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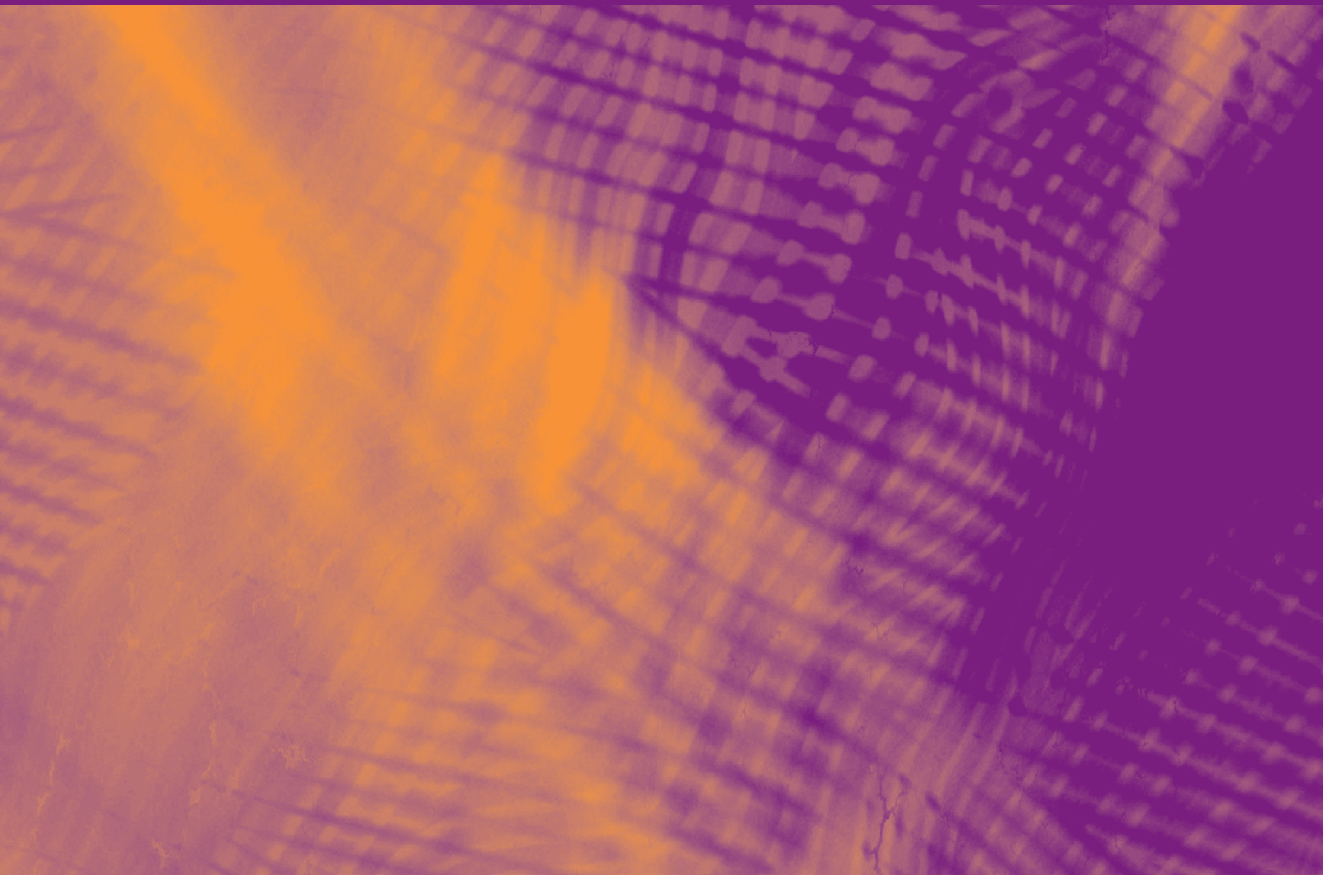
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta

Research Report No.7

Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2

Final report with recommendations



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Glossary of terms

Term	Explanation in the Primary School Curriculum	First reference in this report
Audio lingual method	…the playing of a recorded interview or the teacher vocalising an interview to develop the listening and speaking skills of the child. (Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhuinteoirí, p. 66)	Section 4, p.171
Audio visual method	…pictures, film strips and statues could be used to expand on the audio lingual method. (Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhuinteoirí, p. 66)	Section 4, p.171
Cultural awareness	…an awareness of the Irish language, traditional Irish games, dance, music and drama. The heritage and culture of the country will also be taken into account when developing cultural awareness. (Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhuinteoirí, p. 13)	Section 4, p.170
Differentiation	Differentiation is not explained in the Primary School Curriculum. It is, however, defined as follows in the SEN guidelines published in 2007: …the process of varying content, activities, teaching, learning, methods and resources to take into account the range of interests, needs and experience of individual children. (Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities, Introduction, p. 8)	Section 3, p.66
Direct method	…an effective method to initiate communication between the teacher and the children. (Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhuinteoirí, p. 64)	Section 4, p.171
Grapho/phonic cues	…the information provided in sounds and in combinations of sounds represented by letters and groups of letters that helps to predict words. (English Curriculum, p. 70)	Section 4, p.22
Integration	…making connections between learning in different subjects. (Introduction, Primary School Curriculum, p.16)	Section 3, p.25
Investigations	…activities where ideas, predictions or hypotheses are tested and conclusions are drawn in response to a question or problem. (Science, Teacher Guidelines, p. 159)	Section 1, p.31
Language awareness	…directing the child's attention to the structures and patterns of language within Gaeilge and the differences and similarities between Gaeilge, English and other languages. (Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhuinteoirí, p. 12)	Section 4, p.169
Language function	…greetings, leave-takings, asking and answering questions…(Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhuinteoirí, p. 188)	Section 4, p.30
Organisational settings	These refer to the different ways of organising children for teaching and learning including whole class teaching, group work, pair work and individual work. No explicit definition is provided in the curriculum.	Section 3, p.19
Phrase method	…this method advises the teaching of useful phrases or sayings…(Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhuinteoirí, p. 67)	Section 4, p.171
Scanning	…reading quickly in order to establish the organisation and principal features of a text by letters and groups of letters that helps to predict words. (English Curriculum, p. 70)	Section 4, p.157
Series method	…an expansion of the direct method. A series of sentences are placed together to form a story this is depicted through pictures or actions. (Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhuinteoirí, p. 64)	Section 4, p.171
Syntactical cues	…the information contained in grammar and language use that facilitates the interpretation of text by letters and groups of letters that helps to predict words. (English Curriculum, p. 71)	Section 4, p.154
Total Physical Response method (TPR)	…this method is limited to physical actions. A link is made in the child's mind between the action and the word or phrase that relates to it. (Gaeilge, Treoirlínte do Mhuinteoirí, p. 65)	Section 4, p.171

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) initiated a second phase of review of the curriculum in primary schools in September 2006. The review focused on the experiences of principals, teachers, parents and children with *Curaclam na Gaeilge*, the *Science Curriculum*, and the *Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum*. Findings in this report are based on data from 1,369 completed teacher questionnaires (Teacher Template Study) and interviews with children, parents, teachers and principals in eight schools (School Case Study), gathered from September 2006 to May 2007. Key findings are provided in this Executive Summary. More detailed findings and conclusions are presented in Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5 of this report.

Curriculum impact, successes, challenges, priorities

Impact on children's learning

Table i. Impact of the curriculum on children's learning – summary

Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
Increased use of oral language	Increased knowledge and understanding about the world	Awareness of others
Interest and enjoyment	Increased sense of curiosity and interest	Personal development
Sense of pride and love	Development of skills	The environment

- Across the three subjects, teachers reported that the curriculum had a *positive* impact on children's learning.

- In Gaeilge, children's increased use of oral language both formally during Gaeilge lessons and informally throughout the school day, their obvious enjoyment of and engagement in ranganna Gaeilge, and their growing sense of pride in and love for, their language, culture, heritage and even community (in the case of students in Gaeltacht areas) were identified by teachers as the key influences of the curriculum on children's learning.

- In Science, children's interest in and enjoyment of the subject, their development of the skills of working scientifically, and their increased awareness and understanding of the world around them were identified by teachers as the key influences of the curriculum on children's learning.

- In SPHE, children's growing awareness of (the needs and opinions of) others and their ability to relate to others, their growth in personal development—particularly their self-awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect—and their increased awareness of threats to the environment, and the ways in which they could play a role in protecting the natural world were identified by teachers as the key influences of the curriculum on children's learning.

Curriculum successes

Table ii. Curriculum successes – summary

Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
Enjoyment	Engagement	Self-expression
Oral language skills	Science skills	Communication
	Knowledge and understanding	Teaching methods

- The curriculum successes identified by teachers reflect the impact of the curriculum on children's learning identified by teachers and reported above.

- In Gaeilge, children's enjoyment of the subject—particularly the use of active learning methods—and their use of oral language as part of the communicative approach to learning Gaeilge were identified by teachers as key successes.

- In Science, children's interest in and enjoyment of the subject, their development of the skills of working scientifically, and their increased awareness and understanding of the world around them were identified by teachers as key successes.

- In SPHE, an increase in children's self-esteem and self-confidence and their acceptance of and ability to communicate effectively with others were identified as key successes. Teachers also highlighted their use of different teaching methods, such as circle time, as a key success.

Curriculum challenges

Table iii. Curriculum challenges – summary

Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
Perception	Resources	Sensitivity of content
Time*	Time	Time*
Resources	Class size	Resources

** Time challenge includes perceived curriculum overload and issues of class size/children's needs*

- Across the three subjects, teachers identified time as one of the greatest challenges of curriculum implementation. Teachers described two key dimensions of the time issue. One focused on perceived curriculum overload (insufficient time to fully implement all curriculum subjects), while another focused on class size/children's needs (insufficient time to meet the needs of all learners). Similarly, lack of time related to curriculum overload and class size was identified as a key challenge to curriculum implementation in English, Mathematics and Visual Arts in the *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (NCCA, 2005).

- Across the three subjects, resources were also identified as one of the greatest challenges of curriculum implementation. In Gaeilge, respondents noted a lack of age-appropriate, modern and interesting resources, including teaching resources and real books. In Science, respondents noted a lack of resources, including teacher resource materials such as teacher manuals. Similarly, in SPHE respondents noted a lack of resources and the difficulty of locating and assembling them.

- In Gaeilge, the negative perceptions about the language that children can pick up from parents, peers and the community were also identified as a key challenge to curriculum implementation.

- In Science, the difficulty of undertaking hands-on, practical work with large class groups was also identified as a key challenge to curriculum implementation.

- In SPHE, the sensitivity of the content of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and teachers' own discomfort with teaching this content to young children was identified as a key challenge to curriculum implementation.

Curriculum priorities

Table iv. Curriculum priorities – summary

Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
Oral language skills	Resources	Curriculum content
Writing and grammar skills	Active learning	Resources
Resources	Curriculum content	Teaching methods

- In Gaeilge, respondents identified the need to prioritise the use of oral language in both formal lesson settings and informally in general classroom talk. They also prioritised the development of children's writing and grammar skills, by offering children increased opportunities to write in a number of different genres along with a structured programme of grammar instruction. Finally, respondents noted that they required more information on age-appropriate and attractive resources to support the teaching of Gaeilge.

- In Science, respondents noted that they required more resources—including physical, structural/organisational, financial and human resources—in order to teach the subject effectively. Respondents also prioritised involving children in a hands-on

practical role during Science lessons, reflecting the emphasis on activity learning in the Science Curriculum. Finally, teachers prioritised supporting children's conceptual and procedural understanding of Science across all four strands of the Curriculum.

- In SPHE, respondents prioritised particular curriculum content, including promoting tolerance and respect for peers and other cultures, and RSE. The RSE issue was considered of particular importance in the senior classes for children dealing with the problems of adjusting to adolescence. Respondents also prioritised the need to develop suitable resources, especially in Gaeilge, for SPHE. Finally, teachers prioritised greater use of circle time in SPHE.

Teaching approaches and methodologies

Organisational settings

- Across the three subjects, whole class teaching was the most frequently used organisational setting reported, followed by group work, pair work and individual work. Gaeilge was the subject in which teachers reported most frequent use of a variety of the four organisational settings.

Use of teaching resources and ICT

- Across the three subjects, teachers reported a reliance on text-books. For Gaeilge and SPHE, teachers' resource books/manuals were considered more helpful for planning teaching than either the curriculum or the teacher guidelines for those subjects. In each subject 50% or more of respondents reported using textbooks *frequently.* In Gaeilge 87% of respondents reported using textbooks *frequently*.

- It is of note that in one case study school teachers reported using textbooks in Mathematics and Gaeilge only. In this school teachers rationalised their decision not to use textbooks in other subjects by noting the perceived overload that textbooks can generate in contrast to the potential for developing *real learning* using a range of *good resources*.

- Across the three subjects, lack of suitable resources was identified as an issue. In Gaeilge, teachers reported the need for attractive and age-appropriate classroom materials. In the case of Irish-medium schools, respondents noted the lack of resources 'trí Gaeilge' for all subjects. In Science, respondents noted the need to maintain a large stock of equipment and materials. In SPHE, respondents noted, in particular, the need for support materials and resources to support the teaching of sensitive material.

- Limited use of ICT was reported for all three subjects. For example, in Gaeilge and SPHE over three quarters of respondents reported that they seldom or never used ICT to support teaching and learning, compared with over half in Science.

Higher-order thinking

- Across subjects, teachers reported limited use of opportunities to develop children's higher-order thinking skills. Findings for Science and SPHE showed that there is a need for greater development of children's higher-order thinking skills such as summarising, analysing, inferring and deducing. Data for Science, concerning the frequency with which teachers provided opportunities for children to *work scientifically* and to *design and make*, indicated that these skills are not being developed to their full potential. In SPHE, 40% of respondents reported that they *seldom* or *never* provided children with opportunities to become discerning about the messages they receive from the media.

Assessment

- Across the three subjects, teacher questioning remains the most *frequently* used informal assessment strategy. This mirrors the findings of the *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (2005).

- In Gaeilge, respondents noted that assessment is restricted to informal methods because of a lack of formal assessment tools such as standardised tests. Respondents reported that assessment of the oral component of Gaeilge is particularly challenging, especially when attempting to assess younger children whose receptive language skills are more advanced than their expressive language skills.

- In Science, respondents noted that the collaborative nature of children's learning posed a challenge to the assessment process. As with the other subjects, teacher questioning and teacher observation continue to be the most dominant assessment methods used in Science.

- In SPHE, findings highlight the complex nature of classroom assessment in the affective domain, where much of the learning is internalised and of a long-term nature. The data suggests that teachers are ambivalent about assessing SPHE and would be unhappy with formal assessment of subject.

Curriculum strands and strand units

Gaeilge

- Curaclam na Gaeilge acknowledges that teachers should take account of frequent mistakes but should not correct these overtly during communicative activities. No specific examples of how this might happen in practice are given in Curaclam na Gaeilge and it appears that teachers may be unsure of how to direct

children's attention to form,[1] while maintaining the importance of meaning through the communicative use of Gaeilge.

- One of the general objectives of Curaclam na Gaeilge is that the child would be enabled to learn various reading skills through a pre-reading programme. Respondents reported that the strategies they made the least use of in this area were specific teaching of the alphabet and letter sounds and the use of grapho-phonic cues.

- The reported under-use of the writing process in Gaeilge mirrors findings relating to writing in English from *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (NCCA, 2005). Analysis of findings with regard to writing in Gaeilge indicates that teachers in both Irish- and English-medium schools may still find this a challenging area.

Science

- Within skills development, respondents recorded the frequency with which children were provided with opportunities to develop the seven skills listed in the Science Curriculum that help promote higher-order thinking skills. Teachers recorded that children were most frequently provided with opportunities to develop such skills as questioning, observing and predicting. It is of note that teachers reported that children were provided with fewer opportunities to develop the skills of investigating and experimenting, estimating and measuring, and analysing.

- Respondents indicated that visits to habitats outside of the immediate school environs posed some challenges. These included financial limitations, restricted access because of a school's urban location, the suitability of sites, and challenges of obtaining permission from land-owners.

1 Form refers to grammatically correct use of language.

SPHE

- Teaching and learning about sexuality has historically been the focus of considerable controversy. However, almost three-quarters of respondents to SPHE, Question 3 recorded providing opportunities, *frequently* or *sometimes*, for the children in their classes to come to understand their sexuality and the processes of growth, development and reproduction.

- The SPHE Curriculum recommends that SPHE be taught in three dimensions: in the context of a positive school climate and atmosphere, through discrete time, and through an integrated approach across a range of subjects. It appears that this is what is happening in schools. Given the content of the SPHE Curriculum, it is not surprising that teachers find opportunities for integrating concepts and ideas and skills across the subjects of the curriculum.

SECTION 1:

CURRICULUM REVIEW

Curriculum review process

It is now almost ten years since the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) was developed by the NCCA through widespread engagement with the partners in education. Since then, a number of significant changes have occurred in primary schools including the integration of pupils with special educational needs and the arrival in many schools of children whose first language is neither English nor Irish. There have also been unprecedented social and cultural changes in Ireland. These have resulted in remarkably different lives for all children. The NCCA's Strategic Plan 2006-2008 notes that:

> *The challenge for education in these contexts is to contribute in significant ways to ensuring the personal well-being of children and young people, to ensuring that they are robust enough to handle the many external challenges they face and make good choices, and to ensuring that they are capable of making decisions and judgements autonomously and with confidence* (p. 17).

Council's Strategic Plan notes that while the care and professionalism of teachers are pivotal to meeting this challenge, the demands placed on principals and teachers by the changing environment outside schools, and by increasing legislative requirements placed on schools, cannot be underestimated.

The purpose of the Primary Curriculum Review is to ensure that the curriculum in primary schools remains responsive to the experiences and needs of principals, teachers, parents and children. The Education Act (1998) confers responsibility on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), *to review the curriculum, or any part of the curriculum, for schools and the syllabuses taught and to advise the Minister* (Section 41, Sub-section 2). Curriculum review is vital to system improvement; it involves

gathering, analysing and reporting information about how the curriculum is experienced in order to improve it.

The curriculum is organised in six curriculum areas comprising eleven subjects. Key aims, principles and features of the curriculum are explained in the *Introduction*. Curriculum documents (including curriculum objectives and strands/strand units) and teacher guidelines (including advice on planning, teaching and assessment) are provided for each subject. Added to the *Introduction*, these comprise 23 books in all. In its totality, the curriculum aims 'to enable children to meet, with self-confidence and assurance, the demands of life, both now and in the future' *(Introduction,* p.6).

Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1

During the 2003/2004 school year, the NCCA initiated the *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1*. It was designed to find out to what extent and with what effect the curriculum had enabled teachers to achieve this aim for all students. It focused on English, Visual Arts and Mathematics, the first three curriculum subjects for which in-service was provided to teachers by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP). The review gathered quantitative and qualitative data using a teacher questionnaire (Teacher Template Study) and a series of school-based interviews with principals, teachers, parents and children (School Case Study).

Four key findings were identified in the report on the *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (2005). These concerned the structure of the English curriculum, assessment in the curriculum, information for parents, and methods of teaching with the curriculum. The review findings were published in May 2005 (See Appendix C for a summary of findings). Since then, they have had a significant impact on the development of Council's Strategic Plan 2006-2008 and Council's Plan of Work for each year.

In September 2005, the NCCA published *Additional support material: Structure of the English Curriculum* (2005) in response to difficulties reported by teachers when using the strands to plan their lessons in English. This document provides an *alternative structure for the English Curriculum* (using oral language, reading and writing). It was developed in direct response to teachers' requests for additional resources to support their planning using either the strands or the strand units. Each primary school teacher received a copy of the additional support material.

In March 2006, the NCCA launched a *DVD for parents* on *The What, Why and How of children's learning in primary school* (2006) in response to parents' requests for more information about the curriculum in primary schools. The DVD was published in five languages (English, Gaeilge, French, Lithuanian and Polish). It was distributed to primary schools in April 2006 for dissemination to all parents of primary school children during the 2006/2007 school year. Since September 2007, the DVD content has been available as broadband video on the NCCA website.

In December 2006, the NCCA awarded a tender to develop ACTION (Assessment, Curriculum and Teaching Innovation on the Net) to *show* rather than *tell* what teaching and learning with the curriculum looks like across curriculum areas/subjects and class contexts. This website is being developed to respond to teachers' requests for greater advice on *methods of teaching* with the curriculum in primary schools. The first phase of work on this website will be launched in September 2008.

The NCCA's guidelines for schools on *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum* were launched in November 2007. These guidelines were designed to respond to teachers' requests for much more detailed advice on how *assessment* can be used to support teaching

and learning in primary schools. The NCCA also worked with primary schools during the 2006/2007 school year to develop Report Card Templates (RCTs) in response to teachers' requests for information on recording and reporting children's learning with the curriculum.

In addition, the NCCA has used findings from the *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (2005) to feed into current work across projects, as relevant. For example, findings concerning teachers' and children's experiences with the infant curriculum have informed the development of the *Framework for Early Learning* (0-6) and the interface between the Framework and the *Primary School Curriculum* (Department of Education and Science (DES),1999).

Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2

This second phase of Primary Curriculum Review (during the 2006/2007 school year) was designed to gather information about teachers' experiences with the curriculum. Findings from this review compliment other reports concerning the impact of the curriculum on teaching and learning in primary schools, including the National Assessment of English Reading (NAER) and National Assessment of Mathematics Achievement (NAMA) by the Educational Research Centre (ERC), as well as the Whole School Evaluations (WSEs) and published reports on curriculum implementation evaluation by the Inspectorate of the DES.

Three subjects, Gaeilge, Science and Social, Personal and Health Education, (SPHE), provided the vehicle for the second phase of review. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered via school-based interviews with principals, teachers, parents and children (School Case Study) and a teacher questionnaire (Teacher Template Study).

Inservice and curriculum implementation

Based on the schedule for rolling implementation of the curriculum in classrooms, the NCCA identified Gaeilge, Science and SPHE as the three subjects for review in phase 2. Table 1 shows the years in which the PCSP provided teacher in-service in these three subjects and the year in which 'formal implementation' of the subjects in schools was scheduled to commence.

Table 1.1. Inservice and implementation schedule for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE

<table>
<tr><th>School year</th><th>Inservice
Irish-medium schools</th><th>Inservice
English-medium schools</th><th>Formal
implementation</th></tr>
<tr><td>1999/2000</td><td>Gaeilge
Seminar-2 days
School planning-1 day</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">2000/2001</td><td>Gaeilge
School planning-1 day</td><td>Gaeilge
Seminar-1 day</td><td rowspan="2">Gaeilge in Irish medium schools</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Science project for some schools
Seminars and school visits</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">2001/2002</td><td></td><td>Gaeilge
Seminar-1 day
School planning-1 day</td><td rowspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">SPHE
Seminar-1 day</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Science project for some schools
Seminars and school visits</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">2002/2003</td><td></td><td>Gaeilge
Seminar-1 day
School planning-1 day</td><td>Gaeilge in English-medium schools</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">SPHE
Seminar-1 day</td><td rowspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Science
Seminar-2 days
School planning-1 day</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">2003/2004</td><td colspan="2"></td><td>SPHE</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>Science</td></tr>
</table>

As Table 1 shows, teachers (with the exception of the newly-qualified who have begun their teaching career during this time) had a minimum of four years to teach Curaclam na Gaeilge and three years to implement the curriculum in Science and SPHE before the second phase of the Primary Curriculum Review took place. An overview of these three subjects is provided below.

Curaclam na Gaeilge

The teaching and learning content of Curaclam na Gaeilge is organised under four strands – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Although the four strands are separated from each other in the curriculum, they are integrated as much as possible in the Gaeilge lesson. The strands are subdivided in to the strand units- Developing interest, Understanding language and Using language.

The curriculum is based on a communicative approach. The main aims of this approach are to enable the child to use the language to meet communicative objectives and to allow him/her the opportunities to use the Gaeilge (s)he has learned on a regular basis. Categories of language functions are part of each strand of the curriculum. The categories of language function referred to in Curaclam na Gaeilge are:

- communicate with others
- give and seek information
- express and seek an opinion
- convince another person of something
- structure a conversation
- seek clarification in a conversation.

The review of Gaeilge is timely in tapping into teachers' experiences in implementing Curaclam na Gaeilge in all types of schools, including Gaelscoileanna and scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht. This review will complement Council's current work on the review of languages, including Gaeilge, currently underway in the post-primary curriculum.

Science Curriculum

The Science Curriculum is for all children from junior infants to sixth class. Building on environmental studies in *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971), the Science Curriculum supports children in learning about the physical and biological aspects of the world. It does this by developing children's skills in two areas: working scientifically and designing and making. The Science Curriculum includes four strands – Living things, Energy and forces, Materials, and Environmental awareness and care. Each strand is subdivided into strand units which focus on particular concepts. Table 1.2 presents the strand units from infants to 2nd class and from 3rd to 6th class. Presenting the units in this way illustrates the development in children's learning as they focus on themselves and their own environment in their early years in primary school, and progress to looking at life, and particularly human life in more detail, and exploring others' environments from 3rd class onwards.

The Science Curriculum emphasises the importance of children learning through practical investigations. The curriculum also recommends that children's ideas should provide the starting point for Science activities, and that their learning in Science should be linked to everyday situations.

Table 1.2. Strand units in the Science Curriculum

Strand	Infants – 2nd class	3rd – 6th class
Living things	• Myself • Plants and animals	• Human life • Plants and animals
Energy and forces	• Light • Sound • Heat • Magnetism and electricity • Forces	• Light • Sound • Heat • Magnetism and electricity • Forces
Materials	• Properties and characteristics of materials • Materials and change	• Properties and characteristics of materials • Materials and change
Environmental awareness and care	• Caring for myself and my locality	• Environmental awareness • Science and the environment • Caring for the environment

In light of its relatively recent introduction as a subject, the NCCA is keen to find out about principals', teachers', children's and parents' experiences with the Science Curriculum. To gain a fuller picture of children's experiences with the Science Curriculum the NCCA has commissioned researchers from St. Patrick's College, Dublin and Dublin City University to answer the question: *What is Science like for children in primary school?* The research uses a range of methods including classroom observation in order to find out what children learn in Science, where they learn Science, how they learn in Science, and with whom.[1]

A second part of this research asks, *How does children's learning in Science at primary level impact on their learning of Science in first year at post-primary?* This is particularly timely. Data gathering takes place following five years of implementation of the Science Curriculum in primary schools. Findings from this second component of research will help the NCCA support the transition of students from primary

1 Following its completion in summer 2008, this commissioned research will also be published as an NCCA research report.

to post-primary schools. It will provide important data on curriculum continuity and progression in learning.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum

Like Science, SPHE is relatively new to the curriculum at primary level, although education programmes such as *Walk Tall* and *Stay Safe* informed teachers' work in SPHE before the development of the SPHE Curriculum. SPHE focuses on developing children's values, attitudes, skills and understandings about themselves, other people and the society in which they live. Table 1.3 presents the strands and strand units from infants to 2nd class and from 3rd to 6th class.

Table 1.3. Strand units in the SPHE Curriculum

Strand	Infants – 2nd class	3rd – 6th class
Myself	• Self-identity • Taking care of my body • Growing and changing • Safety and protection	• Self-identity • Taking care of my body • Growing and changing • Safety and protection • Making decisions
Myself and others	• Myself and others • My friends and other people • Relating to others	• Myself and others • My friends and other people • Relating to others
Myself and the wider world	• Developing citizenship • Media education	• Developing citizenship • Media education

The curriculum explains that SPHE may be taught in three different contexts: within a positive school climate and atmosphere, through discrete time, and through an integrated approach across a range of subject areas. The curriculum also recommends that the teacher would choose some content from each of the three strands in any one year.

Curriculum review is underpinned by research design. The following section gives an overview of research design and data gathering for the *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2*.

Research design

Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered for this second phase of review using a teacher questionnaire (the Teacher Template Study) and a series of school-based interview schedules (the School Case Study). This section briefly describes methods for gathering and analysing data for each study.

Teacher Template Study

The teacher questionnaire (*Review and Reflection Template for Teachers,* Appendix A) was developed in consultation with both the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) and School Development and Planning Support (SDPS). Before being finalised, it was piloted with teachers in eight schools of varying types and locations. The questionnaire was then sent to teachers in all primary schools to support them in reflecting on their experiences of the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE in their classrooms. It was presented in three sections, each corresponding to one of the three subjects. An introductory section elicited relevant background information from teachers such as numbers of years teaching experience and the class(es) they were teaching. Response formats for each subject included check boxes (single and multiple tick items), rating and frequency scales ,and open-ended fields (narrative responses).

The structure of the *Gaeilge, Science and SPHE sections* of the *Review and Reflection Template for Teachers* was comparable. Questions were categorised under the headings: strands and strand units, approaches and methodologies, and assessment. There was also a general category that included questions about teachers' successes, challenges and priorities with the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE, as well as a question exploring their partnerships with parents in supporting children's progress with each subject and a question looking at the impact of the curriculum for each subject on children's learning. Within the Gaeilge section of the questionnaire

there were questions for all respondents, while some questions were specific to teachers in Irish-medium or English-medium schools.

Data gathering

A national stratified random sample of 200 schools (150 English-medium schools and 50 Irish-medium schools) was identified by the Education Research Centre (ERC) for participation in the Teacher Template Study which commenced in November 2006. This national stratified random sample of primary schools was selected on the basis of school size, urban/rural location, disadvantaged status, and gender mix. Schools which had taken part in Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1, or were currently working with the NCCA on other projects, were excluded from the sample. Separate samples were drawn for English-medium and Irish-medium schools, the latter being over-sampled in order to provide sufficient numbers for analysis.

The identified schools were invited to participate in the study. Initial phone contact was made with all 200 school principals and this was followed by a formal written request that teachers in the school complete and return the template. Where it proved difficult to make initial contact or where a principal indicated that the school did not wish to participate, a substitute school of a similar size, location, status and gender mix was contacted. In all, nine English-medium and two Irish-medium schools from the original samples were replaced by comparable schools from a supplementary list which had already been compiled. Receipt of completed and returned templates was logged and acknowledged in writing to the school. Where necessary, schools were reminded by letter to return templates.

By 9 March, 2007 1,369 templates had been returned and were included for analysis. Among the selected schools, 138 returned at least one completed questionnaire, giving an overall school response

rate of 69%. There was some variation between English-medium and Irish-medium schools, with school response rates of 73% and 58% respectively. Some 50% of all teachers in the 200 selected schools returned a completed questionnaire, a reasonable response rate for a postal survey. There was some variation between the sectors, with a response rate of 52% for teachers in English-medium schools and 44% for teachers in Irish-medium schools.

Data analysis

Analysis of data from the Teacher Template Study began in March 2007. Data were entered in www.surveymonkey.com (a commercially available survey design and analysis package) and imported into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). SPSS was used to analyse data and generate output. Much of the data was ordinal in measurement, having been collected with closed-ended items using Likert scales.

Analysis of the data yielded by 95 (91%) of the 104 template questions is included in this report. As much of the data from the remaining questions was already represented in responses to other questions, it was decided not to include analysis of the remaining 9 questions (9%). For example, the data yielded by SPHE, Question 14b (Appendix A, p. 37) regarding the challenges experienced by teachers in using a variety of resources were already included in their responses to SPHE, Questions 4, 6 and 8 (Appendix A, pages 33-35) regarding the challenges they had experienced in teaching the different strands. Cross-analysis of data was also undertaken and is contained in Sections 2 to 4 below.

In order to adjust for slight differences in profile between respondents and non-respondents and, more importantly, to adjust for the over-sampling of Irish-medium schools, the quantitative data were re-weighted for analysis. This re-weighting resulted in very

slight variation. Nevertheless, analyses in the report are based on weighted data so that, where possible, inferences can be made for certain groups to the broader population of teachers.

Confidence intervals

Table 1.4 presents the confidence intervals for all schools (Irish-medium and English-medium) combined and separately.

Table 1.4. Confidence intervals (95% level)

	Response percentage				
	5%	25%	50%	75%	95%
Total teachers in sample	±1.12	±2.23	±2.57	±2.23	±1.12
Teachers in English-medium schools	±1.23	±2.44	±2.82	±2.44	±1.23
Teachers in Irish-medium schools	±2.69	±5.34	±6.17	±5.34	±2.69

The confidence intervals suggest the extent to which values computed from the sample of teachers in the Teacher Template Study are reflected in the population of primary school teachers. For the purposes of Table 1.4, intervals were computed for a 95% confidence level. Thus, the confidence intervals identify two values within which the real population value is represented (to 95% certainty), based on the percentage of responses to each question (from 5%-95%). These plus/minus values for each percentage of respondents are the upper and lower confidence bounds.

To interpret these estimates, we can examine the confidence interval for *total teachers in sample* at the 75% level, (that is, given a certain finding from 75% of teachers in the sample), because we are interested in finding out how good this statistic is as a population estimator. The confidence interval given is plus or minus 2.23. This means that when 75% of teachers give a certain response, one can be

95% confident that the 'true' value for this response lies between 73% and 77%. As Table 1.4 shows, the confidence intervals are somewhat wider (and therefore, less precise) for teachers in Irish-medium schools because of their lower response rates. Thus, if 75% of the teachers in the study give a certain response it means that, with 95% confidence, the response for the total population would be between 70% and 80%.

Non-response bias

Across questionnaire items, the proportion of questions unanswered by teachers (item non-response) typically ranged from 10% to 20%. Teachers in English-medium schools had higher levels of non-response (around 40%) for questions relating to Gaeilge. On further inspection, non-response to these questions (which were asked in Gaeilge) was found to be systematically related to teachers' perceived competence in Gaeilge. Thus, 64% of teachers who felt their reading in Gaeilge *needs some work* did not answer these questions compared to 35% of those who felt their reading was *excellent*. As a result, responses relating to Gaeilge for teachers in English-medium schools must be interpreted with some caution.

The template study also yielded qualitative data from open-ended questions. As the re-weighting of the quantitative data yielded no significant difference (±1), it was decided not to re-weight qualitative data. Qualitative data have been analysed as described in the data analysis section of the school case study below. The number of teachers who responded to open-ended questions was generally lower than the number who responded to questions which included check boxes and rating or frequency scales. This is not surprising, given the additional time required to complete open-ended questions and the fact that teachers repeatedly recorded *lack of time* as a challenge.

School Case Study

The Teacher Template Study informed the design of the School Case Study (including the specification of generative lines of inquiry). The latter was designed to add depth to the findings of the Teacher Template Study. It also provided further scope for exploring general curriculum issues. Individual and focus group interviews were held with principals, teachers, children and parents from March to the end of May 2007. An overview of the eight case study schools is given in Appendix B, Table 1. Collectively, they represented schools which are

- English-medium and Irish-medium (Gaelscoil agus scoil sa Ghaeltacht)
- in the School Support Programme (SSP) under the DEIS action plan for educational inclusion
- single sex and mixed
- junior and senior
- rural and urban
- multi-denominational, Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland.

Table 1.5 presents the numbers of parents, children and teachers that were interviewed in each school.

Table 1.5. School Case Study: Numbers of children, parents and teachers interviewed

School*	Teaching or administrative principal	Children	Parents	Principals and teachers
Ave Maria NS	Administrative	8	6	6
Dursey Educate Together	Teaching	10	4	5
Gaelscoil Dhún Éideann	Administrative	8	7	12
Knockcarraig NS	Teaching	8	3	2
St. Deborah's Girls' NS	Administrative	14	3	6
St. Simon's NS (C. of I.)	Teaching	11	7	4
Scoil an Charraig Aonair	Teaching	8	8	5
Scoil Úna	Administrative	8	3	6
Total		75	41	46

* All names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Data gathering

As for the Teacher Template Study, initial contact with school principals in the School Case Study was made by phone and followed by a formal written request for participation. On the one occasion that it proved difficult to make initial contact with the principal of the intended school, a substitute school of a similar size, location, status and gender mix was contacted. Consent forms were developed for use with participants. Interview guides were also formulated and were forwarded to the schools involved before the interviews took place (Appendix B).

Data were gathered through school-based interviews with children, parents, teachers and principals from the eight case study schools about their curriculum experiences to date. The interview schedules

are provided in Appendix B. Interviews were scheduled during one or two visits to each school. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis and presentation in this final report.

Data analysis

Paper-based and/or software-supported analyses procedures[2] were used to analyse the qualitative case study data, as well as the qualitative data from the Teacher Template Study. Team members first analysed a component of the interviews in this way (within-case analysis). Team members, under the direction of a project manager, then collectively analysed interview data during a series of full-day team meetings to interrogate key findings across all schools (cross-case analysis). Adherence to an agreed writing guide helped to ensure standardised analysis and approach.

Presentation of findings

The following points are provided to clarify the procedures for formatting and presenting research findings within this report.

- The sample size for this final report is 1,369 (N=1,369) but as the size of the data set varies for individual questions, the number of respondents (n) is provided in each question.

- In this document, in tables as well as narrative, figures that originally included a decimal fraction have been rounded-off.[3] On occasions therefore, percentages total to more than 100. In all cases percentages within the narrative of this report have been presented as numerals.

2 QSR NUD*IST 6 (N6) qualitative data software

3 In rounding off decimals within mixed numbers, decimals less than five-tenths have been dropped, while decimals greater than or equal to five tenths have increased the whole number by one. The software packages used in analysis, for example Excel and SPSS, reduce numbers which include only a decimal of less than five-tenths, that is 0.4 or 0.1 to 0. This means that, on occasion, total percentages will equal more than 100%..

- As noted in the description of the Teacher Template Study, open-ended questions which were not limited to fixed alternatives were used to elicit responses from teachers. Closed-item responses alone could not reflect teachers' experiences. Open-ended questions were included, therefore, to give teachers the scope to expand on their curriculum perceptions and experiences.

- Two types of open-ended questions were included. One type was used as an extension of the preceding question. It asked the respondent to provide a reason for his/her answer, for example Questions 1a and 1b for each of the three subjects. The second type of open-ended question was used to probe teachers' perceptions and experiences, without the limits of a closed question with pre-defined categories of response or a preceding lead-in question. For example, the last question for each of the three subjects was: '*In furthering my own implementation of the Gaeilge/Science/SPHE Curriculum, I would like to prioritise the following'….*

- The gathering of data from open-ended questions was considered critical to the design and development of the teacher questionnaire. Given the relatively large sample size, the analysis and presentation of open-ended questionnaire data focused on the identification of key trends and patterns across responses, using quantitative measures. To facilitate the reader, quantification of responses around critical themes and sub-themes is provided for all open-ended questions. This has enabled the research team to present key themes generated by teachers, and to report on the relative significance of each, based on the number of respondents for each. To avoid confusion, all open-ended questions in Sections 3 and 4 are identified as such in the shaded question-descriptor.

