by 7% (n=71) of the total number of respondents as a significant part of primary education. A further 4% of all respondents (n=41), expressed concern about the current approach to teaching Gaeilge and emphasised the need to focus on oral proficiency in primary schools. A small number of respondents questioned the role of Gaeilge in the primary curriculum in light of the other priorities for primary education.

> *… **proper teaching of the Irish language** through **conversational Irish** and developing these skills… (Parent)*

> *… **teach Irish as a spoken language** and **an introduction to other languages including the roots of English words**. (Parent)*

*At **tábhacht faoi leith ag baint leis an nGaeilge san oideachas** (Múinteoir)*	*There's a **particular importance attached to Irish in education** (Teacher)*
*…**níos mó béime ar an nGaeilge gach áit sa scoil.** Céard faoi **ábhar eile trí Gaeilge** ar nós Dráma, Ealaíon nó Spórt trí Ghaeilge i ngach uile scoil. Is gá go mbeadh sé taitneamhach. (Tuismitheoir, Múinteoir)*	*… **more emphasis on Irish everywhere in the school**. What about teaching other subjects such as Drama, Arts, or Sport through the medium of Irish in every single school? It [Gaeilge] has to be enjoyable. (Parent, Teacher)*

> *… **make up our minds whether Irish is/is not a priority**. (Principal)*

> *… make decisions at national level regarding the teaching of Irish: **the current situation is unsustainable**. (Principal)*

A focus on oral language was highlighted as a top priority for English also; *… give greater emphasis to oral language in English and Irish;* and*, our children should at least be able speak English and Irish* . Some elements of the English Curriculum were highlighted for improvement; *proper sentence formation in English and spelling; and, English comprehension poses a major problem for most pupils.* Respondents highlighted the need to revise the English Curriculum and improve particular elements of it.

> *…revisit the English Curriculum and **develop a more meaningful, practical and usable framework** to ensure that all strands can be clearly identified and taught in a cohesive manner. (Teacher)*

> *… [develop] **a more structured approach to the English Curriculum** to show the specific objectives/ areas covered in each class. (Teacher)*

> *… **make the English Curriculum more user-friendly.** Many of the objectives are quite vague. In the senior classes, grammar and punctuation **objectives could be made specific**. For example, when should speech marks be learnt? I have found that there is a huge reliance on text books to guide this area. (Teacher)*

4.1.2 Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE)

SESE (or History, Geography and/or Science) was mentioned in 171 responses.

> *… learn through History, Geography, and Science about the **child's own environment and culture** and how they **relate to the wider world**.* (Parent)

15% of all respondents (n=145) noted that the SESE area should be a priority with a particular emphasis on Science.

> *The **groundwork for developing scientists of the future must start at primary level**. (Teacher)*

> *I think **Science is a priority**. **I would like to be a scientist** so I could **find new cures for diseases and long term illnesses and make people better**. I love learning about new things in science in school. I **like doing projects and experiments** with my teacher and friends. (Primary school pupil)*

Respondents highlighted the value of science to develop children's investigative skills and their capacity for higher-order thinking.

> *Science is beneficial to the primary student as it **develops their problem solving and investigative skills** leading to them becoming overall greater critical thinkers.* (Teacher)

> *The **study of science subjects is essential in the development of children's problem solving and investigative skills**.* (Teacher)

> *Science! **Exploration, planning, observation, recording and hands-on practical activities** are so important in this broadening technological era.* (Teacher)

> *Quite apart from the **capacity of science to enthuse, engage and inspire inquiring young minds**, **primary science surely has to be prioritised as an area of national concern.** Waiting until second level may be too late.* (Teacher educator)

Respondents noted that children must demonstrate a high level of performance in science at second-level to be considered for entry into certain third-level courses.

> *Science is also **required if a child wishes to study medicine, science**, or **some maths modules** in **third level colleges**. (Teacher)*

> *Science is required for **medicine, food science, biochemistry, engineering and many maths courses**. These are the sectors in the economy we need to focus on in these recessionary times. (Teacher)*

4.1.3 Arts education

Arts education (and/or visual arts; music and/or drama) was considered a priority for 165 (17% of) respondents. The three arts subjects were each highlighted in similar numbers of responses—7% of all respondents prioritised visual arts and drama while 9% prioritised music. Across all three subjects, respondents focused mainly on the potential to develop children's creativity and innovation through the arts area.

