Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

Report of main findings from parents on the review and redevelopment of the Primary Curriculum

NCCA

July 2019

Contents

Introduction

Phase one of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum took place in 2017 with the public consultation on 'Curriculum Structure and Time'. This consultation provided the first opportunity since the publication of the *Primary School Curriculum* (PSC) in 1999 to step back and consider how the curriculum is structured and how time is used across it. Phase two, in-train since the beginning of 2018, focuses on the development of a draft framework for a redeveloped curriculum. One strand of this work involves 44 schools and settings from across the country through the establishment of a Schools Forum. Together, these represent the rich diversity of school contexts in Ireland. Representatives from the preschools and schools meet every 4-6 weeks as a Forum to input, guide and influence the direction of the redevelopment of the primary curriculum. The work with the Schools Forum not only provides additional expertise, experience and insight into the curriculum work but also engenders greater stakeholder support and ownership. Partnership with teachers, parents, children and school management is a cornerstone of this work.

The benefits of parental involvement in education have long been recognised, given the large body of evidence that children thrive educationally and emotionally where parents support and are involved in their child's learning and education. During October 2018, the NCCA held twenty focus group sessions with parents of children attending primary school. This report sets out the findings from the meetings. The focus group sessions were an initial opportunity to involve parents in the NCCA's primary curriculum review and redevelopment work. A series of parent focus group sessions took place in October 2018 to work with parents and to gather their perspectives on, and suggestions for a redeveloped curriculum. The parents represented schools from different contexts. This diversity provided a rich tapestry of views and opinions about the purpose of a primary education and what the curriculum should do for children and their learning. As well as hearing from participants, the sessions also provided an opportunity for them to learn about the role and work of the NCCA in reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum.

Supporting engagement

At the beginning of the new 2018/2019 school year, principals of the primary schools, managers of the three preschools and the principal of the post-primary school in the Schools Forum were contacted about the possibility of holding a parent focus group session in their school / setting. The email also contained information letters for the principals / managers and the chairpersons of the Parents' Association / Council (Appendix 1). Further information about the intention and rationale for the focus group meetings was provided at the September 18th meeting of the Schools Forum. 20 schools (see Figure below) enthusiastically agreed to host a parent focus group session in October. The schools were also encouraged to invite parents from neighbouring schools and feeder preschools in their locality.

Sessions took place at a time and date most convenient to the schools to maximise the potential for parental attendance. Some sessions took place in the mornings while others took place at night. Each session lasted approximately one hour, and discussions were facilitated and recorded by members of the NCCA Early Childhood and Primary Team. The sessions were informal so that parents interacted with each other, listened to all views and gave a good airing to the issues (Bell, 2005). The largest parent focus group session had 55 participants while the smallest had five. Approximately 400 parents in total attended a parent focus group across a four-week week period from 1st October to 26th October 2018. The geographical spread of these schools is displayed in the Figure below.