- Gaeilge is allocated two and a half hours a week in the infant classes and three and a half hours a week in all other classes in English-medium schools. It is allocated three hours a week in the infant classes and four hours a week in all other classes in Irish-medium schools. This is significantly more time than is allocated to either Science or SPHE. The curriculum area of SESE, of which Science is a component alongside History and Geography, is allocated two and a quarter hours a week in infant classes and three hours a week in all other classes, in all primary schools. SPHE is allocated a half an hour a week in all classes in all primary schools. Likert scales used throughout the Gaeilge section of the template reflect this difference in time allocation by using six points, one of which is *every day*. As Science or SPHE are not intended to be taught everyday it was unnecessary to include this point in a Likert scale for questions in these two subjects. When responding to questions about teaching and learning in Science and SPHE teachers were, therefore, given the option of a four-point Likert scale. To facilitate the comparison of findings in Gaeilge with findings for the other two subjects the Likert point *once or twice a month* has been equated with *sometimes*, and the Likert points *once a week, a couple of times a week* and *everyday* have been equated with *often* or *frequently*. This yields insights into the relative frequency of practices across subjects.

- Where quotations from principals, teachers, children or parents are included, every effort has been made to ensure that they are indicative and broadly representative. Nevertheless, all quotations came originally from individuals who were expressing their own ideas and feelings.

- In all tables, 'Table Valid n%' has been replaced simply with 'n%'.

The following section will present a profile of respondents to the Teacher Template Study.

SECTION 2: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

This section presents a profile of participants in the Teacher Template Study based on teacher self-report. The initial 11 questions of the template were designed to gather this profile information which included teachers' qualifications, type and length of experience, the type of schools they taught in and their current positions in their schools. The last question asked whether the NCCA's DVD for parents,[1] *The What, Why and How of children's learning in primary school* had been distributed to parents.

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 1
(Male/Female) Please tick as appropriate.
(tick boxes)

The proportion of male to female respondents was examined in Question 1.

Table 2.1. Profile of respondents, Q. 1: Gender

	Respondents
	n%
Male	13
Female	88
Total	100

n=1,347

The respondent valid percentage ratio of approximately 1 male to every 7 females (1:7) differs somewhat from the current 1:5 male/female ratio among primary teachers in Ireland.[2]

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 2
What is your current position within your school?
(tick boxes)

1 Throughout this report, 'parent' refers to 'parent and/or guardian'.
2 Irish National Teachers Organisation, Central Executive Committee Report, Annual Congress, 2007

In Question 2 respondents were asked about their current positions. As teachers can fill more than one position in a school, respondents had the option of ticking more than one box. The total number of responses therefore exceeded n.

Table 2.2. Profile of respondents, Q. 2: Current position

	n%
Class Teacher	72
Special Educational Needs Teacher e.g. Learning Support/Resource	15
Deputy Principal	5
Administrative Principal	4
Teaching Principal	3
Language Support Teacher	3
Other	2
Home-School Liaison Co-ordinator	1
Resource Teacher for Travellers	1
Early Start Teacher	0

n=1,345

There was some over-lap between the options listed and responses given as *Other*. Of the 30 respondents (just 2%) who indicated Other, nine identified themselves as *Assistant Principals*, which corresponds with the option *Deputy Principal* above, while nine others indicated that they were working in the area of special needs.

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 3a
What classes are you teaching this year?
(blank text box)

Respondents were asked to identify what classes they were teaching at the time of the survey.[3]

3 In Question 5 (Appendix A, p. 1) respondents were invited to record how much experience they had of teaching at each class level. It has been decided not to include analysis of Question 5 as teachers' responses indicated very little variation in the mean number of years teaching experience at each level.

Table 2.3. Profile of respondents, Q. 3a: Classes currently taught by respondents

	Respondents		Respondents
	n%		n%
Junior infants	11	5th	7
Senior infants	11	6th	7
1st	10	Multi-grade: Junior infants-2nd	7
2nd	10	Multi-grade: 2nd and 3rd	1
3rd	8	Multi-grade: 3rd-6th	9
4th	7	Special groups	13

n=1,248

The spread of classes among the respondents (Table 2.3) shows the infant to second classes representing higher figures than the senior classes, with 42% of respondents teaching infant to second classes and 29% of respondents teaching third to sixth classes. In addition, 13% of respondents indicated that they taught special groups. This reflects the high number of Special Educational Needs teachers (learning support or resource) reported in Question 2. Table 2.4 shows that, overall, more respondents taught single grade classes (70%) than multi-grade classes (17%).

Table 2.4. Profile of respondents, Q. 3a: Breakdown of single-grade and multi-grade classes

	Respondents
	n%
Single-grade	70
Multi-grade	17
Special groups	13
None	0
Total	100

n=1,248

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 3b
How many children are in your class(es)?
(blank text box)

It was envisaged that the number of children being taught could have significance for respondents' answers to questions regarding the teaching and learning of Gaeilge, Science and SPHE. The data from Question 3b were cross-analysed with data from Question 3a (Table 2.5) and the number of valid responses was 1,085.

Table 2.5. Profile of respondents, Q. 3b: Number of children in classes

Number of children in class(es)	Type of class		
	Single grade n%	Multi-grade n%	Special groups n%
1-5	0	1	7
6-10	0	5	28
11-15	2	8	8
16-20	18	15	12
21-25	25	22	17
26-30	42	37	20
31-35	11	12	5
36-40	0	0	3

n=1,085

It is relevant that 28% of respondents reported that their classes had more than 31 children. A further 72 respondents to Question 3b (6%) reported that they taught groups of varying sizes on a daily basis. Some of these indicated that they were special educational needs teachers. The groups taught included one-to-one and groups of two or more, including groups of 19.

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 4
Excluding career breaks, how many years of teaching experience do you have in primary schools?
(Give number of years as appropriate.)
(blank text boxes)

In Question 4, teachers were asked to indicate how many years of teaching experience they had in primary schools and whether that experience was in Ireland or abroad.

Table 2.6. Profile of respondents, Q. 4: Years of teaching experience in Ireland

Years	In Ireland
	n%
1 year or less	8
1-5	29
6-10	17
11-15	7
16-20	7
21-25	12
26-30	10
31-35	8
36+	4

n=1,290

The majority of respondents reported that they had one to five years experience of teaching *in Ireland*. This reflects the increased output of new, probationary teachers in recent years, in that 13% of respondents indicated that they had experience teaching abroad.

Table 2.7. Profile of respondents, Q. 4: Years of teaching experience abroad

Years	Abroad
	n%
3 years or less	73
3-6	16
6-9	4
More than 9 years	7

n=167

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 6a
Have you spent time teaching in a setting other than a primary school?
(tick boxes)

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 6b
If yes, please list setting(s) and number of years as appropriate.
(blank text boxes)

In all, 81% of teachers who answered this question reported that they did not have experience of teaching in a setting other than in a primary school. The 19% of respondents who indicated that they did teach in a setting other than a primary school referred to teaching at post-primary level, Teaching English as a Foreign Language, teaching in a special needs setting, and teaching on Gaeltacht/Irish Summer courses.

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 7
What professional qualifications do you have? Please list year of award as appropriate.
(blank text boxes)

Table 2.8. Profile of respondents, Q. 7: Respondents' qualifications[4]

		Respondents
		n%
a	B. Ed. Degree	60
b	Diploma in Teaching (NT)	25
c	Other undergraduate degree	25
d	Postgraduate Certificate in Education	20
e	Other degree/qualification	11
f	Diploma in Remedial Education/Learning Support	5
g	Other Masters degree	5
h	Diploma in special education (or equivalent)	2
i	M.Ed. degree	3
j	Doctoral degree	0

n=1,222

A total of 60% of respondents reported that they had a B.Ed. degree. An equal number (25%) of respondents recorded having either a diploma in teaching or another undergraduate degree, the most common of which was B.A. Just over 8% of respondents indicated that they held a Master's degree.

The data revealed that 4% of respondents did not specify that they held any teaching qualification. These respondents indicated having *other undergraduate degrees* but did not indicate that they held qualifications in any of a, b, d, f, h or i (see Table 2.8). This may have resulted from the limited structure of Question 7 which did not provide options for teachers holding postgraduate qualifications in education other than *Postgraduate Certificate in Education*.

4 Percentages total to more than 100% as respondents could hold more than one qualification.

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 8
Which of the following types of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) have you accessed to support your implementation of the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE?
(tick boxes)

Table 2.9. Profile of respondents, Q. 8: Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

	Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
	n%	n%	n%
PCSP in-service	92	93	92
PCSP cuiditheoireacht	58	46	42
SDPS facilitation	18	15	18
Seminars/courses organised by local education centre	10	20	22
Seminars/courses organised by INTO	6	11	10
Leadership Development for Schools (LDS)	2	1	2
Other	1	2	2

n=979-1,068

The most common form of CPD accessed by respondents was PCSP in-service, followed by PCSP cuiditheoireacht. Science was recorded as the subject for which respondents had accessed CPD most frequently. This could reflect the relative newness of Science as a curriculum area. Of note also is that LDS was established in 2002 and was originally geared specifically towards newly appointed principals and deputy principals.. This would account for the low number of respondents reporting that they had accessed LDS professional development.

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 9
How would you assess your own level of competence in Irish?
(tick boxes)

Question 9 was included to gather information about respondents' perception of their competence and confidence in Gaeilge to give an added dimension to findings for Curaclam na Gaeilge.

Table 2.10. Profile of respondents, Q. 9: Respondents' level of competence in Gaeilge

	needs some work	good	very good	excellent
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Listening	8	31	43	18
Speaking	18	39	34	10
Reading	7	31	44	18
Writing	16	39	35	10

n=1,298-1,311

The majority of responses across the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing fell into the *very good* and *good* categories. Respondents indicated that they gauged their competence in the receptive skills (listening and reading) as better than their competence in the expressive skills (writing and speaking). An average of 62% of teachers reported that their competence was *excellent* or *very good* in listening and reading, while just 45% reported that their competence was of the same standard in writing and speaking.

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 10 a, b, c ,d e
In what type of school do you teach? (tick boxes)

Questions 10a to 10e were designed to ascertain the profile of respondents' schools. These questions form the basis for cross-analysis with subsequent questions.

Table 2.11. Profile of respondents, Q. 10a: School type

	n%
Urban	76
Rural	24

n=1,298

The proportion of urban to rural schools represented in this sample is approximately 3:1. The sample was stratified for school location so the ratio of urban to rural schools represents the national proportion. The large number of urban respondents can be attributed to the larger school sizes typical in urban areas.

Table 2.12. Profile of respondents, Q. 10b: School type

	n%
Vertical school (all classes to sixth)	77
Senior school	9
Junior school	8
Other	6

n=1,328

Table 2.13. Profile of respondents, Q. 10c: School gender mix

	n%
Mixed gender	65
Girls only	15
Boys only	11
Junior mixed/senior girls	9
Junior mixed/senior boys	0
Other	1

n=1,332

Responses indicated under *Other* included schools that had mixed gender until the end of second class when boys move on to other schools, and other combinations of mixed gender that changed to single gender at different levels.

Table 2.14. Background, Q. 10d: Language of instruction

	n%
English-medium	92
Irish-medium: Gaelscoil	6
Irish-medium: Scoil sa Ghaeltacht	2
Other	0

n=1,342

The Irish-medium schools comprised 6% Gaelscoileanna and 2% Scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht. This reflects the percentage (8%) of Irish-medium schools nationally.

Table 2.15. Profile of respondents, Q. 10e: School Support Programme (DEIS)

	n%
Not in the programme	67
Urban band 1	27
Urban band 2	14
Rural	3

n=1,369

In some cases, respondents from the same school reported a different DEIS status. To refine the data set, the school details of each response were matched with the current DEIS listing to obtain the figures above. Within this sample, the ratio of respondents in the School Support Programme to those not in the programme is 1:4. Nationwide, the ratio is 1:5.[5] The DEIS listing had not been finalised at the time of sampling for this survey. The difference between the ratio figures can be accounted for by the fact that the sampling frame integrated the original designated disadvantaged school listing instead of the DEIS listing.

5 Figures for the last complete school year 2005/6 indicate that there were 3,291 primary schools.

Teacher template, Background information: Q. 11
Has the DVD The What, Why and How of children's learning in primary school been distributed to parents in your school? (tick boxes)

The majority (77%) of respondents to Question 11 indicated that the DVD *The What, Why and How of children's learning in primary school* had been distributed to parents in their schools. In 23% of cases it was reported that it had not been distributed.

Respondent profile

The typical teacher in Ireland is female (83%),[6] teaches a single-grade class (60%),[7] of approximately 24 children,[8] infants to second (52%),[9] in a mixed-gender (83%)[10] English-medium school (92%).[11] Meanwhile, the typical participant in the Teacher Template Study was a female class teacher (88%), who taught a single-grade class (70%) of between 26-30 children (42%). She taught infants to second class (49%)[12] in a mixed-gender (65%), urban (76%), English-medium school (92%). She held a B.Ed. degree (60%) and rated her competence in Gaeilge as *very good* or *good* (73-75%). She had between one and five years teaching experience (37%). This is significant as her pre-service teacher education and all subsequent CPD happened since the introduction of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

6 Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Central Executive Committee Report, Annual Congress, 2007
7 Total number of multi-grade teachers: 7,262, total number of single-grade teachers: 10,871 (DES, 2004/5 figures)
8 Pupil/Teacher ratio in all primary schools: 17.1:1, average class size excluding integrated pupils: 23.9:1, average class size including integrated pupils: 24.3:1 (DES, 2004/5 figures)
9 Infant classes: 26%, 1st and 2nd: 26%, 3rd and 4th: 24%, 5th and 6th: 24% (DES, 2004/5 figures)
10 Educational Research Centre Sampling Frame based on 2004/5 DES figures
11 Educational Research Centre Sampling Frame based on 2004/5 DES figures
12 In this survey 42% of single-grade teachers and 7% of multi-grade teachers taught infants to second class.

Table 2.16: Comparative data of typical respondent and population profile

Category	Respondent profile		National profile	
		% of respondents		% of population
Teacher gender	Female	88	Female	83
Single/multi-grade class	Single-grade	70	Single-grade	60
Class size	26-30	42	24	--
Class level	Infants to second	49	Infants to second	52
Class gender	Mixed	65	Mixed	83
Medium of instruction	English	92	English	92

SECTION 3:

FINDINGS ACROSS THE THREE SUBJECTS

In the Teacher Template Study questions were presented for each subject under the headings: Strands and strand units, Approaches and methodologies and Assessment. Further questions were included in a general category. Some of the questions were common across the three subjects and some were subject specific.

Analysis of the questions that were common across the three subjects is presented in this section. The sequence of findings follows the order of questions as laid out in the template. Material from the School Case Study is also included here to add depth to the findings from the Teacher Template Study.

Strands and strand units

The template included two questions on planning at classroom level which were common across the three subjects. These questions elicited teachers' opinions of the usefulness of the layout of the curriculum in strands and strand units (Question 1a) and the relative usefulness of a variety of resources for planning (Question 2). Teachers were also asked to provide their reasons for answers to both questions (Questions 1b and 2b).

Classroom planning

Teacher template, Gaeilge, Science, SPHE: Q. 1a
In planning for my teaching of Gaeilge/Science/SPHE, I find the layout of the curriculum in strands and strand units: (four-point rating scale: not helpful, somewhat helpful, helpful, very helpful)

Table 3.1 on the following page presents the findings for all three subjects.

Table 3.1. Gaeilge, Science, SPHE, Q. 1a: Classroom planning

	not helpful	somewhat helpful	helpful	very helpful
	n%	n%	n%	n%
In planning for my teaching of Gaeilge, I find the layout of the curriculum in strands and strand units:	5	24	53	18
In planning for my teaching of Science, I find the layout of the curriculum in strands and strand units:	1	8	47	43
In planning for my teaching of SPHE, I find the layout of the curriculum in strands and strand units:	1	11	49	39

n=1,146-1,161

As Table 3.1 illustrates, teachers who answered this question were most satisfied with the layout of the Science Curriculum (90% found it *very helpful* or *helpful*), followed closely by the layout of the SPHE Curriculum (88% found it *very helpful* or *helpful*). Respondents were less satisfied with Curaclam na Gaeilge (71% found it *very helpful* or *helpful*).

Teacher template, Gaeilge, Science, SPHE: Q. 1b
Please give a reason for your answer.
(blank text box)

This question (one per subject) asked respondents to cite a reason for their responses to Question 1a regarding the helpfulness of the layout of the curriculum in strands and strand units for classroom planning.

Classroom planning: Gaeilge

This question was answered by 971 teachers. This was a response rate of 71%. Analysis shows that clarity, structure and coverage were the reasons teachers gave most frequently for finding the layout of Curaclam na Gaeilge helpful.

Over half of respondents (52%) stated that they found the *clear layout of the curriculum* in strands and strand units helpful for their classroom planning. A typical response was: 'Tá sé soiléir agus leagtha amach go maith/It is clear and well organised.' The word *soiléir* was used in up to 300 responses.

One in five respondents (almost 18%) indicated that the layout of the curriculum in strands and strand units provided *useful guidance and structure* in planning for the teaching and learning of Curaclam na Gaeilge. One respondent wrote: 'Cuireann sé struchtúr ar an ábhar/it puts structure on the subject,' while another said, 'Cabhraíonn na snáitheanna agus na snáithaonaid leat nuair atá tú ag déanamh do phleanáil/The strands and strand units help you when you are doing your planning.'

It was noted by 6% of respondents that the layout of the curriculum was helpful in planning for *curriculum coverage*. As one respondent wrote, 'is féidir a bheith cinnte go bhfuil tú ag dul i mbun gach gné den curaclam/you can be sure that you are covering every aspect of the curriculum.'

Respondents also cited the *benefits of the examples and the exemplars* in the curriculum and guidelines, the range of useful ideas and hints that were offered, and the clarity of the aims, objectives and themes.

Some teachers referred negatively to the over-complication and breadth of the curriculum, the lack of helpfulness of content, and the inaccessibility of curriculum language.

Classroom planning: Science

This question was answered by 989 teachers. This was a response rate of 72%. Findings were broadly similar to those for Gaeilge. Half of respondents indicated that they thought the strands of the Science

Curriculum were *clearly laid out, accessible, and easy to follow.* Typical comments from teachers noted that the strands were clearly laid out and *the units were broken down into manageable units of work*. Others noted that it was *éasca teacht ar an eolas/easy to get at the information*.

Nearly one-third of respondents (32%) noted that the curriculum structure was *helpful for short-term and long-term planning.* Respondents noted that the curriculum had a *very ordered system with easy to follow objectives* that gave *structure to the planning of work*. Teachers also said that the programme was detailed and concise, that the objectives were clear, that it was practical and suitable for different classes and age groups, and that it incorporated interesting and useful topics.

Similar to findings for Gaeilge, one in eight respondents referred to *curriculum coverage,* noting that the structure of the Science Curriculum helped them ensure that all strands and different aspects of the curriculum were covered in their planning and teaching. One respondent wrote: 'It helps ensure all areas are covered – no topics are omitted. It helps you plan your schemes of work for the year and you can see at a glance if you are covering all areas of the curriculum.'

As for Gaeilge, a significant number of respondents also indicated that the curriculum provided helpful examples and good ideas. A smaller number said that it was child-centred and user-friendly.

Findings show that a majority of respondents reacted positively to the Science Curriculum. The reasons given above regarding the layout of the curriculum and its helpfulness for planning comprised the comments of 90% of respondents to this question. There was a small minority who reacted negatively to the layout for a variety of reasons including excessive breadth and over-complication.

Classroom planning: SPHE

This question was answered by 958 teachers (slightly fewer than for Science and Gaeilge). Findings were similar to those for Gaeilge and Science, with over one-third (34%) of respondents referring to the *accessibility and clarity* of the SPHE Curriculum. Typical comments included:

> *You can see exactly what is on the curriculum at a glance, it is written in very accessible language, giving good ideas for the classroom, it's user friendly, each class is colour-coded and the content clearly displayed.*

Mirroring findings for Gaeilge and Science, 17% of respondents commented positively on the helpful curriculum *structure.* One teacher wrote:

> *Tá an t-ábhar seo chomh leathan go gceapaim go gcabhraíonn sé é a bheith roinnte mar atá. Cuirtear structúr ar an ábhar/ This subject is so broad that I think it helps to have it divided as it is. It puts structure on the subject.*

Other typical comments included: 'It is all there ready to be implemented; the layout gives structure to the planning and provides for even, comprehensive coverage.'

The helpfulness of the curriculum strands and strand units for *planning,* whether at classroom level or at whole-school level, was referred to by 10% of respondents. Comments included: 'The strands and strand units help you for termly and weekly planning and as the SPHE co-ordinator I found it easy to draw up whole school plans.' Teachers also referred to the helpfulness of the curriculum layout when schools were planning across a two-year span.

Echoing findings for Gaeilge and Science on curriculum coverage, teachers commented positively on the SPHE Curriculum's provision of *clear objectives.* This facilitated planning, ensured that all areas received attention, and minimised overlap and duplication. One teacher wrote: 'It acts as a clear set of guidelines to follow and ensures you remember to develop the necessary skills while exploring the topics.' A number of respondents referred to using the curriculum to structure the content of their School Plan

Those who commented favourably about the layout of the SPHE Curriculum in strands and strand units out-numbered those who made negative comments by a ratio of over eight to one. Respondents who were critical of the layout of the strands and strand units referred to *vagueness* or *lack of clarity* in them and to an overlap of topics. Some felt that the strands and strand units were *too complicated*. One teacher wrote: 'Like many areas of the curriculum, I find the SPHE section vague, lacking in structure, heavy on aspiration and extremely light in content.' Another said: 'Tá an t-uafás ann. Deacair teacht ar an t-eolas go héasca/There is an awful lot there. It is difficult to find the information easily.'

Classroom planning: findings across subjects

There is very little variation across responses to this question for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE. The number of respondents for subjects was similar (70-72%). Three key reasons for the 'helpfulness' ratings given to the curriculum were common across subjects. They focused on curriculum clarity and accessibility, structure and layout (in strands and strand units), and facility for curriculum coverage. For each subject, negative feedback was expressed by less than 10% of all respondents. Most were typically concerned with excessive curriculum breadth.

Resources for classroom planning

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 3, Science and SPHE: Q. 2
When planning for my teaching of Gaeilge/Science/SPHE, I find the following resources are:
(four-point rating scale: not helpful, somewhat helpful, helpful, very helpful)

This question asked teachers to indicate how useful they found the resources listed in Table 3.2 below when planning for their teaching of Gaeilge, Science and SPHE.

Table 3.2. Gaeilge, Science, SPHE: Usefulness of resources for planning

		Primary School Curriculum	Teacher guidelines	Whole school plan	Teachers' resource books/ manuals	Children's textbooks/ workbooks
		n%	n%	n%	n%	n%
Gaeilge	not helpful	4	4	8	3	8
	somewhat helpful	26	27	22	18	23
	helpful	53	50	43	41	41
	very helpful	17	19	27	38	29
Science	not helpful	1	2	7	1	5
	somewhat helpful	12	18	19	12	21
	helpful	49	48	45	41	43
	very helpful	39	33	30	47	31
SPHE	not helpful	1	2	4	1	10
	somewhat helpful	12	17	20	9	25
	helpful	51	52	42	39	37
	very helpful	36	30	35	51	28

n=7-1,170

This analysis produced two striking findings. The first was that most respondents indicated that, for each subject, they found teachers'

resource books/manuals *very helpful*. The second was that, by comparison to the other subjects, fewer respondents indicated finding Curaclam na Gaeilge and *Teacher Guidelines* for Gaeilge *very helpful*.

Approaches and methodologies

This part of the template included questions on a range of teaching and learning approaches and methodologies. The questions focused on teachers' experience of using

- organisational settings
- differentiation strategies
- methods of integration
- teaching strategies
- resources
- ICT.

Organisational settings

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 25, Science: Q.13, SPHE: Q.10
I use the following organisational settings when teaching Gaeilge/Science/SPHE:
(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

In this question, respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they used the organisational settings listed in Table 3.3 when teaching the three subjects. As outlined in Section 1, page 31, some adjustments have been made to the frequency scale for Gaeilge in this and in other tables below in order to facilitate comparisons.

Table 3.3. Gaeilge, Science, SPHE: Approaches and methodologies – organisational settings

		Whole class teaching	Group work	Working in pairs	Individual work
		n%	n%	n%	n%
Gaeilge	never	0	3	1	2
	seldom	1	8	5	8
	sometimes	1	13	9	3
	frequently	98	77	85	87
Science	never	0	1	2	5
	seldom	1	5	14	15
	sometimes	12	51	58	34
	frequently	86	43	26	46
SPHE	never	0	2	4	4
	seldom	1	8	13	13
	sometimes	12	47	49	35
	frequently	86	44	34	49

n=1,041-1,161

Whole class teaching was the organisational setting most respondents indicated using *frequently.* For each of the three subjects, at least 80% of respondents indicated that they used the other organisational settings *frequently* or *sometimes*.

Most children who were interviewed as part of the School Case Study indicated they liked working in pairs or in groups. Sometimes this was because they sat beside a friend and liked the chance to work with him/her: 'I like working in pairs because the teacher always puts us with the person that sits next to us and my best friend sits next to me and we like working together' [1st class child]. Others said they liked working with friends because 'you can talk to them while you are working' [2nd class child]. There was general agreement that it was good to have someone to 'confer with' [3rd class child]. If one made a mistake 'someone else could find [it]' [4th class child]. Another child pointed out: 'I like working in groups

because when you are stuck, two heads are better than one' [6th class child]. One child said: 'I like groups as well because it is nice to hear everyone's opinion because everybody has a different opinion' [6th class child]. Working in a group was preferable too when playing language games, they said. The children did recognise however that, on occasions, some members of the group did not contribute much: 'They usually just leave someone to do all the work and they just sit down' [4th class child]. They also realised that at times there was too much going on in a group to allow for in-depth thought: 'You need some time to concentrate' [5th class child]. It was possible too, they asserted, that one child 'might take charge and boss you around' [4th class child].

Cross-analysis indicated that teachers of classes of 15 children or less were somewhat less likely to use whole class teaching or individual work during Science and SPHE. It also indicated that teachers in Irish-medium schools were more likely than their counterparts in English-medium schools to use group work and individual work in their teaching of Gaeilge, regardless of class size. However no significant difference was indicated between responses in relation to whole class teaching or pair work.

With regard to the use of the organisational settings for the teaching of Science, cross-analysis of the data indicated that teachers with less than five years experience were most likely to use pair work, group work and individual work, while teachers with more than fifteen years of experience were least likely to use these organisational settings. The use of whole class teaching did not vary by years of teaching experience.

Differentiation strategies

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q.26, Science: Q. 14, SPHE: Q. 11
The two strategies I find most helpful in differentiating for children's learning in Gaeilge/Science/SPHE are:
(blank text box)

Differentiation strategies: Gaeilge

This question was answered by 897 teachers (66%). The most frequently cited strategy was the use of organisational settings to differentiate for children's learning. This was followed by differentiating the level or volume of work and the use of active learning methods.

Almost three-quarters of respondents (74%) indicated that they used *organisational settings to differentiate for children's learning* in Gaeilge. Just under one-third (32%) indicated that they differentiated for children's learning by using pair work. The comparable figure for group work was 28%. Teachers who elaborated on their responses indicated that they used mixed ability pairs or groups. It was noted that *more able children* assisted those who may be challenged by the work in hand. A number of teachers also referred to the fact that when working in pairs or groups, children could be assigned different tasks depending on their ability. Teachers who cited pair or group work as a differentiation strategy did not indicate whether the children in their class(es) were initially shown how to work effectively in a pair or group setting. Of teachers who answered this question, 14% noted that they frequently used either whole class teaching or individual work as a differentiation strategy. However these respondents chose not to expand on their answers.

More than one-third (35%) of respondents reported *differentiating either the level or volume of work* for pupils depending on the children's

abilities in Gaeilge. *Tascanna difriúla bunaithe ar chumas an pháiste/different tasks based on the ability of the child* was typical of the responses given.

Just under one-fifth (19%) of teachers noted that they used *active learning methods* such as role play, word games, poetry/rhymes/songs, stories and drama as a means of differentiating children's learning in Gaeilge.

Differentiation strategies: Science

Almost three-quarters (74%) of the 922 respondents to this question indicated that they found the use of various *organisational settings* to be the most effective strategy in differentiating for children's learning in Science. This mirrored the findings for Gaeilge above. These settings included working in groups of same or mixed ability, working in pairs, working as individuals and working as a whole class. In noting these organisational settings, some teachers elaborated on the benefits of using group work and paired work. One teacher commented: '[I use] group work whereby within the group children have different roles appropriate to their talents.' Another teacher reported using 'group work with each member [child] being assigned a different role e.g. reporter, recorder, timekeeper, person to ensure group are working together.' Many teachers indicated they used mixed ability grouping. One teacher noted how this type of grouping strategy enabled 'children [to] become *mini teachers* to explain to each other.' Similarly, in describing the benefits of pairing children in Science, one teacher stated that (s)he used a 'buddy system – very able with less able child.' Another teacher commented how in pairs, 'the weaker children are aided and guided by the more able children.'

Using a variety of methods of teaching to ensure all children are enabled to engage with and work on task was identified by 37% of respondents as the most effective strategy in differentiating for children's learning in Science. In particular, many teachers noted their

use of questioning which enabled them to target *children capable of answering higher/middle/lower order questions.* One teacher reported using *appropriate answer cues for those having difficulties comprehending a lesson*. Other teachers highlighted how practical work, a key methodology in the *Science Curriculum*, enabled children of different abilities *to discover for themselves.*

Over one-quarter of respondents indicated that using *differentiated tasks* was the strategy they found most effective in supporting all children's learning in Science. As one teacher reported, (s)he prioritised 'tascanna níos deacra nó níos éasca a bheith ullmhaithe do na páistí/to have more difficult or easier tasks prepared for the children.'

Just over a tenth of respondents (11%) reported using differentiated outcomes as an effective way of supporting children's learning in Science. One teacher described this strategy as presenting '[the] same task but [having] different expectations for children.' Some teachers illustrated their use of the strategy as follows: *The children use a variety of methods of recording and reporting information: written, orally, pictorially so that each child can play their part.*

Differentiation strategies: SPHE

Of the respondents to this question, 868 (58%) recorded *organisational settings* as the strategy they found most effective in differentiating for children's learning in SPHE. This was lower than the comparable percentage for the other two subjects. The majority of respondents highlighted the opportunity that group work provided for individual children, especially those who are shy, to contribute their thoughts and opinions during SPHE lessons. Respondents also noted using group work as a means of mixing children of different learning strengths. Some teachers stated that they placed less able children in groups with higher achievers in order to enhance the value of group

work: *paistí cumasacha a bheith mar eiseamláir do na paistí eile/able children can be an example for the other children*. Co-operative games were also mentioned by respondents in this context. Other respondents indicated that pair work was the strategy they found most effective in differentiating for children's learning in SPHE. They talked of pairing children of similar ability and of different learning strengths for activities.

In differentiating for children's learning in SPHE, 19% of respondents listed circle time as the strategy they found most effective. *Circle time* was seen as a democratic option in the classroom. One teacher said that 'circle time ensures that less vocal children get a hearing.' Teachers also referred to the option children had to 'pass' when they did not wish to respond.

Small percentages of respondents noted using group discussions, role play, drama and questioning as ways of differentiating for children's learning in SPHE.

Differentiation strategies: findings across subjects

Analysis of responses to this question for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE indicated that the use of organisational settings was the method most used by respondents to differentiate for children's learning. Teachers also reported that they used differentiated tasks and a variety of teaching methods.

Methods of integration

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 27a, Science: Q. 15a, SPHE; Q. 12a
I integrate children's learning in Gaeilge/Science/SPHE across the Primary School Curriculum in these ways:
(tick boxes)

Table 3.4. Gaeilge, Science, SPHE: Approaches and methodologies – methods of integration

	Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
	n%	n%	n%
Connecting concepts/ideas from Gaeilge/Science/SPHE with those in other subjects	71	80	82
Applying skills learned in Gaeilge/Science/SPHE to other subjects	57	69	77

n=783-1,125

Across the three subjects, more respondents indicated that they integrated concepts and ideas with other subjects than they applied skills learned. The lowest levels of integration were reported for Gaeilge. The SPHE Curriculum recommends that the subject be taught, in part, through an integrated approach across a range of subjects. It is note-worthy, therefore, that more teachers recorded integrating concepts, ideas and skills learned in SPHE with those learned in other subjects.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 27b, Science: Q. 15b, SPHE: Q. 12b
An example of how and where I have successfully integrated learning in Gaeilge/Science/SPHE across the Primary School Curriculum is
(blank text box)

In this open-ended question teachers were asked to give examples of how and where they had successfully integrated each of the three subjects across the *Primary School Curriculum*.

Methods of integration: Gaeilge

Almost half (47%) of the 974 respondents noted that they had successfully integrated learning in Gaeilge with learning in Physical education. Irish dancing was specifically mentioned. The majority of

teachers who specified how they had used Gaeilge in PE said that they issued directions, instructions or commands in Gaeilge. Another wrote:

> Ó ám go ham, déanaim Corpoideachais trí mheán na Gaeilge. Is féidir leis na páistí na horduithe a thuiscint agus muna bhfuil a fhios acu cad atá á rá agam baineann siad úsaid as ceisteanna a d'fhoghlaim siad sa rang Gaeilge.
>
> From time to time, I do PE through the medium of Irish. The children can understand the orders and if they don't know what I'm saying, they use questions they've learned during Gaeilge.

Just over a quarter of respondents (27%) indicated that they used Gaeilge when teaching Music. Much of the linkage between the subjects arose from the teaching of Irish songs and lessons relating to traditional Irish music and dance. Less than a quarter (23%) of respondents indicated that they integrated Gaeilge with Drama.

Apart from specific subjects, 14% of respondents reported integrating Gaeilge with everyday, classroom language.

Methods of integration: Science

Teachers considered *language* to be an important tool for building children's knowledge and understanding in Science. Of the 951 respondents 41% reported that they integrated Science with language, while 29% of respondents referred to English oral work and writing. The 12% of respondents who mentioned Gaeilge referred specifically to oral language and the building of vocabulary. Many teachers commented on the natural links between Science and certain other subjects. Geography was the subject most commonly mentioned in this respect. Less than half (41%) of teachers indicated that they

integrated learning in Science with Geography, while 35% of respondents referred to integrating learning in Science with Visual Arts. The majority of these respondents mentioned integrating Science with the Construction strand.

Many teachers referred to developing children's *skills* in Science and using these skills in other subjects. Examples of skills development most usually reported included *questioning, estimating, predicting, measuring,* or *using a process to analyse a problem and find solutions.* There were references to *applying* the skills of the scientist to problems in Mathematics, Geography or History. Some teachers also mentioned *transferring* the skills of measurement or of observation to other subjects.

Methods of integration: SPHE

Of the 918 respondents to this question 43% indicated that they integrated *learning* in SPHE with language, 31% of respondents mentioned English specifically, while 12% of respondents referred to integrating children's learning in SPHE with Gaeilge. Teachers referred to increasing the children's vocabulary and developing their language generally as a means of making learning in SPHE more effective. Some teachers talked of discussion and debate in their classes when SPHE themes or topics were being considered. Circle time was frequently cited in this respect. Creative writing as a means of expressing opinions was mentioned by a number of teachers. Others used language lessons to re-present ideas or concepts from SPHE lessons, for example in poetry or in stories. Some teachers referred specifically to literature – tales and fables with a moral dimension – as a resource for SPHE.

Integration of SPHE with *Science* was reported by over a quarter (28%) of respondents. Personal hygiene, dental care and healthy eating were the most common areas for building links. There were

many references to schools' healthy eating policies. Exercise and substance abuse, especially smoking, were also mentioned frequently. Teachers also reported integrating work in promoting environmental awareness with both Science and Geography. One teacher noted integrating SPHE with Geography and Science 'in order to understand how the environment exists and its link with everyone; and our responsibility towards it.'

Just under a quarter (22%) of respondents indicated that they integrated SPHE with *Geography*. Teachers reported making links between the two subjects in promoting awareness and understanding of other cultures. Paralleling the responses of teachers concerning the integration of Science across the curriculum, a large number of teachers reported seeing natural links between the knowledge presented in SPHE and that in Science and Geography, particularly in relation to environmental care issues.

Other teachers viewed integration and SPHE in more general terms. One teacher wrote that 'group work/pair work in all other subjects reflects on concepts acquired in SPHE.' Another said:

> *Tá coincheapa agus scileanna atáimid ag iarraidh a chothú ag rith tríd gach uile rud a dhéanaimid, ceapaimse/There are concepts and skills that we are trying to support and that run through every thing we do, I think.*

Integration: findings across subjects

In general, respondents indicated that they integrated one curriculum area with another as against integrating skills learned in one area across the curriculum. It is hardly surprising that teachers mentioned linking Geography, Science and SPHE, given the similarities between these subjects.

Teaching strategies

The following paragraphs include analysis of data regarding approaches and methodologies in Science and SPHE. As there are similarities between the teaching methods and approaches for these two subjects, it is possible to draw some comparisons. Because the approaches and methodologies for Gaeilge refer to specific language approaches, and so are dissimilar to the other subjects, they will be discussed in Section 4 of this document.

Teaching strategies: Science

Teacher template, Science: Q.16
I use the following approaches and methodologies in teaching Science: (four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

The Science Curriculum recommends that teachers use a range of approaches and methodologies to support children as they learn about scientific ideas and concepts, and develop the necessary skills to work scientifically.

Table 3.5. Science: Q.16: Approaches and methodologies: Science

Approaches and methodologies	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Talk and discussion	0	1	15	85
Using pictures/visual images	0	5	34	61
Learning collaboratively/co-operatively	1	4	39	57
Using hands-on experience	0	3	44	53
Looking at children's work	1	10	39	50
Using the environment	0	6	46	48
Applying scientific ideas/concepts to everyday life	1	9	50	41
Starting with the children's ideas	4	15	41	40

n=35-1,151

All respondents reported using talk and discussion *frequently* or *sometimes* as a methodology in their teaching of Science, and more than 95% indicated that they used pictures/visual images and collaborative/co-operative learning either *frequently* or *sometimes*. The *Primary School Curriculum* advocates the use of these methodologies across all subjects.