> ***Drama in education and the arts*** *should be **at the centre of a critical and creative framework for learning** at this stage of the educational system. (Teacher educator)*

> *… a **strong creative curriculum** which develops children's higher order thinking skills [and ...] imaginative skills. (Teacher educator)*

> *Tá **cothú acmhainní cruthaitheacha agus léiritheacha** sna healaíona fíorthábhachtach freisin (Tuismitheoir)*
>
> *The fostering of creative resources and expression in the arts is extremely important also. (Parent)*

> *… teach the arts, effectively and purposefully, to give voice to the **child's creativity and imagination** and are **core to any society's understanding of itself** as well as being a means of forging a path to the future (teacher)*

4.1.4 Physical education (PE)

Physical education was prioritised by 149 (16% of) respondents. Responses focused mainly on developing children's physical skills, as part of a broad education in an effort to promote a healthy lifestyle. Responses are outlined in the previous section in which children's physical well-being was a component of children's overall well-being, which was the third most frequently cited priority. (Section 3.2 focuses on responses which prioritised children's physical well-being).

4.1.5 Mathematics

Mathematics was prioritised by 112 (12%) of respondents. Similar to responses for the language area, responses for mathematics focused mainly on the need to prioritise *oral mathematics* in primary school. Respondents noted the need to ensure mathematics activities were relevant to children and activity-based. Similar to findings for language, respondents called for greater clarity in the mathematics curriculum and highlighted the need to support parents to help their children learn mathematics at home.

> *… increase time spent on **oral maths** in the first years at school. (Teacher)*

> *… [ensure that] maths programmes consist of **concrete and relevant activities** which **interest the children**. Primary school Maths relies too much on books. (Teacher)*

> *… have **more activity-based maths** … to improve children's maths, problem solving, etc.(Teacher, Deputy Principal)*

> *… have **a more prescriptive** [more specific] **curriculum for maths** as many teachers don't feel comfortable designing their own maths course and the books on the market at present are not at all sufficient. (Teacher)*

> ***Parents report that they could never do maths themselves** so they can neither help their children at home and worse, they **pass on negative messages about maths to their children** and **have very low expectations** in the area of numeracy for them. **Parents need some kind of** a **'Maths Curriculum User Guide'** which takes them through the curriculum and shows them how to do multiplication, division, fractions, percentages, etc. (Lecturer)*

4.1.6 Social, personal and health education (SPHE)

Responses for the three aspects of SPHE are outlined in the previous section. (See social education [3.2.3, communicating; 3.6.2, belonging], personal education [3.2.1, child's voice, expression; 3.6.1, identity] and health education [3.4.2, physical well-being]). Responses which focused on all three aspects of SPHE focused mainly on the need for increased prioritisation of these dimensions of children's education and more time and flexible use of time to meet children's SPHE needs.

> *… **give SPHE a higher priority** than it has at present. In particular issues such as **self- esteem and self-confidence are very important** for pupils' personal growth and development. If pupils are struggling with social and emotional problems in school **their education will be compromised**. Much time is spent in school by teachers in dealing with social and behavioural issues as part of classroom management. If **more time was devoted to SPHE** many **pupils' social and emotional problems or difficulties might be minimised** or prevented. **Outside agencies do not address these issues** for most children, they tend to deal with children in crisis. (Teacher)*

> *… give time to **deal with SPHE issues as they arise** rather than having to be taught specifically during a lesson. (Teacher)*

> *SPHE only gets a **small amount of time allocated to it** and I think this is a very important area for children. (Teacher)*

> *The current **SPHE curriculum needs revision and updating** to **cater for the realities of 21st century Ireland**… The current allocation of 30 minutes of discrete time per week is insufficient to explore the difficult and complex issues within the SPHE curriculum. SPHE requires on-going commitment at both national and local level. (Lecturer)*

4.1.7 Religious education (RE)

Of the 29 respondents (3%) who prioritised religious education in their responses, the majority did so from a negative perspective. Most of this relatively small group (n=24, 3%) believed that the emphasis should be placed on educating children about various world religions and cultures and that a focus on any one particular denomination should not be a feature of primary education.