Figure: Locations of parent focus group sessions
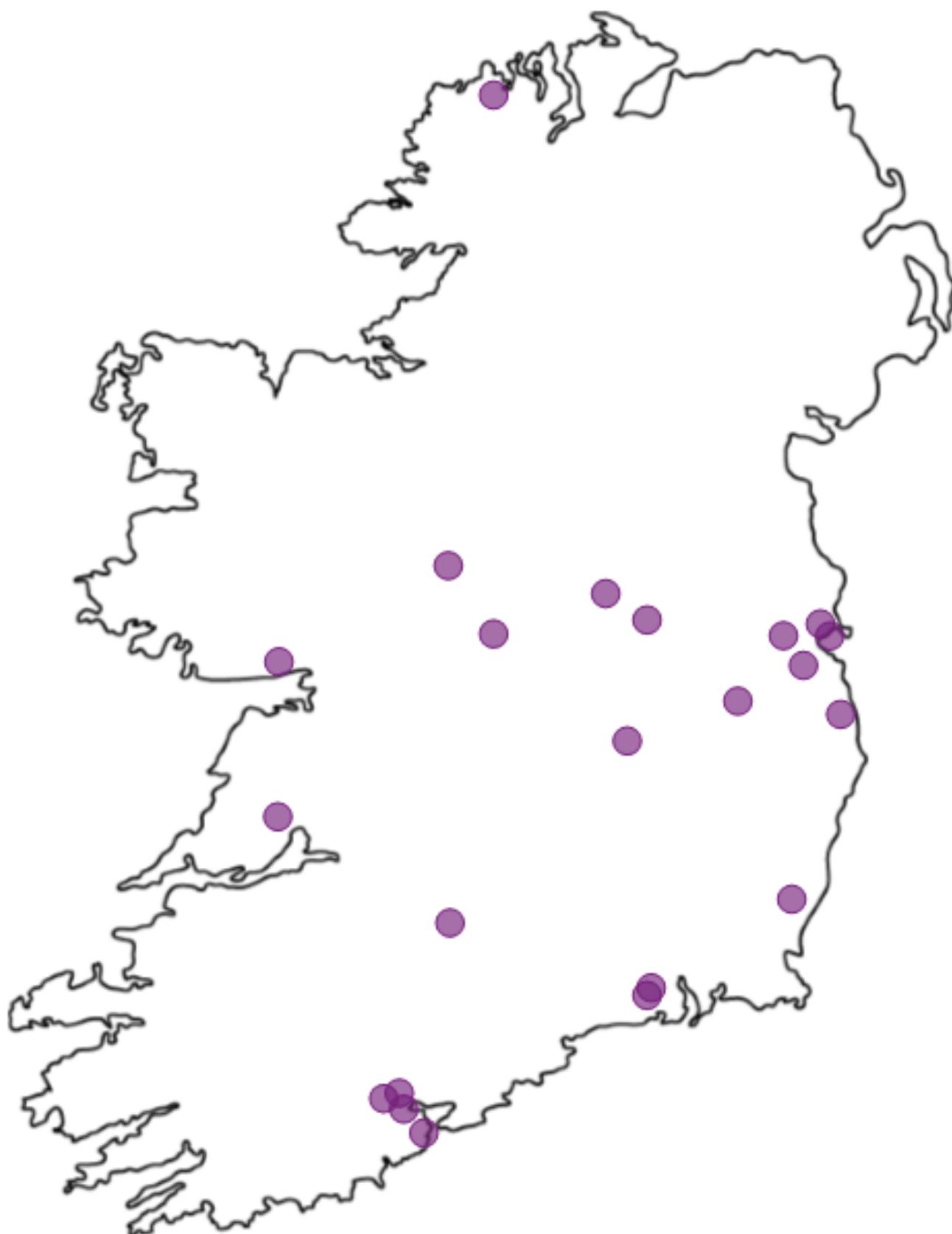
Sample of tweets shared post meetings

NCCA @NCCAie · 16 Oct 2018

Thank you to the parents in St. Colman's Wood Primary School, Roscommon for sharing ideas and hopes for a redeveloped primary curriculum #primarydevelopments

💬 1   🔁 3   ♡ 19   ✉

NCCA @NCCAie · 11 Oct 2018

Another very successful meeting with parents, this time with Greystones CNS to consider the future of the primary curriculum #primarydevelopments

💬   🔁 5   ❤ 11   ✉

NCCA @NCCAie · 8 Oct 2018

Thanks to the parents in Creeslough NS and Dunfanaghy NS for taking part in our primary curriculum focus group #primarydevelopments

💬   🔁 1   ♡ 13   ✉

Research design and methodology

Data collection

The specific questions, data collection sample and research method situate this work with parents within the qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth investigation of the concepts and a deepening of the understanding of the complexity of the issues involved. Research has to demonstrate 'fitness for purpose' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.460). The research approach that seemed most suitable was the focus group. Focus groups offered a valid way of collecting parental views on the primary curriculum by empowering parents to speak out and voice their opinions. Interaction between participants can yield insights not otherwise available (Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

The overall aim of the parent focus groups was to develop an understanding of what parents would like to see children learning in primary school, how they would like to see children learning, to explore what skills parents would like children to develop which would be of benefit to them now and into the future; and finally, to explore parents' ideas and suggestions about subjects and curriculum areas. To help guide discussions, questions were drafted and forwarded to the National Parents Council (Primary) for feedback. Table 1 below sets out the finalised set.