Using hands-on experience, applying scientific ideas/concepts to everyday life, and starting with the children's ideas are methodologies that are particularly important in Science teaching. As Table 3.5 shows, respondents also reported using these often in their teaching, with 97% providing children with hands-on experience and 91% helping children to link their Science learning to everyday life *frequently* or *sometimes*. Of note is the fact that less teachers (81%) reported using children's own ideas as a starting point for Science work.

Just over half (52%) of respondents indicated that they used the media *frequently* or *sometimes* while the comparable figure for ICT was 41%. These were the least frequently used approaches and methodologies as reported by teachers. About half respondents (48% and 59% respectively) noted they *seldom* or *never* used the media or ICT.

Teaching strategies: SPHE

Teacher template, SPHE: Q.13
Active Learning Methodologies are central to the teaching of SPHE. I use the following strategies for active learning in teaching the SPHE Curriculum:
(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Table 3.6 (below) presents the three approaches and methodologies that the largest number of respondents indicated using frequently in their teaching of SPHE.

Table 3.6. SPHE: Q. 13: Approaches and methodologies: SPHE

Approaches and methodologies	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Talk and discussion	0	0	7	93
Circle time	5	14	32	49
Other	8	20	25	48

n=16-1,165

As with Science, 100% of the teachers who responded to this question reported using talk and discussion frequently or sometimes as strategies for active learning in teaching the SPHE Curriculum. A large majority (81%) of respondents indicated that they used circle time frequently or sometimes. Teachers who took part in the School Case Study echoed this. One teacher explained:

> *Children…love having an opportunity to talk about those kinds of things, especially circle time, it works very well…They really enjoy it and it is very relevant.*

In their answers to template questions generally, small numbers of respondents rated the *other* option. Consequently, the other option is rarely mentioned in the analysis. In this case however, some 73% of respondents recorded using strategies that were not listed (other option) *frequently* or *sometimes*. Teachers indicated that such strategies included field trips, situational problem-solving dramas and social skills games.

Just 25% of respondents reported using ICT either *frequently* or *sometimes* as an active learning methodology in teaching the SPHE Curriculum, while 42% of teachers who responded to this question reported using the media *frequently* or *sometimes* as a methodology.

Teaching Strategies: Findings across subjects

In both subjects, high percentages of respondents indicated that they used talk and discussion *frequently* or *sometimes* as methodologies. Smaller percentages noted using ICT or the media either *frequently* or *sometimes*.

Resources

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q, 29a, Science: Q. 17a, SPHE: Q. 14a

I use the following resources in teaching Gaeilge:

(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, often)

The response options given were not the same in the comparable question for each of the three subjects. It is not possible, therefore, to make direct comparisons across the three subjects. Nevertheless, there are some similarities.

Resources: Gaeilge

Table 3.7. Gaeilge, Q. 29a: Use of resources

	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Pictures and posters	0	2	6	92
Text books/workbooks	5	4	4	87
Concrete objects	1	5	11	84
Real books	27	30	18	25
T.V. programmes	35	37	16	12
Internet	55	28	11	6

n=3-997

Of note is that 83% and 72%, respectively, of respondents reported *seldom* or *never* using the Internet or television programmes. Given the centrality of the approach to Curaclam na Gaeilge 57% of respondents ,worryingly, reported *seldom* or *never* using real books.

Resources: Science

Table 3.8 presents the extent to which teachers reported using a range of resources in their Science teaching.

Table 3.8. Science, Q. 17a: Use of resources

	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Real objects/materials	0	3	32	65
Teacher resource books	1	4	29	65
Textbooks	4	9	28	58

n=3-1,147

Visitors to the classroom and ICT were the resources the least number of respondents indicated using *frequently* or *sometimes*.

Resources: SPHE

Table 3.9 presents the extent to which teachers reported using a range of resources in their SPHE teaching.

Table 3.9. SPHE, Q. 14a: Use of resources

	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Classroom/playground incidents	0	3	26	71
Stories	0	4	36	60
Textbook materials	2	10	39	50

n=1-1,167

Website resources were reportedly used *frequently* or *sometimes* by only 32% of respondents while visitors to the classroom or school were reportedly used *frequently* or *sometimes* by only 30% of respondents.

Findings across subjects

Across the three subjects, relatively high numbers of respondents noted the frequent use of textbooks. This is particularly noteworthy

in the case of Science. Though the Science Curriculum says that textbooks and work cards can be used to support active investigative work, it specifically advises that lessons should not be based solely on them (Teacher Guidelines, Science, p. 27).

Data from one of the eight case study schools provided a notable exception to findings concerning the emphasis on textbook use. In this school, teachers used class text-books for two subjects only: Mathematics and English. The decision to restrict the use of textbooks to these subjects was agreed by all staff. Reasons provided for this decision focused on reducing the cost of book purchase by parents, alleviating the pressure on teachers to *cover the book,* and supporting creative learning methods by children:

> *With the textbook, you feel that the parent has spent twenty euro on this book and that's a lot for just one book or one subject. And if you haven't got it done by the end of the year, you think, 'Oh my goodness, I have 10 pages left in this book!' There's the pressure to finish it. But that [completing the textbook] isn't giving independent thinking to the children. It is not giving active learning. It is just using the book for the sake of the book.*

Teachers noted that *this* way of teaching, *is a different mind set, a way of thinking*. They cited years of teaching experience and particularly experience in Special Education as key strengths in teaching without textbooks. Teachers readily acknowledged that this way of teaching is *definitely harder work*, but were quick to highlight the tangible benefits to children: *So much of their work is independent work and they are creative and their vocabulary comes from having access to good books*. In the final analysis, teachers suggested that access to good quality resources was worth more than any class textbook.

Returning to data from the teacher questionnaire, it's interesting to note that low percentages of respondents reported using ICT as a classroom resource (the Internet, website resources, CD-ROMs, digital camera, video recorder) *frequently* or *sometimes* in their teaching of Gaeilge, Science and SPHE. Similarly, visitors to the classroom or school were another resource that teachers reported using less frequently.

ICT

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 30a, Science: Q. 18a, SPHE: Q. 15a
I use ICT to support teaching and learning in Gaeilge/ Science/SPHE:
(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, often)

As Table 3.10 shows, across the three subjects, more respondents indicated that they *seldom* or *never* used ICT to support teaching and learning than indicated that they *frequently* or *sometimes* used it.

Table 3.10. Gaeilge, Science, SPHE: Use of ICT

	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
I use ICT to support teaching and learning in Gaeilge:	46	33	12	10
I use ICT to support teaching and learning in Science:	21	35	35	9
I use ICT to support teaching and learning in SPHE:	43	34	19	5

n=1,051-1,132

A considerable majority of teachers (79%) indicated that they *seldom* or *never* used ICT to support teaching and learning in Gaeilge, followed by 77% in SPHE and 56% in Science. The most frequent use of ICT was reported in Science; 44% of respondents reported

using ICT *frequently* or *sometimes*, followed by 24% in SPHE and 22% in Gaeilge.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 31, Science: Q. 19, SPHE: Q. 16
The children and I use ICT to support teaching and learning in Gaeilge/Science/SPHE for the following purposes: (tick boxes)

Findings for teachers' use of ICT are presented first followed by findings for children's use of ICT.

Teachers' use of ICT: findings across subjects

The low response rate to this question across the three subjects is of note. The greatest response rate was provided for Science (50%), followed by SPHE (45%) and Gaeilge (34%).

Table 3.11. Gaeilge, Q. 31: Teachers' use of ICT to support teaching and learning in Gaeilge

Purpose	Respondents
	n%
To plan for teaching and learning	34
To seek and find information	23
To promote interest	18

n=6-462

Table 3.12. Science, Q. 19: Teachers' use of ICT to support teaching and learning in Science

Purpose	Respondents
	n%
Plan for teaching and learning in Science	50
Research and retrieve information/resources	50
Gather, organise and present data	29
Record work	23

n=6-681

Table 3.13. SPHE, Q. 16: Teachers' use of ICT to support teaching and learning in SPHE

Purpose	Respondents
	n%
Plan for teaching and learning in SPHE	45
Research and retrieve information and resources	44
Record, analyse and present work	20

n=4-617

Across the three subjects, the largest proportion of teachers reported using ICT to support their planning for teaching and learning, followed by use of ICT to research and retrieve information. It is of note that, across the three subjects, teachers provided limited evidence of the use of ICT for pedagogical rather than professional purposes, that is to present information or demonstrate experiments for students.

Children's use of ICT in learning: findings across subjects

Response rates to this part of the question (focusing on children's use of ICT) were lower than for the previous part of the question (which focused on teachers' use of ICT). Once again, the greatest response rate was provided for Science (30%), followed by SPHE (22%) and Gaeilge (18%).

Table 3.14. Gaeilge, Q. 31: Children's use of ICT to support learning in Gaeilge

Purpose	Respondents
	n%
To develop listening skills	18
To promote interest	17
To promote understanding	15
To develop speaking skills	15

n=3-242

Table 3.15. Science, Q. 19: Children's use of ICT to support learning in Science

Purpose	Respondents
	n%
Complete project work	30
Research and retrieve information/resources	30
Develop observation skills	24
Gather, organise and present data	23

n=3-411

Table 3.16. SPHE, Q. 16: Children's use of ICT to support learning in SPHE

Purpose	Respondents
	n%
Complete project work	23
Develop self-confidence in using a wide range of technology	19
Develop communication skills	18

n=3-308

Findings show that some children have used ICT to develop skills across the three subjects (productive and receptive language skills in Gaeilge, observation skills in Science, and communication skills in SPHE). Use of ICT by children to complete project work was also reported for Science and SPHE. It's notable that in Gaeilge, only 10% of respondents (less than 2% of all teachers who completed the questionnaire) indicated that the children in their class(es) used ICT to develop writing skills. This finding is significant given the potential of ICT to support the writing process. It echoes similar findings regarding writing in the English Curriculum, reported in the *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (NCCA, 2005).

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 32, Science: Q. 20, SPHE: Q. 17
The following are examples of the types of ICT I use most frequently and how I use them:
(blank text boxes)

Types of ICT used: findings across subjects

Once again, a greater response rate was provided for this question in Science (38%) compared with SPHE (29%) and Gaeilge (28%), although all response rates are notably low.

Table 3.17. Gaeilge, Q. 32: Types of ICT used to support learning in Gaeilge

Purpose	Respondents
	n%
Word processing packages	38
Internet	21
CD-ROMs	19

n=336

Table 3.18. Science, Q. 20: Types of ICT used to support learning in Science

Purpose	Respondents
	n%
Internet	26
Word processing packages	24
Digital camera/video	19

n=527

Table 3.19. SPHE, Q. 17: Types of ICT used to support learning in SPHE

Purpose	Respondents
	n%
Internet	27
Word processing packages	21
Digital camera/video	14

n=402

Across all three subjects, teachers reported using the *Internet* to support teaching and learning. Respondents reported their use of the Internet to plan lessons and to gather teaching ideas and resources, and their children's use of the Internet to research topics for project work and to souce information to compliment, consolidate and/or extend work being covered in class. In Gaeilge, teachers' use of the Internet also focused on checking words and phrases, and sourcing games and crossword puzzles for children to complete in class.

The use of *word processing packages* was also reported across the three subjects. General teacher use of word processing focused on the design and print of posters and worksheets for classroom and school use as well as flashcards, words and phrases to support pictorial representations. In Gaeilge, teachers' reported use of word processing packages by children focused on typing up stories and projects, keeping a diary, writing personal news, and composing cards, invitations and letters. In Science, children's use of word processing focused on documenting field trips and recording information such as the progress and/or findings of an investigation, or to write up a report on a project or field-trip. In SPHE, teachers reported that children mostly used word processing to complete SPHE written assignments and project work.

Teachers also reported using the *digital camera/video* in Science and SPHE. Uses in Science included taking photographs of the children engaged in investigation and/or on field-trips and illustrating projects

with photographs and/or supportive videos. Teachers reported that in Science photographs were also used to record change, for example taking photographs of trees to record seasonal changes. In SPHE, respondents reported using the digital camera/video to record field trips such as a *green school's outing*. Respondents also cited using the digital camera/video to complement the teaching of the strand *Myself* by taking photographs of the children at the start and end of the academic year to show how they had grown/changed, and photographing children's faces demonstrating different feelings.

In Gaeilge, respondents also reported using *CD-ROMs* for educational games, paired work, and giving the children the opportunity to practise reading and grammar skills.

Assessment

This section included three questions on teachers' use of assessment as part of teaching and learning in Gaeilge, Science and SPHE. The template questions focused on

- assessment methods
- the use of assessment information
- the challenges presented by assessment.

Assessment methods

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 33, Science: Q. 21, SPHE: Q. 18
I use the following methods to assess children's learning in Gaeilge/Science/SPHE as follows:
(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Different methods of assessment are more applicable to some

curriculum areas. Consequently, there were some differences in the template options available to teachers. Nevertheless it is possible to combine analysis of the responses.

Table 3.20. Gaeilge, Science, SPHE: Methods of assessment

		Teacher questioning	Teacher observation	Teacher designed tasks and tests	Work samples, portfolios, projects
		n%	n%	n%	n%
Gaeilge	never	0	0	3	10
	seldom	0	1	7	17
	sometimes	1	1	17	26
	frequently	99	98	74	47
Science	never	0	0	2	5
	seldom	1	0	8	14
	sometimes	9	5	40	47
	frequently	91	94	50	34
SPHE	never	0	0	5	5
	seldom	0	0	17	21
	sometimes	11	6	41	48
	frequently	89	94	37	26

n=1-1,148

Across the three subjects, 100% of respondents indicated that the method of assessment they used *frequently* or *sometimes* was teacher questioning. This was closely followed by *teacher observation*. This mirrored findings on assessment methods in *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (NCCA, 2005). In Gaeilge and Science, over 90% indicated that they used teacher-designed tasks and tests *frequently* or *sometimes* as an assessment method compared with 78% for SPHE. Almost three-quarters of respondents recorded that they used children's work samples and projects for assessment purposes either *frequently* or *sometimes*.

Some 21% of respondents said they *frequently* or *sometimes* used curriculum profiles to assess children's learning in Gaeilge. Cross-analysis of the data highlighted that teachers in Irish-medium schools are significantly more likely to use work samples/projects or curriculum profiles when assessing children's learning in Gaeilge than their counterparts in English-medium schools. Cross-analysis also indicated that teachers in schools that are part of the School Support Programme (DEIS) are somewhat more likely to never use work samples, portfolios or projects when assessing Gaeilge.

Some 41% of respondents indicated that they *frequently* or *sometimes* used concept mapping in assessing children's learning in Science. The comparable figure for annotated (labelled) drawings was 70%.

The use of assessment information

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 34, Science: Q. 22, SPHE: Q. 19
I find the information I gather about children's learning helpful for:
(four-point rating scale: not helpful, somewhat helpful, helpful, very helpful)

Table 3.21. Gaeilge, Science, SPHE: Use of assessment information

		planning subsequent lessons	providing feedback to children	reporting to parents/ guardians	compiling portfolios/ collections of children's work	recording information in a central school file	supporting transition to another primary school or to post-primary
		n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%
Gaeilge	not helpful	1	7	2	13	29	22
	somewhat helpful	7	26	12	29	29	25
	helpful	23	36	31	34	21	30
	very helpful	70	31	55	24	21	24
Science	not helpful	1	2	5	8	28	29
	somewhat helpful	11	16	21	24	38	34
	helpful	39	49	46	46	25	28
	very helpful	49	33	29	22	9	11
SPHE	not helpful	1	2	2	10	28	25
	somewhat helpful	9	16	19	32	34	28
	helpful	34	34	47	41	27	32
	very helpful	56	39	32	17	11	16

n=7-1,124

Across the three subjects most respondents indicated that they found the assessment information they gathered *very helpful* or *helpful* for planning subsequent lessons. A high percentage also reported that they found the information gathered was *very helpful* or *helpful* for reporting to parents/guardians and for providing feedback to children. Of interest is that, by comparison to the comparable information in Gaeilge, more respondents saw the information they

gathered in Science and SPHE *helpful* for giving feedback to children.

Smaller percentages found the information they gathered on children's learning *very helpful* or *helpful* for recording information in a central school file, compiling portfolios/collections of children's work or for supporting a child's transition to another school (primary or post-primary). In the case of the latter, this may reflect the number of respondents who indicated that they were teaching junior classes. (Section 2, Table 2.3). Such teachers would not typically be involved with children's transition to post-primary schools.

The challenges presented by assessment

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 35, Science: Q. 23, SPHE: Q. 20
In my experience, the main challenge in assessing children's learning in Gaeilge/Science/SPHE is:
(blank text box)

Assessment challenges: Gaeilge

This question was answered by 786 respondents. This represented a 60% response rate. The challenges reported most frequently by respondents are described below.

Of the teachers who responded to this question, 31% cited the *lack of time* to carry out assessment as the main challenge in assessing children's learning in Gaeilge. This reflects findings for Mathematics in *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (NCCA, 2005). In citing lack of time, teachers also referred to perceived curriculum overload, large class sizes and the number of children who need to learn English as an additional language. One respondent described the connection between the time challenge and the number of children in the class saying: 'an t-am a fháil chun proifílí aonracha a dhéanamh le 32 páiste sa rang!/finding time to do individual profiles with 32 children in the class!' Another teacher commented on how hard it can be to 'find

the time to plan for how individual needs can be addressed.' Another highlighted the challenge of carrying out assessment in all of the strands of Curaclam na Gaeilge saying: 'A child could be excellent at reading Irish but might not be a very competent writer/speaker. It's difficult to find the time to assess all areas of the curriculum in Irish.'

Of respondents to this question, 14% cited the *absence of standardised tests* for Gaeilge as a challenge in assessing children's language development in each of the strands of Curaclam na Gaeilge. Teachers noted the absence of a national standard against which children's language development could be judged and the consequent difficulty in assessing exactly how children were progressing. As one teacher explained:

> *Níl aon scrúdú foirmiúil naisiúnta, le "stens" ar nós an Bhéarla nó an Mata ar fáil, chun comparáid a dhéanamh le páistí eile na tíre.*
>
> *There are no national formal tests like in English and Mathematics with "stens" available, to compare children with other children in the country.*

This challenge was also highlighted by teachers who responded to the consultation on *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary schools* (NCCA, 2006).

A minority of respondents (14%) also referred to the challenges of assessing *oral language,* particularly in the infant classes where reading and writing in Gaeilge have not yet been introduced formally. The challenges noted by teachers highlighted the fact that many children, especially the very young and those who are shy, can understand more Gaeilge than they produce. According to respondents, assessing oral language posed a challenge especially in English-medium schools where children do not begin formal reading or writing in Gaeilge

until second class. One teacher noted the difficulties in relation to this:

> *Is teanga í, tá sé deacair tuiscint na Gaeilge a measúnú mura bhfuil labhairt agus scríobh na Gaeilge acu. Tagann tuiscint roimh labhairt.*
>
> *It is a language, it is hard to assess understanding of Gaeilge if they can't speak or write through Irish. Understanding comes before speaking.*

Another teacher noted that 'the new Gaeilge curriculum is mostly oral orientated…collecting work samples and projects is not very practical in infants anyway.' Again, teachers referred to the absence of standardised tests on which their assessments of oral language might be based.

Assessment challenges: Science

There were 663 respondents to this question, representing a 48% response rate. Some 48% of these teachers highlighted brú ama/ pressure of time as the most significant challenge they experienced in assessing children's learning in Science. Teachers identified two main sources of this challenge—class size and the breadth of the curriculum. 'Finding time with large class sizes and [an] overloaded curriculum' was how one teacher articulated the challenge. Many teachers referred to the difficulties large class sizes created for them in ring-fencing time to gather information on how well each child was learning in Science. One teacher noted how difficult it was 'trying to get round all children in class to assess oral or written work.' Another teacher commented: 'As I teach junior infants … it is all teacher observation and question time which can be difficult in a large class.' A number of teachers cited the breadth of the Science Curriculum as exacerbating the challenge of finding time in large

classes. One teacher commented: 'I think that a general record of Science achievement is feasible but to record achievement in each strand … is next to impossible unless the class size is reduced.' Others spoke of an overloaded curriculum generally and the resulting lack of time for assessment. One respondent summarised it noting: '[the] lack of time [for assessment] because of overloaded curriculum, lack of time with all other subjects to teach also.'

Over one-quarter (28%) of respondents identified 'doing' assessment, in effect *the assessment process,* as the second greatest challenge they experienced in assessing children's learning in Science. Within this, they commented on the demands in using a range of assessment methods and the unavailability of assessment resources to help them make accurate judgments about children's learning. One teacher captured the essence of the challenge when (s)he noted: '[The greatest challenge is] organising myself and not feeling daunted by different assessment formats.' Respondents highlighted the challenge they faced in using a range of methods to gather assessment information. One teacher noted that observation '[is] difficult to record' while another commented on the difficulty in 'designing tasks that will accurately and fairly assess learning in Science and not just development in handwriting.' Some teachers referred to the difficulties posed by recording and using assessment. The lack of resources such as standardised tests to assess children's learning in Science in comparison to English and Mathematics was noted by a number of respondents.

The particular *nature of the Science Curriculum* was identified by 25% of respondents as presenting the third greatest challenge in assessing children's learning. Teachers attributed the challenge of assessing children's knowledge and understanding, and their scientific skills to three main factors: the content of children's learning, the emphasis on collaborative learning and the emphasis on practical work.

Elaborating on the challenge presented by the content of the *Science Curriculum*, many teachers referred to concepts. One teacher reported: 'Pupils in general find Science concepts difficult to grasp. In some ways, I feel they are not yet mature enough to apply the skills of logic, reasoning and questioning which the Science Curriculum demands/expects.' Another teacher noted how difficult it was 'eliciting information on what children's ideas are on a concept.' Focusing on children's Science skills, some respondents noted how 'pinpointing whether or not each individual child has progressed in their scientific skills' was exacerbated by the fact that the *Science Curriculum* advocates collaborative learning. Group work made it especially difficult to *assess an individual student's ability and individual understanding as opposed to group effort*. Furthermore, the focus on practical work contributed to Science *not [being] conducive to formal assessment*.

Assessment challenges: SPHE

There were 618 respondents to this question, a response rate of 45%. Analysis of responses identified three key challenges that were experienced by teachers in assessing children's learning in SPHE.

Just 24% of the 618 respondents commented on *the difficulty of assessing the nature of learning in SPHE*. Responses fell into two broad categories. A small group felt the subject should not be assessed at all: *Knowledge, skills and attitudes are not formally testable; each child's opinion is valid and cannot be assessed*. A larger group indicated that though assessment may be valid it was, nonetheless, difficult. Respondents described children's learning in SPHE as *personal, complex, opinion-based, sensitive, abstract* and *intangible*. Many teachers referred to the fact that, as the personal development of the child is at the heart of SPHE learning, some objectives are of a long-term nature. The success of SPHE teaching and learning, therefore, might not be

apparent for many years. One teacher wrote: 'It may take longer time than a school year to see progression and personal development; SPHE is for life.' A number of teachers wondered whether the attitudes taught or learned in the classroom could truly be assessed within the confines of the classroom or whether they would only be apparent in the family and social life of the child. A respondent noted that 'sensitive issues are often covered and it's hard to assess what they've taken on board without prying.' A few teachers suggested that children say what they think teachers want to hear even if they (the children) have not internalised the concepts or ideas. Teachers highlighted the difficulty of measuring children's views and opinions, the development of values (especially when orally expressed), and the assessment of affective areas of learning. Some respondents felt that the difficulties in assessing learning in SPHE arose from the stage of development or maturity of the children themselves. Teachers' comments referred to younger, shy, withdrawn, or quiet children who lack either the appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas or the confidence to convey their views. Teachers also commented on many children's inability to understand complex issues. Lack of language skills was also mentioned by a few teachers in relation to newcomer children whose first language may not be English.

Almost the same percentage of respondents (23%) reported *time and class size* as challenges in assessing SPHE. In this they mirrored responses to the comparable questions for Gaeilge and Science. Teachers spoke of *time to listen to all pupils* and class size as challenges in assessing the children's learning in SPHE. Though some teachers referred separately to either time or class size, some cited both in their comments. A small number of responses also referred to *curriculum overload*. Teachers who qualified their comments made the point that it was the difficult, given these circumstances, to assess individual children.

While 12% of respondents referred to the *lack of appropriate assessment* instruments for SPHE, only one teacher in a hundred suggested that there should be a formal standardised test for the subject. This was in contrast to the more frequently expressed opinion that the subject is not assessable by formal testing. However, teachers did express the need for some form of assessment instruments such as checklists or differentiated worksheets. Others referred to their need for support in recording and reporting assessment information from SPHE. Some respondents considered observation to be inadequate as the main assessment method, noting that *observations can be misleading.* Observation was, however, frequently considered to be the most suitable method for assessing learning in SPHE. A few teachers referred to the lack of significant written evidence of children's work in SPHE, leading them to conclude that assessment by means of discussion and observation was the best approach. A small percentage of respondents referred to their own lack of expertise in devising alternative assessment methods.

Assessment challenges: findings across subjects

Across the three subjects, respondents reported that lack of time was a major assessment challenge. Linked to this was class size and perceived curriculum overload. Respondents noted the challenge of assessing the nature of learning in SPHE and the nature of the Science Curriculum itself. Teachers noted the lack of standardised tests in Science and Gaeilge. They noted, too, the problems associated with assessing oral language especially in very young children. They also commented on the difficulty of assessing practical investigations and group work.

General

This section of the template included questions on a range of issues regarding teachers' experience of the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science

and SPHE. The questions yielded qualitative data and focused on

- involvement of parents/guardians in supporting children's progress
- impact on children's learning
- successes
- challenges
- priorities.

Involvement of parents/guardians

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 36b, Science: Q. 24, SPHE: Q. 21
Parents/guardians are involved in supporting their children's progress in Gaeilge/Science/SPHE through:
(blank text box)

In this open-ended question teachers were asked to illustrate how parents/guardians were involved in their children's progress in each of the three subjects.

Involvement of parents/guardians: Gaeilge

This question was answered by 866 teachers. This was a response rate of 63%. Homework, oral language and displaying a positive attitude were the three most frequently reported ways of involving parents/guardians in supporting their children's progress in Gaeilge.

Almost two thirds (66%) of teachers who responded to this question noted that parents/guardians were involved in supporting their children's progress in Gaeilge by helping them with *homework*. The homework activities cited most often were reading and spellings.

More that one-third (37%) of teachers reported that parents/

guardians, whatever their ability level, supported their children's progress by speaking Gaeilge informally at home. One teacher described this involvement with *oral language* in the following way: 'an Gaeilge atá acu féin a úsáid i dtimpeallacht na scoile agus sa bhaile más féidir/use the Gaeilge they have in the school environs and at home if possible.'

A minority (13%) of teachers reported that a *positive attitude* to Gaeilge was a means through which parents/guardians supported their children's progress in Gaeilge by, as they said, '*ag taispeáint don pháiste go bhfuil spéis agus meas acu ar an Gaeilge/showing the child that they have an interest and respect for Gaeilge.*

Parents who participated in the School Case Study (see Section 1, Table 1.5) had a positive attitude to the language. They indicated that they approved of the communicative approach to language learning now being used in schools. As one parent noted: 'By dwelling on the spoken language first, instead of hammering in the verbs, you will get more success. You know that they will pick it up.'

In comparison, 11% of teachers noted that a negative attitude to Gaeilge on the part of parents/guardians did not support children's progress in Gaeilge. Some parents who took part in the School Case Study acknowledged their negative attitudes to Gaeilge, which they felt arose from their own experiences in school. They had consequent difficulties, they said, in helping their children with Gaeilge homework. One parent noted: 'The language was forced on you years ago in school, you had to learn it and you didn't like it.'

Involvement of parents/guardians: Science

The 851 teachers responded to this question represented a 62% response rate. Of these, 88% indicated that they involved parents/guardians in supporting children's progress in Science through *homework*. This ranged from checking and signing completed work to

co-operating with children as they investigated, researched and learned about scientific concepts. Many respondents reported encouraging parents to help their children use ICT and in particular the internet in carrying out homework tasks. One such teacher noted that (s)he supported parental involvement by 'encouraging research in the home on various topics using newspapers, magazines, the Internet, etc.' Some teachers involved parents by *getting children to show their work at home and explain it to parents*. Others encouraged *them [parents] to question their children*. A number of teachers also reported that they encouraged parents to act as models in promoting certain values and attitudes within the Science Curriculum. This was especially so in the strand *Environmental awareness and care.* One teacher encouraged 'parents to get children to take responsibility for their own environment', while another noted that (s)he 'encouraged parents to assist [their children] in recycling and to promote responsibility towards environmental awareness and care.'

One third of respondents (33%) recorded that they involved parents/guardians by *sharing information* with them. Teachers reported using a variety of strategies ranging from formal and infrequent to informal and ongoing. In the case of the former, some teachers referred to *cruinnithe foirmiúil idir múinteoirí agus tuistí/formal meetings between teachers and parents.* These meetings included parent/teacher meetings and *meetings with parents in September outlining the curriculum to be covered*. Some teachers described specific Science events including a Science evening or open day: *so parents can see first hand the Science going on in the school. This means that parents can talk/discuss the activities with their children*. One teacher wrote about *having a display of work, experiments for parents in [the] school hall during school time. Children themselves demonstrate to parents work and projects they worked on during term*. A small number of teachers referred to using *reports to parents* at the end of the school year. The informal strategies included sending *samples of the children's work home for parents to view and writing notes in*

children's [homework] journals. The parents who were involved in the School Case Study indicated varying practices in relation to how much information they had received on their children's Science learning in school. One parent noted that, 'Science was a thing that I didn't realise they were doing in school to be honest, until quite recently.' A parent from another school noted that their children participated annually in 'lá eolaíochta na scoile, bíonn an halla lán d'obair eolaíochta na bpáistí/school Science day when the hall is filled with the children's Science work.'

A quarter of teachers (25%) recorded involving parents/guardians in supporting children's progress in Science by *asking them to help gather materials/equipment needed for investigations* and with design and make activities. In most cases, teachers did not identify individual materials or resources. A small number of teachers spoke about encouraging parents to bring their children on *nature walks to collect things for the bord dúlra/nature table.*

Parents who were involved in the School Case Study did not, in the main, refer to helping children gather materials for investigations at home. Rather they remarked on the children discussing the investigations they had carried out in school and, importantly, on their enthusiasm for carrying them out again, voluntarily, at home. The parents had a positive attitude towards Science and commented that their children were also favourably disposed towards the subject. One parent explained why (s)he thought children felt so positively about the subject: 'It is because the kids are actually getting down and dirty and doing everything and I think that is fantastic. They are experimenting'.

Involvement of parents/guardians: SPHE

Of the 858 respondents who answered this question, 94% indicated that they involved parents/guardians in supporting children's progress

in SPHE through sharing information either verbally or through written communication. Teachers who answered this question spoke of discussing issues with parents/guardians, and of talking to them about children's responses and about upcoming themes in SPHE. They wrote of encouraging children and parents to discuss what had been or would be learned during SPHE lessons in school. One teacher spoke of 'encouraging parents to discuss topics with their children in an open manner, e.g. safety and protection and sensitive issues.' Respondents commented on formal parent teacher meetings, group meetings, and information evenings for parents. One spoke of 'talking to parents at parent teacher meetings about the SPHE programme and what it hopes to achieve.' Teachers wrote of sending home letters, notes, surveys, and other printed matter specifically linked to parts of the SPHE programme such as Stay safe and Relationships and Sexuality Education.

It was these programmes in particular that parents referred to during the School Case Study. One participant felt that parents generally would like more information in relation to the content of some of these programmes, especially Relationships and Sexuality Education. (S)he stated:

> *I would like to have been brought in at the beginning of the year and been told what the curriculum for the year is. Like 'Myself and others' and the sex education in it. I would like to have an idea of what is going to be taught for the year.*

Teachers wrote of *sending home cover letters or notes in school bags*. Respondents referred to asking parents to sign consent forms prior to children embarking on some areas of the programme. They also mentioned asking parents to sign copies of school policies. Smaller numbers of teachers indicated that they involved parents/guardians in their children's progress in SPHE through end of year reports.

Of teachers who responded to this question, 50% recorded that they involved parents/guardians through their *children's work*, be that *class-work* or *home-work,* written or oral. Teachers wrote of requesting parents to help with homework and at times to sign it. Respondents wrote of keeping parents/guardians involved by sending home worksheets and work samples that necessitated further discussion. A teacher referred to 'putting *'Discuss with parents'* instructions together with (the) worksheet or relevant topic for homework.' Another wrote of 'home activities e.g. family fun-time worksheet, discussion, scrapbook to be completed at home.' Teachers mentioned asking children to engage parents/guardians in further research for SPHE at home. They spoke of children searching for photographs and other resources. A respondent wrote of parents 'ag cabhrú leis na páistí obair bhaile a dhéanamh agus eolas a fháil ón idirlíon/helping the children do their homework and get information on the Internet.' One referred to 'homework assignments such as gathering photographs/interviewing grandparents.' A respondent indicated that (s)he asked children to complete projects at home with parents'/guardians' help, of *designing tasks that involve parental input and support*. Some respondents mentioned involving parents/guardians *creating displays to make parents aware of work being undertaken*.

Just 11% of respondents recorded involving parents/guardians in supporting children's progress in SPHE by enlisting their help with the school's *healthy diet and lifestyle policy.* One teacher spoke of 'involving parents in implementing the school's healthy eating lunch policy,' while another wrote that 'parents provide healthy food for a food tasting activity.' A number of parents who were involved in the School Case Study referred to the healthy eating policy of the school their child(ren) attended. They commented on the children's enthusiasm for such policies. As one parent commented: 'It is very easy to make them a good lunch here because they are not allowed have the rubbish, it is just not cool to bring in rubbish.'

Findings across subjects

Table 3.22. Involvement of parents/guardians – findings across subjects

Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
Homework	Homework	Sharing information
Oral language	Sharing information	Children's work: class or home
Positive or negative attitude	Gathering materials and/or equipment	School's healthy diet and lifestyle policy

n=851-866

Based on teachers' responses, it appears that, across the three subjects, parents/guardians are regularly involved in supporting children's progress by helping with homework. With regard to Science and SPHE, parents/guardians are also involved by a mutual sharing of information with teachers and by helping the children to collect resources for use in school. However, parents interviewed during the School Case Study indicated that they would like more information, particularly with regard to SPHE.

Impact on children's learning

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 37a, Science: Q. 25, SPHE: Q. 22

In my experience, I think the curriculum for Gaeilge/ Science/SPHE is impacting on children's learning in the following ways:

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Impact on children's learning: Gaeilge

There were 853 respondents to the question regarding the impact of Curaclam na Gaeilge on children's learning, a 62% response rate. The three most frequent responses are detailed below.

Just over a third (36%) of respondents noted that Curaclam na

Gaeilge had impacted positively on children's learning by increasing the amount of Gaeilge they spoke, not only during the Gaeilge lesson but also informally throughout the school day. One teacher stated: 'Cuireann sé béim ar an teanga mar theanga labhartha gníomhach cumarsáide/It puts an emphasis on the language being a spoken, active and communicative language.' As a result of the *increased use of oral language* the teachers felt that the children's communication and listening skills in general had also improved.

The children who were interviewed as part of the School Case Study were, on the whole, positive about learning Gaeilge, especially in groups or pairs. They were particularly enthusiastic about oral work. One child explained: 'My favourite bit of Irish is when we speak to each other in Irish and we have scenarios where one is the shopkeeper and the other is the customer' [5th class child].

Just under a third (31%) of teachers indicated that fostering an *interest in and enjoyment of* Gaeilge lessons was the greatest impact Curaclam na Gaeilge had on children's learning. A number of teachers referred to the fact that they were teaching infants, and/or that the enjoyment related specifically to active learning tasks such as drama, singing and word games.

Almost a fifth (19%) of respondents noted that Curaclam na Gaeilge had impacted on children's learning by instilling a *sense of pride and love* for their language, culture, heritage, and even community, as commented on by teachers from one school in a Gaeltacht area. Teachers typically remarked: 'bród a mhúscailt ins na páistí as a gcuid cultúir agus teanga féin/to instil in the children pride in their culture and language.' Some of the children who were interviewed as part of the School Case Study referred to this sense of pride too. One child remarked: 'It is the language of our country, English was just brought in, but I think it is nicer to have a bit of Irish, even though it is not

used much' [6th class child]. Children in another school echoed this. One said: 'It is our national language.' Another child said that 'if you become a rugby player or something for Ireland, you would have to sing the Irish Anthem' [4th class childs].

Other areas alluded to by teachers were the general impact learning Gaeilge had on children's cognitive skills, on children's interest in and ability to learn other languages, the positive impact of the child-centred curriculum on all areas of the child's learning, and the development of the child's self confidence both in relation to Gaeilge and other areas of the curriculum.

However, 64 teachers (8% of respondents) noted a negative impact. These said that there had been a decrease in levels of attainment in particular in relation to grammar, reading and writing since the introduction of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). A number of teachers referred to their perception that children were not prepared sufficiently for learning Gaeilge in post-primary schools. These concerns were raised also by teachers and principals who took part in the School Case Study. One principal said:

> *Bhí an-chuid gearáin againn sa mhéad is go raibh an iomarca i gceist leis an gcuraclam athbhreithnithe…agus nach bhfuilimid in ann díriú go leor ar na bunábhair níos mó agus go bhfuil 'dumbing down' ar siúl ar na bunábhair…caithfidh na páistí teacht amach le caighdeán réasúnta ard i Rang a Sé/ We had a lot of complaints in that there is too much in the revised curriculum…and that we can't target the basic subjects any more and that there's a 'dumbing down' of the basic subjects…the children have to come out with a reasonably high standard in sixth class.*

A teacher in another school commented:

> *What I have found is that the emphasis has gone off the writing, which is what we did a lot of. But now they can't write. They don't have the tools to even do what we expect them to do up the school.*

A colleague of his/hers continued:

> *I feel sorry for the teachers who are teaching the senior classes because the children then have to go into post-primary and there is a whole different set of expectations of them. I am wondering what is going to happen when the children who have gone all the way through, go into post-primary and suddenly find they are reading really difficult pieces and poetry and everything and I think that will be a problem. There is going to have to be a change in the post-primary school curriculum as well.*

Impact on children's learning: Science

There were 958 respondents to this question, giving a 70% response rate. Some 56% of respondents reported children's *increased knowledge and understanding* of their world as the greatest impact of the Science Curriculum on their learning. Elaborating on this, some teachers focused on a specific strand of the Science Curriculum. Of these, the strand *Environmental awareness and care* was mentioned most frequently. Teachers noted children's increased awareness and appreciation of, or information about the environment: [the Science Curriculum] *gives them a love/appreciation of nature and our natural environment*. Similarly, other teachers commented that the 'Science Curriculum encourages respect for the environment and living things and makes them more aware … of their role in taking care of the environment.'