> *… take religion out of Primary School. (Teacher)*

> *… teach religion after school* to those whose parents want them to learn it and *preparation for First Communion and Confirmation should also be outside of school hours. (Parent)*

> *Denominational religion should not be taught during the school day in any school - instead children should be taught about different religions and cultures* and respect for all should be instilled in children. (Parent)

4.2. Priorities for how the curriculum is specified

In addition to the findings outlined above for curriculum areas and subjects, some responses prioritised general improvements in how a curriculum is organised and presented, as outlined in Table 15. These responses are briefly examined here.

Table 15. Features of curriculum specification, in order of priority

Rank	Curriculum area	n	%
1	Curriculum overload	99	10%
2	Curriculum integration	87	9%
3	Curriculum clarity	32	3%

4.2.1 Curriculum overload

10% (n=100) of respondents acknowledged the significant challenges in using the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) which was described as being; ... *far too broad and full of wishful thinking.* In the words of one respondent; a*n overloaded curriculum militates against achieving the primary purpose of primary education.* Respondents described a range of unintended consequences of the overcrowded primary curriculum:

> *I strongly believe that the curriculum has become overloaded and as a result progress in these [curriculum] areas is affected. (Teacher)*

> *What's happening is present is a bit like "jack of all trades and master of none". (Teacher)*

*There are too many subjects - **standards are dropping and the 3 Rs are neglected**… (Teacher, Deputy Principal)*

*One **cannot achieve high standards in the basics and serve all the curriculum** as laid out in 1999… [it] cannot be done with children… maybe it could be done with robots! (Teacher)*

One solution mooted by respondents was to focus the curriculum on skills rather than content:

*The present curriculum is **overloaded with too many subjects**, but if [the] **emphasis was on (research) skills** then many **topics could be condensed time wise** while valuable skills would be learned and applied. (Parent)*

4.2.2. Curriculum integration

It is noteworthy that 9% (n=87) of all respondents highlighted the need for a strong emphasis on cross-curricular education and integration of curriculum subjects at primary level. An integrated approach was noted to reduce curriculum overload and to provide children with a broad education which includes all curriculum areas.

*It would be helpful for the **curriculum to be streamlined** or **to give teachers training in how to integrate more.** (Teacher)*

*It would be beneficial to **group subjects together** to allow **a more topic based approach** to teaching in the primary school. (Teacher)*

*… **emphasise project-based learning** which **pulls many subjects together** (e.g. a local history project in Irish with photos, interviews and artwork, maths in context through woodwork/construction projects).(Parent, Lecturer)*

*… needs to be **a little bit more creative** in **integrating literacy and numeracy into other areas of the curriculum**, and to **lessen the artificial borders** around curriculum areas. (Lecturer)*

*I would hate to see literacy swallowing up the Arts and SESE time. **Literacy is cross curricular**. (Teacher)*

*With a very crowed curriculum, drama provides opportunities for **cross-curricular learning** (Teacher)*

Added to these findings calling for increased integration of subjects, it may be worth noting that a minority of respondents (n=15) called for drama to be integrated across the primary curriculum.

4.2.3 Curriculum clarity

32 respondents (3%) considered lack of clarity in the curriculum to be a major concern and highlighted the need for greater focus on priorities for children's learning in primary

school including, *specific targets for each class*, and a call for improvements in the English Curriculum in particular.

> *… give **a clear outline from the curriculum** as **what is required to be covered** (Principal, Teacher)*

> *… need **clearly-stated objectives** for **each of the subject areas** at each of the **individual class levels** (not the 2-year programmes as outlined in both the 1971 & 1999 Curricula). (Principal)*

> *… be **more target-based**, especially in the languages. The current curriculum is too broad and there is **not a consistent standard set that each pupil should reach by the end of their primary years**. (Principal)*

> *… the English Curriculum needs to be revisited and **a more meaningful, practical and usable framework** developed to ensure that **all strands can be clearly identified and taught in a cohesive manner.** (Teacher)*

> *Our curriculum needs to be streamlined on order **to cater for all our pupils** especially those who are **experiencing difficulties**. (Parent, Teacher)*

> *The 1971 Primary School Curriculum was in many ways better suited to the realisation of [priorities for children's learning], with **more clearly defined learning outcomes** defined. Since the 1999 Curriculum was introduced, there has been **a 'watering down' of the focus** required in the areas of literacy and numeracy. There is a need to have **a very clear programme of work outlined at the different class levels**, with **a progressive development of skills from level to level.** (Principal)*

The next section looks at some implications of the findings outlined in Sections 3 and 4 for the primary developments, beginning with the new language curriculum.