Table 1: Research questions for the focus group meetings

1.	What would you like to see children learning in primary school?
2.	How would you like to see children learning? How do you think children learn best?
3.	What skills would you like children to develop which would be of benefit to them now and into the future?
4.	Are there particular subjects / curriculum areas that are especially important for children in the primary school years?
5.	Are there particular subjects / curriculum areas that are no longer as important for children as they may have been?
6.	Is there anything that you would like to see introduced into the curriculum that is not already included?
7.	Is there anything else that you would like to say about what and how children learn in primary school?

Research ethics

Each parent was provided with information in the informed consent statement about the nature and purpose of the meeting (Appendix 2). Parents were required to give their informed consent to participate in the research (Bulmer, 2008). It was also clearly explained at the beginning of each focus group session that participants were free to participate, decline or withdraw altogether. This initial part of the meeting was also used to inform participants about the work of the NCCA in reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum and the purpose of the focus group sessions with parents.

Data analysis

Parental feedback from the different sessions was collated and synthesised, with the main themes feeding directly into this paper. The complete process of data analysis required that the data be *systematically organised, continually scrutinised, accurately described, theorised, interpreted, discussed and presented* (Ryan, 2006, p.95). Braun and Clarke (2006) present a six-step process as follows:

1. Familiarising yourself with the data

2. Generating initial codes

3. Searching for themes

4. Reviewing themes

5. Defining and naming themes

6. Producing findings.

Codes emerged using the seven questions as a frame. Additional codes were then created, and they were categorised under the questions. This led to further refining of the codes. During this part of the analysis, different sections of the data needed to be differentiated and combined through an iterative and reflexive process using a matrix, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). The process of reading through the data, interpreting it while identifying and refining important concepts was key. This allowed for further reflection with a focus on the interrelated aspects of the participants involved. The provisional codes eventually helped to determine and generate themes. Codes relating to similar concepts were grouped together into significant themes. Tables 2-4 below provide an example of the

data-labelling which ties research question one directly to the data. In round two, some of the codes were deleted, amalgamated or renamed. This iterative process was undertaken for all seven research questions.

Round One

Table 2: What would you like to see children learning in primary school?

Code	Examples
Dispositions	▪ Cooperation, respect, honesty, trust, confidence, independence, resilience, adaptability, self-belief ▪ Love and positive attitude of learning
Life skills	▪ Emotional and social skills ▪ Self-care, mindfulness, anti-bullying, wellbeing, resilience, self-esteem, empathy
Ethics	▪ An ethical framework, not necessarily part of Religious Education ▪ A sense of ethics and openness; learn to be kind to others; listening; being inclusive; open to the opinions of others
Swimming	▪ A very important skill for children to learn ▪ It is a safety issue and should be taught from 3rd class
Healthy eating	▪ Need to learn about food ▪ More about healthy food, the effects of different types of food, what is nutritionally good for them
Computers / IT	▪ Digital literacy, internet safety, general IT skills, safety skills online
Aistear	▪ *Aistear* is working well with young children
Physical education	▪ More focus on PE and not just sport
Modern languages	▪ From junior infants / a young age ▪ Cultural aspects of language learning ▪ Modern language skills ▪ More emphasis on languages ▪ Mandarin is a language of the future ▪ Usefulness of experiencing a second language

Round Two

Table 3: What would you like to see children learning in primary school?

Code	Examples

Positive dispositions	▪ Attention to the development of children's dispositions
	   o Respect
	   o Honesty
	   o Trust
	   o Confidence
	   o Independence

	o Resilience o Adaptability
Modern languages	▪ From a young age ▪ Cultural aspects of language learning ▪ Modern language skill ▪ More emphasis on modern languages ▪ Mandarin is a language of the future
Ethics and moral values	▪ An ethical framework not necessarily part of Religious Education ▪ Inclusive education
Digital learning	▪ Digital literacy ▪ More focus on computers and basic IT ▪ Learning the language of technology (Code)

Table 4: Emerging themes for children's learning in primary school

▪ Positive dispositions and moral values ▪ Modern languages ▪ Ethics and inclusion ▪ Digital learning

Presentation of findings

The analysis was carried out on the field notes gathered during the focus groups. The main findings are presented under themes linked to the research questions. They are presented in no particular order.

What would parents like to see children learning in primary school?