This response by one teacher captured what half of the respondents (50%) identified as the second greatest impact of the Science Curriculum on children's learning. 'It [Science] engages them and it ignites their curiosity.' Many teachers noted children's heightened interest in the world around them and how this was a driver to seek out new knowledge. This is captured in the following response:

> *iad a chur ag ceistiú: ar lorg eolais, ag déanamh taighde; ag muscailt suim iontu sa timpeallacht, srl. go bhfuil urraim againn don domhan/getting them to question: to look for information; to do research; awakening interest in them in the environment around them, etc. that we have a responsibility for the world.*

Developing this theme of children's thirst for information, one teacher noted: 'Children now don't take things for granted, they ask questions to find out why things work the way they do.' Some teachers attributed this to the open-ended investigative nature of learning in the Science Curriculum: 'Tá a fhios ag páistí go bhfuil níos mó ná dóigh amháin le freagraí ceisteanna/eolas a fháil/children know there is more than one way to answer questions/get information.' Another teacher commented:

> *It [Science] gives the child an opportunity to pose questions that interest them and come up with a way to figure out the answer themselves. It allows the child to be wrong – they can prove an idea they had incorrect or figure out a better way to do something.*

Some teachers considered this investigative approach to learning important for enabling children to *think 'outside the box'*. Elaborating on this point, one teacher noted: '[Science is] creating a positive experience for children. [It] provides freedom for investigating, estimating, predicting, etc. Children don't get these opportunities in

other subjects.' Concurring with this point, another teacher commented: 'Children themselves are partly in charge of their learning—sharing learning.' This may result in children feeling 'bródúil as rudaí a fhoghlamaíonn siad iad féin/proud of things they learn themselves.'

In general, the children who were interviewed as part of the School Case Study agreed with these findings. They indicated that they liked learning Science very much. They spoke of Science being fun. When asked if there were any bits of Science that they did not really like, one child simply responded: 'Ohhhh, I LOVE Science!!!' [2nd class child].

Children said they liked conducting investigations and drawing pictures of the investigations. They also thought it was important to learn about Science for their time in post-primary schools and for their possible future roles as adults (scientists, teachers, doctors, dentists, nurses, chemists). One child remarked: 'I think it is important to learn about Science because when you are going for a job, it will give you a lot of options' [6th class child].

Children mirrored what some teachers mentioned above. They thought that it was important to learn about Science because it helped them to understand the world around them, as one child said 'to see how things work' [2nd class child]. Another child said 'because it could be like how to stop something, some eruption like stopping a volcano from erupting, like a bomb from erupting' [4th class child]. Without Science, one said 'there wouldn't be as much antidotes for anything' [6th class child]. Another said:

> *I like having a general idea of what is what in Science, because it is nice to know things like that. If we didn't do Science you wouldn't really know anything about the body, and you wouldn't know anything about electric currents or magnets or anything. So it is nice to have a general idea* [6th class child].

Another child in the same group summed it up well

> *Well Science comes into our lives everyday when you think about it. If you hurt yourself, that is Science. If you are trying to figure out, if your brother hits you and you have a bruise, that is Science. It comes into our lives every day and if you want a career in Science, you need to be good at it* [6th class child].

The third greatest impact of the Science Curriculum on children's learning as reported by teachers was the *development of skills*. The Science Curriculum supports children's development of the skills of working scientifically and the skills for designing and making. In the case of the 31% of respondents who identified this as a significant impact, most referred to the skills of *ag obair mar eolaí/working as a scientist*. Some teachers identified specific skills. Collectively, they referred to *questioning, observing, predicting, estimating and measuring, analysing, recording, and communicating.* Some skills were mentioned less often than others, in particular analysing and communicating the results or outcomes of investigations. A small number of teachers commented on the positive impact of children's ability to work scientifically on their learning across the Science Curriculum. As one teacher noted: 'The practice of working scientifically, questioning, observing, etc. makes them [the children] more critical thinkers and sharper to minute detail.'

Impact on children's learning: SPHE

Almost all (99%) of the 1,000 respondents to this question referred to the content of the strand *Myself and others*. Findings focused on the growing child's increasing awareness of others and of their needs and opinions and on children's improving ability to relate to others. The child's behaviour with his/her peers at work and at play, in the classroom and outside it, were reported by respondents as indictors of

the positive impact of SPHE lessons.

Respondents referred to children becoming more aware of others, more concerned for them, having greater respect for others and their property, and displaying better manners and courtesy. One teacher said that the strand 'gives them a greater sense of empathy with others.' Teachers also spoke of children's increasing awareness of their responsibility to others. Evidence quoted by respondents included greater willingness of children to co-operate and work in groups and to share and take turns with greater patience. One teacher wrote that the strand 'Myself and others encourages turn taking which affects all other tasks and lessons.' Listening to others and accepting their differing views and opinions was seen as evidence of the positive impact of SPHE on children's social development.

Some of the children who took part in the School Case Study were aware of this themselves. One child thought learning about SPHE was 'important because you are aware of other people's feelings' [6th class child], while another felt that 'if we didn't have SPHE we wouldn't socialise with people' [6th class child].

Teachers also highlighted children's growing awareness of themselves as part of a wider society and community beyond family and peers. One teacher wrote that the strand 'helps them to think about themselves and their friendships, family and the wider world.' Respondents also mentioned children's awareness of their responsibility to contribute to the wider community.

Respondents referred to the improving social skills of the children. Teachers talked of children interacting more positively with their peers. They wrote of children's greater awareness of personal safety. The children's knowledge of strategies for self-protection from possible abuse, including bullying, appeared *to help them cope better in certain situations.*

A large majority (81%) of respondents commented on the impact of the strand *Myself*. Their remarks relating to the strand were concerned with aspects of the children's personal development. Teachers referred to the growing self-awareness of children. One teacher commented: 'Bíonn siad níos eolaí futhú féin/they are more knowledgeable about themselves.' Respondents spoke of children's improved self-confidence and enhanced self-esteem and of the children 'using skills practiced in lesson to deal with bullying, anger and frustration.' Greater self-respect was also evident, according to many responses.

The opportunities that SPHE provided for children to express their opinions and feelings within a safe environment were highlighted by teachers. The use of circle time was singled out particularly as a means of structuring and facilitating this expression. One teacher wrote that 'circle time is a good safe opportunity to talk.' Another commented: 'Circle time has a huge impact on children's listening and turn-taking skills.' Teachers said too that circle time was *a great vehicle for developing language and discussion skills.*

Respondents referred to a greater awareness of nutrition among children. A number of teachers felt that the impact of work in this respect could be observed in the improved nutritional quality of children's lunches. Teachers commented also on children's improving skills in decision making, conflict resolution, and in communication generally. One teacher said that children seemed more 'ábalta seasamh suas dá gcearta féin/more able to stand up for their rights.' Some teachers also commented on the positive impact of the SPHE Curriculum on sexuality education for children. Teachers referred to children having a better understanding of their bodily development and greater respect for their bodies as a result.

A smaller proportion (18%) of respondents commented on the

content of the strand *Myself and the wider world*. Teachers highlighted in particular children's increased awareness of the differences between peoples, and their increased awareness of the environment and of their responsibility for its care.

Respondents wrote of children gaining greater understanding of the diversity among people, especially in cultural terms. Some teachers saw this understanding as including peers with special needs and disabilities. Teachers referred to the celebration and tolerance of different cultures. One respondent wrote that 'children learn to appreciate difference and diversity.'

According to respondents, children are becoming increasingly aware of threats to the environment and of the ways in which they could play a role in protecting the natural world. Some responses expressed this as children's 'respect' for the environment.

Impact on children's learning: findings across subjects

Table 3.23. Impact on children's learning – findings across subjects

Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
Increased use of oral language	Increased knowledge and understanding about the world	Awareness of others
Interest and enjoyment	Increased sense of curiosity and interest	Personal development
Sense of pride and love	Development of skills	The environment

According to respondents, the curriculum in Gaeilge, Science and SPHE appears, on the whole, to be impacting positively on children's learning especially in the areas presented in Table 3.23.

Successes

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 38, Science: Q. 26, SPHE: Q. 23
The greatest success which I have experienced in implementing the curriculum for Gaeilge/Science/SPHE is:
(blank text box)

This question prompted teachers to list the greatest success they had experienced in teaching each of the three subjects. Their responses are analysed subject by subject below.

Successes: Gaeilge

There were 931 respondents to this question, a response rate of 68%. Almost half (47%) of respondents listed children's *enjoyment and interest* in Gaeilge as their greatest success in teaching Curaclam na Gaeilge. As one teacher noted:

> *Mothaím go bhfuil dearcadh dearfach ag an gcuid is mó den rang ar an nGaeilge. Cabhraíonn an drámaíocht agus ról-ghlacadh cuid mhaith leis seo.*
>
> *I feel that the majority of children in my class have a positive attitude towards Gaeilge. Drama and role play help a lot with this.*

It should be noted that, in listing children's enjoyment and interest as a success, some teachers qualified their answers. A number of teachers suggested that it may not have been the Gaeilge children were enjoying but the active learning activities, particularly drama and word games, that were used during Gaeilge classes. Other respondents commented that they were referring only to the enjoyment of Gaeilge lessons in junior classes.

More than one third (39%) of respondents listed children's *informal*

use of oral language as their greatest success. In this regard, teachers mentioned hearing children speak Gaeilge on their own initiative and/or using phrases learned in a Gaeilge lesson in contexts outside of the classroom. One teacher noted the following:

> *ag éisteacht le na páistí ag baint úsáid as an nGaeilge a d'fhoghlaim siad sa rang Gaeilge i gceachtanna difriúla nó i gcomhrá neamhspléach.*
>
> *listening to the children using the Irish they have learnt in the Irish lesson during a different lesson or as part of an independent conversation.*

While teachers generally noted the increased use of oral Gaeilge as a success in relation to teaching Curaclam na Gaeilge, as with enjoyment and interest above, a number of teachers noted that this pertained specifically to younger children. This was referred to also by teachers in the School Case Study. One teacher said: 'The oral communication has definitely improved and they do enjoy it more, but there is a big 'but' in the challenges.' A colleague continued: 'I agree with the fun, certainly there is more fun. It is more open because it is more informal I suppose … I think that 'but' comes in particularly in the senior classes.' Another teacher commented: 'I am getting very disillusioned with the Gaeilge curriculum at senior level. It appears to lack structure.'

Principals in the School Case Study highlighted their schools' success in supporting children's development of *oral Irish*. Elaborating on this point, some principals spoke about children enjoying using the language and showing an improved attitude towards it. This attitudinal change was evident in parents as well as children. One principal said: 'I think it (the improved attitude) comes from the parents as well, I would feel that there is more enthusiasm for the language.' Two principals spoke about their schools' success in

integrating spoken Gaeilge with the fabric of the school day, with one of the principals referring to using the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to support children's communication through Gaeilge:

> *We would use an awful lot of incidental Irish in the school. Even little things…We don't have it in our policy that PE is taught through Irish, but we certainly would include it because PE would be a subject on its own…The staff would try to make the effort and speak to each other in Gaeilge.*

Successes: Science

There were 917 respondents to this question, giving a 67% response rate. In all, 44% of respondents highlighted the level of *children's engagement with Science* as a major success. Children's enjoyment of the practical, hands-on nature of the subject was noted by many respondents. One commented:

> *Mine just think it's play. It [Science] is fun and games for them. They thoroughly enjoy it [Science], getting their hands wet and getting themselves mucky in whatever they have to do. They really enjoy it, it is a very simple easy programme for Infants. Yesterday, we were finding out if things bent, it nearly had my head done! Materials that bend and don't bend, they practically tried to break everything in the class! So they totally enjoyed it!*

Similarly, principals in the School Case Study noted the children's love of learning through Science: 'I think Science is becoming more and more popular. The kids like it.'

Teachers reported that Science lessons awakened a keen interest in some children and heightened their natural sense of curiosity. Children embraced the subject and in some cases did extra

investigative work at home. One teacher noted:

> *Tar éis ceachtanna éagsúla a dhéanamh, bhíodh na paistí ag teacht ar ais chugam le scéalta faoi rudaí a rinneadh sa bhaile as a stuaim féin/After different lessons, the children would come back to me with stories about things they had done at home of their own accord.*

Children who took part in the School Case Study also spoke of trying things out for themselves at home. Parents, according to the children, were supportive of these investigations at home. One child said:

> *Yesterday…we were doing rockets and we put a vitamin C tablet in this tube, we put in water and we put it upside down and the liquid fizzes up and the air has nowhere to go so it pops up and goes into the air…yesterday, I was trying the rocket in the back garden and it went over into my neighbours back garden because it went so high* [2nd class child].

There was a feeling amongst the teachers that the hands-on, practical side of the subject was helping to maintain the children's interest and engagement in Science. Teachers noted that the children looked forward to Science lessons and remained focused on the task to be performed. They also commented that children derived a sense of pride from their work. Teachers mentioned too that children's self-esteem appeared to increase when they took an active role in successful investigations.

A third (33%) of the respondents highlighted *investigations and the development of investigative skills* as an area of success. Several teachers recorded being pleased that they themselves had the confidence to conduct investigations with their classes. One teacher stated that his/her greatest success was having 'confidence to do experiments –

development of personal skills.' Another teacher noted that 'carrying out practical work was his/her greatest success.'

Most teachers who highlighted the development of investigative skills as a success referred to the skills of working scientifically. As one teacher noted:

> *We have had great fun with the experiments and finding out things. They really, really enjoy it and they love finding out ways of doing things or predicting what will happen. They really enjoy saying 'Well, I think this is going to happen' and why it will happen and they are quite smart about it really. If they think I can't do something, they really rise to it and find a way around something…they just love it.*

Many respondents referred to individual skills. Of these the most frequently mentioned were, in descending order, investigating and experimenting, questioning, and observing and predicting.

The 21% of respondents who highlighted *children's knowledge and understanding of Science* mentioned that the Science Curriculum, particularly the practical elements of the curriculum, had led to the children having a *heightened awareness of how their world works*. Children began to question how and why things worked following their experience with Science at primary level. Respondents also reported that children gained a greater level of independence through investigating their own theories and predictions in a hands-on manner.

Respondents to this question noted repeatedly that the children were able to transfer the understanding gained in Science to other curriculum areas. One teacher commented:

> *It is rewarding seeing children's understanding of areas develop and how they become more confident at questioning things*

> *about their environment, and transfer their understanding to other curricular areas.*

A number of teachers also pointed to the fact that the skills of working scientifically were transferable to other subjects and that it was obvious that their pupils were doing so:

> *The strategies they learn in Science are very important. They look at things, they think about them and they predict. A lot of that can be carried through in Geography. We were talking about energy last week, predicting what can happen based on our current behaviour and how we can change it. If they look at things and analyse them, it does carry across the subjects, Geography and History and in English of course they are predicting as well.*

The main area in which the knowledge gained through Science exhibited itself was through the children's increased understanding of scientific concepts and their ability to connect these to everyday occurrences and objects. One teacher noted: 'They began to connect Science with everyday things happening around them'.

Successes: SPHE

There were 929 respondents to this question. This was a response rate of 68%. Some 49% of respondents indicated that their greatest success in implementing the SPHE Curriculum was in the area of *children's self-esteem and self-expression*. Sub-themes within this finding included children's confidence, communication, awareness of self and their own safety, and responsibility for their actions.

Within this category, the largest numbers of teachers indicated that their greatest success focused on children's improved levels of self-confidence/esteem. Other teachers recorded that their greatest success was the children's increased ability to express their feelings and ideas:

> *It is a success that the children are all sufficiently confident to speak out. They do speak out and they all have an opinion and they are not afraid to say it. They are terrifically confident children and I think the fact that they are listened to in SPHE is key to that.*

One teacher wrote of 'open, happy children who have the confidence to express any issues they may have.' Another mentioned 'seeing special educational needs children more settled and happy as a result of raised self-esteem.' One respondent said that SPHE 'allows children to speak freely and voice opinions.' Another recorded that the subject was 'empowering children to express themselves in time of need.' Some principals in the case study schools also commented on the success of the SPHE Curriculum building up children's self-esteem and their interpersonal skills. As one noted: 'SPHE is very much [about] building self-esteem. Even in the junior infants you would hear our junior infants say 'I'm using my own brain.'

Just under half (44%) of respondents to this question listed children's *improved interactions with others* as a success. Teachers spoke of children's relations with others, their contribution to a positive classroom atmosphere and their efforts to combat bullying. Teachers also mentioned conflict resolution, the development of social skills and the management of behaviour. They wrote, too, about problem solving, children's participation in group work, and dealing with diversity. Within this category, the largest number of respondents noted children's increased respect and tolerance for others as their greatest success in implementing the SPHE Curriculum. This was often linked to the previous theme concerning children's growing confidence in their own voice:

> *They do speak out and they all have an opinion and they are not afraid to say it. I do listen to them and they realise their*

> *opinion is valid, and I think that is a great success. They are forced as well to listen to other children and to realise that there is one voice and you listen to whoever is talking at the time. That is a huge success. With SPHE it really forces them to sit back and consider other people in a positive way.*

Teachers noted that children are becoming increasingly able to support difference within the classroom, through SPHE. One teacher wrote that 'children are much more accepting of differences be it colour, culture, academic ability, etc. and more co-operative with one another.' Other teachers recorded the improved atmosphere in their classes as their greatest success. One respondent wrote: 'Through dogged perseverance I have managed to create a sound, democratic atmosphere in my classroom especially during group work activities.' Another teacher said that SPHE had 'impacted very positively on class relations.' Some teachers noted children's improved ability to deal with bullying. One respondent said that there were 'no bullying problems anymore or if any arise children are very willing to speak about them.' Teachers spoke of children's improved conflict resolution skills while others spoke of improved social skills as their greatest successes.

A minority (13%) of respondents to this question listed *teaching methods* as their greatest success in implementing the SPHE Curriculum. The largest group within this theme cited circle time as their greatest success. One teacher spoke of 'the children's ability to sit in a circle, wait their turn, listen to each other and show empathy,' while another teacher explained:

> *When I was working with children with ADD and ADHD the children learned the importance of relating to others as well as personal safety, through mainly circle-time, where talk and discussion was the most important methodology used.*

The principal of one school summed up his/her school's success with circle time using the following words: 'I think circle time has been phenomenal.'

Reflecting on their experience with the SPHE Curriculum as curriculum leaders in their schools, some principals drew attention to the influence of local school context on children's and teachers' experience with the curriculum. One principal commented: 'We feel that for a lot of the children, a lot of the positive messages that they are getting here may well be what will guide them. They might not necessarily get it all from home.'

Successes: findings across subjects

Table 3.24. Successes in implementing the Primary School Curriculum

Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
Enjoyment	Engagement	Self-expression
Oral language skills	Science skills	Communication
	Knowledge and Understanding	Teaching methods

n=917-931

Response rates for this question in each of the three subjects were high. However, it is worth noting that approximately one-third of respondents to the template chose not to indicate any success in implementing the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science or SPHE. The successes recorded by respondents echoed the impacts they noted above. Teachers referred to engagement and increased understanding of scientific concepts. They spoke of enjoyment, improved confidence and interactions with others.

Challenges

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 39, Science: Q. 27, SPHE: Q. 24
The greatest challenge, if any, which I have experienced in implementing the curriculum for Gaeilge/Science/SPHE is:
(blank text box)

In responding to this question, teachers listed the greatest challenges they faced when implementing the curriculum for each of the three subjects.

Challenges: Gaeilge

A total of 879 (64% of the teachers who completed the template) responded to this question. Almost half (47%) of respondents noted *negative attitudes* on the part of parents, children and in the community at large as a challenge when teaching Curaclam na Gaeilge. Parents' negative attitudes may have arisen from their own experiences of learning the language. Respondents indicated that parents' attitudes had a consequent impact on their children's learning of, and approach to, the language. Teachers reported that many children had little exposure to the language prior to starting school or outside of the school setting.

One teacher described the challenges faced in the following way:

> *…an dearcadh atá ag na tuismitheoirí agus na páistí. Níl siad ag caint Gaeilge sa bhaile agus níl na tuismitheoirí ábalta cabhair a thabhairt dóibh sa bhaile.*
>
> *…the negative attitude that parents and children have. They do not speak Irish at home and the parents can't help them at home.*

Another teacher stated that they felt challenged in relation 'to fostering a positive attitude towards Irish'.

Expanding on some of the challenges reported by teachers, principals in the School Case Study focused specifically on children's oral language. These included responding to children's diverse language needs in multi-class settings. The principal of a newly established school reflected on how the transfer of children from other primary schools in the area increased the challenge of supporting children's learning given their different levels of language ability and experience:

> *We have mixed 4th, 5th and 6th at the moment, but you could have seven or eight levels of Irish in there because they would have come from different schools, different areas where it [Gaeilge] would have been at different levels.*

The principal of a Gaelscoil highlighted the challenge of encouraging parents to try to use Gaeilge with the children to help support their language learning.

A total of 17% of teachers who responded indicated that they were challenged by *external issues* when implementing Curaclam na Gaeilge. The main issues that emerged were time, overloaded curriculum and class size.

Teachers noted that these three issues tended to impinge on each other. As one teacher noted: '[There is a very] full curriculum and I find it difficult with a class of 28 to get around to everyone.'

The theme of external issues was also highlighted by principals. One principal spoke about a mismatch in curriculum priorities regarding spoken Gaeilge and identified how this had created challenges in teaching the language:

> *We are following the curriculum as much as we can but in 5th and 6th, there is still too much emphasis on the written and jumping the hoops in the grammar. At the same time, we are*

> *conscious that if we don't do it, they will be expected to know it in September. So there is a huge divergence between primary and the secondary curriculum…I know the Minister is putting 40% for oral Irish in Leaving Cert but I have heard no mention of oral Irish for Junior Cert. If you don't do that it is a waste of time…the kids have tonnes of Irish but never get to use it.*

The theme of priorities in Curaclam na Gaeilge emerged in the responses of two other principals. One of these principals reflected on the challenge of limiting a fall-off in the standard of children's reading and writing in Gaeilge given the focus on spoken language: 'The whole focus has been on oral Irish. I fear that the standard of reading and writing will definitely not be up to the standard it was, I know it won't in Irish.' Commenting on the increased focus on oral language in Curaclam na Gaeilge, another principal noted that a lack of teacher confidence was a challenge. Elaborating on this, the principal commented:

> *The inspectors have come in and questioned our approach to Irish…I felt they were measuring us by old standards. If we are going to take an oral approach in Irish, you cannot expect to have all the grammar at the same position as it was 20 years ago.*

A minority (14%) of respondents referred to the *lack of resources* available in Gaeilge as a challenge for the teaching and learning of Curaclam na Gaeilge. One teacher referred to the necessity of 'breis acmhainní a chur ar fáil as Gaolainn/making more resources available in Gaeilge.'

Challenges: Science

A total of 819 teachers responded to this question, representing a 59% response rate. Of these, 38% of respondents cited *a lack of*

resources and equipment as a challenge in implementing the Science Curriculum. The main issue surrounding resources was, simply, a dearth of them. Teachers noted that even when schools had resources it could sometimes be difficult and time-consuming to track down the particular resources needed. As one teacher noted: 'Sharing a box of magnets between nine teachers is not ideal.' Other reported that needs included running water in classrooms, storage facilities for resources/equipment, and knowledge of how to use some equipment. Repondents mentioned the lack of teacher resource materials such as books. They referred to the time and expense involved in replacing consumable materials. Teachers highlighted a difficulty in gathering up everyday items for use in investigative work. They pointed out that, while the items themselves were not difficult to find, it was often challenging to gather them in the quantities needed for a full class. One teacher summarised the challenge regarding resources as follows:

> *Resources. We discussed this challenge as a staff at our last curriculum day. Organising resources, class sizes, getting around every child, we like to have things. We were doing electrical circuits recently and we were lucky enough to have one between two but it would have been brilliant to have one for each child. Then re-stocking the resources…So I suppose, organisation of resources and money to buy resources as well. That is the biggest challenge for us in Science.*

Likewise, some principals highlighted a lack of resources for teaching Science. For one principal, the lack of tangible materials was exacerbated by a lack of space in the classroom:

> *You are not clearing away the Irish books until the end of the day so you can put something on them with water and everything, and there is nothing we can do about it. You just*

> *don't have the space. You would want a room with stuff they [the children] can root at and pull at and spill water without being afraid of wetting their books. If you are going to be serious about it [Science] you are going to have to look at [school] design.*

The lack of teacher resource books and textbooks linked to the Science Curriculum seemed to be a particular problem for teachers in Irish-medium schools, many of whom noted the difficulty of translating scientific terminology into Gaeilge. Several respondents recorded that, in the absence of such resources, they had to use English phrases and vocabulary.

More than one-quarter (28%) of respondents indicated that *time* was a challenge when implementing the Science Curriculum. Several teachers noted that they found it difficult to fit Science into *an overloaded curriculum*. Teachers noted that the subject was difficult to teach well in just one hour a week. One teacher wrote: 'I find it difficult to make Science as practical and as fun as possible in the time allocated. Other subjects have to take priority in my class.' Similarly, one teacher involved with the School Case Study noted:

> *With Science, it is fitting it into a very crowded curriculum. Like most of the subjects, it is trying to fit them all in. And then, just the setting up and looking over in each corner to see if such and such is doing one. Because you have health and safety issues with Science.*

Another major issue for respondents was the amount of time needed for planning and organising Science lessons. This included time to research the topic to be taught so that they felt prepared for children's questions, time to plan the investigative work, time to gather appropriate resources, and time to set up practical work. Some principals also highlighted time as a barrier to using the outdoor

environment as a learning site and resource for children's work in Science:

> *…things like field trips and bringing in local people to talk to the classes, all laudable and lovely if you can make them happen. But they are another aspect that is loaded on to the teacher when it comes to planning the subject…In an ideal world, if you had all the time in the world to do the preparation…the programmes are really good.*

Just under one-fifth (19%) of respondents noted that *class size* was a challenge for teaching and learning in Science. Several teachers noted that they had small classrooms and large classes, and that this made it difficult to engage the children in practical work. Many of them felt that there were health and safety issues involved, as the children were often restricted with regard to the space in which they carried out investigations. Teachers in multi-grade settings had to manage carrying out investigative work with one group, whilst not disturbing the more book-centred learning of other groups, or attempting to carry out several sets of investigative work at once. Many felt that they could not give all the children the attention they needed in this situation. Class size was also an issue with regard to equipment for practical work. Teachers noted that equipment was often insufficient and this meant that not all children had the opportunity to test their own predictions. They were often forced to place children in large groups in order to allow them some access to the equipment.

Challenges: SPHE

There were 798 respondents to this question. This was a response rate of 58%. Three key themes emerged as challenges for respondents in implementing the SPHE Curriculum.

Just over half (54%) of respondents to this question referred to the *scope of the content* as their greatest challenge in implementing the

SPHE Curriculum. Teachers said they were challenged by the sensitivity of some of the material, the difficulty in teaching RSE due to the content of the programme, and teachers' own discomfort or lack of training. They noted, too, the demands of covering such a broad programme and of getting responses from *reluctant speaker[s]*. Some teachers wrote of the challenge of ensuring that children were listening to each other and able to express themselves in return.

A number of respondents spoke of *being careful with touchy subjects*. Another said that 'lessons around sexuality are challenging.' Many teachers questioned their own preparation for teaching sensitive issues, particularly with older children. One teacher explained: 'I don't know if we are that well trained to be dealing with it all, it is a big thing. If you were told something – what do you do? How do you respond?'

One teacher wrote of the challenge of 'trying to get four-year-olds to see things from someone else's point of view.' Teachers also referred to assessment, cultivating confidence and self-esteem, and the need to be sensitive to the children's home background as challenges for the SPHE Curriculum.

Of the teachers who responded to this question, 44% mentioned *time constraints, class size and an overloaded curriculum* as their greatest challenge in implementing the SPHE Curriculum. The limitations mentioned pertained to difficulties regarding timetabling: *time to do all elements of it properly,* giving discrete time to the curriculum area, and finding the opportunity to hear individual responses and contributions from the children in a large class during, for example, a circle time session. Respondents also referred to the half hour per week allocated to SPHE in the *Primary School Curriculum: half an hour per week - not enough for such a broad area*. Respondents also referred to an overloaded curriculum as being an additional challenge. Principals too highlighted the challenge of time. In particular, they commented

on the difficulty in ensuring that children had opportunities to experience the breadth and depth of the curriculum as a subject in its own right, given the highly integrated nature of much of the content:

> *it was always done but it was done in a far more holistic manner than it is being done now. Separating it as an entity, I don't know if it's a subject…it is a huge pressure on time for people.*

Mirroring some of the challenges identified with Science, another principal noted the challenge in planning and organising the more interactive and practical aspects of the subject, including field-trips and visitors to the classroom.

Teachers perceived the curriculum in general as being overloaded – vast according to one teacher. Teachers also spoke about the difficulty of *covering all the strand units* within the SPHE programme.

Teachers also highlighted the difficulty of giving each child a voice in SPHE, particularly in the context of large classes. This was cited in the previous section as a strength of SPHE (the focus on the individual child's voice). As one teacher noted: 'The greatest challenge for me is to cover the curriculum and to give every child a chance to speak and to be heard and to express their opinion, because they all have one.' As before, the challenges of teaching children of different ages and developmental stages was noted by a number of multi-grade teachers. As one teacher explained in the School Case Study:

> *I find it hugely challenging that I have third class and sixth class, you have some very mature sixth class and some incredibly babyish third class, they are only in from second class. They are coming from the baby room and they can say*

> *things that are so innocent. It is a challenge to keep it, because kids being the way they are, the bigger kids can say something very provocative just to get a reaction. That is not fair on the smaller kids; they would not have the knowledge to go with it, so I find that hard. Keeping a lid on the bigger ones.*

A minority (12%) of respondents to this question noted that *resources*, or more correctly lack of them, posed challenges in implementing the SPHE Curriculum. Teachers also spoke of the challenge of locating and assembling suitable resources, *organising material that is relevant and suitable in the time available and finding resources suitable for multi-class situations.*

Challenges: findings across subjects

Table 3.25. Challenges in implementing the Primary School Curriculum

Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
Perception	Resources	Scope of content
Time*	Time	Time*
Resources	Class Size	Resources

n=798-879 *Time challenge includes class size and perceived curriculum overload

The challenges mentioned by teachers in answering this section of the template echoed those they had referred to already regarding assessment. Across the three subjects, time, class size and curriculum overload were again reported, as was lack of resources.

Priorities

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 40, Science: Q. 28, SPHE: Q. 25
In furthering my own implementation of the curriculum for Gaeilge/Science/SPHE, I would like to prioritise the following:

Priorities: Gaeilge

There were 890 respondents, representing a 64% response rate, to this question. Two-fifths (41%) of these respondents indicated that they wanted to prioritise the *spoken language* in their implementation of Curaclam na Gaeilge. They hoped to do this by increasing the amount of informal Gaeilge used throughout the school during the day, by encouraging children and parents to speak Gaeilge outside school and by having *frása na seachtaine/a phrase of the week* in use in school.

One teacher wrote: 'I would like to prioritise encouraging the use of Gaeilge in everyday situations so it becomes a 'real' language for the children.' Likewise, some principals in the School Case Study highlighted spoken Gaeilge and indicated that they wished, in particular, to build on their schools' achievements to date. Other principals focused on their intention to promote greater enjoyment of the language. One of them hoped that this might lead children 'to appreciate more our own heritage and put more of a value on our Gaeilge and through that I do think that certainly children have the facility to do very well in Irish.'

One-fifth (20%) of the teachers who responded noted the need for more attractive *age appropriate resources* for the implementation of Gaeilge. Teachers indicated the need for more resources in relation to each of the four strands of Curaclam na Gaeilge. They also noted the need for information in relation to the resources that are already available in Gaeilge. A large number of the teachers listed the use of ICT as a priority for themselves. They noted the need to collect more ICT resources for the teaching and learning of Gaeilge. They wrote too of their own desire to become familiar with the ICT resources currently available for the teaching and learning of the language.

A minority (15%) of teachers indicated that they would like to prioritise *writing in Gaeilge* in their future implementation of Curaclam na Gaeilge. Teachers suggested that giving the children opportunities to write in a number of genres and to make use of the writing process were ways of doing this. In relation to their intentions with regard to writing, some teachers of senior classes stated that the teaching and learning of grammar was a key priority for them in the implementation of Curaclam na Gaeilge in the future. A number of teachers noted that having a structured whole school plan for grammar would be of benefit.

Priorities: Science

A total of 807 teachers responded to this question, representing a 59% response rate.

Some 53% of the teachers who answered this question highlighted *resources* as their most significant priority for future implementation of the Science Curriculum. They identified two themes within this priority: accessing additional resources, and making greater use of existing resources. In highlighting the need for additional resources teachers referred to physical and structural/organisational resources, financial and human resources. The physical resources included *more concrete materials and prepared resource packs for such topics as light/heat/sound, work cards made out…step by step, very user-friendly.* One respondent noted that teachers need 'a lot more resources and clear cut explained lesson plans to accompany them.' (S)he concluded: 'We are not scientists'. Teachers prioritised sourcing, funding, organising (in topic/theme packs), using and storing resources. One teacher in a case-study school talked about the valuable role of resources in maintaining children's interest and curiosity in Science. She described the school's commitment to developing a resource bank for Science as follows:

> *A priority for us is to have resources, to build up resources. There is a certain amount you can build up yourself with light and sound and that type of thing and you can buy a magnetic set. But everything is very expensive so you have to really devise your own resources and again, some of them you have to get fresh every year. Other things you can build up, a box on sound or light or whatever.*

Reflecting on his/her staff needs in Science, one principal in the School Case Study commented:

> *[staff] would like a box of resources with the lesson plans for each group in that…you don't have to think at all, with the lesson structure and the worksheets and everything all there for you…for different class levels as well…it is a huge task but it is being done.*

A number of teachers referred to the need for resources such as textbooks and manuals to support them in planning for and organising their Science teaching. Teachers in Irish-medium schools commented on this especially. Many teachers noted a lack of time as a barrier to sourcing and organising resources. A small number referred to a need for a dedicated space in their schools for teaching Science. In particular, these teachers prioritised having suitably equipped Science rooms or laboratories.

In prioritising greater use of existing resources, many teachers indicated that they would like to emphasise an *increased use of the environment and school surroundings.* In elaborating on this priority, teachers focused on using the outdoor environment for habitat studies, field-trips, and also for trails. Some principals too commented on making better use of the outdoor environment:

> *…now the theory is that each class will do two real field trips*

> *per year into those environments [log piles, meadowland with bog, woodland, river]. They will know what they are looking for, they will do scientific investigations and they will do hands on. If it is not hands-on, it is a waste of time.*

Over one-quarter (28%) of respondents identified *practical or hands-on work by children* as their second greatest priority in their Science teaching. In highlighting this priority, teachers used a number of terms interchangeably. These included *practical work, hands-on work, experiments, investigations, child-centred activities, discovery learning, and active learning.* Many teachers referred to the importance of *níos mó trialacha a dhéanamh leis na páistí sa rang/doing more investigations with the children in the class.* Other teachers noted their intention to use *investigations to provide the children with opportunities for self-learning and for more self-discovery.* Most teachers who identified practical work as a priority provided little elaboration. One teacher's comment may, nonetheless, reflect in general terms teachers' rationale for placing so much emphasis on practical work in their Science teaching: '[I would like to prioritise] active investigation. I think the best way to learn is to be actively involved, 'Do and understand'.'

Just under a quarter (23%) of respondents to this question identified *curriculum content and methodology* as their third most important priority. Three themes emerged in their responses – the strands, the skills, and using children's ideas as starting points in teaching and learning Science. Teachers prioritised supporting children's conceptual understanding across all four strands: *Living things, Energy and forces, Materials, and Environmental awareness and care.* Many of these respondents highlighted the strands *Energy and forces, and Environmental awareness and care.* Of those teachers who focused on the strand *Living things* most prioritised habitat studies. This concurs with the information on resources where the outside environment was highlighted by many teachers as a resource they would like to

make greater use of in their Science teaching. A number of respondents prioritised the development of children's skills of working scientifically: *deis a thabhairt do na páistí na scileanna ar fad a bhaineann le bheith ag obair mar eolaí a fhorbairt/to give the children opportunities to develop the skills involved in working as a scientist*. Other teachers prioritised providing children with practical problem-solving opportunities through designing and making models and artefacts.

Principals involved with the School Case Study also reported some challenges in relation to the Science Curriculum. Two of them identified the need to support teachers in becoming more confident in teaching the subject.

Priorities: SPHE

There were 802 respondents to this question. This was a response rate of 59%. Of the 43% of respondents who listed *curriculum content* as their priority in furthering their own implementation of the SPHE Curriculum, the largest group referred to promoting tolerance and respect for peers and other cultures in the children in their classes.

Respondents also referred to RSE and related issues. Teachers outlined these issues as problems of adjustment for adolescents, which included changing feelings, physical changes, and transition to second level education. Teachers also wrote about healthy lifestyle and diet, and about how important it is that children are made aware of possible dangers and of keeping safe.

Other areas listed by respondents included specific strands, citizenship, and improving children's sense of self and self-esteem: *raising self-esteem among children – particularly boys.* As one teacher in the School Case Study explained:

> *Well the self-esteem and self worth is definitely a huge thing for us…and the language maybe to express their feelings, the*

correct language. Also, we want them to be aware of healthy eating, etc. and basically to get on with others without telling tales!

Just under one-third (31%) of respondents listed *classroom management and methodology* as their priority in furthering their own implementation of the SPHE Curriculum. Teachers wrote of strategies they wished to use or improve. A large number mentioned circle time, specifically, as a methodology they wished to explore further, use more efficiently, or begin using. They also referred to *developing reflective abilities of pupils so that they are able to enjoy quiet times for longer periods.* One teacher wrote about 'tuilleadh straitéisí a úsáid gan a bheith ag braith ar am chiorcail an-iomarca/using more strategies so as not to be relying too much on circle time.' Another referred to 'nurturing an ever-supportive classroom environment where the life-skills of SPHE can be reinforced at any possible and appropriate moment,' while yet another spoke of 'making the lessons more relevant to my particular students' needs/requirements.' One teacher reflected the concerns of many when (s)he wrote of 'providing opportunities to encourage children who may feel excluded due to lack of English as their first language to express their needs, concerns and the use of co-operative strategies.'