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5. Discussion and implications

This final section discusses some trends across findings and looks at implications of the responses for curriculum development. The shift from fragmentation towards integration in our thinking about children, their lives and their learning, and how we approach curriculum development is one important idea across responses.

5.1 What strikes us as significant in the findings?

5.1.1 Hierarchical relationship between skills

Across the six priorities, there's a recognition that skills learned in the primary school years are related to one another (such as communication and literacy) and that many have a hierarchical quality, so that some are significant in the learning of others. In this study, foundational literacy and numeracy skills were seen as essential for more sophisticated learning and for enabling children to engage fully with society now and in the future. Similarly, developing a positive self-identity was considered necessary for children to engage with and contribute to others, and to develop a positive identity as a member of the classroom/school community. To some extent this view has replaced the notion of 'basic' skills, i.e., that somehow the lowest levels skills, like spelling and number facts, were important ends in themselves or were more important than higher order skills. Findings here reflect the current thinking that skills which underlie the learning of others are quite fundamental, such as problem-solving and self-regulation skills (Nisbet et al, 2012) which were the focus of the first priority (regarding life skills). These are all fundamental skills in the sense that they underline many different kinds of learning and the extent to which children can develop these is likely to have wide-ranging effects on their future experience as learners.

5.1.2 Similar concerns across sectors

The six priorities reflect six fundamental areas for children's development in primary school. Many of the priorities could be described as dispositions, i.e.; *enduring habits of mind and action* (Aistear, 2009, p. 54). These focus on helping children to (i) develop life skills; be good communicators; be well; engage in learning; and develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. Table 16 shows the similarities between these priorities for primary education and recent developments in early childhood education, junior cycle education, and senior cycle education.

Table 16. Primary priorities, childhood themes, junior cycle key skills and senior cycle key skills

Primary priorities	Early childhood themes	Junior cycle key skills	Senior cycle key skills
Develop thinking, learning and life skills	Exploring and thinking	Managing information and thinking	Critical and creative thinking
		Being creative	Information processing
Communicate well	Communicating	Communicating	Communicating
Be well	Well-being	Staying well	Being personally effective
Engage in learning	Identity and belonging	Managing myself	
Have a strong sense of identity and belonging		Working with others	Working with others

Despite the limitations of this small initiative to identify priorities for primary education, the similarities with recent developments across sectors are striking. While educational policy has, in the past, taken a sectoral approach to developments, Table 15 reminds us that children themselves do not live in sectors, nor do our priorities for them vary significantly from one sector to the next.

5.1.3 Children's well-being as a starting point

The broadening of the primary curriculum in 1999 to include SPHE underlines the acceptance that primary schools have a key role in children's personal and social development. Its striking that the personal and social dimensions of children's primary education featured in all six priorities (3.1.1, learning skills; 3.1.2 reaching potential; 3.2.1, child's voice; 3.2.3 social skills, 3.3.1, psychological well-being; 3.3.2, physical well-being; 3.4.1, confidence; 3.5.2, child-centred learning; 3.6.1, self-concept; and 3.6.2, sense of belonging). There's something of a mismatch between the high ranking for elements of SPHE and the low ranking for the subject. There's a sense that primary education is expected to engage with issues which may have their origin in the home and in children's lives outside of school, but which are children's starting point for learning.

For teachers this involves closing the gap, *between what we know about the determinants of children's well-being and their ability to learn, and what we do to enable*

them to flourish (Kickbusch, 2012). In our large, primary classes, perhaps the real challenge is to recognise and respond to the range of children's individual and social differences which are now greater in primary school than at any time before. Primary schools in the last decade include increasing numbers of children whose first language may be other than Gaeilge or English, or who may be have learning difficulties or challenging behaviour. The practice of mainstreaming and the increasing readiness to accept multi-cultural attitudes underlines the acceptance of social and individual differences in primary schools. Findings here highlight the challenge of moving beyond acceptance to a more targeted development of each child's personal and social well-being. The emphasis on developing children's life skills, the importance of the school environment, the importance of children engaging with learning and the development of children's self-expression and communication skills are all related to the child's interaction with adults (teachers/parents) and with their peers. There is also acceptance in the findings that not only is the teacher-pupil relationship of importance for engagement with school but that it is also important for success and achievement (Roorda et al., 2011).