Positive dispositions

Parents, across focus group sessions, indicated a strong preference for children to develop positive dispositions and moral values. There was clear convergence that children need plenty of opportunities to develop and enhance a range of positive dispositions which would benefit them both in and out of school. The specific dispositions that parents referenced were: respect, honesty, trust, confidence, independence, resilience and adaptability. They were of the view that *attention needs to be given to the development of children's dispositions especially resilience and adaptability in* a redeveloped curriculum so that children can thrive and reach their full potential.

Modern foreign languages

The possibility of including modern foreign languages in a redeveloped curriculum generated quite a lot of discussion. There was strong feeling in a number of meetings that from a young age, children should have the opportunity to learn a language other than English and Irish. Some parents felt that children would have a richer experience if they were exposed to *the cultural aspects of language learning* and had the opportunity to develop *foreign language skills.* There were clear suggestions that *more emphasis on foreign languages* would be welcomed. As one parent posited, *Mandarin is the language of the future.*

Ethics and moral values

There was some attention and focus given to the inclusion of ethics as part of children's learning. When it was mentioned parents spoke of having an ethical framework that would not *necessarily* [be]

part of Religious Education. There was discussion about the value of citizenship and societal values and how children should experience an inclusive school community.

Digital learning

There was plenty of feedback about the prominence and importance of digital learning for children. Parents were strongly of the view that technology is and will be an important part of children's lives now and in their futures. Many would like to see *more focus on computers and basic IT.* Part of the conversations about technology led to suggestions about a curriculum providing opportunities for children to *learn the language of technology (code).* There was also some concern that while digital technology needs to be embraced, care needs to be taken not to overemphasise it as *children will still need to be able to calculate and work out things independently.*

How would parents like to see children learning?

Active learning

Parents across the sessions strongly voiced their preference for children to have learning experiences that are practical while being *fun and enjoyable.* There were calls for children to have ample exposure to a range of learning materials and experiences both inside the classroom and outside in the local environment. It is hoped this would engage children more and enliven their learning experience. Parents highlighted the need for children to have opportunities to move around the classroom suggesting that currently there is *not enough physical movement during the day.*

Group learning and project work

The overall view expressed was that children benefit from group learning and interacting with their peers. There were frequent references to the importance of *collaboration* and *cooperation.* When discussing the merits of group learning, some parents spoke about *mixed ability groups and children working together.* The key message emerging was that *children need to learn through collaboration and social interactions.* Parents would also welcome opportunities for children to engage in more project work as *children love completing work in groups.* Parents posited positive views about *more project-based learning for upper primary.* The view was also expressed that project work *enables ownership and more self-directed learning* while facilitating *less focus on text-books.*

Enhanced use of outdoor / local environment

There were engaging discussions on the value of *learning outside of the traditional classroom.* Parents see a real educative value in children having regular opportunities to leave their classroom for more *outdoor learning, where possible.* In a minority of discussions where this idea arose, parents spoke also about the joy and importance of nature walks and learning through nature. There was positivity about *getting outside more to use the environment as a tool.* Parents see plenty of opportunities for broadening children's experience beyond the confines of the physical classroom.

Integration and thematic learning

Integration and thematic learning were mentioned in a number of meetings in terms of *core subjects being integrated more* and *cross subject learning.* Some parents felt that thematic learning would *allow teachers more freedom* and help to reduce curriculum overload. Interestingly, there was specific preference expressed, albeit from a minority of parents, for thematic learning rather than subject-based learning in the junior classes. One parent, in her description of thematic learning, spoke of it being more *meaningful.* When the concepts of integration and thematic learning arose in discussions, there were suggestions that children should be able to immerse themselves more in their learning rather than moving quickly from subject to subject. There was also a view that too many separate subjects are creating false divisions in learning.

Learning through play

The theme of playful learning and children learning through play featured prominently in responses from parents. They saw many advantages to learning through play. There were requests for more *playful learning experiences* and opportunities for *learning through play in the older classes.* There was a suggestion that play stops too early in primary school. There was a definite appetite among parents for play to underpin children's learning in the junior, middle and senior classes. Children's experiences of *Aistear* also came in for positive commentary.

What skills would parents like to see children develop?