Time issues were a priority for a number of respondents. Teachers said that they needed to spend more time planning for SPHE, and that the subject should be given discrete time each week as against being integrated with other subjects or being dealt with informally as the need arose. Some teachers wrote of *ensuring that sufficient time is given to dealing with issues with SPHE and not allowing more academic concerns to dominate.* Teachers also referred to time management issues when implementing improved learning and teaching methods with large classes. One wrote of group work:

Thóg sé seo an t-uafás ama orm! Ta gearghá le ranganna níos

> *lú chun an curaclam leasaithe seo a chur i bhfeidhm/ It took an awful amount of my time! There is an urgent need for smaller classes to implement this revised curriculum.*

Reflecting on classroom management, and in particular on group work from a school leader's perspective, a principal in the School Case Study noted:

> *I would be interested in building the teacher's confidence around going all out with group work. It is happening, but I would like to see more of it.*

Some respondents wrote of planning for the subject as a priority, while others mentioned the necessity for parental involvement with the SPHE programme. Of those who responded, 22% referred to resources as their priority in this area. Many teachers wrote of making themselves more aware of what was already in their schools, but others continued to highlight the *lack of resources* for SPHE, including those in Gaeilge. One teacher highlighted the need for 'resources suitable to extreme disadvantage.' The media were seen by some teachers as a resource as well as a strand unit. Respondents also mentioned visitors/professionals from the community as a resource for teaching and learning SPHE. This was seen as desirable but not always feasible. In one instance a teacher commented that (s)he would like to 'have funding to bring into school various people from different walks of life.' Other respondents highlighted ICT. The Internet, CD-ROMs and other software were cited as resources for planning teaching and learning. One teacher connected ICT use and the need for reduced class size: 'I would also use broadband and ICT a lot more if I had a class of 25 children.' One teacher said that (s)he planned 'to use ICT more in my planning and teaching of SPHE – all types of ICT, especially the Internet and using the projector for whole class teaching.' Another teacher wrote:

Overall, I feel that the use of ICT especially for teachers is essential. However, if you do not have access to a laptop or your own personal computer/printer it is impossible. I feel that as professionals we should be provided with each one.

Priorities: findings across subjects

Table 3.26. Priorities for implementing the Primary School Curriculum

Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
Oral language skills	Resources	Curriculum content
Writing and grammar skills	Active learning	Resources
Resources	Curriculum content	Teaching methods

n=802-890

Teachers spoke of prioritising curriculum content and teaching and learning methods across the three subjects. They also mentioned classroom management as a priority. Respondents indicated that they saw resources as a priority in maximizing the use of ICT for teaching and learning.

The remaining questions of the *Review and Reflection Template for Teachers* were specific to each subject. Analysis of these questions is contained in Section 4.

SECTION 4:

FINDINGS SPECIFIC TO EACH SUBJECT

Findings specific to each of the three subjects, Gaeilge, Science and SPHE, are provided in this section. Key lines of inquiry for each subject focus on strands, strand units and teaching approaches and methodologies.

Curaclam na Gaeilge

The findings specific to Curaclam na Gaeilge are discussed in this section. The focus initially is on the responses to questions pertaining to each of the strand units: listening, speaking, reading and writing. This is followed by an analysis of the more general issues, including challenges and successes of teaching Gaeilge in primary schools. Teachers in Irish-medium and English-medium schools were asked to respond to different and common sets of questions. (See Section 1, pages 25 and 31, and Appendix A).

Categories of language function

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 2
When planning for progression in children's learning in Gaeilge, I find the following categories of language functions are:
(four-point rating scale: not helpful, somewhat helpful, helpful, very helpful)

Respondents from Irish-medium and English-medium schools answered this question. Table 4.1 outlines their top three responses.

Table 4.1: Gaeilge, Q. 2. Usefulness of categories of language function

	not helpful	somewhat helpful	helpful	very helpful
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Communicate with others	2	16	45	38
Give and seek information	3	25	48	25
Structure a conversation	6	24	47	23

n=1,129-1,164

The category of language function which the *least* number of teachers (33%) reported as being either *very helpful* or *helpful* was to convince another person of something. At a basic level this language function can be used to seek permission, such as asking to leave the classroom. At a higher level, it requires children to have the ability to boast, tease, give advice, encourage, and complain. It requires higher-order language skills which depend on a comprehensive knowledge of the relevant vocabulary and basic sentence construction. These higher-order language skills may be more readily developed by children in Irish-medium primary schools. Unsurprisingly, therefore, cross-analysis highlighted that although this language function was cited by all respondents as the least helpful when planning for progression in children's learning in Gaeilge, responses from teachers in Irish-medium schools in this regard were more positive than those from teachers in English-medium schools.

Listening

This sub-section deals with the opportunities children receive and challenges teachers experience in their teaching of the *Listening* strand.

Teachers from Irish-medium and English-medium schools were asked an identical question on the opportunities that they provide children in their class(es) to develop listening skills. The responses are compared and contrasted in the analysis below.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 4 and Q.11
I enable children to develop listening skills by providing the following opportunities for them:
(tick boxes)

In Questions 4 and 11 teachers were given a list of eight listening activities and asked to mark all that were relevant/used in their

class(es). Regardless of school type, teachers did not differ significantly in their choice of activities.

Table 4.2. Gaeilge, Q. 4 and Q. 11: Developing children's listening

Listening activities	Respondents	
	Irish-medium schools	English-medium schools
	n%	n%
Listening and actively responding to rhymes, songs, poems, stories, etc.	99	97
Listening to Irish being used informally as a social language and as a language used for classroom management	N/A*	96
Listening to Irish being used as the regular language for communication within the classroom	99	N/A*
Listening and following instructions, for example Deir Ó Grádaigh	96	92

n=100 -1,080

*option not available to respondents from that school type

Between 87% and 97% of respondents from English-medium schools ticked six of the eight listening activities listed. Of these, 54% of teachers indicated that children in their class(es) are given the opportunity to listen to others speaking in Gaeilge. This could include listening to children from their own or from other classes. In Irish-medium schools, 95% of teachers reported using this strategy. This difference in usage of the same strategy may be indicative of the fact that children in Irish-medium schools speak Gaeilge at all times as opposed to set periods each day.

Between 93% and 99% of teachers from Irish-medium schools ticked seven out of the eight activities listed. As with the teachers from the English-medium schools, listening and responding actively to suitable radio and television programmes was the least used activity. Only 56% of the teachers from Irish-medium schools and 17% from

English-medium schools noted that they used this as an activity for developing the listening skills of the children in their class(es).

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 21a
The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the Listening strand is:
(blank text box)

This open-response question on the challenges teachers encounter in teaching the listening strand was completed by teachers in both Irish-medium and English-medium schools. The analysis is discussed in light of the recurring themes that emerged. In order to add weight to the significance of these themes the data have been quantified in the analysis. This is further supported by a qualitative analysis of the responses.

There were 909 (66%) respondents who listed a challenge with regards to teaching the *Listening* strand of Curaclam na Gaeilge. From this three themes emerged. A third (33%) of the 909 teachers who responded reported that language barriers posed a challenge. Three *language barriers* were identified: dialect, speed of the spoken language, and the vocabulary used.

Concerning the first of these language barriers, dialect, teachers noted that many listening resources do not allow for adequate engagement with dialects. The feedback from teachers was divided as to whether they would have a preference for exposing children to listening to all three dialects or whether children should engage with one dialect only. Teachers who favoured specialising in a single dialect found that children experienced greater difficulties when having to listen to and understand all three dialects.

The second most frequently cited language barrier was the speed of the spoken language. Teachers noted that the speed with which

people spoke on the CDs used for listening activities posed a challenge for the children. This was further exacerbated by the vocabulary used by the speaker which was often beyond the capabilities of the children.

Just over one-quarter (28%) of teachers who responded to this question noted the challenge of *maintaining children's attention* throughout listening activities. The two difficulties highlighted in relation to this were underdeveloped listening skills and a lack of interest in the subject.

About half of these respondents attributed the challenge of maintaining children's attention to poor listening skills. They maintained that this was a direct result of the excessive time children spend looking at television or playing video games. The other half stated that children's lack of interest in Gaeilge as a language has a negative effect on their listening time span. Teachers reported that children view Gaeilge as a school-bound language that has no relevance or applicability for them at home or in the wider community.

A further 17% of respondents stated that the *lack of interesting resources* was a challenge to the teaching and learning of the *Listening* strand. This mirrors findings from Question 20 and also findings from the consultation report on *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools* (NCCA, 2007), which highlighted the lack of interesting, age-appropriate resources as a great challenge in teaching Gaeilge and teaching other subjects through Gaeilge.

Speaking

Responses to questions related to the *Speaking* strand of Curaclam na Gaeilge highlighted the different strategies teachers use to develop competence and confidence among the children in their class(es), the reasons they use these strategies, the different contexts in which

children speak Gaeilge, and the opportunities children are given for speaking Gaeilge.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 5a and Q. 5b
The three strategies I find most helpful in developing the children's competence and confidence in speaking Gaeilge are:
(tick boxes)
Please give a reason for your answer.(blank text box)

Teachers from English-medium schools were asked to indicate the three speaking strategies that they find most helpful in developing children's competence and confidence in speaking Gaeilge. They were also given the option of including, if they wished, any other strategy other than those listed.

Table 4.3. Gaeilge, Q. 5a: Strategies for developing competence and confidence

Strategies	Respondents
	n%
Games/tasks/problems	58
Rhyme/poetry	40
Active songs/songs	40
Drama	38

n=33-735

The top three strategies that teachers indicated as being helpful in developing the children's competence and confidence in speaking Gaeilge (Table 4.3) were games, tasks and problems (58%), rhymes and poetry (40%), and active songs/songs (40%). Teachers reported that these strategies encourage the children to enjoy learning Gaeilge and to actively engage in the lesson. As one teacher stated: 'Getting the children involved in games and role play makes the language accessible and fun.'

Just 3% and 4% of teachers, respectively, noted finding videos and speaking units helpful in aiding the development of children's speaking skills through Gaeilge. This reflected respondents' reported limited use of the media and ICT generally across the three subjects and the reported challenge of the lack of resources for Gaeilge.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 12
I motivate the children to develop their speaking skills in a range of contexts such as:
(tick boxes)

In Question 12, respondents could choose from a range of activities and from three settings: discrete time, other curriculum areas and the school yard. Analysis of the three most frequently reported responses in relation to each of the settings is given separately.

Table 4.4. Gaeilge, Q. 12: Use of range of contexts for development of speaking skills

Discrete time		Other curriculum areas		School yard activities	
Activities	n%	Activities	n%	Activities	n%
Storytelling	86	Role-playing	81	Games/tasks/ problems	63
Rhymes/poetry	84	Storytelling	79	Speaking/debating/ asking questions	49
Speaking/ debating/asking questions	83	Drama	75	Interviews	47

Storytelling, rhymes/poetry, speaking, debating, and asking questions were the most frequently reported activities used during discrete time for the development of speaking skills.

When using other curriculum areas to develop children's speaking skills in Gaeilge, the most frequently reported activities were role-playing, followed by storytelling and drama.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 13
I offer children help in developing their speaking skills through offering them opportunities to practise speaking in a range of activities.
(four- point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Teachers from Irish-medium schools were invited to respond to this question. At least 95% of teachers indicated that they used four of the six listed activities when developing children's speaking skills.

Table 4.5. Gaeilge, Q. 13: Activities for developing speaking skills in Irish-medium schools

	never	seldom	once or twice	once a month	a couple of times a week	every day
	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%
Listening actively	2	0	2	6	18	73
Speaking in turn	1	1	2	4	23	69
Compose suitable answers	1	1	3	7	25	62

n=95-101

To argue an opinion and to attempt to persuade someone was the activity cited least by respondents (*seldom* 19% and *never* 6%). This corresponds with the findings from Question 2 and highlights the limited use of higher-order language and thinking skills.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 21b
The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the Speaking strand is:
(blank text box)

In both Irish-medium and English-medium schools 918 (68%) teachers answered this question.

More than one-quarter of responses highlighted *negative attitudes to Gaeilge* as a challenge when teaching the *Speaking* strand of Curaclam na Gaeilge. Teachers reported that Gaeilge appears to have very little relevance to children's everyday lives beyond the classroom. They also noted the challenge of encouraging children to speak Gaeilge in the school grounds, outside the environs of the classroom. One teacher described this challenge in the following way:

> *spéis agus meas don teanga a spreagadh agus go mbeadh Gaeilge á húsáid idir teanga na scoile agus teanga an bhaile trí cabhair a thabhairt do thuismitheoirí.*
>
> *to encourage an interest and respect for the language and that Irish would be used as a school and home language by providing help to parents.*

Further challenges related to negative attitudes to the language included:

- low usage of Gaeilge in the wider community
- little home support for children to speak Gaeilge
- the negative attitude of a large number of parents towards Gaeilge
- teachers' own lack of interest and competence in Gaeilge.

Around one-fifth of responses mentioned the *limited use of Gaeilge* as a challenge when teaching the *Speaking* strand. This was attributed to the different levels of ability in the classroom and children's lack of confidence in speaking Gaeilge, which was reflected in their reluctance to speak Gaeilge aloud. Children who do not have English or Gaeilge as a first language posed an additional challenge in

relation to providing opportunities for all children to practise and develop their speaking skills. Further challenges included meeting the needs of children with speech and language difficulties and the needs of children who come to school with limited English vocabulary. One teacher stated that 'the standard of English is very low, so Irish hasn't much chance.'

A similar number of responses mentioned the *precise use of Gaeilge* as challenging. The precise use of language covers areas such as sentence structure, pronunciation, inter-language, and other areas of grammar. The area of grammar was also raised as a cause of concern in the consultation process on *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools* (NCCA, 2007). As one teacher commented: 'They have huge difficulty in pronouncing words and the correct grammatical formation of sentences.'

Reading

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 6 and Q. 14
In preparing children for formal reading I use the following strategies to teach early literacy:
(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Teachers from Irish-medium schools were offered eight response options to this question, while teachers in English-medium schools were offered a ninth option: early literacy games.

Table 4.6. Gaeilge, Q. 6 and 14: Early literacy strategies

Irish-medium schools				
	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Interactive reading	4	3	9	85
Environmental print	2	4	11	84
Stories	2	2	7	90

English-medium schools				
	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Environmental print	6	9	9	
Rhymes/ poetry	2	3	19	
Stories	6	15	21	

n=82=699

Table 4.6 lists the top three choices of strategies used to teach early literacy. It should be noted that two of the most frequently used choices are common to both Irish-medium and English-medium schools. These are environmental print and stories.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 7 and Q. 15
I use the following word identification strategies to develop children's competence in reading:
(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Question 7 and Question 15 were identical for respondents in Irish-medium and English-medium schools and, overall, responses were similar. Table 4.7 provides an overview of responses to these questions.

Table 4.7. Gaeilge, Q. 7 and 15: Word identification strategies

	Irish-medium schools				English-medium schools			
	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%
Cues from children's prior knowledge	2	1	3	94	6	5	7	83
Contextual cues	1	1	3	96	8	8	8	76
Syntactical cues	3	3	3	92	12	14	9	65
Grapho-phonic cues	3	7	5	85	14	19	12	55

n=93-726

At least 55% of teachers from English-medium schools reported using all four word identification strategies *frequently.* A significant majority (83%) reported that they used cues from children's prior knowledge *frequently* as a word identification strategy, while 33% of respondents in English-medium schools indicated that they used grapho-phonic cues *seldom* or *never.* This echoes the large number of teachers who reported *seldom* or *never* teaching the alphabet and letter sounds in Question 6 above.

Most respondents from Irish-medium schools reported using all four types of cues *frequently*. Of these four choices, the strategy used most *frequently* by the great majority of respondents (96%) was contextual cues. A minority of teachers (10%) indicated that they used grapho-phonic cues the least. This is similar to the responses given by teachers in English-medium schools.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 8 and Q. 17
I provide the following activities and opportunities which foster a reading culture among the children in my class(es): (four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Tables 4.8 and 4.9 provide an overview of responses to these questions.

Table 4.8. Gaeilge, Q. 8: Fostering a reading culture in English-medium schools

	never	seldom	once or twice	once a month	a couple of times a week	every day
	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%
Reading aloud	6	2	3	10	33	46
Modelling reading	7	5	8	13	33	35
Share children's work	12	14	13	22	27	12

n=711-776

Table 4.9. Gaeilge, Q. 17: Fostering a reading culture in Irish-medium schools

	never	seldom	once or twice	once a month	a couple of times a week	every day
	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%
Listening to teacher or pupils reading	0	2	2	10	31	55
Modelling reading process	6	9	12	11	27	36
Using classroom library and helping to organise it	2	6	8	25	25	34

n=91-98

Reading aloud or listening to a teacher or other pupils reading aloud were the strategies most frequently cited by teachers from both Irish-medium and English-medium schools. Modelling of the reading process was also cited by respondents from both types of school.

Taking part in special reading occasions in the school was the activity that teachers in both Irish-medium and English-medium schools indicated using least.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 16.
I use reading strategies to develop children's comprehension skills
(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

This question was applicable to teachers from Irish-medium schools

only. Table 4.10 gives an outline of their responses. Each of the strategies listed were used *sometimes* or *frequently* by 65% or more of respondents.

Table 4.10. Gaeilge, Q. 16: Strategies to develop children's comprehension skills

Strategies	never	seldom	once or twice	once a month	a couple of times a week	every day
	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%
Using clues	4	4	5	20	36	32
Scanning the text	5	9	7	13	39	27
Using dictionaries	23	12	4	14	28	19

n=87-92

The top three strategies for developing children's comprehension skills that teachers indicated using *every day* were using clues, scanning the text and using dictionaries. Of interest is that though 19% of respondents indicated that the children in their class(es) used a dictionary *every day*, 23% indicated that their pupils *never* used one to help develop comprehension skills.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 21c
The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the Reading strand is:
(blank text box)

Although this was an open-response type question, the frequency with which challenges were cited were logged in order to ascertain the three main challenges that teachers faced when teaching the *Reading* strand. In all, 693 teachers, roughly 50% of the total number of respondents, answered this question. Of these, 39 respondents indicated that the reading strand was not applicable to their situation

as they were teaching a class that had not started reading in Gaeilge. As a result the percentages listed below were calculated out of 654.

Over a quarter of these respondents (28%) noted that the lack of *interesting, age appropriate reading resources* for children posed a challenge when teaching this strand of Curaclam na Gaeilge. As well as the lack of resources, teachers found that many of the available resources were too difficult, old-fashioned, or unrelated to the child's everyday life. One teacher expressed this challenge by saying there is a need for 'leabhair tarraingteach a nua foilisithe agus in oiriúint don aois ghrúpa a bheith ar fáil go forleathan/newly published interesting books which are widely available and suitable for the correct age group.'

A further 25% of teachers considered children's *underdeveloped language skills* as a challenge. Teachers commented that children have underdeveloped language skills in a number of areas, all of which impact on the teaching and learning of reading Gaeilge. Particular areas of concern included phonics, word attack/decoding, and comprehension. Of these three concerns, phonics was reported most frequently. In particular, respondents noted that the different sounds of Gaeilge and English posed a challenge for many children learning to read Gaeilge, because they transferred their knowledge of the English phonetic code inappropriately to Gaeilge. Teachers also noted that young children find it hard to differentiate between English and Gaeilge sounds. This can be related to findings from Questions 6, 7 and 15, which highlighted the limited use of the teaching of the alphabet, letter sounds and grapho-phonic cues. In describing this challenge one teacher said,

na fuaimeanna difriúla idir léitheoireacht as Gaeilge agus as Béarla, go háirithe i ranganna níos óige, tá sé deacair ar na páistí na difríochtaí a aithint. Níl alán cabhair chun an fhadbh seo a réiteach.

the different sounds when reading in Gaeilge and reading in English, especially in the younger classes, it is difficult for the children to recognise the differences. There is not a lot of help to solve this problem.

A minority (12%) of teachers acknowledged that *motivating children to read* and remain interested in reading books that are written in Gaeilge was a challenge. The lack of interesting age appropriate resources added to this challenge. They said that the range of abilities within a class, and in particular the issue of children presenting with difficulties in English reading, had a negative impact on the children's motivation to read. A further issue concerned the lack of support at home for Gaeilge and the lack of use of Gaeilge outside of the school. Respondents reported that parents often felt unable to help their children with reading Gaeilge since they do not have a good grasp of the language themselves. This had the unfortunate consequence of children not practising their reading at home and ultimately hindering their progress in reading.

Writing

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 9 and Q. 18
The genres which children use for personal/independent writing in my class(es) are:
(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Teachers from Irish-medium and English-medium schools were asked to respond to this question.

Table 4.11. Gaeilge, Q. 9: Genres of personal/independent writing

Irish-medium schools				
Genre	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Personal news	6	7	14	73
Stories	12	9	23	57
Paragraph	17	12	28	43
Headings	17	17	23	43

English-medium schools				
Genre	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Personal news	9	18	31	42
Poetry/song	18	16	29	38
Stories	14	16	33	36
Headings	26	21	18	36

n=81-604

The majority of respondents from both Irish-medium and English-medium schools indicated that engaging children in writing their news was the most frequently used form of literary composition. After that there was some divergence between respondents from the two types of schools.

Only 6% of respondents from English-medium schools indicated that the children in their class(es) used e-mails as a written genre. This percentage was slightly higher for respondents from Irish-medium schools, with 13% indicating that the children in their class used it *frequently* or *sometimes*.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 10 and Q. 19
I provide opportunities for the children in my class(es) to improve their writing by using the writing process approach (drafting/editing/redrafting):
(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Teachers from Irish-medium and English-medium schools responded to this question about the frequency with which they provided opportunities for the children in their classes to improve their writing by using the writing process approach of drafting, editing and redrafting.

Table 4.12. Gaeilge, Q. 10 and 19: Opportunities for use of writing approach

	Irish-medium schools				English-medium schools			
	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%
Opportunity for children to use the writing process approach (drafting/ editing/ redrafting)	7	19	31	44	31	29	27	13

n=90-562

The responses given indicate that children in Irish-medium schools are more likely to encounter frequent opportunities to use the writing process in Gaeilge than their counterparts in English-medium schools. The majority of respondents from Irish-medium schools indicated that they *frequently* or *sometimes* gave their pupils the opportunity to engage with the writing process approach. The opposite was indicated by teachers in English-medium schools, with 60% reporting that they *seldom* or *never* gave the children in their classes opportunities to use the writing process approach when writing in Gaeilge.

This is a similar finding to that of the *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1, English*. In both the teaching of English and Gaeilge, regardless of whether it is an Irish-medium or an English-medium

school, children (according to teachers) are *seldom* or *never* given the opportunity to use the writing process.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 21d
The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the Writing strand is:
(blank text box)

Respondents in Irish-medium and English-medium schools were asked to complete this open-ended question. Fewer teachers (608) provided a response to the challenge faced when teaching the *Writing* strand than to the other three strands: *Listening* (909), S*peaking* (918) and *Reading* (693). This may be due to the large number of infant teachers who responded to the template. The discussion of the responses is categorised into the three most frequently cited challenges in teaching the W*riting* strand.

Over one-third of respondents (37%) noted the challenge posed by children's poor knowledge of *grammar.* Teachers referred to difficulties children encountered with sentence structure. This was particularly apparent when children attempted to translate English directly into Gaeilge. This difficulty was attributed to the lack of structured time set aside within the curriculum guidelines for teaching grammar. One teacher described the challenge posed by a lack of knowledge of grammar in the following way:

> *seo an chuid is measa de na scileanna ar fad. Tá cruinneas agus gramadach ceart in easnamh. Ba cheart níos mó béime a chur ar ghramadach.*
>
> *this is the worst section of all the skills. Precise writing and grammar are missing. More of an emphasis should be put on grammar.*

Almost one-fifth of teachers (18%) noted the challenges children faced in relation to *spelling and phonics in Gaeilge*. The teachers who responded indicated that children's prior knowledge of English spellings and phonics and their fear of spelling words incorrectly hindered their attempts at writing in Gaeilge. The challenge of spelling and phonics was described by one teacher as follows:

> *Tá fuaimeanna na Gaeilge casta; na fuaimeanna a úsáidtear i scríbhneoireacht an Bhéarla, ní hionann iad agus iad siúd sa Ghaeilge.*
>
> *Irish sounds are complex; the sounds that are used in writing English are not the same as those used in Irish.*

Phonics was also referred to as a challenge in relation to teaching correct pronunciation when speaking in Gaeilge and when teaching reading.

A minority (10%) of the teachers who responded to this question identified children's *lack of vocabulary in Gaeilge* as a challenge faced by both teachers and children when writing is being undertaken within the classroom. One teacher noted: 'Níl an foclóir acu chun scríobh go leathan ar téama amháin agus a gcuid smaointe a chur síos/ They do not have the vocabulary to write extensively or to capture their thoughts on a particular subject in written form.'

Teachers reported that, due to children's limited vocabulary, time needed to be spent teaching the relevant words and phrases prior to engaging in the writing task. Not only was this extremely time-consuming but it also had the adverse affect of limiting the amount of time that could be spent on the actual writing activity.

Other challenges which the respondents noted encountering frequently included:

- a lack of interest in and the relevance of Gaeilge to the children's everyday lives
- making proper use of the writing process
- the broad objectives of the curriculum including the big difference in standard expected from infant classes and more senior classes.

Challenges of teaching all subjects through Gaeilge

Question 20 was applicable to teachers in Irish-medium schools only. It was a two-part open response question in which teachers were asked to highlight the various challenges of teaching the entire curriculum through the medium of Gaeilge. The challenges reported have been quantified in the analysis to ascertain the top three prevalent themes. Part b of this question asked teachers to identify the ways in which they attempted to overcome these challenges.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 20 a
The biggest challenge, if any, with regards to teaching all subjects (except English) through Irish in Irish-medium schools is:
(blank text box)

In all, 42% of the 194 teachers who responded to this question identified the *lack of appropriate and engaging teaching and learning resources* for Gaeilge, and for other subjects through Gaeilge, as a key challenge. Teachers reported translating textbooks for *Social, environmental and scientific education* (SESE) subjects from English to Gaeilge, due to the lack of availability of appropriate texts written in Gaeilge for these subjects. As one teacher noted: 'Is gá mórchuid eolais a aistriú ó théacsleabhair i mBéarla, go háirithe sa Stair agus Tír Eolas/It is necessary to translate a large amount of text from English textbooks, in particular for History and Geography.' Teachers also

noted the lack of resources such as CDs, DVDs, posters, and information books for use across subjects in Irish-medium schools.

The significant lack of resources for teaching Gaeilge and teaching other subjects through Gaeilge also emerged as a finding throughout the consultation process on *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools* (NCCA, 2007).

Some 34% of teachers reported the difficulty of ensuring that the language used within lessons was *accessible* to all children when teaching the curriculum (except English) through Gaeilge. There were two main challenges. The first was that the vocabulary used in textbooks written in Gaeilge is often too difficult for the children to engage with on a meaningful level. One teacher said, 'go bhfuil an-chuid den teanga atá scríobhtha sna leabhair ró-dheacair do na páistí/that most of the language written in the textbooks is too difficult for the children.'

The second challenge of the accessibility of language was that children need to be taught subject-specific vocabulary explicitly prior to the teaching of the lesson itself. As one teacher said:

> *Caithfidh tú díriú isteach ar an bhfoclóir don ábhar cuí sula dtosaíonn tú ag múineadh an cheachta. Tógann sé sin roinnt mhaith ama ón lá scoile.*
>
> *It is necessary to zone in on the particular language for the appropriate subject before you begin teaching the lesson. That takes up a lot of time out of the school day.*

In responding to this question teachers highlighted the challenge of developing teaching and learning resources in Gaeilge which suit the language abilities and age range of the children. Teachers noted that this would be better achieved through the development of new resources in Gaeilge as opposed to the direct translation of resources from English.

Just 17% of teachers identified *children's previous knowledge of Gaeilge* as a challenge in relation to teaching in an Irish-medium school. There were two main challenges. The first was children's prior knowledge of Gaeilge when they begin school and the second was parents' own knowledge of the language. The support parents give their children for learning Gaeilge and learning through Gaeilge was also reported as a challenge. One teacher described the challenge as:

> *easpa Gaeilge na bpáistí ag teacht isteach agus easpa cabhrach ó na tuismitheoirí sa teanga/the children's lack of Gaeilge when they come into school and the lack of help/support for the language that they receive from their parents.*

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 20b
I overcome this challenge by:
(blank text box)

Some 184 teachers from Irish-medium schools replied to Question 20b outlining the strategies they used to address challenges for teaching all subjects (except English) through Gaeilge.

Just over one-third (34%) of the 184 teachers who answered this question indicated that they *modify the language* used in lessons across the curriculum, including texts used in lessons, in three main ways:

- translating text (generally from English into Irish, yet Irish into English was mentioned frequently)
- simplifying the Gaeilge used in texts
- explaining difficult subject-specific words and phrases before the lesson.

These points illustrate how teachers are trying to overcome the challenges they experience in teaching all subjects through Gaeilge without the availability of appropriate resources. They also highlight the challenge of teaching through the medium of Gaeilge and the extra time this takes. For example, children's subject-specific English vocabulary may have to be taught in Gaeilge before the Science or History lesson can be taught. One teacher explained how (s)he made an effort to combat this:

> *an t-ullmhúcháin teanga a dhéanamh i rith an ranga Gaeilge foirmiúil ionas nach í an Ghaeilge féin atá á múineadh agat i rith rang Eolaíochta mar shampla.*
>
> *[We] do the language preparation as part of the formal Irish lesson so that, for example, it is Science that is taught in the Science lesson and not Gaeilge.*

As with teachers' reported *modification of language*, the making of their own resources again appears to be a method teachers are using to address the lack of language resources in Gaeilge across the curriculum. Just under one-quarter (24%) of respondents reported that although it was time-consuming, it was also necessary to compile and develop their own teaching aids. These could include posters, flash-cards and photocopying extracts from a number of different books that are written in Gaeilge to ensure a variety of texts are available for the children to read. The following is an outline of some of the different resources one teacher developed:

> *mo chuid acmhainní féin a chumadh – mo leabhráin féin a dhéanamh ó fhotocóipeáil ó réimse mór leathan, póstaeir a tharraingt le lipéid Ghaeilge.*
>
> *developing my own resources – making my own books by photocopying from a wide variety of books, drawing posters with Irish labels.*

Strategies to promote a communicative approach to Gaeilge

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 22
I employ the following strategies to promote a communicative approach in my classroom:
(blank text box)

Respondents from Irish-medium and English-medium schools were requested to respond to Question 22. A total of 958 teachers responded to this question.

Just 65% of respondents reported using *oral language* as a strategy to promote a communicative approach to Gaeilge amongst the children in their class(es). The oral language strategies teachers reported using were:

- using Gaeilge informally throughout the whole school day including using Gaeilge for orders and classroom instruction
- children sharing their personal news
- children asking and answering questions in Gaeilge.

One teacher listed his/her use of oral language as a strategy to promote a communicative approach in the following way: 'I try to use Gaeilge informally in the classroom and in realistic situations so that the children can see Gaeilge as a means of communication.'

Of the 958 teachers who responded to this question, 50% noted using *active learning methods* as a means to promoting a communicative approach to Gaeilge in their classes. The active learning methods listed included the use of drama and role play, songs, rhymes and poems, and games.

Of teachers who responded to this question, 17% stated that they

used *organisational settings* as a strategy for promoting a communicative approach in their classes. The organisational settings they referred to were pair work and group work. A very small number of teachers referred to the use of circle time in response to this question. These findings seem to contrast with those given in response to Question 25, which asked respondents which organisational settings they used when teaching and using Gaeilge.

Language awareness

Teachers from both Irish-medium and English-medium schools were invited to answer Question 23.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 23
To develop children's language awareness in real contexts, I draw the children's attention to:
(tick boxes)

Some 977 teachers responded to this question. Table 4.13 gives an outline of the three most frequently reported responses to this question.

Table 4.13. Gaeilge, Q. 23: Development of language awareness

	Respondents
	n%
Various patterns within Irish, for example grammar, spelling and punctuation marks	74
Similarities and differences between Irish and English, for example word order in sentences	72
Similarities and differences between letter sounds in English and in Irish, and in other languages	65

n=977

In developing children's language awareness in real contexts, respondents (74%) most frequently cited drawing children's attention

to various patterns within the language of Gaeilge such as grammar, spelling and punctuation marks. Highlighting similarities and differences between Gaeilge and English (for example, word order in sentences) was also frequently cited (72%). This was followed by 65% of teachers who said that they drew children's attention to similarities and differences between letter sounds in English and in Gaeilge, and in other languages.

In developing children's language awareness the smallest percentage of respondents (32%) reported drawing children's attention to similarities between Gaeilge and other languages, if appropriate.

Cultural awareness

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 24
When teaching Gaeilge, I emphasise the following aspects of Irish cultural awareness:
(tick boxes)

Table 4.14 outlines the aspects most frequently reported by respondents from Irish-medium and English-medium schools.

Table 4.14. Gaeilge, Q. 24: Aspects of cultural awareness

	Respondents
	n%
Music	93
Irish games	78
Dances	77

n=1,118

The great majority (93%) of respondents indicated that the aspect of culture they most emphasised when teaching Gaeilge was music. This was followed by traditional games and dances. This reflects findings on integration in Section 3 where respondents listed the teaching of music, including Irish songs, and lessons relating to traditional Irish

music and dance as providing opportunities for integration with Gaeilge.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 28
I use the following methodologies in the teaching of Gaeilge: (four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Curaclam na Gaeilge recommends the use of a variety of pedagogical approaches and methodologies. Teachers from Irish-medium and English-medium schools were asked to indicate the frequency with which they employed various teaching approaches from a list of six such methodologies.

Table 4.15. Gaeilge, Q. 28: Teaching methodologies

	never	seldom	once or twice a month	once a week	couple of times a week	every day
	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%
Direct method	0	1	2	3	19	76
Phrase method	2	5	11	17	31	35
Total physical response method (TPR)	5	8	15	16	31	25
Audio-lingual method	3	5	14	26	34	18
Series method	9	11	20	18	25	17
Audio-visual method	17	18	15	15	20	15

n=799-1,035

Of the six options given, 76% of teachers reported using the direct method *every day.* Further 35% of respondents indicated that they also used the phrase method *every day*, while 25% noted using the total physical response method *every day*.

Parental involvement

Teachers from both Irish-medium and English-medium schools were invited to answer Question 36a which was included in the *General* section of the template.

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 36a
I inform parents/guardians about classroom practice with regard to the strands of the curriculum – listening, oral language, reading and writing:
(tick box)

Table 4.16. Gaeilge, Q. 36a: Informing parents about classroom practice

	I inform	I do not inform
	n%	n%
I inform parents/guardians about classroom practice with regard to the strands of the curriculum – listening, oral language , reading and writing	55	45

n=1,063

Further analysis of these findings highlighted that teachers in Irish-medium schools are significantly more likely to inform parents about classroom practice than their counterparts in English-medium schools. Cross-analysis also indicated that there was little systematic variation between the classes being taught by respondents and informing parents. Findings from the NCCA consultation on *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools* (NCCA, 2007) indicated that parents would like more information in relation to what their children are learning in school. This was also borne out in the case study interviews with parents.

Most appealing aspect of learning Gaeilge

Teacher template, Gaeilge: Q. 37b
In my experience, the aspect of learning Gaeilge that most appeals to the children in my class(es) is:
(blank text box)

Teachers from both Irish-medium and English-medium schools were again invited to answer Question 37b which was included in the *General* section of the template. There were 1,025 respondents to this question. Teachers' top three responses all refer to aspects of oral language, which is, perhaps, an indicator that children are enjoying the communicative approach to language learning.

As indicated by responses to this question (64%) and responses to a number of other questions in the Gaeilge and other sections of the teacher template, the aspect of Gaeilge which appealed to the children most was engagement in *active learning* methods. Frequently cited active learning methods included drama, role play and games. One teacher who expanded on this stated that when children are engaged in role play or word games 'bíonn an-spraoi acu agus labhraíonn siad an teanga chomh éasca, déanann siad dearmad ar an iarracht/they have such enjoyment and speak the language so easily that they forget about the effort.'

Nearly half (48%) of the respondents stated that the children in their class(es) enjoyed *oral activities* such as songs, poems and stories in Gaeilge. As one teacher noted: 'The songs, stories and rhymes they learn are thoroughly enjoyed by the children.'

One-fifth (21%) of teachers who responded to the question indicated that the aspect of Gaeilge which the children in their class(es) enjoyed most was *speaking and developing their vocabulary* in Gaeilge. One teacher said that when children are speaking they have

'taitneamh agus craic go háirithe san agallaimh beirte/fun and enjoyment especially in paired interviews.'

Science Curriculum

Questions 3 to 12a of the teacher template referred to the strands and strand units of the Science Curriculum. The key lines of inquiry in this sub-section therefore are the strands, strand units and methodologies.

Strand: Living things

Teacher template, Science: Q. 3
I provide opportunities for the children in my class(es) to learn first-hand about plants and animals by visiting and investigating the following habitats:
(tick boxes)

Table 4.17 presents the habitats respondents indicated were investigated most often.

Table 4.17. Science, Q3: Strands and Strand Units – Living things

Habitat	n%
Tree	90
Grass/parkland	68
Footpath	66
Garden	66

n=60 -1,043

Wasteland (10%), meadow (10%) and peatland (9%) were the least visited habitats.

Teacher template, Science: Q. 4
The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Living things is:
(blank text box)

It is important to note that the majority of respondents answered this question not in relation to the strand *Living things* as a whole but in relation to visits to habitats only. In this case the layout of the teacher template may have caused some confusion. The positioning of the question directly after one which related specifically to habitats, rather than the strand as a whole, was unfortunate. Given the number of questions teachers were asked to answer, it is understandable that a certain amount of imprecision may have resulted.

Of the 932 respondents to this question, 36% felt that their greatest challenge was *access to habitats.* Many respondents stated that the location of their school, meant that they had access only to a limited number of habitats. Several respondents stated that their schools were located in urban areas and had little in the way of natural environments in the vicinity. A majority of these respondents flagged that their schools had DEIS status and reported that, as a result, the financial resources were not available to allow for trips to different habitats.

Some 21% of respondents noted that either *the number of pupils and/or the age of pupils* in their class(es) made trips outside the school grounds to different habitats difficult. There is a need for extra adult support to aid with supervision on such trips. Younger children in particular need supervision and direction to keep them with the group and on task. In many cases there are simply not enough adults in a school to assist on such visits. While it is ideal that parents be asked to assist, this is often not possible due to the number of families with two parents working outside the home.