5.2 What are the implications for the primary developments, beginning with the new Language Curriculum?

Respondents' calls for a prioritisation of skills and dispositions, a reduction in content, and greater clarity on curriculum aims and outcomes, signal that the primary developments will aim for a leaner, more relevant and helpful curriculum for teachers and children. It will attend to children's needs now, while preparing children for future learning in a way which is developmentally appropriate. Table 15 suggests that there's scope for the curriculum revisions, beginning with language, to have a foundation in principles of learning and development which are cross-sectoral and this will be one focus of the new curriculum specification.

In addition, curriculum revisions, beginning with a new language curriculum for children in junior infants to second class, will…

… give children **opportunities to develop a sense of power and agency**, by showing how children can develop their sense of self and their ability to express themselves, rather than being passive recipients of language education.

… help teachers to **engage and motivate children using a range of interesting and relevant learning activities, and active learning methods** so that the curious and enthusiastic 4 or 5-year old child in junior infant classes does not become a disillusioned or disengaged 12-year old in sixth class.

… provide a **clear path to progression so that each child can learn at his/her own level and pace, and teachers can assess and support each child's progress** from one level to the next.

… show how children can **develop their language and literacy skills through practical life skills that interest them**, e.g., preparing food, growing plants/vegetables, making short videos, sending emails, planning and managing projects, etc. These echo the Children's voices recorded for the 2011 conference 'Children their lives their learning' (NCCA, 2011a).

… **move away from teaching language and literacy in discrete subjects towards providing more integrated learning experiences for children.** The new specification for the language curriculum will highlight connections across learning experiences at three levels of integration (O Duibhir and Cummins, 2012).

… focus on developing **children's communication skills with adults and children in a range of contexts, especially their oral language development in English and Gaeilge**.

Over the life of Council's Strategic Plan (2012-2015), these findings are particularly relevant to three aspects of the primary developments concerning the:

- new integrated **language curriculum** for English and Gaeilge
    - o Junior infants to second class (September, 2014)
    - o Third to sixth class (September, 2016)
- revised **mathematics curriculum**
    - o Junior infants to second class (September, 2014)
    - o Third to sixth class (September, 2018)
- revised **infant curriculum** (2014, 2018)
    - o Language and Mathematics (September, 2014)
    - o All other elements (September, 2018)

Engagement with adults and especially children about their priorities for primary education will continue to be a priority in the primary developments, given the valuable feedback from this online invitation. Our next steps will be to ask children themselves (and boys, in particular), to what extent the primary curriculum works for them (Carr-Chellman, 2012; McCoy, McCoy et al, 2011) and how it can be improved.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Information on respondent groups

7.1.1 Teachers

Teachers were the largest respondent group (677), representing over two thirds of all respondents. Some teachers provided additional information about themselves which is included in Table 17.

Table 17. Respondents: Teacher group, additional information

Respondent descriptions	n
Teacher ▪ 1 Lecturer in Education ▪ 1 former student	570
Principal ▪ 1 Principal of an urban DEIS school ▪ 18 teaching Principals ▪ 1 Lecturer in education	84
Pre-service student teacher	17
Deputy Principal ▪ 2 teaching Deputy Principals	4
Retired Teacher	2

7.1.2 Parents

Less than one-fifth of respondents (180) were parents. Table A2 provides additional information provided by parents about themselves.

Table 18. Respondents: Parent group, additional information

Respondent descriptions	n
Parent ▪ 1 from Nigeria ▪ 1 with a child with SEN	155
Parent and Lecturer ▪ 1 lecturer in Languages ▪ 1 lecturer in College of Education	9
Parent and student ▪ 1 studying Early Childhood Education	2
Parent and former student	1
Parent and Visiting French Teacher	1
Parent and Early Childhood Practitioner	3
Parent and Education Provider	1
Parent and member of a Board of Management	3
Parent and grandparent	1
Parent and Schools Outreach Officer (Third level)	1
Parent and academic	1
Parent and playwright	1
Parent and Teacher Educator	1