Life skills, inter- and intra-personal skills

A range of opinions were expressed about the need for children to acquire important life skills that will enable them to thrive. The overall view was that social and emotional skills, wellbeing and preparation for the real world are critical for all children, including those with special educational needs. There were suggestions that the primary curriculum should therefore support the development of children's *self-care, self-esteem* and *self-belief.* There were plenty of references to the importance of coping skills and children needing flexibility in attitude. Communication skills were also considered very important with frequent requests for children to have more opportunities for debating and arguing, public speaking and interacting with others. There were also requests for children to learn practical skills such as knitting and sewing, cooking, typing and swimming.

Skills to support learning

Parents made frequent requests for the further inclusion of skills that they felt would support and enhance learning. The most frequent suggestions were critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills, problem-solving skills and information management skills. They were clear that the curriculum would need to be explicit about how and where a curriculum would support children in acquiring these higher-order skills. While the strong consensus about teaching these skills is worth noting, it is also worth mentioning that apart from naming the skills, parents provided little elaboration on their value.

Digital skills

The place, purpose, future and value of digital skills came up for discussion in a majority of groups. Parents commented favourably about children learning general IT skills in primary school. There was a clear sentiment that children growing up in a digital age need to embrace technology in a safe and productive way. Some parents suggested the future inclusion of coding with reference to their children's experience of *CoderDojo,* in a redeveloped curriculum. As part of children's experience with and exposure to digital technologies, it was felt that they need to be taught how to maintain a safe web presence and to be aware of the dangers of cyber-bullying. Parents' concern for their children's safety online was a common thread across discussions.

Are there particular subjects that are important or no longer as important for children in primary school?

English and Mathematics

Across the focus group sessions, the future place of English and Mathematics generated considerable discussion. There were strong views expressed about the importance of both subjects for children's education and future prospects in life. Parents were clear *that children need to be able to speak and read well* and that *reading and writing are still very important and should not be lessened.* When discussing mathematics, the view was that this area is *very important for children's futures* and it should *link to the real world.*

STEM Education and Science

Many parents held the view that children would benefit from an increased focus on STEM education and, in particular, science in the primary curriculum. Some references were made to engineering and opportunities for children to work with Lego. There was sentiment that this kind of playful learning should be fostered from an early age. There was also a suggestion that *more natural sciences should be taught* to children.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education (PE)

Parents spoke about the importance of SPHE as a subject in the primary curriculum. Indeed, there were calls for time allocated to SPHE to be increased. There were also calls for a greater focus on emotions, feelings and relationships within Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE): *RSE needs a huge focus on relationships.* They spoke too about health promotion, healthy eating and food nutrition. PE was referenced on a number of occasions across sessions. Comments emerged about a need for it to be looked at as something more than just sport. There was support for *more emphasis to be placed on it [PE]* and *more time needs to be allocated to it [PE}.*

Visual Arts and Music

In meetings where parents raised the importance of visual arts and music, they expressly called for them to be retained in the primary curriculum and perhaps play a more prominent role. Parents

explained that these subjects are *important confidence builders* for children while also being enjoyable. They noted that for some children this is the only curriculum area where they really experience joy and success in school. They suggested bringing arts across the curriculum as a means of learning in other subjects. Interestingly, there were very few references to drama as a subject already in the curriculum. The commentary very much focused on valuing visual arts and music.

Content across the curriculum

Parents struggled to identify areas or subjects that are no longer important, but there was some suggestion that there is scope to remove content from the curriculum across many subjects. It was suggested that much of the content is covered again at junior cycle and that the focus needs to be on the development of skills at primary level.

Gaeilge

It was acknowledged that the role of Irish in schools needs to be part of a national discussion about the role of Irish in society. Those questioning its role in a redeveloped curriculum or indeed the extent to which it should be included expressed the view that the language is declining and not widely spoken in the country. Although many acknowledged the value of second language learning they suggested that the time spent learning Irish could be better spent on a modern language. Some suggested that teachers who aren't fluent speakers are not well placed to inspire enthusiastic language learning. Others suggested that the focus should only be on oral language and that spelling, and writing should be dropped.