One-fifth (20%) of respondents stated that *planning and the organisation of trips* to habitats was the greatest challenge they faced. Planning issues included the need for the teacher to find, and possibly visit, the habitat before bringing the class(es), the supervision, health and safety of the children whilst on the visit, and the organisation of transport where necessary. Other issues identified by respondents were the development of worksheets to keep the class on task, the completion and return of parental consent forms, and the development of a contingency plan in case of inclement weather.

Other challenges noted by respondents were general health and safety issues (17%), time (16%) and the weather (6%). The 17% who responded that general health and safety was an issue may have explained why so few respondents offered their pupils the chance to visit wastelands and peatlands. In both these habitats there are obvious health and safety concerns. This is the case with the former due to the amount of potentially dangerous rubbish left lying around in such areas. In the case of peatlands, there are the problems with exposure to the elements and of safety whilst on the bog, such as the deceptive nature of such ground which can go from firm under foot to a quagmire in a matter of steps.

Strand: Energy and forces

Teacher template, Science: Q. 5
When learning about concepts in the following strand units, I provide opportunities for the children to investigate using everyday objects and materials:
(four-point rating scale: never, yearly, termly, monthly)

Table 4.18 highlights how often respondents provide opportunities for pupils to investigate in the different strand units.

Table 4.18. Science, Q 5: Strands and Strand Units – Energy and forces

	never	yearly	termly	monthly
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Light	1	44	43	12
Sound	1	44	43	12
Heat	2	46	43	9
Forces	1	46	44	9
Magnetism and electricity	1	46	43	7

n= 1,133 – 1,138

A minority (12%) of respondents stated that they provided opportunities for their pupils to investigate *Light* and *Sound* on a *monthly* basis. This is higher than the figures for the other three strand units, and may be because *Light* and *Sound* integrate neatly with other subjects, for example *Light* with Visual Arts and *Sound* with Music.

The figures for either extreme of the scale *(monthly/never)* show that while these strand units are not being taught every month they are being covered at least *termly* or *yearly* by all but a minority of respondents. It is encouraging to note that across all of the strand units almost half of the respondents provided opportunities for investigation on either a *yearly* or *termly* basis.

Teacher template, Science: Q. 6
The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Energy and forces is:
(blank text box)

A majority (53%) of the 837 respondents to this question identified *resources* as the greatest challenge. For these, lack of resources was simply the issue. However, for a sizable number of respondents, the challenge was that they were unsure of what to do with the resources (and, in particular, equipment) they had.

Less than one-fifth (17%) of respondents felt that *time* was their greatest challenge. Many of the respondents held the view that either the *Primary School Curriculum* as a whole, and/or the Science Curriculum in particular, was overloaded and that it was therefore difficult to find the time to teach everything. This challenge does not relate to this strand alone. Nevertheless, this seemed to be a particular issue with regard to the strand *Energy and forces* because of the amount of time needed to set up some of the investigations.

Just 16% of respondents felt the *number of children* in their class(es) and the consequent *lack of space* were the main challenges they faced. The principal argument presented by respondents focused on the difficulties of undertaking practical group work safely when children are in close proximity to each other. Teachers also mentioned the difficulty of sharing limited amounts of equipment among large numbers of children.

Other reported challenges included investigations (13%), planning (8%), and the teachers' own lack of confidence with the strand (7%).

Strand: Materials

Teacher template, Science: Q. 7
I provide the following opportunity for children in my class(es) to set up investigations and learn about the properties and characteristics of materials:
(blank text box)

This question also proved difficult to analyse. The wording led to such confusion that some respondents stated unambiguously that they failed to understand the question. As the question was open-ended in nature, the answers received were numerous and varied. Many teachers gave one word answers which were difficult to codify with any accuracy.

Nevertheless, the majority of the 857 respondents did indicate that they provided opportunities for the children in their class(es) to undertake hands-on practical investigations in the area of materials. A smaller group reported providing opportunities for the children to identify the properties of materials through discussion and observation in either the whole class setting or in groups. A final group of respondents noted providing opportunities for their pupils to categorise materials and make predictions.

Teacher template, Science: Q. 8
The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Materials is:
(blank text box)

As with questions about the challenges faced in teaching other strands, *resources, class size and space and time* were the main challenges identified by respondents in their teaching of the strand *Materials*.

In all, 49% of the 682 respondents to this question stated that *resources* were the main challenge they faced. In this case the majority of respondents had difficulty sourcing and gathering different materials. Materials that respondents indicated were particularly difficult to obtain were those used in the construction of homes. Another issue for respondents was storage of such a wide variety of materials. This they related to the issue of class size and space.

Of the respondents, 23% stated that the *number of children in their class(es)* and the *available space* in the classroom was a challenge in teaching the strand *Materials*. The large class sizes and the consequent lack of space led to problems with regard to the storage of resources, such as materials and other scientific equipment. It also led to difficulties of classroom management and organisation when attempting to implement practical investigative work.

As with other questions above, the 19% of respondents who stated *time* was their main challenge again mentioned curriculum overload and an inability to fit everything that needed to be done into the school day. The practical work involved in the *Materials* strand was regarded as being particularly time consuming.

Other challenges mentioned by respondents included providing opportunities for practical work, health and safety issues, and the teachers' own lack of knowledge and expertise.

Strand: Environmental awareness and care

Teacher template, Science: Q. 9
In teaching Environmental awareness and care in the Science Curriculum, I provide the following learning opportunities for the children:
Please tick all relevant boxes.

Table 4.19 illustrates the learning opportunities respondents most frequently indicated they made available to children.

Table 4.19. Science, Q 9: Strands and Strand Units – Environmental awareness and care

Learning Opportunity	n%
Using books, photos, newspapers, posters, videos	96
Participating in environmental projects in the school environment	79
Playing, for example role-playing, construction play	56

n=68 – 1,126

The learning opportunities provided most often to children in the strand unit *Environmental awareness and care* were the use of books, photos, newspapers, posters and videos, as 96% of respondents indicated that they utilised these resources. The popularity of various printed and digital media to teach children about *Environmental awareness and care* is understandable given the wide variety of

environments that can be accessed in this way. Such media allow pupils to get a close up look at plants and animals that may be rare, endangered or even dangerous.

Participating in environmental projects in the school environment was the next most frequently provided learning opportunity. More than three-quarters (79%) of respondents indicated that they provided the opportunity of being involved in such projects for the children in their class(es).

More than half (56%) of respondents indicated that they gave the children in their class(es) the opportunity to engage in play.

Less than 50% of respondents indicated that their classes visited areas under change. This may relate to some of the issues pertaining to habitats mentioned already in Question 4 above. There are obvious difficulties with identifying and getting to an environment under change. As with all school trips, there are also health and safety considerations.

Skills development

The template included two questions about teachers' experience of using the Science Curriculum to support the development of children's skills. The first of these questions focused on the skills of working scientifically, while the other focused on the skills of designing and making.

Teacher template, Science: Q. 11a
I provide opportunities for the children to develop the skills of 'working scientifically':
(four-point rating scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Question 11a required respondents to rate each of the seven working scientifically skills according to the frequency with which they

provided opportunities for children to develop the skills. The seven skills are those listed in the Science Curriculum and are presented in the table below. Table 4.20 outlines the frequency with which children were provided with opportunities to develop these skills.

Table 4.20. Science, Q. 11a: Skills development

	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Questioning	0	1	24	75
Observing	0	1	26	73
Predicting	0	4	41	55
Recording and communicating	1	8	42	49
Investigating and experimenting	0	6	55	39
Analysing (sorting and classifying)	1	10	53	36
Estimating and measuring	1	11	57	32

n=1,095-1,123

The three skills which children were given the opportunity to develop most frequently were Questioning (75%), Observing (73%) and Predicting (55%). By comparison only 32% of respondents noted giving children the opportunity to develop the skill of *estimating and measuring frequently*, but it is important to note that the results for this skill were the highest in both the *sometimes* and *seldom* categories. This skill is also developed on a more regular basis through the Mathematics curriculum. With regard to skills which children were never given the opportunity to develop, the results were encouraging. In the case of four of the skills listed, no respondent recorded *never* giving children the opportunity to develop these skills. Only 1% of respondents recorded *never* giving children the opportunity to develop the skills of *estimating and measuring, analysing and recording and communicating.*

Teacher template, Science: Q. 12a
I provide opportunities for the children to 'design and make' (explore, plan, make and evaluate) models and objects: (four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

The *Designing and making* component of the Science Curriculum involves children in solving practical problems. They do this by using and applying their scientific skills and knowledge to practical tasks—encouraging the creative and imaginative aspects of the scientific process. Table 4.21 shows the frequency with which respondents indicated that they created opportunities for children in their class(es) to design and make as part of their learning in Science.

Table 4.21. Science, Q.12a: Skills development

	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
I provide opportunities for the children to 'design and make' (explore, plan, make and evaluate) models and objects.	7	29	52	12

n=1,124

Just 12% of respondents provide opportunities for children to design and make *frequently*. However, 52% provide opportunities *sometimes* and this is an encouraging figure given respondents' comments throughout this section about lack of time for teaching Science. The *Designing and making* element is possibly one of the most time consuming elements of the Science Curriculum as it involves engaging the children in planning, discussing, designing, gathering materials, and making. Such activities can take several lessons to complete and, given the designation of just one hour a week to Science, this could be off-putting for teachers. It is therefore encouraging that over half of respondents gave children the opportunity to undertake such activities on a relatively regular basis.

SPHE Curriculum

Questions 3 to 9 of the teacher template referred to strands and strand units of the SPHE Curriculum. As with Gaeilge and Science above, key lines of inquiry were the strands, strand units and methodologies.

Strand: Myself

This section presents findings from two questions relating to the strand *Myself.*

Teacher template, SPHE: Q. 3
To foster the children's personal development, their health and well being, I provide them with opportunities to: (four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

In Question 3 teachers were asked to rate how frequently they provided their pupils with opportunities to foster personal development, health and well being. The items they were asked to rate reflected the content and objectives of the strand units *Self-identity, Taking care of my body, Growing and changing,* and *Safety and protection*. Table 4.22 illustrates the opportunities respondents indicated providing most frequently for the children in their class(es).

Table 4.22. SPHE, Q. 3: Opportunities for children to develop personal health and well-being

	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Voice own opinions	0	1	17	82
Take increasing responsibility for own actions and behaviour	0	1	21	77
Talk about their feelings	0	2	23	75

n = 1,031-1,192

High percentages of respondents to this question reported providing learning opportunities *frequently* or *sometimes* for their pupils to voice their own opinions, to take increasing responsibility for their own actions and behaviour, and to talk about their feelings.

The overwhelming majority (97%) of respondents indicated that they provided opportunities *frequently* or *sometimes* for children to examine their diet and nutrition and to develop a sense of safety and ability to protect themselves from danger and abuse.

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of respondents noted that they allowed similar opportunities for children in their classes to come to understand their sexuality, and the processes of growth, development and reproduction. It is noteworthy that 29% of respondents recorded *seldom* or *never* providing such opportunities for pupils. Cross-analysis with questions from the respondent profile section of the template indicated that the frequency of opportunities given to children to come to understand their sexuality did not vary by gender of the teacher, years of teaching experience, or the classes being taught by him/her.

Teacher template SPHE: Q. 4
The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Myself is:
(blank text box)

There were 734 teachers (54%) who answered this question. The three main areas that respondents recorded as presenting challenges for them in teaching the strand *Myself* were the sensitive nature of some of the material, time, class size and perceived curriculum overload, and the children's backgrounds (familial, cultural, societal).

Of the 734 respondents who answered this question, 28% indicated that the *sensitive nature of some of the material* was a challenge when

teaching the strand *Myself*. Respondents mentioned relationships and sexuality education and they also mentioned such issues as bereavement, sadness and hygiene in this context. Some teachers also noted that they felt unprepared to teach this strand. They mentioned, too, their own inhibitions when dealing with sensitive material.

Of teachers who responded to this question, 18% listed *time, class size and perceived curriculum overload* as their greatest challenges in teaching this strand. Teachers noted the little amount of time allocated to this subject. One teacher wrote: 'Time allocated to this subject is too short – half-an-hour for SPHE! One hour for Drama! Where are the priorities?' Another mentioned: 'Even though opportunities are provided to talk about feelings and emotions, class size and time constraints make it difficult to give equal opportunity to all children, especially quieter ones.' Yet another wrote: 'The curriculum is so overloaded with subjects that SPHE becomes integrated and often not taught on its own.'

A minority (15%) of respondents recorded the *children's backgrounds* as being a challenge. Comments here ranged from teachers' need to take all children's backgrounds into account when covering topics within the strand to the differing values of school and home. One teacher wrote:

> *Bíonn suíomhanna difriúla ag gach páiste sa bhaile agus caithfidh tú a bheith cúramach nuair atá a leithéid á phlé agat leis na páistí/Children have different situations at home and you have to be careful when you are discussing such things with the children.*

Another said:

> *Bíonn páistí ann a bhfuil measanna, 'values', acu ag teacht ón bhaile agus 'values difiriúla á gcur ina láthair ar scoil/There*

> *are children who have values from home and different values are being presented at school.*

Yet another commented:

> *Due to huge and growing numbers of international students, different cultures and practices within those cultures must be taken on board.*

Just 5% of respondents reported that they did not experience any challenges when teaching this strand. One teacher wrote:

> *I have found the experience of teaching the strand Myself to be very positive. There are plenty of resources available – programmes, information, books and videos. This strand is integrated with the Science Curriculum.*

Strand: Myself and others

This section included two questions on the strand *Myself* and others.

Teacher template, SPHE: Q5
To help the children to create and maintain supportive relationships, I provide them with opportunities to: (four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Over 90% of respondents indicated that they offered each opportunity listed in the question to the children in their class(es) *frequently* or *sometimes*. The opportunities most teachers reported offering to the children in their class(es) are illustrated in Table 4.23 below.

Table 4.23. SPHE, Q. 5: Helping children to create and maintain supportive relationships

	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Treat others with dignity and respect	0	0	11	89
Understand how their actions and behaviour affect others	0	1	14	85
Explore and value friendship	0	1	18	81

n=1,182-1,196

All of the teachers who responded recorded that they *frequently* or *sometimes* provided the children with opportunities to treat others with dignity and respect. In all, 99% of respondents indicated that they *frequently* or *sometimes* provided the children with opportunities to explore and value friendship and to understand how their actions and behaviour affect others. Nearly all (98%) respondents noted that they provided opportunities *frequently* or *sometimes* for their pupils to learn to appreciate their own family, to learn to resolve conflict (compromise, apology, forgiving), and to recognise and deal with bullying behaviour. Cross-analysis indicates that this did not vary by the DEIS status of the school.

Teacher template SPHE: Q. 6
The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Myself and others is:
(blank text box)

Question 6 allowed teachers the opportunity to log the challenges, if any, they had experienced in teaching the strand *Myself and others*. In all, 685 teachers (50%) answered this question.

Of the 685 teachers who responded to this question, 39% referred to the children's ability or inability to *relate well to other people*. One teacher wrote about the challenge in helping children to 'appreciate

that others think differently and see things from different perspectives.' Another mentioned 'the need to get across to children that they must treat others with respect and understand that the world does not revolve around them alone.' One respondent wrote of the challenge of: 'getting the kids to carry through on material they have covered in SPHE, that is treating others with respect, name calling, bullying, etc. Often difficult to get children to empathise with others.' Teachers referred to the problem of bullying. One teacher wrote about helping children to 'deal with bullying situations effectively.' Another spoke of 'making sure children know exactly what the term bullying means, so as they can differentiate between a once off incident and something more serious.' Respondents wrote of conflict resolution. One teacher noted 'the challenge of resolving a conflict between two friends – recognising the qualities of being a good friend.' Another wrote of 'teaching them to resolve conflicts among themselves. It is a daily challenge.' Teachers wrote of children's listening skills in the context of relating to others. One respondent mentioned the challenge for the children of 'connecting lesson material to classroom/yard behaviour during the school day – resolving conflict, listening effectively, while treating all members of the group with dignity and respect.' Another teacher wrote: 'Listening skills are a major concern.' Teachers did however note that the skills mentioned above are challenges for young children especially. One respondent mentioned that 'children see themselves as the most important – it can be difficult for younger children especially to accept others rights.'

Just under one-third (30%) of respondents indicated that *children's social, economic and cultural backgrounds* were challenges when teaching the strand *Myself and others*. One teacher wrote of the challenge of 'dealing with children who come from a variety of backgrounds/ cultures – respect might be lacking for women.' Another wrote:

> 'Is féidir leis an múinteoir an-chuid damáiste a dhéanamh i nganfhios nuair nach bhfuil cúlra iomlán na bpáistí ar eolas acu – dúshlán ná go gcaithfidh an múinteoir a bheith discréideach/The teacher can do a lot of damage unwittingly by not knowing all about the children's backgrounds – it is a challenge for the teacher to be discreet.'

Yet another teacher mentioned the challenge of 'integrating children from all backgrounds – foreign children (respect for females), single parent families, travelling community, while another respondent wrote of making allowances for changing types of families.' Teachers also mentioned that the messages some children received from home conflicted with those they received in school. One teacher summed it up by saying:

> 'Uaireanta tá coimhlint ann idir cad a mhúintear sa rang agus na luachanna/tuairimí atá ag teacht ón mbaile/ Sometimes there's conflict between what's taught in the class and the values/opinions that are coming from the home.'

A minority (17%) of respondents *referred to time, class size and curriculum overload* as challenges in teaching this strand. One teacher considered that 'large class size impacts on lessons where sensitive issues need to be discussed.' Another said: 'I find some children need more individual attention to help them cope with the situation at home and at school. This is difficult to achieve in large classes.' In relation to curriculum overload, a respondent wrote of the challenge of 'teaching it all effectively (it's very broad).' With regard to time, teachers wrote of the challenge of 'finding time to prepare new resources and of the challenge of dealing with the multitude of problems children endure – time to listen to them.' Another

respondent wrote about

> *am a dhéanamh d' ábhar seo! Tá sé ró-easca é a chur ar leataobh agus a rá go bhfuil sé déanta gach lá go néamhfhoirmiúil/making time for this subject! It's very easy to put it aside and say that it's done informally each day.*

Strand: Myself and the wider world

This section included two questions on the strand *Myself and the wider world*. There was a further question on the use made of other programmes when selecting content for SPHE lessons.

Teacher template, SPHE: Q. 7
To help the children become active and responsible citizens in society, I provide them with opportunities to:
(four-point frequency scale: never, seldom, sometimes, frequently)

Table 4.24. SPHE, Q. 7: Helping children to become active and responsible citizens in society

	never	seldom	sometimes	frequently
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Share and co-operate within the class or school community	0	2	19	79
Develop a sense of responsibility for the environment	0	2	21	78
Celebrate and respect difference	0	4	31	65

n=1,156-1,185

Of respondents to this question, 99% recorded that they *frequently* or *sometimes* provided opportunities for the children in their class(es) to develop a sense of responsibility for the environment. Nearly all (98%) respondents indicated that they provided opportunities *frequently* or *sometimes* for their pupils to share and co-operate within the class or school community, while the comparable figure for

celebrating and respecting difference was 96%. Cross-analysis indicated that this did not vary by DEIS status of the school.

Teacher template SPHE: Q. 8
The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Myself and the wider world is:
(blank text box)

There were 568 respondents (41%) to this question. 18% of these respondents listed the *children's levels of maturity* as a challenge when teaching the strand *Myself and the wider world*. One teacher wrote: 'From a child's perspective it's difficult to understand the impact and importance of the wider world.' Several mentioned how *féinlárnach/ egocentric* young children especially tend to be. One teacher wrote that 'young children have a very limited understanding of a sense of space or time. It's hard for them to see outside their circle of friends/ family.' Teachers also spoke of the difficulty of teaching young children about the media and the effects of advertising. One wrote of the difficulty of 'discussing advertisements with children as they are quite young in infants to notice the different techniques used.'

Of teachers who responded to this question, 15% listed *time, class size and perceived curriculum overload* as a challenge when teaching this strand. One respondent said: 'Often my biggest problem is not being able to get around the entire class and hear everyone's opinion.' Another reflected the views of many when (s)he wrote: 'I suppose that there is so much to be done! This goes for all the strands in the SPHE Curriculum, there are so many worthwhile activities/lessons to be explored it's hard to make time for them all!' Another mentioned: 'With such a diverse school population, both on social and ethnic levels, it is important to take the time to ensure everyone is included, celebrated and to approach the topic with sensitivity.'

A minority (12%) of respondents reported that *respect for diversity* was

their greatest challenge in teaching the strand *Myself and the wider world*. Teachers mentioned the difficulty of *overcoming cultural and religious prejudice.* They spoke also of *finding common ground within a school which has multiple cultures.* Teachers also wrote of the difficulty of getting children in Ireland to arrive at the understanding that *not everyone is as fortunate as them.*

Teacher template, SPHE: Q., 9
A variety of programmes is available for teachers in planning and teaching SPHE. I find the following programmes helpful when selecting content for SPHE lessons:
(four-point rating scale: not helpful, somewhat helpful, helpful, very helpful)

Respondents to Question 9 were asked to rate how helpful they found various programmes when selecting content for SPHE lessons.

Table 4.25. SPHE, Q. 9: Helpfulness of various programmes

	not helpful	somewhat helpful	helpful	very helpful
	n%	n%	n%	n%
Walk Tall (Substance Use Programme)	2	11	35	53
Stay Safe (Child Abuse Prevention Programme)	2	9	39	50
Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme (RSE)	4	18	42	36

n=104-1,109

Some 89% of respondents indicated that they found the Stay Safe (Child Abuse Prevention Programme) *very helpful* or *helpful.* The comparable figure for the Walk Tall (Substance Use Programme) was 88%. Of teachers who responded to this question, 78% indicted that they found the Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme (RSE) *very helpful* or *helpful.*

SECTION 5:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section of the report provides a synthesis of the key findings from the analysis of data from the Teacher Template Study and School Case Study presented in Sections 2, 3 and 4. Arising from this, the report focuses on a number of issues in relation to Gaeilge, Science and SPHE, and outlines recommendations in response to these. The recommendations will be the focus of further deliberations following the publication of this report. They will also be informed by findings from school inspections, by current and recent Irish and international research, and by developments in primary education in other countries.

Findings from this second phase of review show that there is much to celebrate as we approach the ten-year anniversary of the curriculum in primary schools. Across all three subjects, children's enjoyment of learning was identified as a key success. Respondents noted the favourable impact on children's learning of the child-centred, hands-on, active learning methodologies outlined in the *Primary School Curriculum*. Teachers and children reported positively on the use of the communicative approach in Curaclam na Gaeilge. Teachers highlighted the level of children's engagement with Science and their increased knowledge and understanding of their environment. Respondents reported that the SPHE Curriculum was impacting positively on children's self-esteem and confidence, and on their interactions with each other.

Issues and recommendations

Alongside the significant successes reported by schools, there were significant challenges. The key issues related to

- time
- methods of teaching and learning
- assessment

- Curaclam na Gaeilge.

This sub-section focuses first on recommendations regarding these issues and the actions that the NCCA might take as part of its work over the coming years. There are also recommendations for the system as a whole. These are outlined later in this section.

Time

Across the three subjects, teachers identified time as one of the greatest challenges in embedding the aims and objectives of the curriculum in learning experiences in classrooms. Teachers described two dimensions of the time issue. One focused on curriculum overload (i.e. insufficient time to implement fully all curriculum subjects or to cover all the objectives within each subject), while the other focused on class size/children's needs (i.e. insufficient time to meet the needs of all learners). Similarly, in *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1 Final Report* (NCCA, 2005), time was identified as a key challenge in teaching English, Mathematics and Visual Arts.

Curriculum overload

Curriculum overload was defined by respondents as the lack of time needed to cover all aspects of a packed curriculum. In Gaeilge, teachers described the time/overload issue in terms of a dilemma of curriculum priority, noting that the increased time given to oral language left insufficient time for reading and writing. (These particular challenges are discussed in more detail later in this section under the heading Curaclam na Gaeilge.) Teachers repeatedly identified lack of time to plan and teach as an issue in Science, particularly in relation to the strands *Energy and forces,* and *Materials.* They highlighted the inadequacy of the one hour per week allocated to the Science Curriculum, given the practical, process-oriented (and therefore time-consuming) nature of the subject. Similarly, teachers noted that the time allocated to SPHE was simply too short.

Class size/children's needs

The second dimension of the time issue concerned children's learning needs and class size. Since the introduction of the *Primary School Curriculum* in 1999 there have been significant changes in the profile of children in primary classrooms in Ireland. In addition, increased prosperity has given rise to cultural and societal changes that have affected the lives of all children. Children whose first language is neither Gaeilge nor English are now attending primary schools[1]. There has also been an increase in the numbers of children with special educational needs being included in mainstream schooling[2]. Teachers and principals flagged the challenges of meeting the growing range of children's learning needs in classrooms. Supporting children who have first languages other than Gaeilge or English and children who have special educational needs were both mentioned as needing more time, and as adding to the sense of 'overload' discussed above.

Not surprisingly, the challenge of listening to and assessing children's oral language in Gaeilge was identified as a key challenge in the context of large and diverse classes. In Science, teachers reported that large classes made it difficult to teach certain strands safely and effectively, given the emphasis on practical, hands-on experience. Monitoring and observing practical work and assessing individual children's tasks in Science were reported as significantly compromised, if not impossible, in large class contexts. In respect of work in the outdoor environment—habitat studies, environmental projects—respondents indicated that a large class was a significant challenge due to the need for additional adult supervision and the

1 Central Statistics Office (CSO), Ireland, Census 2006. 797,281 of the 860,496 children between the ages of 0-14 enumerated in the 2006 census were Irish. 52,500 came from countries outside of Ireland: Europe, 31,944; Africa, 7,647; Asia, 5,497; America (North and South), 4,612; Australia, 568; New Zealand, 147; Other nationalities, 1,543, Multi Nationality, 542; No Nationality, 397; Not Stated, 10,318.

2 National Council for Special Education (2006) Implementation Report, pp. 38, 72. 'The estimated number of children in Ireland with any form of disability, or other condition likely to give rise to a special educational need…is 18% of all children'.

increased transport costs. Similarly, in large classes and particularly in multi-grade classes, respondents noted that it was difficult to enable all children, regardless of ability or personality, to contribute equally in SPHE. Multi-grade classes with children of different ages and stages of development presented particular challenges in this subject, given the very different needs of learners and the importance of involving all children in talk and discussion.

Recommendations

Table 5.1. Recommendations: Time

Proposals	Outputs
To explore curriculum overload with teachers and with relevant NCCA committees	Recommendations for strategies to address overload
To develop examples of integrated units of learning	Resources on integration for teachers

Exploration of curriculum overload

Findings concerning curriculum overload are not surprising perhaps given the sheer volume of curriculum documentation (the *Primary School Curriculum* comprises 23 books), the emphasis on a theoretical rather than practical framework (in the Introduction book), and the subject-by-subject nature of the national programme for curriculum in-service delivery. Clearly, there is potential for re-presenting the curriculum as it was intended—a holistic construct. It will be helpful, therefore, through NCCA committees and working with teachers in their classrooms, to explore the issue of curriculum overload and to identify strategies to address it.

Integrated units of learning

Respondents provided some evidence of curriculum integration in the data gathered from the Teacher Template and School Case Study (see the following sub-section 'Methods of teaching and learning' for more detailed discussion). Teachers noted that a significant amount of SPHE learning may well happen in the context of other subjects and

they acknowledged that the subject naturally permeates many curriculum areas. They also indicated that Gaeilge and Science also afford scope for integration with other subjects.

Findings suggest that teachers generally view integration as the linking of two or more subjects in the context of a particular topic relevant to those subjects. The nature of the learning content involved is seen by teachers as being naturally or logically linked to other subjects. The three subjects which were the focus of this review differ qualitatively in terms of their knowledge content. Thus, teachers reported that, as a language, Gaeilge was used as an aid to learning in other subjects (for example, Physical education and Music), while those other subjects were at the same time seen as a means by which the language was itself developed. In Science, teachers reported links with language, Geography and Visual Arts, while links with language, Science and Geography were reported for SPHE.

It is of note that teachers' understanding and use of curriculum integration, based on findings from this study, focused to a greater extent on the transfer or application of concepts or content knowledge across subjects, and to a lesser extent on the transfer of skills. This is perhaps consistent with the discussion of integration in the curriculum (as one of 14 learning principles). The curriculum states that 'as they mature, integration gives children's learning a broader and richer perspective, emphasises the interconnectedness of knowledge and ideas and reinforces the learning process' (DES, 1999, Introduction, page 16).

Curriculum integration, making 'connections between learning in different subjects' (DES, 1999, Introduction, page 16), offers some potential for addressing the time/overload challenge. However, the *Primary School Curriculum* does not identify these connections for teachers in any significant way. There is scope for exploring the

potential of integration strategies to help reduce curriculum overload. Advice/support for teachers on effective curriculum integration might serve to strengthen children's engagement with key priorities in learning, and support the transfer of concepts and, especially, skills to new learning situations. Such advice might focus more on the integration of skills than on the integration of content knowledge. Shifting the emphasis from integrated subjects to integrated learning also seems to have greater potential in supporting teachers' developing practice in assessment in primary schools. This is discussed later in this section.

The proposed work, exploring overload in the curriculum, and supporting integrated learning, will go some way toward providing greater support for teachers in responding to the time challenge. It is clear, nevertheless, that teachers need greater levels of support from the system in this area. This too is discussed later in this section.

Methods of teaching and learning

The challenge of insufficient time to implement the curriculum due to class size/children's needs is related to the challenge of effectively differentiating children's learning in the primary school. 'Working collaboratively provides learning opportunities that have particular advantages' (DES, 1999, Introduction, page 17). Children who took part in the School Case Study indicated that they liked working in groups or in pairs. However, respondents to the Teacher Template Study reported a greater emphasis on whole-class teaching than on group and pair work. This is similar to findings from *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (NCCA, 2005). There is some scope, therefore, for investigating the extent to which greater variation in organisational settings and teaching methods can help teachers to overcome, to some extent, the challenge of meeting the individual needs of all learners in large and multi-grade classes. Linked to the challenge of meeting the individual needs of all learners is the issue

of providing more opportunities for children to develop their higher-order thinking skills. This section looks at each of the following areas in turn:

- organisational settings
- differentiation
- higher-order thinking.

Organisational settings

The *Primary School Curriculum* notes the importance of using varied organisational settings (whole-class teaching, group work, pair work and individual work). Findings across the three subjects indicated that whole class teaching was the organisational setting most frequently used. Large numbers of respondents (at least 80 per cent) also reported using pair work, group work and individual work *frequently* or *sometimes* in Gaeilge, Science and SPHE. Group work was reported as the most frequently used setting after whole-class teaching.

While there was an emphasis on whole-class teaching, teachers reported using a range of organisational settings. Nevertheless, approximately 10 per cent of respondents to the teacher questionnaire reported *seldom* or *never* using group work across the three subjects. This finding is of note, given children's keen interest in working in peer groups (reported in Section 3) and the tangible benefits that accrue to children's learning and development when they collaborate with peers. In addition, *Science in Primary Schools, Phase 1: Final Report* (Varley, Murphy and Veale, 2008) noted that children enjoyed working collaboratively in small groups to carry out practical work in Science. However, the report questioned how often children had opportunities to do collaborative, practical work as part of their Science learning.

Differentiation

While the curriculum 'allows for differences in capacity and in the range of individual intelligence' (DES, 1999, Introduction, page 17), it does not define or exemplify differentiation for teachers. The more recently published *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* (NCCA, 2007, Introduction, page 8) defines differentiation as, 'the process of varying content, activities, teaching, learning, methods and resources to take into account the range of interests, needs and experience of individual students.' Of the six types of differentiation described in the guidelines (differentiation by level and pace, by interest, by access and response, by structure, by sequence, and by teaching style), teachers in the current review reported the use of three most frequently:

- differentiation by teaching method (for example, use of organisational settings—pairs and groups—with mixed-ability membership)
- differentiation by access and response (for example, use of circle work in SPHE to equalise opportunities for participation by children of all abilities and personalities)
- differentiation by level and pace (for example, adjusting the level or volume of work for children in Gaeilge).

Differentiation by teaching method, specifically the use of different organisational settings, was the most popular strategy reported for all three subjects. Teachers' reasons for using group work, pair work or individual work as a differentiation strategy generally focused on tailoring work to the individual child or, more frequently, pairing a child considered *more able* with a child deemed *less able* in order to support learning. Teachers did not refer to *student interest* as a strategy for differentiation. Little evidence was provided of differentiation by structure (for example, planning small steps of learning for some

children while other children are learning whole units of integrated material), and in particular the specification of different levels of achievement for curriculum objectives for different children. This supports findings in the next sub-sections, *Assessment* and *Curaclam na Gaeilge*, which highlight the challenge in planning for progression in learning and in using assessment to support all children's learning.

Higher-order thinking

The higher-order thinking skills listed in the *Primary School Curriculum* include 'summarising, analysing, making inferences and deductions, and interpreting figurative language and imagery' (DES, 1999, Introduction, p.16). Across all three subjects, the data collected from teachers indicated that limited opportunities were being provided for children to develop these higher-order thinking skills.

Teachers' responses to a range of questions across the template for Curaclam na Gaeilge indicated that children had limited opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills in the area of language. Findings indicated that there is also a need to systematically support teachers and children in developing higher-order thinking skills in Science. For example, the three skills that teachers reported children had opportunities to develop most frequently were questioning, observing and predicting. Teachers reported providing less frequent opportunities in the case of investigating and experimenting, analysing (sorting and classifying), and estimating and measuring. Varley, Murphy and Veale (2008) in their research commented likewise

> *the application of some scientific skills for older pupils appears to lack the appropriate breadth and complexity envisaged by the Primary Science Curriculum. There are relatively few instances of children engaging in designing-and-making activities and thus skill development in this area would, by inference, be limited* (p. 161).

The SPHE Curriculum recommends that children become more discerning in their use of the media. In an age when the media has such an effect on children's lives, it is worth noting the reported low usage of the media to aid teaching and learning in SPHE. This is perhaps surprising given their potential to capture children's interest, and help them engage in critical thinking. On the other hand, there are many teachers' comments in the data which suggest that SPHE does provide children with the opportunity to reflect on real-life issues and consider solutions and courses of action in various situations. Here, higher-order thinking and not mere reproduction of information is the sought after objective.

Recommendations

Table 5.2. Recommendations: Methods of teaching and learning

Proposals	Outputs
To exemplify teaching and learning strategies	Internet video/podcasts Samples of children's work Samples of teachers' materials Tip sheets
To develop support materials	

Teachers already use a range of organisational settings in their classrooms, engage in differentiation, and encourage the development of higher-order thinking skills. Nevertheless, findings suggest a need to provide teachers with greater support in furthering and promoting

- their understanding and use of both group and pair work
- their understanding and practice of differentiation as integral to teaching and learning
- a culture of thinking, questioning and understanding among children as educational goals.

Respondents, especially multi-grade class teachers, referred to the challenge of classroom organisation. This suggests that teachers would value further support on the use of different organisational settings to

support learning. Such support might also cover how teaching and learning methods can be differentiated and how differentiation might be planned for and used, especially in multi-grade situations or when classes are large. The support might also focus on the promotion of higher-order thinking, highlighting how to teach language structures explicitly as a framework for facilitating children's conceptual thinking, and as a means of supporting higher-order thinking among children whose language skills are underdeveloped. This would move children's thinking to a higher level of reflection and analysis (thus going beyond knowing and memorising) so that children could apply thinking skills to produce deeper understanding of a topic or subject. Effective questioning, on the part of the teacher and the child, promotes higher-order thinking and is part of Assessment for Learning (AfL) (see the recommendations regarding Assessment). It is proposed that strategies for each of the methods of teaching and learning be exemplified for teachers and that support materials be developed. These might include samples of children's work and of teachers' materials, internet video/podcasts and tip sheets. Much of the material developed to support methods of teaching and learning, such as samples of children's work at each level, would also link with the planned support on assessment as discussed below.

Assessment

Assessment is part of the teacher's daily interactions with children. Through this interaction, the assessment process provides the teacher with information to make decisions about teaching and learning—

> *selecting curriculum objectives, identifying appropriate teaching methodologies, designing learning activities, choosing suitable resources, differentiating learning, and giving feedback to children on how well they are doing* (NCCA, 2007, p.7).

As in *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (NCCA, 2005) teachers reported a number of challenges associated with assessment. These are discussed under the following headings:

- purpose of assessment
- assessment methods
- exemplification of standards
- use of assessment information.

Purpose of assessment

Teachers identified the nature of learning in the three subjects as a challenge to assessment. Assessing children's oral language in Gaeilge posed difficulty for many teachers, in particular for those teaching infant classes. In Science, teachers were often unsure what they should assess, and noted that they lacked a means of doing so. A significant number of teachers felt that learning in SPHE either defied assessment or should not be assessed at all.

In general, the data suggests that teachers are unclear on the purpose, role and function of assessment and its potential in supporting teaching and learning. In addition, the data suggest that teachers would welcome other ways of assessing children's progress or what they consider are more objective measures of children's learning. The recently-published document, *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* (NCCA, 2007) and the proposed programme of support for assessment in primary schools[3] should provide significant assistance for teachers in this regard.

3 Circular 0138/2006, p. 2, states that, '…a national professional development programme in assessment for learning will be provided for teachers over a number of years. This will aim to support teachers in placing assessment at the heart of the teaching and learning process, supporting children's cognitive, creative, affective, physical and social development. It is intended that all teachers and principals will have access to the programme…'

Methods of assessment

Teacher observation and teacher questioning were reported as the most frequently used assessment methods across all three subjects, reflecting the findings of *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1* (NCCA, 2005). Nonetheless, teachers also reported using teacher-designed tasks and tests, and work samples, portfolios and projects relatively often. In contrast, assessment methods such as curriculum profiles and concept-mapping which can be especially useful in Gaeilge and Science respectively were used less frequently. This is interesting in light of the challenges teachers identified concerning the particular nature of children's learning in certain subjects, which include the emphasis on oral language in Gaeilge, the use of hands-on investigative and collaborative work in Science, and the subjective and personal nature of SPHE.