7.1.3 Other

61 respondents were coded as "Other". None of the respondents in this group identified themselves as parents, teachers, or teachers/parents and no group was greater than 2% of all respondents. Table A3. Includes information on these 61 respondents

Table 19. Respondents: Other group – additional information

Respondent description	n
Lecturer in a Third Level University	18
▪ Lecturer	10
▪ Lecturer in Initial Teacher Education (includes Teacher Educator, PE)	5
▪ Lecturer in Maths	1
▪ Lecturer in Engineering	1
▪ Léachtóir le Fiontraíocht *(Lecturer in Enterprise)*	1
Early Years Practitioner	5
▪ Early years practitioner	5
Respondent working in Drama	4
▪ Drama facilitator	1
▪ Drama Curriculum Consultant to the Primary School Curriculum	1
▪ Drama therapist, Psychotherapist and Drama Facilitator	1
▪ Drama Practitioner, Retired Deputy Principal	1
Student	5
▪ Student (including two primary school pupils)	3
▪ Student, Adult Literacy Teacher, Uncle	1
▪ Student (Masters in Education and Training)	1
Remaining respondents	29
▪ Teacher educator	6
▪ Citizen concerned with education	5
▪ Grandparent	2
▪ No profile submitted	1
▪ European Language Teacher	1
▪ County Childcare Committee Member	1
▪ Health Service Executive employee – pre-school	1
▪ Policy Officer, Barnardos	1
▪ Chairperson of Atheist Ireland	1
▪ Clinical practitioner and academic	1
▪ Librarian	1

Respondent description	n
▪ Former student	1
▪ Engineer	1
▪ Educator	1
▪ Síolta Mentor	1
▪ SNA	1
▪ Philosophy of Disability Researcher	1
▪ Primary school pupils	2

7.1.4 Parents and Teachers

42 of respondents identified themselves as both parents and teachers. Given their role as educators in school and home, these respondents brought a particular perspective to the debate regarding the purpose of primary education and were identified as a specific respondent group. Table A4. provides additional information on respondents in this group.

Table 20. Parent/Teacher group – additional information

Respondent description	n
Parent/teacher (including 1 secondary teacher)	30
Parent, grandparent and retired primary teacher	1
Parent, grandparent and Principal	1
Parent, Teacher and college student	1
Teacher, Parent, artist	1
Parent and Principal (4 who are teaching Principals)	6
Teacher, Deputy Principal and Parent	2

7.2 List of ideas (categories) assigned to responses

Table 21. Main ideas (categories) and responses, sorted alphabetically

	Invitation 1 n=104		Invitation 2 n= 855		Total	
Active learning	13	12%	55	6%	68	7%
Assessment for Learning	3	2%	24	2%	27	3%
Balanced Literacy Numeracy	1	0%	56	6%	57	6%
Belonging, cultural identity	11	10%	29	3%	40	4%
Books, workbooks	7	6%	29	3%	36	4%
Broad education	33	31%	120	14%	153	16%
CPD/ITE	3	2%	62	7%	65	7%
Children's Voice	3	2%	31	3%	34	4%
Citizenship	23	22%	55	6%	78	8%
Classroom resources	4	3%	51	5%	55	6%
Communication	8	7%	58	7%	64	7%
Creativity	11	10%	27	3%	38	4%
Critical thinking	15	14%	55	6%	70	7%
Curriculum integration	4	5%	60	7%	64	7%
Curriculum overload	3	4%	96	11%	99	10%
Curriculum relevance	9	8%	16	1%	25	3%
Curriculum clarity	2	3%	27	3%	29	3%
Equal access	6	7%	6	0%	12	1%
Gaeilge priority	2	1%	69	8%	71	7%
Gaeilge approach	0	0%	41	4%	41	4%
Hands-on learning	0	0%	20	2%	20	2%
ICT - technology (all refs)	4	3%	158	18%	162	17%
ICT - communication	0	0%	7	0%	7	0%
ICT - equipment	1	0%	43	5%	44	5%
ICT - skill	3	2%	62	7%	65	7%
Inclusion, diversity	2	1%	46	5%	48	5%
Independent learner	13	14%	38	4%	51	5%
Language L3	5	4%	74	8%	79	8%
Learning environment	15	14%	39	4%	54	5%
Learning skills	11	10%	37	4%	48	5%