Religious Education

Analysis of findings regarding Religious Education showed a spectrum of views and perspectives both within and across focus group meetings. This was true across all school contexts. While Religious Education was discussed in a most meetings, there were also instances where it did not arise. There was sentiment from some parents expressing support for Religious Education being part of their child's school experience and part of the school's identity. Those questioning the place and role of Religious Education in primary school felt that the focus should be on values and ethics. That said, there was a commonly perceived distinction drawn between faith formation and religious education, with many parents agreeing that education about religion was helpful but that it shouldn't be limited

to the ethos of an individual school and that faith formation should be left to the home. The time spent preparing for Sacraments at the expense of other areas of learning was also raised. There was acknowledgement that it is difficult for children of different faiths and none to hear religion presented as a truth and that segregation can lead to exclusion. It was also suggested that it can be confusing for any child to move *between a belief system and scientific facts*. Much conversation centred around Ireland as a more pluralistic, less faith-centred society with recent referenda cited as examples. It was suggested that children should be given space to decide what they want to believe.

Other ideas from the consultation

Through responding to the questions, parents took the opportunity to talk about wider educational issues.

Increased autonomy for schools

There were calls for increased autonomy for schools locally regarding flexibility in choosing children's learning experiences e.g. more opportunities for physical movement, the allocation of time across the school day for these experiences and the allocation of time for breaks / recreation. However, caution was also expressed as some parents felt that there was a danger that, if schools had too much autonomy, they could *become specialist and elitist*. Autonomy with guidance and examples was preferable as all schools must be for all children. Parents also felt that schools, particularly small or single-sex schools, should be encouraged to collaborate more with other local schools to share resources and enable the teachers to meet with colleagues in other local schools.

Transitions

Parents expressed concern about children's transition into and out of primary school. It was felt that there is not enough continuity and cohesion across the preschool, primary and post-primary sectors in terms of what and how children learn. Some parents felt that it was important that there would be a meaningful link between the *primary curriculum and the overarching keys skills of Junior Cycle.* There was similar commentary about the transition from preschool to primary needing to reflect a curriculum that builds on children's prior experiences.

Homework

A significant thread of discussion concerned the role of homework. While some parents felt it to be a valuable part of learning, many felt that it had a negative impact on their children's quality of life. While many parents could see the value in reading, spellings and tables, *less focus on written work at home would be helpful.* Homework represented a particular issue for parents of children with specific educational needs. There were suggestions that if homework was more meaningful, it might be more helpful. It was also noted that homework is generally a very sedentary activity. It was remarked that schools could consider other forms of homework to encourage the development of life skills and movement.

Funding and resourcing

Some parents spoke about funding arrangements for schools and the level of financial contribution they currently make through fundraising and subscriptions. It was strongly stated that resources, facilities and buildings need to be provided to allow schools to focus on the business of teaching and learning. Parents posited that reducing the pupil teacher ratio would also contribute to a more positive school experience, *particularly in the infant classes.*

Assessment

Assessment was a focus with recommendations that it should be more varied and that children need to be aware of all types of assessment and appreciate their own skills and abilities. It was suggested that children are too aware of standardised tests. Some parents felt that assessment is benchmarked too rigidly in terms of expected learning and standards in different subjects for each class level and they wanted to see less of a focus *on standards / tests and more focus on continuous-, peer- and self-assessment.* Parents felt that they needed to be made more aware of how their child is progressing in different areas in school not just literacy and numeracy.

Role of parents in their children's primary education

Parents considered their own role in supporting their children and schools with a redeveloped curriculum. They felt that they should be encouraged to help in more practical ways examples included, *helping with reading or sports – to relieve some of the burden on teachers.* They also felt that

as the curriculum is developed for teachers, there should also be accompanying materials for parents, explaining the journey their child will travel.

Conclusion

While a number of key themes emerged in the discussions with parents, there was also some contradictory messaging. For example, parents calling for a focus on soft skills, while expressing a desire for continued focus on literacy and numeracy. Parents felt that while the curriculum was too crowded, they did not wish to lose any of the richness from their children's current learning experience. They wanted children to have more time to learn in a multidisciplinary way but also to see increased focus on health and wellbeing and digital literacy. Many parents were unfamiliar with the structure and content of Primary School Curriculum (1999) and were surprised by the number of subjects and the suggested accompanying time allocations.

There were a lot of references to the changing nature of society, the Irish economy and to parents' desire to recognise and protect childhood as a significant and unique time.