Exemplification of standards of achievement

As noted, teachers' lack of awareness of, and perceptions of the limited availability of, assessment tools and resources for the subjects under review was highlighted across findings. Respondents noted the availability of standardised tests for English and Mathematics and indicated that they valued having standards against which to judge children's progress and achievement in these areas. However, teachers drew attention to the absence of standards in other curriculum areas against which to judge children's progress in knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values.

Use of assessment information

Across subjects, teachers reported finding assessment information most helpful for planning follow-on lessons, reporting to parents, and providing feedback to children. It is of note, however, that fewer teachers reported finding assessment information helpful for providing feedback to children in Gaeilge than in Science or SPHE,

despite the greater time allocation for Gaeilge in primary schools and the importance of feedback in language learning. Giving feedback to children is a central strategy in Assessment for Learning—one of two assessment approaches presented in the document, *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* (NCCA, 2007).

While not unique to assessment, the pressure of time was reported by teachers as being the greatest challenge in assessing children's learning in Gaeilge and Science, and the second greatest challenge in SPHE.

Recommendations

Table 5.3. Recommendations: Assessment

Proposals	Outputs
To provide examples of what children understand and can do at each class level	Samples of children's work Teacher commentary on children's work Internet video, AfL tools and resources
To exemplify Assessment for Learning (AfL) techniques	

The data suggest that teachers' assessment practice might be further developed through samples of children's work that show different types of learning across the *Primary School Curriculum* at each of the four class levels. As discussed earlier, these samples could serve as descriptors of children's learning at various stages in their primary education. In this way, they could help teachers in making judgements about children's progress and achievement in learning across the curriculum.

While the document, *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* (2007), should support teachers' assessment practice, the data from this phase of the review suggest that teachers require additional support in using assessment. In particular, teachers reported experiencing challenges in giving feedback, which is an Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategy. Sharing information with children about their progress in learning, and negotiating the next

steps with them can make learning enjoyable, motivating and rewarding for them. Further exemplification of this strategy may be helpful to teachers in developing their assessment practice.

Curaclam na Gaeilge

Curaclam na Gaeilge emphasises a communicative approach to language teaching and learning. It underlines the importance of children communicating through real-life scenarios from the earliest stages. Active learning methods (drama, games, poetry, rhymes and songs) form part of the communicative approach. Analysis of data from the Teacher Template Study and School Case Study indicates that children are responding favourably to a communicative approach and to active learning methods, particularly in the infant classes. However, a range of issues emerged across the findings concerning limited *language production* in Gaeilge.

Pre-formed language activities

Across the findings for Curaclam na Gaeilge, teachers reported an emphasis on pre-formed language activities such as rhymes, poetry, pre-scripted drama, games and listening tasks on CD-ROMs. These are valid language learning opportunities but they can limit language progress as they do not often require a high level of language production on the part of the teacher or the child and they limit the child's exposure to the language as a means of communication. Furthermore, the child does not benefit from the teacher's modelling of higher-order use of the language. As referred to already in the sub-section on assessment, teachers reported less frequent use of assessment information for giving feedback to children in Gaeilge than in Science or SPHE. This again highlights a possible reluctance on the part of the teacher to produce language which has not been pre-formed in the guise of a language game or rhyme. It may also reflect teachers' rating of their productive skills in Gaeilge as weaker

than their receptive skills (in the profile information provided by respondents to the teacher questionnaire).

Range of language experiences

The *Primary School Curriculum* refers to Gaeilge, the language, as one of the most significant aspects of Irish culture alongside traditional stories, literature, superstitions, music, sporting games and dance. However, respondents indicated that they made little use of oral or literacy-based activities for developing children's cultural awareness, focusing instead on classroom games and songs thus providing a limited range of language experiences for children. As with pre-formed language activities, this possibly reflects teachers' rating of their productive skills in Gaeilge.

Form versus meaning

The apparent difficulties with teachers' production of Gaeilge may be compounded by the fact that Curaclam na Gaeilge offers no specific examples of how teachers might direct children's attention to form[4] while maintaining a focus on the importance of meaning, through the communicative use of Gaeilge. For example, Curaclam na Gaeilge acknowledges that teachers should take account of frequent mistakes made by children but suggests that teachers should not correct these overtly during communicative activities, particularly if the meaning is clear. In interpreting and acting on this advice, it seems that teachers may have placed too great a focus on basic communication and too little focus on form.

Reading and writing

Reading and writing were two further areas of language production which teachers in Irish-medium and English-medium schools identified as challenging. Curaclam na Gaeilge states that the child should be enabled to develop early literacy skills by following a pre-

4 Form here is referring to the correct grammatical use of the language.

reading programme. However, findings regarding the strategies used to teach early literacy in Gaeilge in English-medium schools showed that teachers find the process of teaching two phonetic codes (one in English and one in Gaeilge) challenging. Teachers in English-medium schools reported significantly less use of grapho-phonic cues as a word identification strategy compared with their counterparts in Irish-medium schools. Analysis of findings with regard to writing in Gaeilge indicates that teachers in both Irish- and English-medium schools find this a challenging area, mirroring the reported under-use of the writing process in English in the first phase of curriculum review (NCCA, 2005) and also in the final report on the NCCA's consultation and seminar, *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Report on cosultation and Seminar* (NCCA, 2007).

Taken together, these findings across the four strands of Curaclam na Gaeilge—Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing—may account for teachers' reported lack of children's grammatical precision when using Gaeilge (spoken, written or read).

Recommendations

Table 5.4. Recommendations: Curaclam na Gaeilge

Proposals	Outputs
To develop examples of what children understand and can do at each class level	Differentiated samples of children's work Internet video/podcasts Additional support materials for Curaclam na Gaeilge
To exemplify effective error correction	
To exemplify how to teach two languages	

It is proposed to develop differentiated[5] examples of children's work which will highlight the range of what children understand and can do at each class level. It is also proposed to use internet videos/ podcasts to exemplify effective error correction and how to teach two languages.

5 The differentiated examples will reflect the medium of instruction of the school, the class level from which the activities were gathered and the different levels of progress and achievement.

Conclusion

This review of the implementation of the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE in primary schools has highlighted both significant successes and significant challenges for teachers and children. A picture has emerged from the data of teachers and children actively engaging with the three subjects in ways which stimulate successful and enjoyable learning. The picture also depicts scenarios that show significant impediments to curriculum implementation, which both challenge and frustrate teachers.

The data provided by the participants in this review show how the curriculum is working for principals, teachers, parents, and children in classrooms. The findings of this review enable the NCCA to identify how Council can continue to support schools in using the curriculum to shape teaching and learning. Section 6 of this report focuses on how the NCCA will do this.

SECTION 6: MOVING FORWARD

Section 5 pointed to a number of recommendations regarding time, methods of teaching and learning, assessment, and Curaclam na Gaeilge. This section looks at how best the NCCA and schools can respond to these challenges.

Working with schools: Primary network

A curriculum comes to life in the hands of teachers in classrooms. As such, teachers working at different class levels and in different types of schools bring a range of expertise and experience to bear on the curriculum development process. The findings and recommendations arising from this second phase of review of the *Primary School Curriculum* provide tremendous scope for working with primary schools in developing the range of resources identified in Section 5 of the report—samples of children's work, teachers' materials, tip sheets, and Internet video/podcasts. By working directly with teachers the NCCA can ensure that these resources are responsive to the challenges of teaching in today's classrooms.

It is envisaged that the NCCA will establish a network of primary schools to work on shaping the responses to the challenges identified in this phase of the review. This network would comprise clusters of schools, each potentially dedicated to one project (for example, teaching methods). Teachers participating in the network would have opportunities to work with and learn from teachers in other schools within a single cluster, as well as schools in other clusters. Council's work to date concerning the Senior Cycle Network, which supports developments in curriculum and assessment at senior cycle, provides a useful starting point for developing the Primary Network.

Sharing materials with schools: Publication formats

Across the outputs outlined within the recommendations there are references to a range of support materials, resources and online

supports. A key priority of this work will be to avoid further fragmentation of the curriculum in primary schools, by exploring creative ways to share these additional support materials with teachers. There is some scope for combining the various resources in one toolkit for teachers, which would allow for direct and complementary links to be highlighted among the individual projects. It is clear that the NCCA's website for teachers, Assessment, Curriculum and Teaching Innovation on the Net (ACTION), will be significant in hosting a repository of interactive resources across projects.

System support

While the proposed work by Council will go some way toward providing greater support for teachers in responding to the curriculum implementation challenges outlined in Section 5, it is clear that teachers have also called for greater levels of support from the education system. The findings of *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2* present a significant opportunity for all policy makers to work together to provide greater levels of support for primary school teachers and children. The findings highlight the ongoing need for effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers. They have also focused on the limited availability of teaching and learning resources including Information and Communications Technology (ICT) hardware and software for primary schools.

Along with the recommendations outlined earlier for NCCA, there are some significant recommendations for the system arising from the study. These recommendations are outlined below.

Continuing Professional Development

It is arguable whether the kinds of curriculum and assessment innovations outlined in the recommendations for the NCCA will, on

their own, translate into improved outcomes for teachers and learners. It is clear from the findings that there are implications for the CPD of primary school teachers. The traditional model of subject in-service cannot anticipate and address the full spectrum of issues arising from the diverse contexts in which teaching and learning takes place. We know from the process of curriculum review that a curriculum comes alive only in the very particular social context of schools and classrooms; it must therefore be supported in these classroom contexts in order to respond effectively to individual teachers' professional needs and the needs of groups of teachers in particular school contexts. Elmore (2006) has noted that the kind of difficult, contingent and uncertain learning that constitutes effective CPD for teachers is best situated in close proximity to the work itself—the teacher's own classroom. Varley, Murphy and Veale (2008) also highlight pre-service primary teacher education as an area warranting consideration in responding to some of the challenges in supporting children's learning through the *Primary Science Curriculum*.

Recommendations

It is recommended that CPD be provided that focuses on teachers' classroom practices and beliefs, and on the teacher's own classroom as the essential site of change in order to ensure effective ongoing improvement.

Use of teaching and learning resources

Across the three subjects teachers reported a lack of sufficient funds to purchase resources. In Gaeilge teachers highlighted the lack of interesting, age-appropriate resources, for reading in particular, while in Science they reported both a lack of resources (such as investigative equipment) for doing investigative work and a lack of time for learning how to use existing resources. In SPHE teachers also focused on the lack of suitable resources, especially for multi-

grade classes. They noted too the challenge of locating and assembling relevant and appropriate material.

The findings of this review highlight the importance of a range of resources and equipment to support effective teaching and learning in schools. Adequate funding for such resources and equipment is a first step to overcoming the emphasis on textbooks in primary school classrooms. The report *Science in Primary Schools, Phase 1: Final Report* (Varley, Murphy and Veale, 2008) highlights the importance of annual ring-fenced funding for consumable Science resources (p. 172). Teachers generally make the final choice about the resources bought and used in their classrooms. Findings suggest that teachers would benefit from dedicated time and support to explore the potential of these resources to add value to teaching and learning.

Across the three subjects teachers reported a reliance on textbooks. Interestingly, one case-study school provided the exception. In this school teachers rationalised their decision not to use textbooks by noting the challenges that over-reliance on textbooks can generate versus the potential for developing *real learning* with the help of a range of *good resources*.

In Science respondents indicated that they relied on resource books/manuals in their planning of lessons. These books tend to provide topic-based knowledge. It is hardly surprising that teachers welcomed the content—specific resource materials and lesson ideas contained in them. The curriculum documents for Science offer limited scientific information and this may account for their relative unpopularity with respondents as planning resources.

Recommendations

It is recommended that adequate funding be provided for resources in primary schools. It is further recommended that assistance be

provided for schools in sourcing and maintaining resources. It is also recommended that control options for textbooks for schools be explored and that examples of practice from schools where textbook use has been reduced be disseminated.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Response rates to the ICT questions on the teacher template were notably lower than for any of the other areas. For example, just one-quarter of respondents answered the question about the types of ICT used to support Curaclam na Gaeilge. These low response rates are possibly indicative of the erratic provision nationwide for ICT in schools, and also, perhaps, of teachers' attitude to the use of ICT for teaching and learning. Those who did respond reported limited use of ICT for teaching and learning in each of the three subjects. The reasons teachers provided for limited/non-use of ICT mirrored findings in the *ICT Framework: Final report on the school-based developmental initiative* (NCCA, 2007), which pointed to the need for investment in schools' ICT infrastructure including funds for ICT planning, maintenance and improvement.

Similarly, the document *Science in Primary Schools, Phase 1: Final Report* (Varley, Murphy and Veale, 2008) noted that children's experiences of using ICT as an integral part of Science lessons appeared to be extremely limited. The researchers recorded that the teaching methodologies in evidence in classrooms included 'copying from the board, reading textbooks and completing worksheets and workbooks' (pp. 166-167). The researchers also noted children's negative views about reading and writing in Science lessons.

Recommendations

Under the National Development Plan 2007-2013, the government allocated €252 million for ICT in schools. A strategy group was established to advise on priority areas for investment and submitted

its recommendations. It is recommended that a response be made to the ICT strategy group's submission. It is also recommended that CPD on using the curriculum to plan for the use and integration of ICT be provided for teachers.

Conclusion

In the picture of learning and teaching painted by participants in this review there are successes and challenges; there is light and shadow. Children enjoy their learning more, but teachers feel they could achieve more if only they had more time and resources. Use of active learning methods is on the rise, but the use of textbooks still prevails. Children say they enjoy opportunities to work with their peers, but whole class settings predominate. Children's oral language capacity in Gaeilge is improving, but at some cost to progression in, and development of, children's reading and writing skills. Teachers wish to assess children's learning but are unsure what the benchmarks are, and how to determine the standards children are attaining. These and many other tensions emerge from the data of this review. While some issues are particular to a subject, most notably Gaeilge, the issues, in general, are relevant across the curriculum. There are many echoes of findings from the first phase of review, but there are new sounds here too.

In order to realise the value and significance of the findings from this review, key areas of recommendation are outlined as a basis for further deliberation and more detailed planning by Council and its enabling structures. The next steps for the NCCA will involve exploring in more detail the potential and promise of Council's proposed response to the challenges raised in this review, as well as outlining plans for the ongoing process of curriculum review.

It is clear from the first and second phases of curriculum review at primary level that teaching and learning will require ongoing

support, reappraisal and renewal in all subjects, and not just in the three subjects that were the focus of this review. Findings suggest that the one constant in primary education in Ireland today is change itself. The curriculum development process must continue to respond to the needs of teachers and children. The generation of data and information at a local level fuels the development process. To respond to the needs of primary school teachers and children the NCCA will work with children, teachers and principals in primary schools, and parents to support the innovation and development already happening in today's classrooms.

APPENDIX A

Teacher template study

NCCA
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta

Primary School Curriculum

Review and Reflection Template for Teachers

Gaeilge | Science | SPHE

This *Review and Reflection Template for Teachers* is designed to prompt your thinking about your use of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) for Gaeilge, Science and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The template is presented in three sections, each corresponding with one of the three subjects (Gaeilge, Science and SPHE). Each section contains a number of questions regarding your use of the curriculum for that subject.

Please respond to each question based on your experience to date implementing the Primary School Curriculum (1999) for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE in these three subjects.

Background information

1 Please tick as appropriate. **Male** ☐ **Female** ☐

2 What is your current position within your school? Please tick all relevant boxes.

i Class Teacher ☐
ii Special Educational Needs Teacher
e.g. Learning Support/Resource ☐
iii Language Support Teacher ☐
iv Home-School Liaison Co-ordinator ☐
v Resource Teacher for Travellers ☐
vi Early Start Teacher ☐
vii Teaching Principal ☐
viii Administrative Principal ☐
ix Deputy Principal ☐
x Other ☐

3a What class(es) are you teaching this year?

b How many children are in your class(es)?

4 Excluding career breaks, how many years of teaching experience do you have in primary schools? Give number of years as appropriate. **In Ireland** ☐ **Abroad** ☐

5 How many years have you spent teaching children in each class in primary schools in Ireland? For example, if you taught a 3rd/4th grouping for 3 years, count as 3 years teaching 3rd class and 3 years teaching 4th class.

	Classes	**Years**
i	Junior infants	
ii	Senior infants	
iii	First class	
iv	Second class	
v	Third class	
vi	Fourth class	
vii	Fifth class	
viii	Sixth class	
ix	Total years teaching multi-grade classes	

6a Have you spent time teaching in a setting other than a primary school? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

b If yes, please list setting(s) and number of years as appropriate.

Setting	**Years**

7 What professional qualifications do you have? Please list year of award as appropriate.

	Degree(s) and Qualifications	**Year of award**
i	Diploma in Teaching (NT)	
ii	B. Ed. degree	
iii	Other undergraduate degree	
iv	Please specify	
v	Post Graduate Certificate in Education	
vi	Diploma in Special Education (or equivalent)	
vii	Diploma in Remedial Education/Learning Support	
viii	M. Ed. degree	
ix	Other Masters degree	
x	Please specify	
xi	Doctoral degree	
xii	Other degree/qualification	
xiii	Please specify	

8 Which of the following types of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) have you accessed to support your implementation of the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE? Please tick all relevant boxes.

	Support services/Courses	Gaeilge	Science	SPHE
i	PCSP inservice	☐	☐	☐
ii	PCSP cuiditheoireacht	☐	☐	☐
iii	SDPS facilitation	☐	☐	☐
iv	Seminars/courses organised by the local Education Centre	☐	☐	☐
v	Seminars/courses organised by the INTO	☐	☐	☐
vi	Leadership Development for Schools (LDS)	☐	☐	☐
vii	Other	☐	☐	☐
viii	Please specify			

9 How would you assess your own level of competence in Irish? This information is helpful to the NCCA in providing additional support to teachers in implementing the Gaeilge Curriculum. Please tick all relevant boxes.

		Needs some work	Good	Very good	Excellent
i	Listening	☐	☐	☐	☐
ii	Speaking	☐	☐	☐	☐
iii	Reading	☐	☐	☐	☐
iv	Writing	☐	☐	☐	☐

10 In what type of school do you teach? Please tick all relevant boxes.

a Location i Urban ☐ ii Rural ☐

b Type of school i Junior school ☐ ii Senior school ☐ iii Vertical school (all classes to sixth) ☐
iv Other ☐ v Please specify

c Gender mix i Girls only ☐ ii Boys only ☐ iii Mixed gender ☐
iv Junior mixed/senior girls ☐ v Junior mixed/senior boys ☐
vi Other ☐ vii Please specify

d Language of instruction i English-medium ☐
ii Irish-medium: Gaelscoil ☐ iii Irish-medium: Scoil sa Ghaeltacht ☐
iv Other ☐ v Please specify

e School Support Programme (DEIS) i Urban band 1 ☐ ii Urban band 2 ☐
iii Rural ☐ iv Not in the programme ☐

11 Has the DVD, ***The What, Why and How of children's learning in primary school,*** been distributed to parents in your school? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Díríonn an roinn seo den Teimpléad Athmhachnaimh agus Athbhreithnithe ar do thaithí ar mhúineadh na Gaeilge i gCuraclam na Bunscoile.

Tá ábhar teagaisc agus foghlama an Churaclaim Ghaeilge eagraithe faoi cheithre shnáithe:

- Éisteacht
- Labhairt
- Léitheoireacht
- Scríbhneoireacht.

Cé go bhfuil na ceithre shnáithe scartha óna chéile sa churaclam, comhtháthaítear iad i gceachtanna Gaeilge chomh minic agus is féidir.

Tá na snáithe foroinnte i snáithaonaid:

- Ag cothú spéise
- Ag tuiscint teanga
- Ag úsáid teanga.

Sna scoileanna Gaeltachta agus lán-Ghaeilge tá béim curtha ar fhorbairt

- Cumas agus muinín
- Samhlaíocht agus mothúcháin.

Tá an curaclam bunaithe ar chur chuige cumarsáide. Is iad mór-aidhmeanna an chur chuige seo ná go mbeadh an páiste in ann úsáid a bhaint as an teanga chun cuspóirí cumarsáide a bhaint amach agus go mbeadh deiseanna aige/aici an Ghaeilge atá á foghlaim a úsáid go rialta. Tá feidhmeanna teanga i gceist i ngach snáithe den churaclam. Is iad seo a leanas na feidhmeanna atá luaite sa Churaclam Gaeilge:

- Caidreamh sóisialta a dhéanamh
- Eolas a thabhairt agus a lorg
- Dearcadh a léiriú agus a lorg
- Dul i gcion ar dhuine
- Struchtúr a chur ar chomhrá
- Soiléiriú a lorg i gcomhrá.

Más múinteoir tú i scoil ina bhfuil an Béarla mar mheán freagair ceisteanna 1-10 agus ceisteanna 21-40 le do thoil/*Teachers in English-medium schools please answer questions 1-10 and questions 21-40.*

Más múinteoir tú i scoil ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán freagair ceisteanna 1-3 agus ceisteanna 11-40 le do thoil/*Teachers in Irish-medium schools please answer questions 1-3 and questions 11-40.*

Snáitheanna agus snáithaonaid

Pleanáil sa seomra ranga

1a Seo cé chomh chabhrach is atá leagan amach an churaclaim i snáitheanna agus snáithaonaid agus an Ghaeilge á pleanáil agam/*In planning for my teaching of Gaeilge, I find the layout of the curriculum in strands and strand units:*

Rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil/*Please use the following rating scale:*

1=mí-chabhrach/*not helpful,* 2=saghas cabhrach/*somewhat helpful,*

3=cabhrach/*helpful,* 4=an-chabhrach/*very helpful.*

☐

b Cuir fáth le d'fhreagra, le do thoil/*Please give a reason for your answer.*

2 Seo cé chomh chabhrach is atá na catagóirí feidhmeanna teanga seo a leanas agus mé ag pleanáil d'fhorbairt foghlama páistí i nGaeilge/*When planning for progression in children's learning in Gaeilge, I find the following categories of language functions are:*

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil/*In each case, please use the following:*

1=mí-chabhrach, 2=saghas cabhrach, 3=cabhrach, 4=an-chabhrach.

	Catagóirí feidhmeanna teanga	**Ráta**
i	Caidreamh sóisialta a dhéanamh/*Communicate with others*	☐
ii	Eolas a thabhairt agus a lorg/*Give and seek information*	☐
iii	Dearcadh a léiriú agus a lorg/*Express and seek an opinion*	☐
iv	Dul i gcion ar dhuine/*Convince another person of something*	☐
v	Struchtúr a chur ar chomhrá/*Structure a conversation*	☐
vi	Soiléiriú a lorg i gcomhrá/*Seek clarification in a conversation*	☐

3 Seo cé chomh chabhrach is atá na háiseanna seo a leanas agus an Ghaeilge á pleanáil agam/*When planning for my teaching of Gaeilge I find the following resources are:*
I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:

1=mí-chabhrach, 2=saghas cabhrach, 3=cabhrach, 4=an-chabhrach.

	Áis	**Ráta**
i	Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge	☐
ii	Treoirlínte do Mhúinteoirí: Gaeilge	☐
iii	Plean scoile: Gaeilge	☐
iv	Leabhair achmhainne/lámhleabhair do mhúinteoirí	☐
v	Téacsleabhair/leabhair saothair do dhaltaí	☐
vi	Eile ☐	☐

Ba cheart do mhúinteoirí i scoileanna ina bhfuil an Béarla mar mheán ceisteanna 4-10 a chomhlánú.
Ba cheart do mhúinteoirí i scoileanna ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán bogadh ar aghaidh go ceist 11.

Questions 4–10 are to be completed by teachers in English-medium schools. Teachers in Irish-medium schools should move to question 11.

Éisteacht

4 Cuirim ar chumas na bpáistí scil na héisteachta a fhorbairt trí na deiseanna seo a leanas a thabhairt dóibh/*I enable children to develop listening skills by providing the following opportunities for them:*

Cuir tic sna boscaí cuí, le do thoil/*Please tick all relevant boxes.*

	Deis	**Tic**
i	Éisteacht le Gaeilge á húsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil mar theanga chaidrimh agus bhainisteoireacht ranga	☐
ii	Éisteacht le Gaeilge á húsáid go foirmiúil chun frasaí faoi leith a insealbhú/ *Listening to Gaeilge being spoken formally so that certain phrases might be consolidated*	☐
iii	Éisteacht agus freagairt go gníomhach do rainn, amhráin, dánta, scéalta, srl.	☐
iv	Éisteacht agus freagairt go gníomhach do théipeanna/dlúthchéirníní éisteachta/cláir ríomhaireachta/*tapes/CDs/computer programs*	☐
v	Éisteacht agus freagairt go gníomhach do chláir raidió/teilifíse oiriúnacha	☐
vi	Cluichí éisteachta a imirt, m.sh. éisteacht agus taispéaint	☐
vii	Éisteacht agus treoracha a leanúint, m.sh. Deir Ó Grádaigh	☐
viii	Éisteacht le cainteoirí eile, m.sh. páistí eile ón rang nó ó ranganna eile	☐
ix	Eile	

Labhairt

5a Is iad na trí straitéisí is mó a chabhraíonn liom chun cumas labhartha na bpáistí a fhorbairt agus a muinín chun an Ghaeilge a úsáid a chothú ná/*The three strategies I find most helpful in developing children's competence and confidence in speaking Gaeilge are:*

Cuir tic, le do thoil.

	Straitéis	**Tic**		**Straitéis**	**Tic**
i	Agallaimh	☐	vii	Gníomhamhráin/amhráin	☐
ii	Cluichí/tascanna/fadhbanna	☐	viii	Ionad labhartha	☐
iii	Rainn/filíocht	☐	ix	Ról-imirt	☐
iv	Dramaíocht	☐	x	Scéalaíocht	☐
v	Druileanna	☐	xi	Sceitsí/sceitsí le puipéid	☐
vi	Caint, díospóireacht agus ceisteanna a chur	☐	xii	Físeáin	☐
xiii	Eile				

b Cuir fáth le d'fhreagra, le do thoil/*Please give a reason for your answer.*

Léitheoireacht

6 Comhlánaigh má bhaineann sé seo le do thaithí/*To be completed if applicable to your experience.*

Is iad na straitéisí luathlitearthachta a úsáidim i mo rang(anna) roimh tabhairt faoi léitheoireacht fhoirmiúil ná/*In preparing children for formal reading I use the following strategies to teach early literacy:*

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche/*never*, 2=go hannamh/*seldom*,
3=uair nó dhó sa mhí/*once or twice a month*, 4=uair sa tseachtain/*once a week*,
5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain/*a couple of times a week*, 6=gach lá/*everyday.*

	Straitéis luathlitearthachta	**Ráta**
i	Pictiúirleabhair	☐
ii	Prionta san timpeallacht	☐
iii	Leabhair mhóra/leabhair bheaga	☐
iv	Léamh i gcomhpháirt/*shared reading*	☐
v	Rainn/filíocht	☐
vi	Léitheoireacht idirghníomhach, m.sh. nuacht ranga	☐
vii	Scéalta	☐
viii	Leabhair agus téacsanna cruthaithe sa rang/*books and texts produced in class*	☐
ix	Múineadh na haibítre agus fogharluach na litreacha/ *teaching the alphabet and letter sounds*	☐
x	Cluichí luathlitearthachta	☐
xi	Eile	☐

7 Is iad seo a leanas na straitéisí aithintfhocail a úsáidim i mo rang(anna) chun cumas léitheoireachta na bpáistí a fhorbairt/*I use the following word identification strategies to develop children's competence in reading:*

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Straitéis aithintfhocail	**Ráta**
i	Leideanna ón gcomhthéacs/*contextual cues*	☐
ii	Leideanna ón gcomhréir/*syntactical cues*	☐
iii	Leideanna ó réamheolas na bpáistí/ *cues from children's prior knowledge*	☐
iv	Leideanna graif-fhóinice/*grapho-phonic cues*	☐
v	Eile	☐

8 Cothaím cultúr léitheoireachta i measc na bpáistí i mo rang(anna) le gníomhaíochtaí agus deiseanna mar seo a leanas a sholáthar/*I provide the following activities and opportunities which foster a reading culture among the children in my class(es):*

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Gníomh/deis	**Ráta**
i	Léamh os ard	☐
ii	Múnlóireacht ar phróiseas na léitheoireachta/*modelling the reading process*	☐
iii	Saothar na bpáistí a roinnt lena chéile/*share work with each other*	☐
iv	Léamh i gcomhpháirt le daoine eile/*shared reading*	☐
v	Réimse leathan d'ábhar léitheoireachta ar fáil sa leabharlann	☐
vi	Ócáidí speisialta léitheoireachta sa scoil, m.sh. aonach leabhar, cuireadh d'údar	☐
vii	Léitheoireacht neamhspléach ó chineálacha éagsúla téacs	☐
viii	Freagairt do leabhair, scéalta, dánta a roinnt/*responding to books, stories, poems*	☐
ix	Taitneamh a bhaint as taoiléitheoireacht/*enjoy silent reading*	☐
x	Tionscnaimh, m.sh. cara léitheoireachta/*reading buddy*	☐
xi	Scileanna léitheoireachta éagsúla, m.sh. súil thapa/*skimming the text*	☐
xii	Léitheoireacht leathan/*scanning the text*	☐
xiii	Eile	☐

Scríbhneoireacht

9 Comhlánaigh má bhaineann sé seo le do thaithí/*To be completed, if applicable to your experience.*

Is iad na seánraithe a úsáideann páistí don scríbhneoireacht phearsanta/neamhspleách i mo ranganna ná/*The genres which children use for personal/independent writing in my class(es) are:*

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Seánraith	**Ráta**		**Seánraith**	**Ráta**
i	Nótaí	☐	xiv	Cártaí	☐
ii	Dialanna	☐	xv	Ailt	☐
iii	Litreacha	☐	xvi	Scéalta	☐
iv	Ríomhphostanna/*e-mail*	☐	xvii	Teachtaireachtaí	☐
v	Dánta/filíocht/amhráin	☐	xviii	Ceannteidil/*headings*	☐
vi	Tuairiscí/*news reports*	☐	xix	Oidis chócaireachta	☐
vii	Biachláir	☐	xx	Agallaimh	☐
viii	Nuacht phearsanta	☐	xxi	Liostaí	☐
ix	Achoimrí/*summaries*	☐	xxii	Léirmheasanna (reviews) m.sh. ar leabhair	☐
x	Míniú/*explanations*	☐	xxiii	Sceitsí	☐
xi	Suirbhéanna	☐	xxiv	Tionscnaimh/*projects*	☐
xii	Foirmeacha	☐	xxv	Cúntais foghlama/*records of learning*	☐
xiii	Irisí/nuachtáin ranga	☐	xxvi	Eile	☐

10 Tugaim deiseanna do na páistí i mo rang(anna) feabhas a chur ar a gcuid obair scríofa trí dhul i ngleic le próiseas na scríbhneoireachta (dréachtú/eagarthóireacht/athdhréachtú)/*I provide opportunities for the children in my class(es) to improve their writing by using the writing process approach (drafting/editing/redrafting):*

Rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:

1=choíche,	2=go hannamh,	3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain,	5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain,	6=gach lá.

☐

Ba cheart do mhúinteoirí i scoileanna ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán an mhír seo a chomhlánú.
Ba cheart do mhúinteoirí i scoileanna ina bhfuil an Béarla mar mheán bogadh ar aghaidh go ceist 21.

This section to be completed by teachers in Irish-medium schools.
Teachers in English-medium schools should move to question 21.

Éisteacht

11 Cuirim ar chumas na bpáistí scil na héisteachta a fhorbairt trí na deiseanna a leanas a thabhairt dóibh:

Cuir tic sna boscaí cuí, le do thoil.

	Deis	**Tic**
i	Éisteacht le Gaeilge á húsáid mar ghnáth-theanga chumarsáide ranga	☐
ii	Éisteacht le Gaeilge á húsáid go foirmiúil chun frásaí faoi leith a insealbhú */Listening to Gaeilge being spoken formally so that certain phrases might be consolidated*	☐
iii	Éisteacht agus freagairt go gníomhach do rainn, amhráin, dánta, scéalta, srl.	☐
iv	Éisteacht agus freagairt go gníomhach do théipeanna/dlúthchéirníní éisteachta/cláir ríomhaireachta	☐
v	Éisteacht agus freagairt go gníomhach do chláir raidió/teilifíse oiriúnacha	☐
vi	Cluichí éisteachta a imirt, m.sh. éisteacht agus taispéaint	☐
vii	Éisteacht agus treoracha a leanúint, m.sh. Deir Ó Grádaigh	☐
viii	Éisteacht le cainteoirí eile, m.sh. páistí eile ón rang nó ó ranganna eile sa chlós	☐
ix	Eile	☐

Labhairt

12 Spreagaim páistí chun a scileanna labhartha a fhorbairt i gcomhthéacsanna éagsúla mar a leanas:

Cuir tic sna boscaí cuí, le do thoil.

	Comhthéacs	Am discréideach don fhorbairt	Réimsí curaclaim eile	Sa chlós
i	Agallaimh	☐	☐	☐
ii	Caint, díospóireacht agus ceisteanna a chur	☐	☐	☐
iii	Cluichí/tascanna/fadhbanna	☐	☐	☐
iv	Drámaíocht	☐	☐	☐
v	Druileanna	☐	☐	☐
vi	Físeáin	☐	☐	☐
vii	Gníomhamhráin/amhráin	☐	☐	☐
viii	Ionad labhartha	☐	☐	☐
ix	Scéalaíocht	☐	☐	☐
x	Sceitsí/sceitsí le puipéid	☐	☐	☐
xi	Rainn/filíocht	☐	☐	☐
xii	Ról-imirt	☐	☐	☐

13 Seo a leanas an méid cabhrach a thairgim do pháistí a scileanna labhartha a fhorbairt trí dheiseanna chleachtaidh i ngníomhaíochtaí éagsúla:

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Gníomh/deis	Ráta
i	Éisteacht go gníomhach	☐
ii	Caint ar a seal/*speaking in turn*	☐
iii	Tairiscint an eolais is riachtanaí don éisteoir	☐
iv	Freagraí oiriúnacha a chumadh	☐
v	Argóint a dhéanamh faoi dhearcadh agus iarracht a thabhairt ar dhaoine a mhealladh	☐
vi	Léiriú freagraí indibhidiúla ar dhánta, scéalta, dhrámaí agus chláir teilifíse	☐

Léitheoireacht

14 Comhlánaigh má bhaineann sé seo le do thaithí.

Is iad na straitéisí luathlitearthachta a úsáidim i mo rang(anna) roimh tabhairt faoi léitheoireacht fhoirmiúil ná:

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Straitéis luathlitearthachta	Ráta		Straitéis luathlitearthachta	Ráta
i	Pictiúrleabhair	☐	vii	Prionta sa timpeallacht	☐
ii	Leabhair mhóra/leabhair bheaga	☐	viii	Léamh i gcomhpháirt	☐
iii	Rainn/filíocht	☐	ix	Scéalta	☐
iv	Léitheoireacht idirghníomhach, m.sh. nuacht ranga				☐
v	Leabhair agus téacsanna cruthaithe sa rang				☐
vi	Múineadh na haibítre agus fogharluach na litreacha				☐
x	Eile				☐

15 Seo a leanas mar a úsáidim straitéisí aithintfhocail i mo rang(anna) chun cumas léitheoireachta na bpáistí a fhorbairt:

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Straitéis aithintfhocail	Ráta
i	Leideanna ón gcomhthéacs/*contextual cues*	☐
ii	Leideanna ón gcomhréir/*syntactical cues*	☐
iii	Leideanna ó réamheolas na bpáistí/*cues from children's prior knowledge*	☐
iv	Leideanna graif-fhóinice/*grapho-phonic cues*	☐
v	Eile	☐

16 Is é an méid a úsáidim straitéisí léitheoireachta chun scileanna tuisceana na bpáistí a fhorbairt ná:

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Straitéis léitheoireachta	Ráta
i	Léitheoireacht leathan	☐
ii	Súil thapa	☐
iii	Léitheoireacht chuardaigh	☐
iv	Léitheoireacht mhachnamhach	☐
v	Úsáid leideanna	☐
vi	Úsáid foclóirí	☐

17 Cothaím cultúr léitheoireachta i measc na bpáistí i mo rang(anna) trí gníomhaíochtaí agus deiseanna mar seo a leanas a sholáthar.

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Gníomh/deis	**Ráta**
i	A leabhair scéalta pearsanta a roinnt le páistí eile	☐
ii	Úsáid leabharlann ranga agus cabhrú é a riaradh	☐
iii	Cabhrú chun cairteanna a choimeád chun dáta, m.sh. cairteanna aimsire	☐
iv	Freagairt ar leabhair/*responding to literature* m.sh. scríobh léirmheasa, léiriú athchóirithe dráma	☐
v	Páirt a ghlacadh in ócáidí speisialta léitheoireachta sa scoil, m.sh. aonach leabhar, cuireadh d'údar, tionscnamh scríbhneoireacht leabhair	☐
vi	Gníomhaíochtaí léitheoireachta a roinnt lena dtuismitheoirí/gcaomhnóirí	☐
vii	Comhoibriú ar ghníomhaíochtaí léitheoireachta, m.sh. léitheoireacht beirte	☐
viii	Éisteacht le léitheoireacht an mhúinteora nó le léitheoireacht páistí eile	☐
ix	Múnlóireacht/*modelling* ar phróiseas na léitheoireachta	☐
x	Léitheoireacht ó réimse leathan téacs, m.sh. fíorleabhair Ghaeilge	☐

Scríbhneoireacht

18 Is iad na seánraithe/*genres* a úsáideann páistí don scríbhneoireacht phearsanta/neamhspleách i mo ranganna ná:

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Seánraith	**Ráta**		**Seánraith**	**Ráta**
i	Nótaí	☐	xiv	Cártaí	☐
ii	Dialanna	☐	xv	Ailt	☐
iii	Litreacha	☐	xvi	Scéalta	☐
iv	Ríomhphostanna	☐	xvii	Teachtaireachtaí	☐
v	Dánta/filíocht/amhráin	☐	xviii	Ceannteidil	☐
vi	Tuairiscí	☐	xix	Oidis chócaireachta	☐
vii	Biachláir	☐	xx	Agallaimh	☐
viii	Nuacht phearsanta	☐	xxi	Liostaí	☐
ix	Achoimrí	☐	xxii	Léirmheasanna, m.sh. ar leabhair	☐
x	Míniú	☐	xxiii	Sceitsí	☐
xi	Suirbhéanna	☐	xxiv	Tionscnaimh	☐
xii	Foirmeacha	☐	xxv	Irisí/nuachtáin ranga	☐
xiii	Cúntais foghlama	☐	xxvi	Eile _____	☐

19 Tugaim deiseanna do na páistí i mo rang(anna) feabhas a chur ar a gcuid obair scríofa trí dhul i ngleic le próiseas na scríbhneoireachta (dréachtú/eagarthóireacht/athdhréachtú):

Rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:

1=choíche,	2=go hannamh,	3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain,	5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain,	6=gach lá.