	Invitation 1 n=104		Invitation 2 n= 855		Total	
Life skills	16	15%	61	7%	77	8%
Lifelong learning	18	17%	22	2%	40	4%
Literacy	32	30%	237	27%	269	28%
Love of learning	28	26%	29	3%	57	6%
Multi-denominational	5	4%	31	3%	36	4%
Numeracy	29	27%	236	27%	265	28%
Oral language	0	0%	96	11%	96	10%
Parental involvement	8	7%	30	3%	38	4%
Play	5	4%	24	2%	29	3%
Reach potential	15	14%	55	6%	70	7%
RE, spiritual education	6	5%	15	1%	21	2%
SEN, diagnosis	2	1%	24	2%	26	3%
Social education	36	34%	126	14%	162	17%
Stimulate curiosity	13	12%	16	1%	29	3%
Transition	4	3%	5	0%	9	0%
Well-being – psychological (all refs)	49	47%	160	19%	209	22%
Well-being - emotional	32	30%	121	14%	153	16%
Well-being - spiritual	11	10%	20	2%	31	3%
Well-being - physical	21	20%	172	20%	193	20%
Why drama?	0	0%	14	1%	14	2%

Table 22. Main ideas (categories) and responses, sorted by frequency

	Invitation 1 n=104		Invitation 2 n= 855		Total	
Literacy	32	30%	237	27%	269	28%
Numeracy	29	27%	236	27%	265	28%
Well-being – psychological (all refs)	49	47%	160	19%	209	22%
Well-being - physical	21	20%	172	20%	193	20%
ICT - technology (all refs)	4	3%	158	18%	162	17%
Social education	36	34%	126	14%	162	17%
Broad education	33	31%	120	14%	153	16%
Well-being - emotional	32	30%	121	14%	153	16%
Curriculum overload	3	4%	96	11%	99	10%
Oral language	0	0%	96	11%	96	10%
Language L3	5	4%	74	8%	79	8%
Citizenship	23	22%	55	6%	78	8%
Life skills	16	15%	61	7%	77	8%
Gaeilge priority	2	1%	69	8%	71	7%
Critical thinking	15	14%	55	6%	70	7%
Reach potential	15	14%	55	6%	70	7%
Active learning	13	12%	55	6%	68	7%
CPD/ITE	3	2%	62	7%	65	7%
ICT - skill	3	2%	62	7%	65	7%
Communication	8	7%	58	7%	64	7%
Curriculum integration	4	5%	60	7%	64	7%
Balanced Literacy Numeracy	1	0%	56	6%	57	6%
Love of learning	28	26%	29	3%	57	6%
Classroom resources	4	3%	51	5%	55	6%
Learning environment	15	14%	39	4%	54	5%
Independent learner	13	14%	38	4%	51	5%
Inclusion, diversity	2	1%	46	5%	48	5%
Learning skills	11	10%	37	4%	48	5%
ICT - equipment	1	0%	43	5%	44	5%
Gaeilge approach	0	0%	41	4%	41	4%
Belonging, cultural identity	11	10%	29	3%	40	4%

	Invitation 1 n=104		Invitation 2 n= 855		Total	
Lifelong learning	18	17%	22	2%	40	4%
Creativity	11	10%	27	3%	38	4%
Parental involvement	8	7%	30	3%	38	4%
Books, workbooks	7	6%	29	3%	36	4%
Multi-denominational	5	4%	31	3%	36	4%
Children's Voice	3	2%	31	3%	34	4%
Well-being - spiritual	11	10%	20	2%	31	3%
Curriculum clarity	2	3%	27	3%	29	3%
Play	5	4%	24	2%	29	3%
Stimulate curiosity	13	12%	16	1%	29	3%
Assessment for Learning	3	2%	24	2%	27	3%
SEN, diagnosis	2	1%	24	2%	26	3%
Curriculum relevance	9	8%	16	1%	25	3%
RE, spiritual education	6	5%	15	1%	21	2%
Hands-on learning	0	0%	20	2%	20	2%
Why drama?	0	0%	14	1%	14	2%
Equal access	6	7%	6	0%	12	1%
Transition	4	3%	5	0%	9	0%
ICT - communication	0	0%	7	0%	7	0%