The importance of parental involvement and engagement is so well established that it stands as one of the most agreed-upon principles of good educational practice (Borgonovi and Montt, 2012; Desforges and Aboucaar, 2003). The available information on parental involvement in curriculum development nationally and internationally is somewhat limited, but what literature does exist indicates that parents tend to feel under-informed with regards to content and systems of curriculum. Opportunities to engage with parents about curriculum are available at a national level, through the NCCA's partnership model of curriculum development, and at a local level through the involvement of parents with various aspects of both *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009), the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) and the *Primary Language Curriculum*, *Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* (NCCA, 2015).

The NCCA wishes to thank the parents for attending the focus group sessions, and for sharing their time and perspectives so generously. The draft Primary Curriculum Framework will be published later this year and will form the basis for extensive consultation in 2020. This will provide a further opportunity for parents to share their thoughts on a redeveloped primary curriculum.

References

Bell, J. (2005). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers in education, health and social science.* Fourth Edition. Maiden-Head: McGraw-Hill Education

Borgonovi, F. and G. Montt (2012). Parental Involvement in Selected PISA Countries and Economies, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 73. Paris, France: OECD Publishing. Accessed at http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k990rk0jsjj-en

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', Qualitative Research in Psychology, Vol. 3, pp 77 – 101.

Bulmer, M. (2008). 'The ethics of social research'. In N. Gilbert (ed.) *Researching Social Life.* Third edition. London: Sage, pp 45 – 47.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education.* Sixth edition. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Department of Education and Science (1999). *The Primary School Curriculum*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Miles, M. and Huberman, A. M. (1994) (Second Edition) *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook.* London: Sage

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2009). *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Dublin*: NCCA.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2015*). Primary Language Curriculum - Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*. Dublin: NCCA.

Ryan, A. B. (2006). 'Methodology: Analysing qualitative data and writing up your findings'. In: M. Antonesa, H. Fallon, A. B. Ryan, A Ryan, T. Walsh and L. Borys (eds.) *Researching and writing your thesis: A guide for post-graduate students,* pp 70 – 89. NUI, Maynooth: Maynooth Adult and Community Education.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Initial communication with schools

Letter for Principal

Dear principal,

This October, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in reviewing and redeveloping the Primary School Curriculum would like to meet and speak directly with parents from schools involved in the Schools Forum. It is essential that as well as teachers, we hear parents' views and opinions about a future primary curriculum.

With the school's permission, NCCA would like to facilitate a Parents' Focus Group meeting in your school. It would be important for all parents to be invited to attend with the possible inclusion of parents that do not yet have children in school but will in the next couple of years. This is to ensure a broad range of parental voices are included in the feedback. Parents would be notified of the meeting in the usual manner which each school uses and the meeting would be facilitated by the NCCA. The meeting should take no longer than an hour. All the information gathered will be anonymous and no individual parent or school would be identifiable.

A suitable date and time for the meeting can be decided in consultation with the chairperson of the parents' association, yourself and the NCCA. The following questions will be used to guide the discussion.

1. What would you like to see children learning in school?

a. What skills would you like children to develop which would benefit them now and into the future?

2. How would you like to see children learning? (How do you think children learn best?)

3. What skills would you like children to develop which would be of benefit to them now and into the future?

4. Are there particular curriculum areas / subjects that are especially important for children in the primary school years?

5. Are there particular curriculum areas / subjects that are no longer as important for children as they may have been?

6. Is there anything that you would like to see introduced into the curriculum that is not already included?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to say about what children learn in school?

The main themes emerging from the feedback will be helpful in shaping the work on the curriculum. It will also be presented at the NCCA Curriculum Seminar on November 29th in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin 8.

It would be most helpful if you would discuss the possibility of facilitating this meeting with the chairperson of the Parents' Association and if you could provide them with a copy of the attached letter. If your school is able to accommodate this request, please email me by Friday 21st September

with suggested meeting dates and times. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to clarify anything.

With kind regards,

…………

Education Officer

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Letter for Chairperson of Parents' Association

Dear Chairperson,

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. As part of this work, the Council is currently working with network of schools to review and redevelop the primary school curriculum. Your child's school is part of this network. This participation provides an important opportunity for the local school community to contribute to what it thinks a new primary curriculum should do for children and their families in the years ahead.

This October the NCCA is hoping meet with parents of current and future children in your school to learn about their views and opinions on what they would like children to learn about and experience in primary school. If your school agrees to this request, the informal meeting with parents will be facilitated by NCCA and will take no longer than one hour. There will be a written record of the meeting so that an accurate account of people's contributions is taken. The information gathered will be anonymous and no individual parent or school would be identifiable. A suitable date and time for the meeting can be decided in consultation with the school principal, yourself and the NCCA.

The following questions will be used to guide the discussion.

1. What would you like to see children learning in school?

a. What skills would you like children to develop which would benefit them now and into the future?

2. How would you like to see children learning? (How do you think children learn best?)

3. What skills would you like children to develop which would be of benefit to them now and into the future?

4. Are there particular curriculum areas / subjects that are especially important for children in the primary school years?

5. Are there particular curriculum areas / subjects that are no longer as important for children as they may have been?

6. Is there anything that you would like to see introduced into the curriculum that is not already included?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to say about what children learn in school?

It may be helpful for parents if the questions are circulated to them in advance, so they have time to give a considered response. If the school can accommodate the NCCA in this request, I look forward to collaborating and meeting with you in the future.

With kind regards,

………………………..

Education Officer, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Appendix 2: Consent form for parent focus groups

Hearing your views on *what* and *how* children learn in primary school

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. As part of this, the NCCA is working with schools to review the primary curriculum. This is an opportunity for teachers, parents/guardians, children and the local community to have their say about teaching and learning in primary schools into the future.

In partnership with your child's school, the NCCA is organising a meeting on _____ at _____pm. The meeting will take place in _____ and will give you, as a parent, an opportunity to share your thoughts on the primary curriculum. The questions below will be used to guide the discussion and key points will be recorded in notes.

1. What would you like to see children learning in primary school?

2. How would you like to see children learning? How do you think children learn best?

3. What skills would you like children to develop which would be of benefit to them now and into the future?

4. Are there particular subjects / curriculum areas that are especially important for children in the primary school years?

5. Are there particular subjects / curriculum areas that are no longer as important for children as they may have been?

6. Is there anything that you would like to see introduced into the curriculum that is not already included?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to say about what and how children learn in primary school?

When writing notes on the discussion, no comment or opinion will be attributed to an individual. Discussion points recorded at the meeting will be used by the NCCA in its curriculum work. You are free to stop taking part in the meeting at any time and/or to ask for a question to be explained if you are unsure what it means.

The NCCA Team looks forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

_____ Education Officer, NCCA

Consent for Participation: Hearing your views on *what* and *how* children learn in primary school

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is working with schools to review the primary curriculum. As part of this, the NCCA is meeting with parents/guardians to hear their views about *what* and *how* children should learn in primary school into the future. Notes will be taken during the discussions and no comment or opinion will be attributed to an individual.

You are invited to take part in a discussion with the NCCA.

………

After reading the attached letter, please tick the relevant boxes below.

I am happy to participate in the discussion during which key points will be recorded in notes for use by the NCCA in its curriculum development work.	☐ Yes, I am happy to participate. ☐ No, I am not happy to participate.
I understand the purpose of this meeting.	☐ Yes, I understand the purpose of this meeting ☐ No, I do not understand the purpose of this meeting.
I give consent for my photograph to be taken during the meeting and used by the NCCA on social media.	☐ Yes, I give consent. ☐ No, I do not give consent.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for taking part in this important work.

Appendix 3: Parent focus group venues

Court N.S. Monamolinn, Gorey, Wexford

Creeslough National School, Donegal

Greystones CNS, Greystones, Wicklow

Heath National School, Greatheath, Portlaoise, Co. Laois

Inch National School, Inch, Co Clare

Naas Community National School, Naas Co Kildare

Newtown Junior School, Waterford

Rathfarnam Parish National School, Rathfarnam, Dublin

Rochestown Educate Together National School, Rochestown, Cork

Scoil Bhríde JNS, Donaghmede, Dublin

Scoil Bhríde, Crosshaven, Cork

Scoil Fhursa, Galway

Scoil Mhuire agus Eoin, Mayfield, Cork

Scoil Mhuire Senior, Blakestown, Dublin

Scoil Ursula Naofa, Waterford

St Mary's NS, Athlone, Westmeath

St Marys of the Isle National School, Cork City

St Michael's Special School, Roscommon

St Etchen's NS, Kinnegad, Westmeath

St Joseph's Primary School, Tipperary Town

St Comán's Wood Primary School, Roscommon