7.3 Aistear's Themes and Aims

Table 23. Aistear's Themes and Aims

Theme	Aims
Well-being	*Children will…* ▪ be strong psychologically and socially. ▪ be as healthy and fit as they can be. ▪ be creative and spiritual. ▪ have positive outlooks on learning and on life.
Identity and Belonging	*Children will…* ▪ have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories. ▪ have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended. ▪ be able to express their rights and show an understanding and regard for the identity, rights and views of others. ▪ see themselves as capable learners.
Communicating	*Children will…* ▪ use non-verbal communication skills. ▪ use language. ▪ broaden their understanding of the world by making sense of experiences through language. ▪ express themselves creatively and imaginatively.
Exploring and Thinking	*Children will…* ▪ learn about and make sense of the world around them. ▪ develop and use skills and strategies for observing, questioning, investigating, understanding, negotiating, and problem-solving, and come to see themselves as explorers and thinkers. ▪ explore ways to represent ideas, feelings, thoughts, objects, and actions through symbols. ▪ have positive attitudes towards learning and develop dispositions like curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resourcefulness, and risk-taking.

Further information on Aistear is available on the NCCA website at ncca.ie/earlylearning.

7.4 Key Skills of Junior Cycle

Table 24. Key Skills of Junior Cycle

Managing Myself	Staying Well	Communicating
- Knowing myself - Making considered decisions - Setting and achieving personal goals - Being able to reflect on my own learning - Using digital technology to manage myself and my learning	- Being healthy, physical and active - Being social - Being safe - Being spiritual - Being confident - Being positive about learning	- Listening and expressing myself - Using numbers and data - Performing and presenting - Discussing and debating - Using digital technology to communicate
Being Creative	**Working with Others**	**Managing Information and Thinking**
- Imagining - Exploring options and alternatives - Implementing ideas and taking action - Learning creatively - Stimulating creativity using digital technology	- Developing good relationships and dealing with conflict - Cooperating - Respecting difference - Contributing to making the world a better place - Learning with others - Working with others through digital technology	- Being curious - Gathering, recording, organising and evaluating information and data - Thinking creatively and critically - Reflecting on and valuing my learning - Using digital technology to access, manage and share content

Further information on Key Skills of Junior Cycle is available on the Junior Cycle website at juniorcycle.ie.

7.5 Senior Cycle Key Skills

Table 25. Senior Cycle Key Skills

Key Skill	Element
Information Processing	▪ Accessing information from a range of sources ▪ Selecting and discriminating between sources based on their reliability and suitability for purpose ▪ Recording, organising, summarising and integrating information ▪ Presenting information using a range of information and communication technologies
Critical and Creative Thinking	▪ Examining patterns and relationships, classifying and ordering information ▪ Analysing and making good arguments, challenging assumptions ▪ Hypothesising and making predictions, examining evidence and reaching conclusions ▪ Identifying and analysing problems and decisions, exploring options and alternatives, solving problems and evaluating outcomes ▪ Thinking imaginatively, actively seeking out new points of view, problems and/or solutions, being innovative and taking risks
Communicating	▪ Analysing and interpreting texts and other forms of communication ▪ Expressing opinions, speculating, discussing, reasoning and engaging in debate and argument ▪ Engaging in dialogue, listening attentively and eliciting opinions, views and emotions ▪ Composing and performing in a variety of ways ▪ Presenting using a variety of media
Working with Others	▪ Working with others in a variety of contexts with different goals and purposes ▪ Identifying, evaluating and achieving collective goals ▪ Identifying responsibilities in a group and establishing practices associated with different roles in a group (e.g., leader, team member) ▪ Developing good relationships with others and a sense of well-being in a group ▪ Acknowledging individual differences, negotiating and resolving conflicts ▪ Checking progress, reviewing the work of the group and personally reflecting on one's own contribution
Being Personally Effective	▪ Being able to appraise oneself, evaluate one's own performance, receive and respond to feedback ▪ Identifying, evaluating and achieving personal goals, including developing and evaluating actions plans ▪ Developing personal qualities that help in new and difficult situations, such as taking initiatives, being flexible and being able to persevere when difficulties arise ▪ Becoming confident and being able to assert oneself as a person

Further information on Senior Cycle Key Skills is available on the NCCA website at ncca.ie.