☐

20a Comhlánaigh má bhaineann sé seo le do thaithí.

Is é an dúshlán is mó, más ann, a bhaineann le múineadh gach ábhar (ach amháin an Bhéarla) trí Ghaeilge sna scoileanna Gaeltachta agus lán-Ghaeilge ná:

b Téim i ngleic leis an dúshlán seo trí:

Ba cheart do mhúinteoirí i ngach scoil ceisteanna 21-40 a chomhlánú.

Questions 21-40 to be completed by teachers in all schools.

21 Is é an dushlán is mó, más ann, a bhaineann le múineadh na Gaeilge i gcás gach ceann de na ceithre snáithe thíos ná/*The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching each of the four strands listed below is:*

a Éisteacht

b Labhairt

c Léitheoireacht

d Scríbhneoireacht

22 Is iad na straitéisí a úsáidim chun cur chuige cumarsáide a chur i bhfeidhm i mo rang(anna) ná/ *I employ the following strategies to promote a communicative approach in my classroom:*

Feasacht Teanga

23 I gcomhthéacsanna réalaíocha, chun cur le tuiscint na bpáistí ar fheasacht teanga, dírím aire na bpáistí i mo rang(anna) ar a leanas/*To develop children's language awareness in real contexts, I draw the children's attention to:*

Cuir tic sna boscaí cuí, le do thoil/*Please tick all relevant boxes.*

	Straitéis	**Tic**
i	Patrúin éagsúla laistigh den Ghaeilge, m.sh. gramadach, litriú agus comharthaí poncaíochta	☐
ii	Sloinnte agus logainmneacha sa cheantar	☐
iii	An Ghaeilge mar a labhraítear í sa Ghaeltacht	☐
iv	Na cosúlachtaí agus na difríochtaí idir fhogharluach na litreacha *(letter sounds)* i nGaeilge, i mBéarla, agus i dteangacha eile	☐
v	Na cosúlachtaí agus na difríochtaí idir an Ghaeilge agus an Béarla, m.sh. ord na bhfocal in abairt	☐
vi	Na cosúlachtaí agus na difríochtaí idir an Ghaeilge agus teangacha eile, má tá sé oiriúnach	☐
vii	Focail Ghaeilge i mBéarla na hÉireann agus i dtíortha eile, m.sh. 'clan'	☐
viii	Seanfhocail	☐
ix	Eile	

Feasacht Chultúir

24 Cuirim béim ar na gnéithe seo a leanas d'fheasacht chultúr na hÉireann agus curaclam na Gaeilge á cur i bhfeidhm agam/*When teaching Gaeilge, I emphasise the following aspects of Irish cultural awareness:*

Cuir tic sna boscaí cuí.

	Gné	Tic		Gné	Tic
i	Cluichí Gaelacha	☐	vii	Ceol	☐
ii	Rince	☐	viii	Seanamhráin	☐
iii	Traidisiúin béil	☐	ix	Amhráin nuachumtha/*recently composed songs*	☐
iv	Traidisiúin scríofa	☐	x	Rainn traidisiúnta	☐
v	Piseoga/*superstitions*	☐	xi	Scéalta dúchasacha/*stories from the Irish tradition*	☐
vi	Eile				

Cur chuige agus modheolaíochtaí

25 Bainim leas as na suíomh eagair seo i múineadh agus in úsáid na Gaeilge/*I use the following organisational settings when teaching and using Gaeilge:*

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Suíomh Eagair	Ráta
i	Múineadh an ranga iomlán	☐
ii	Obair ghrúpa	☐
iii	Obair i mbeirteanna	☐
iv	Obair aonair	☐

26 Is iad an dá straitéisí is mó a chabhraíonn liom freastal ar éagsúlacht chumais na bpáistí i nGaeilge ná/*The two strategies I find most helpful in differentiating for children's learning in Gaeilge are:*

27a Tacaím le comhtháthú foghlaim na bpáistí sa Ghaeilge trasna Curaclam na Bunscoile sna slite seo/*I integrate children's learning in Gaeilge across the Primary School Curriculum in these ways:*

Cuir tic sna boscaí cuí.

	Slí	**Tic**
i	Coincheapanna/smaointe na Gaeilge a nascadh leo siúd in ábhair eile/ *Connecting concepts/ideas from Gaeilge with those in other subjects*	☐
ii	Scileanna na Gaeilge a úsáid in ábhair eile/ *Applying skills learned in Gaeilge to other subjects*	☐
iii	Eile ☐	

b Is sampla maith é seo a leanas den chaoi inar chomhtháthaigh mé foghlaim sa Ghaeilge trasna Curaclam na Bunscoile/*An example of how and where I have successfully integrated learning in Gaeilge across the Primary School Curriculum is:*

28 Bainim leas as na modhanna múinte seo agus an Ghaeilge á múineadh agam (leathanaigh 64-67, Gaeilge: Treoirlínte do Mhúinteoirí)/*I use the following methodologies in the teaching of Gaeilge:*

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Modh	**Ráta**
i	An modh díreach/*direct method*	☐
ii	Modh na sraithe/*series method*	☐
iii	Modh na lánfhreagartha gníomhaí/*total physical response method (TPR)*	☐
iv	An modh closlabhartha/*audio-lingual method*	☐
v	An modh closamhairc/*audio-visual method*	☐
vi	Modh na ráite/*phrase method*	☐

29a Bainim leas as na háiseanna teagaisc seo a leanas agus an Ghaeilge á múineadh agam/
I use the following resources in teaching Gaeilge:

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Áis	**Ráta**
i	Ábhair choincréideacha/*concrete objects*	☐
ii	Áiseanna Teicneolaíocht an Eolais agus na Cumarsáide (TEC)/*ICT resources* m.sh. dlúthdhioscaí-ROM, ceamara digiteach, fístaifeadán/ *CD-ROMs, digital cameras, video recorder*	☐
iii	Bosca éadaigh	☐
iv	Bréagáin	☐
v	Cártaí éagsúla, m.sh. luaschártaí, leidchártaí, rólchártaí	☐
vi	Cláir theilifíse, m.sh. nuacht, cartúin, scannáin	☐
vii	Fíorleabhair Ghaeilge	☐
viii	Idirlíon	☐
ix	Leabhair acmhainne/*resource books*	☐
x	Pictiúir agus póstaeir	☐
xi	Puipéid	☐
xii	Taifeadáin	☐
xiii	Téacsleabhair/leabhair saothair	☐
xiv	Eile ☐	☐

b Is é an dúshlán is mó, más ann, a bhaineann le háiseanna teagaisc difriúla a úsáid ná/
The greatest challenge, if any, in using a variety of resources is:

30a Seo a leanas cé chomh minic is a úsáidim Teicneolaíocht an Eolais agus na Cumarsáide (TEC) chun tacú le teagasc agus foghlaim na Gaeilge/*I use ICT to support teaching and learning in Gaeilge:*

Rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

☐

b Cuir fáth le d'fhreagra, le do thoil/*Please give a reason for your answer.*

31 Úsáidim féin agus na páistí TEC chun tacú le teagasc agus foghlaim na Gaeilge chun/
The children and I use ICT to support teaching and learning in Gaeilge for the following purposes:

Cuir tic sna boscaí cuí/*Please tick all relevant boxes.*

	Cuspóirí úsáid TEC	**Múinteoir**	**Páistí**
i	Pleanáil le haghaidh teagasc agus foghlaim sa Ghaeilge	☐	
ii	Spéis a chothú sa Ghaeilge	☐	☐
iii	Tuiscint a chothú	☐	☐
iv	Scileanna éisteachta a fhorbairt	☐	☐
v	Scileanna labhartha a fhorbairt	☐	☐
vi	Scileanna léitheoireachta a fhorbairt	☐	☐
vii	Scileanna scríobhneoireachta a fhorbairt	☐	☐
viii	Eolas a lorg agus a fháil	☐	☐
ix	Feasacht teanga agus eolas ar chultúir eile a leathnú/ *to extend language and cultural awareness*	☐	☐
x	Tacú le measúnú/*to support assessment*	☐	☐
xi	Eile ☐	☐	☐

32 Seo a leanas samplaí de na cineálacha TEC is minice a úsáidim agus an chaoi a bhainim leas astu/*The following are examples of the types of ICT I use most frequently and how I use them:*

(Samplaí de chineálacha TEC: cláir phróiseála focal, printéir, dlúthdhioscaí-ROM, dioscaí digiteach ilúsáideacha, cláir cur i láthair, ríomhphost, scannóir, idirlíon, ceamara digiteach, físcheamara digiteach/*Examples of types of ICT: word processing packages, printer, CD-ROMs, DVDs, presentation and authoring software, e-mail, scanner, internet, digital camera/video.)*

Cineál TEC	**Samplaí den chaoi a bhainim leas as/astu**
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Measúnú

33 Bainim leas as na modhanna seo a leanas chun measúnú a dheanamh ar dhul chun cinn na bpáistí sa Ghaeilge/*I use the following methods to assess children's learning in Gaeilge as follows:*

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=choíche, 2=go hannamh, 3=uair nó dhó sa mhí,
4=uair sa tseachtain, 5=cúpla uair sa tseachtain, 6=gach lá.

	Modh	**Ráta**
i	Uirlísí measúnaithe	☐
ii	Breathnóireacht an mhúinteora/*teacher observation*	☐
iii	Ceistiú an mhúinteora/*teacher questioning*	☐
iv	Tascanna agus trialacha deartha ag an múinteoir/*teacher designed tasks and tests*	☐
v	Samplaí oibre, bailiúcháin agus tionscnaimh/*work samples, portfolios, projects*	☐
vi	Próifílí curaclaim	☐
vii	Eile ☐	☐

34 Seo a leanas cé chomh chabhrach is atá an t-eolas a fhaighim ón measúnú ar dhul chun cinn na bpáistí sa Ghaeilge chun/*I find the information I gather about children's learning helpful for:*

I ngach cás, rátáil mar is cuí, le do thoil:
1=mí-chabhrach, 2=saghas cabhrach, 3=saghas cabhrach, 4=an-chabhrach.

	Aidhm	**Ráta**
i	Ceachtanna a phleanáil	☐
ii	Tuairisc a thabhairt do pháistí/*reporting to children*	☐
iii	Tuairisc a thabhairt do thuismitheoirí/chaomhnóirí/ *reporting to parents/guardians*	☐
iv	Samplaí d'obair an pháiste a bhailiú, m.sh. i mbailiúchán/ *collecting samples of children's work e.g. in a portfolio*	☐
v	Cuntas scoile an pháiste a chruthú agus a choimeád/ *recording information in a central school file*	☐
vi	Tacú leis an bpáiste aistriú go bunscoil eile nó chuig iarbhunscoil	☐
vii	Eile ☐	☐

35 I mo thaithí, is é an príomhdhúshlán a bhaineann le measúnú ar dhul chun cinn na bpáistí sa Ghaeilge ná/*In my experience, the main challenge in assessing children's learning in Gaeilge is:*

Ginearálta

36a Cuirim eolas ar fáil do na tuismitheoirí/caomhnóirí faoin gcleachtas sa rang ó thaobh na ceithre snáithe den Curaclam – éisteacht, labhairt, léitheoireacht agus scríbhneoireacht/*I inform parents/guardians about classroom practice with regard to the strands of the curriculum – listening, oral language, reading and writing:*

Cuirim ☐ Ní chuirim ☐

b Bíonn tuismitheoirí/caomhnóirí páirteach maidir le dul chun cinn a bpáistí i nGaeilge trí/*Parents/guardians are involved in supporting their children's progress in Gaeilge through:*

Liostaigh gníomhaíochtaí in ord éifeachtachta le do thoil, an ceann is éifeachtaí mar uimhir a haon/*Please list activities in order of importance, with the most significant as number one.*

37a I mo thaithí, sílim go bhfuil Curaclam na Gaeilge ag dul i bhfeidhm ar fhoghlaim na bpáistí ar na bealaí seo a leanas/*In my experience, I think the Gaeilge Curriculum is impacting on children's learning in the following ways:*

Liostaigh in ord tábhachta le do thoil, an ceann is tábhachtaí mar uimhir a haon/*Please list in order of importance, with the most significant impact as number one.*

b I mo thaithí, an gné d'fhoghlaim na Gaeilge is mó a thaitníonn leis na páistí i mo rang(anna) ná/*In my experience, the aspect of learning Gaeilge that most appeals to the children in my class(es) is:*

c Cuir fáth le d'fhreagra, le do thoil/*Please give a reason for your answer.*

38 Is é an rath is mó a bhain mé amach agus mé ag cur Curaclam na Gaeilge i bhfeidhm go dtí seo ná/*The greatest success which I have experienced in implementing the Gaeilge Curriculum is:*

39 Is é an dúshlán is mó, más ann, a bhaineann le feidhmiú Churaclam na Gaeilge ó mo thaobhsa ná/*The greatest challenge, if any, which I have experienced in implementing the Gaeilge Curriculum is:*

40 Agus mé ag déanamh tuilleadh forbartha ar an gcaoi a mhúinim Curaclam na Gaeilge, seo iad na rudaí a dtabharfainn tús áite dóibh/*In furthering my own implementation of the Gaeilge Curriculum, I would like to prioritise the following:*

This section of the Teacher Review and Reflection Template focuses on your experience of teaching Science in the Primary School Curriculum. The Science Curriculum helps children to develop their scientific knowledge and ideas, and their ability to work as scientists.

The Science Curriculum presents the knowledge and ideas in four strands:

- Living things
- Energy and forces
- Materials
- Environmental awareness and care.

Each strand is divided into a number of strand units with each unit enabling children to explore particular concepts in detail. Children learn to work as scientists by having opportunities to work scientifically and to design and make models and objects.

The Science Curriculum emphasises children's ideas as a starting point for learning in Science. The curriculum highlights the importance of children learning through first-hand experiences by working with everyday objects and materials. Supporting children to link their new learning in Science to everyday situations and problems also helps to make the learning more authentic, interesting and enjoyable. Working in and learning about the environment is an important part of this. The Science Curriculum encourages children to work together, to share ideas and to record their work in different ways including photographs, written notes, annotated drawings and displays.

Strands and strand units

Planning

1a In planning for my teaching of Science, I find the layout of the Science Curriculum in strands and strand units:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=not helpful, 2=somewhat helpful, 3=helpful, 4=very helpful.

☐

b Please give a reason for your answer.

2 In planning for my teaching of Science, I find the following resources:

Please use the following rating scale: 1=not helpful, 2=somewhat helpful, 3=helpful, 4=very helpful.

	Resource	Rate
i	Science Curriculum	☐
ii	Teacher Guidelines: Science	☐
iii	Whole School Plan: Science	☐
iv	Teacher resource books/manuals	☐
v	Children's textbooks/workbooks	☐
vi	Other _____	☐

Living things

3 I provide opportunities for the children in my class(es) to learn first-hand about plants and animals by visiting and investigating the following habitats:

Please tick all relevant boxes.

	Habitat	Tick		Habitat	Tick
i	Hedgerow	☐	x	Pond	☐
ii	Footpath	☐	xi	Stream	☐
iii	Grass/parkland	☐	xii	River	☐
iv	Tree	☐	xiii	Woodland	☐
v	Wild area	☐	xiv	Meadow	☐
vi	Wasteland	☐	xv	Log pile	☐
vii	Garden	☐	xvi	Seashore	☐
viii	Peatland	☐	xvii	Forest	☐
ix	Other _____				

4 The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Living things is:

Energy and forces

5 When learning about concepts in the following strand units, I provide opportunities for the children to investigate using everyday objects and materials:

Please use the following rating scale: 1=never, 2=yearly, 3=termly, 4=monthly.

	Strand Unit	Rate		Strand Unit	Rate
i	Light	☐	iv	Forces	☐
ii	Sound	☐	v	Magnetism and electricity	☐
iii	Heat	☐			

6 The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Energy and forces is:

Materials

7 I provide the following opportunity for children in my class(es) to set up investigations and learn about the properties and characteristics of materials:

8 The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Materials is:

Environmental awareness and care

9 In teaching Environmental awareness and care in the Science Curriculum, I provide the following learning opportunities for the children:

Please tick all relevant boxes.

	Learning opportunity	**Tick**
i	Visiting/going on field trips to areas undergoing change	☐
ii	Interviewing/talking with people in the local community	☐
iii	Using books, photos, newspapers, posters, videos	☐
iv	Playing, e.g. role-play, construction play	☐
v	Using the internet	☐
vi	Simulating (where possible) tests to observe the effects of environmental problems	☐
vii	Participating in environmental projects in the school environment	☐
viii	Participating in environmental projects in the locality/community	☐
ix	Other	

10 The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Environmental awareness and care is:

Skills development

11a I provide opportunities for the children to develop the skills of 'working scientifically':

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Skill of 'working scientifically'	**Rate**
i	Questioning	☐
ii	Observing	☐
iii	Predicting	☐
iv	Investigating and experimenting	☐
v	Estimating and measuring	☐
vi	Analysing (sorting and classifying)	☐
vii	Recording and communicating	☐

b I use the following strategy to gather evidence of progression in the development of children's skills of 'working scientifically':

12a I provide opportunities for the children to 'design and make' (explore, plan, make and evaluate) models and objects:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

☐

b An example of an opportunity which I have provided for the children in my class(es) to 'design and make' a model/object is:

Approaches and methodologies

13 I use the following organisational settings in teaching Science:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Organisational setting	Rate
i	Whole class teaching	☐
ii	Pair work	☐
iii	Group work	☐
iv	Individual work	☐

14 The two strategies I find most effective in differentiating for children's learning in Science are:

15a I support the integration of children's learning in Science across the Primary School Curriculum by:

Please tick all relevant boxes.

	Method	Tick
i	Connecting science concepts/ideas with those in other subjects	☐
ii	Using the skills of scientific inquiry in other subjects	☐
iii	Other	

b An example of how and where I have successfully integrated Science across the Primary School Curriculum is:

16 I use the following approaches and methodologies in teaching Science:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Approach/methodology	**Rate**
i	Starting with the children's ideas	☐
ii	Playing, e.g. role-play, construction play, water/sand play	☐
iii	Using hands-on experience	☐
iv	Using the environment	☐
v	Applying scientific ideas/concepts to everyday life	☐
vi	Solving problems	☐
vii	Talking and discussing	☐
viii	Learning collaboratively/co-operatively	☐
ix	Using pictures/visual images	☐
x	Doing written activities	☐
xi	Using media	☐
xii	Using ICT	☐
xiii	Looking at children's work	☐
xiv	Other ☐	☐

17a I use the following resources in teaching Science:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Resource	**Rate**		**Resource**	**Rate**
i	Audio/visual materials	☐	vii	Textbooks	☐
ii	Current news items/events	☐	viii	Visitors	☐
iii	Environment	☐	ix	Website resources	☐
iv	Real objects/materials	☐	x	ICT, e.g. CD-ROMs,	
v	Worksheets/workcards	☐		digital camera, video-recorder	☐
vi	Teacher resource books	☐	xi	Other ☐	☐

b The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in using a variety of resources in teaching Science is:

18a I use ICT to support teaching and learning in Science:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

☐

b Please give a reason for your answer.

19 In teaching and learning Science the children and I use ICT to:

Please tick all relevant boxes.

	Purpose of ICT use	Teacher	Children
i	Plan for teaching and learning in Science	☐	
ii	Develop observation skills	☐	☐
iii	Research and retrieve information/resources	☐	☐
iv	Conduct simulated investigations/tests	☐	☐
v	Complete project work	☐	☐
vi	Gather, organise and present data	☐	☐
vii	Record work	☐	☐
viii	Communicate with other classes/schools	☐	☐
ix	Support assessment	☐	☐
x	Other	☐	☐
xi	Please specify		

20 The types of ICT I use most frequently and how I use them are:

(Examples of types of ICT: word processing packages, CD-ROMs, DVDs, presentation and authoring software, printer, e-mail, scanner, internet, digital camera/video, drawing packages, image editing software, spreadsheets, data loggers, databases, sensors to measure variables such as heat, light, sound.)

Type of ICT used	Example(s) of use
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Assessment

21 I use the following methods to assess children's learning in Science:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Method	Rate		Method	Rate
i	Teacher observation	☐	iv	Teacher-designed tasks and tests	☐
ii	Concept-mapping	☐	v	Work samples, portfolios, projects	☐
iii	Annotated (labelled) drawings	☐	vi	Teacher questioning	☐
vii	Other _____	☐			

22 I find the information I gather about children's learning in Science helpful for:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=not helpful, 2=somewhat helpful, 3=helpful, 4=very helpful.

	Purpose	Rate
i	Planning subsequent lessons	☐
ii	Providing feedback to children	☐
iii	Reporting to parents/guardians	☐
iv	Compiling portfolios/collections of children's work	☐
v	Recording information in a central school file	☐
vi	Supporting a child's transition to another school (primary or post-primary)	☐
vii	Other _____	☐

23 In my experience, the main challenge, if any, in assessing children's learning in Science is:

General

24 I involve parents/guardians in supporting children's progress in Science by:

Please list activities in order of effectiveness, with the most significant as number one.

25 In my experience, I think the Science Curriculum is impacting on children's learning in the following ways:

Please list in order of importance, with the most significant impact as number one.

26 The greatest success which I have experienced in implementing the Science Curriculum is:

27 The greatest challenge, if any, which I have experienced in implementing the Science Curriculum is:

28 In furthering my own implementation of the Science Curriculum, I would like to prioritise the following:

This section of the Teacher Review and Reflection Template focuses on your experience of teaching Social, Personal and Health Education in the Primary School Curriculum. SPHE provides for the development of a broad range of values, attitudes, skills and understanding relevant not only to the child's own health and well-being but to other people and to the society in which he/she lives.

The SPHE curriculum consists of three strands:

- Myself
- Myself and others
- Myself and the wider world.

The strand **Myself** is subdivided into the following strand units for all class levels:

- Self-identity
- Taking care of my body
- Growing and changing
- Safety and protection.

The additional strand unit Making decisions is taught in third to sixth classes.

The strand **Myself and others** comprises the strand units:

- Myself and my family
- My friends and other people
- Relating to others.

The Strand **Myself and the wider world** comprises the strand units:

- Developing citizenship
- Media education.

The SPHE Curriculum recommends that the subject be taught in three dimensions or contexts, i.e. in the context of a positive school climate and atmosphere, through discrete time and through an integrated approach across a range of subjects. The curriculum also recommends that the teacher would choose some content from each of the three strands in any one year. It is envisaged that the content not covered in year one, would be included in the teacher's planning for the following year.

Planning

1a In planning for my teaching of SPHE, I find the layout of the curriculum in strands and strand units:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=not helpful, 2=somewhat helpful, 3=helpful, 4=very helpful.

☐

b Please give a reason for your answer.

2 In planning for my teaching of SPHE, I find the following resources:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=not helpful, 2=somewhat helpful, 3=helpful, 4=very helpful.

	Resource	Rate
i	SPHE Curriculum	☐
ii	Teacher Guidelines: SPHE	☐
iii	Whole School Plan: SPHE	☐
iv	Teacher resource books/manuals	☐
v	Children's textbooks/workbooks	☐
vi	Other	☐

Myself

3 To foster the children's personal development, their health and well being, I provide them with opportunities to:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Learning opportunity	Rate
i	Try new tasks	☐
ii	Experience new situations	☐
iii	Take increasing responsibility for their own actions and behaviour	☐
iv	Voice their own opinions	☐
v	Talk about their feelings	☐
vi	Set goals for themselves	☐
vii	Make decisions	☐
viii	Reflect on their own achievements	☐
ix	Develop a sense of personal responsibility and come to understand their sexuality and the processes of growth, development and reproduction*	☐
x	Learn to respect and care for their bodies	☐
xi	Examine their diet/nutrition	☐
xii	Develop a sense of safety and an ability to protect themselves from danger and abuse	☐
xiii	Become more confident in coping with change	☐

* As appropriate to the class level and in compliance with the school's RSE policy.

4 The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Myself is:

Myself and others

5 To help the children to create and maintain supportive relationships, I provide them with opportunities to:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Learning opportunity	**Rate**
i	Learn to appreciate their own family	☐
ii	Explore the contribution each person makes to family life	☐
iii	Understand the behaviours that promote harmony in family life	☐
iv	Explore and value friendship	☐
v	Understand how their actions and behaviour affect others	☐
vi	Treat others with dignity and respect	☐
vii	Cope with the persuasive influences of peers	☐
viii	Learn to listen effectively	☐
ix	Learn about different types of communication and their appropriate use	☐
x	Empathise with others, and see others' perspectives	☐
xi	Learn to resolve conflict (compromise, apology, forgiving)	☐
xii	Recognise and deal with bullying behaviour	☐

6 The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Myself and others is:

Myself and the wider world

7 To help the children become active and responsible citizens in society, I provide them with opportunities to:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Learning opportunity	Rate
i	Share and co-operate within the class or school community	☐
ii	Become aware of individual and community rights and responsibilities	☐
iii	Explore the contribution each person makes to community life	☐
iv	Celebrate and respect difference	☐
v	Be part of something that goes beyond personal interest	☐
vi	Develop a sense of responsibility for the environment	☐
vii	Understand the concept of the interdependence of peoples of the world	☐
viii	Explore the concept of democracy through working in groups	☐
ix	Become discerning about the messages they receive from the media	☐
x	Examine the effects of advertising on various aspects of life	☐

8 The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in teaching the strand Myself and the wider world is:

9 A variety of programmes is available for teachers in planning and teaching SPHE. I find the following programmes helpful when selecting content for SPHE lessons:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=not helpful, 2=somewhat helpful, 3=helpful, 4=very helpful.

	Programme	Rate
i	Walk Tall (Substance Use Programme)	☐
ii	Stay Safe (Child Abuse Prevention Programme)	☐
iii	Bí Folláin: A Programme in Social and Health Education	☐
iv	Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme (RSE)	☐
v	Action for Life (Irish Heart Foundation)	☐
vi	Primary School Health Education Programme (N.W. Health Board)	☐
vii	Other	☐

Approaches and methodologies

10 I use the following organisational settings in teaching SPHE:

Please use the following rating scale: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Organisational setting	Rate
i	Whole class teaching	☐
ii	Pair work	☐
iii	Group work	☐
iv	Individual work	☐

11 The two strategies I find most effective in differentiating for children's learning in SPHE are:

12a I support the integration of children's learning in SPHE across the Primary School Curriculum by:

Please tick all relevant boxes.

	Method	Tick
i	Connecting SPHE concepts/ideas with those in other subjects	☐
ii	Using the skills developed in SPHE in other subjects	☐
iii	Other	

b An example of how and where I have successfully integrated SPHE across the Primary School Curriculum is:

13 Active learning methodologies are central to the teaching of SPHE. I use the following strategies for active learning in teaching the SPHE Curriculum:

Please use the following rating scale: 1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Strategy	Rate		Strategy	Rate
i	Talk and discussion	☐	vii	Collaborative/co-operative learning	☐
ii	Drama activities	☐	viii	Co-operative games	☐
iii	Written activities	☐	ix	Pictures, photographs and visual images	☐
iv	The media	☐	x	Looking at children's work	☐
v	The environment	☐	xi	ICT	☐
vi	Problem-solving	☐	xii	Circle work	☐
xiii	Other				☐

14a I use the following resources in teaching SPHE:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Resource	**Rate**
i	Audio/visual materials	☐
ii	Classroom/playground incidents	☐
iii	Community resources	☐
iv	Current news items/events	☐
v	Materials, e.g. clothing/costume, food, improvised objects	☐
vi	Songs, poems	☐
vii	Stories	☐
viii	Textbook materials	☐
ix	Visitors	☐
x	Website resources	☐
xi	Other ☐	☐

b The greatest challenge, if any, I have experienced in using a variety of resources in teaching SPHE is:

15a I use ICT to support teaching and learning in SPHE:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

☐

b Please give a reason for your answer.

16 In teaching and learning SPHE the children and I use ICT to:

Please tick all relevant boxes.

	Purpose of ICT use	Teacher	Children
i	Plan for teaching and learning in SPHE	☐	
ii	Research and retrieve information/resources	☐	☐
iii	Explore techniques used in the media	☐	☐
iv	Complete project work	☐	☐
v	Record, analyse and present work	☐	☐
vi	Become more discerning in using technology and the media	☐	☐
vii	Develop self-confidence in using a wide range of technology	☐	☐
viii	Develop communication skills	☐	☐
ix	Support assessment	☐	☐
x	Other ☐	☐	☐

17 Types of ICT I use most frequently and how I use them are:

(Examples of types of ICT: word processing packages, CD-ROMs, DVDs, presentation and authoring software, printer, e-mail, scanner, internet, digital camera/video, image editing software.)

Type of ICT used	Example(s) of use
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Assessment

18 I use the following methods to assess children's learning in SPHE:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently.

	Method	Rate		Method	Rate
i	Teacher observation	☐	iii	Teacher-designed tasks and tests	☐
ii	Work samples, portfolios, projects	☐	iv	Teacher questioning	☐
v	Other				☐

19 I find the information I gather about children's learning in SPHE helpful for:

Please use the following rating scale:
1=not helpful, 2=somewhat helpful, 3=helpful, 4=very helpful.

	Purpose	Rate
i	Planning subsequent lessons	☐
ii	Providing feedback to children	☐
iii	Reporting to parents/guardians	☐
iv	Compiling portfolios/collections of children's work	☐
v	Recording information in a central school file	☐
vi	Supporting a child's transition to another school (primary or post-primary)	☐
vii	Other	☐

20 In my experience, the main challenge, if any, in assessing children's learning in SPHE is:

General

21 I involve parents/guardians in supporting children's progress in SPHE by:

Please list activities in order of effectiveness, with the most significant as number one.

22 In my experience, I think the SPHE Curriculum is impacting on children's learning in the following ways:

Please list in order of importance, with the most significant impact as number one.

23 The greatest success which I have experienced in implementing the SPHE Curriculum is:

24 The greatest challenge, if any, which I have experienced in implementing the SPHE Curriculum is:

25 In furthering my own implementation of the SPHE curriculum, I would like to prioritise the following:

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24 Merrion Square, Dublin 2.
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APPENDIX B

School case study

School case study: Overview of schools

Table 1: Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2: School Case Study: Overview of schools

School	Teaching or Admin. Principal	Boys (B) or Girls (G) or Mixed (M)	Rural (R) or Urban (U)	Schools Support Programme	English LI (E) or Gaeilge TI (G)	Newcomer Irish students
Ave Maria NS	Admin.	M	U	DEIS Urban	E	Yes
Dursey Educate Together	Teaching	M	U	No	E	Yes
Gaelscoil Dhún Éideann	Admin.	M	U	No	G	No
Knockcarraig NS	Teaching	M	R	DEIS grant received	E	Yes
St. Deborah's Girls' NS	Admin.	G	R	No	E	Yes
St. Simon's NS, (C. of I.)	Teaching	M	U	No	E	Yes
Scoil an Charraig Aonair	Teaching	M	R	No	G	Yes
Scoil Úna	Admin.	M	U	No	E	Yes

Semi-structured interview guide

Individual interview (Principal)

The following interview guide will be used for the individual interview with the principal. This interview is scheduled for approximately 35 – 40 minutes.

School planning

What strategies do you as principal use to encourage and enable teachers to collaborate in their classroom planning?

How does the classroom planning mirror/fit in with the school plan? What strategies do you as principal use to encourage and enable teachers to refer to the school plan when engaging in classroom planning?

Who has been involved in the school planning process? What strategies do you use to involve those different partners? Have other people been involved in school planning for other subjects?

How and by whom is the implementation of the school plan for a given subject monitored, evaluated and revised?

Curriculum subjects

What have been your school's greatest *successes* in implementing the curriculum for *Gaeilge, Science and SPHE?*

What have been the greatest *challenges* faced by your school in implementing the curriculum for *Gaeilge, Science and SPHE?*

What are your *priorities* for implementing the curriculum in *Gaeilge, Science and SPHE* in the *future?*

Assessment

Can you outline briefly the types of assessment records your school keeps? How are they used?

How do you ensure the early identification of children with learning difficulties including learning disabilities?

What arrangements are in place for reporting to parents/guardians?

Involvement of parents, board of management, local community

What opportunities do you have for involving parents/guardians and the local community in teaching and learning in the classroom (e.g. file sa rang, project work, healthy lunches, substance abuse, 'design and make')?

How do you inform parents/guardians and the board of management about the curriculum in your school (e.g. presentations, newsletters, exhibitions)? Which of these, if any, have you found to be effective? Why?

Did you receive the DVD for parents, *The What, Why and How of children's learning in primary school?* Did you disseminate it? How? When? What did you, as principal, think of it?

Conclusion

What are your school's strengths in implementing the *Primary School Curriculum*?

What, in your experience, are/is the most significant challenge(s) you face as a school, in implementing the *Primary School Curriculum*?

The *Primary School Curriculum* highlights the importance of literacy as central to children's development. What have you done, or would like to do, to promote literacy among children in your school?

The *Primary School Curriculum* highlights the importance of numeracy as key to children's development. What have you done, or would like to do, to promote numeracy among children in your school?

Is there anything else you would like to say about implementing the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE in your school?

Focus group interview (Teachers and principal)

The following interview guide will be used for the semi-structured interview with teachers (and principals, if available). This interview is scheduled for approximately 35–40 minutes.

Planning

To what extent, and to what effect, have you been involved in the development of school policy for *Gaeilge, Science and SPHE?*

Gaeilge

What *successes* have you experienced in the implementation of Curaclam na Gaeilge (at different class levels)?

What *challenges* have you experienced in planning for the implementation of Curaclam na Gaeilge (at different class levels)?

What are your *priorities* for Gaeilge at different class levels in your school?

Conas a úsáideann tú súgradh mar straitéis foghlama Gaeilge sna ranganna naíonáin?
How do you use play as a learning strategy in Irish in infant classes?

Conas a éiríonn leat scileanna gramadaí an pháiste a fhorbairt ionas go n-úsáideann siad gramadach na Gaeilge i gceart agus iad ag iarraidh iad féin a chur in iúl ó bhéal nó i scríbhinn?
How do you develop the child's grammar skills so that they use Irish grammar correctly when they are trying to make themselves understood orally or in writing?

SESE: Science

What *successes* have you experienced in the implementation of the *Science Curriculum* (at different class levels)?

What *challenges* have you experienced in planning for the implementation of the *Science Curriculum* (at different class levels)?

What are your *priorities* for Science at different class levels in your school?

The curriculum recommends a practical and investigative approach to learning in Science. What particular successes have you experienced with this approach? Challenges?

What strategies do you use to elicit the children's ideas as a starting point for learning in Science?

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

What *successes* have you experienced in the implementation of the *SPHE Curriculum* (at different class levels)?

What *challenges* have you experienced in planning for the implementation of the *SPHE Curriculum* (at different class levels)?

What are your *priorities* for SPHE at different class levels in your school?

Methods of teaching and learning

What strategies do you use to differentiate teaching and learning to meet the needs of the children in your class(es)?

The *Primary School Curriculum* [Introduction, p. 16] identifies thinking skills as those of summarising, analysing, making inferences and deductions, and interpreting figurative language and imagery.

Where do you find opportunities to foster thinking skills in children in your class/es?

Can you talk about ways in which you've made links across subjects for children in your class?

Describe some of the opportunities you have created/strategies you have used with children in your class to link their learning in Gaeilge, Science and SPHE to everyday situations.

General

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experience of implementing the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE?

Focus group interview (Children)

The following interview guide will be used for the semi-structured interview with children. This interview is scheduled for approximately 25 – 30 minutes.

Strategies for questioning children at different developmental levels are provided below, beginning with the strategies which may be used with younger children.

- **Playing:** Organise a table with play figures of a classroom scene so that each child in the interview is represented by one play figure. Ask children to use the figures to show you/tell you their response to each of the interview questions.

- **Imagining:** Ask children to imagine that they had three wishes which they could use to change something about their learning in school. What would they change?

- **Responding to rhyme/poetry/story:** Read a short story, poem or rhyme about learning in school to children and ask them to relate the questions you are asking to the poem.

- **Storytelling:** Invite the children to help you create a true story about their life in school in X class. Begin the story by saying "Once upon a time there were # children in X class. They were very busy learning with their teacher and with their friends. Some of the important things they were learning were…"

- **Writing:** Gather poster making materials (paper and markers) and explain to children that we are going to create a story about their life in X class. Begin the story by talking about what children have been doing so far this year.

Classroom displays/Children's work (5-10 minutes)

I see that your class has been busy learning about…/I'm really impressed with all of your work on…/Can you tell me a little about…what this project was all about?/…what you've been doing and learning in…?

- Gaeilge
- Science
- SPHE

Approaches and methods (5 minutes)

Can you tell me who you worked with to create…? Did you talk to the teacher/other children in the class when you were making/learning…?

- individual work
- pair work
- group work
- class work

Do you like learning with other children/by yourself? Why? Why not?

Materials/Resources (5 minutes)

Can you tell me about the materials you used to create…? What kinds of books have you been using to learn about…?

- books (e.g., textbooks, reading books)
- learning resources (e.g., games)

- Visual Arts materials (e.g., 2-D, 3-D)
- ICT resources (e.g., Internet, educational software)

Likes/dislikes, successes/challenges (5 minutes)

What was your (least/) favourite part of…? /What did you like most/least about…?

Do you think it is important to learn about…? Why?

What was the most exciting part of…for you? Why?

Additional questions (5 minutes)

Questions with older children could elicit:

- *events/occasions/opportunities* created to support children's learning
  - learning groups
  - information sessions
  - concerts, etc.
- *time* spent learning within the three curriculum areas, i.e., the longevity of different projects from the child's experience:
  - pacing/sequencing of teaching/learning
  - balance of learning experiences
- *audience* for the child's work:
  - involvement of parents/community members in children's learning

Focus group interview (Parents)

The following interview guide will be used for the semi-structured interview with parents. This interview is scheduled for approximately 35–40 minutes.

Gaeilge, Science, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

What has been your child's greatest *success* in his/her

- Gaeilge
- Science
- SPHE learning?

What has been your child's greatest *challenge* his/her

- Gaeilge
- Science
- SPHE learning?

What would you like to see happening in his/her/

- Gaeilge
- Science
- SPHE learning in the *future?*

What do you think is the biggest *difference* between your own learning and your child's learning in

- Gaeilge
- Science

What do you think are the benefits of learning SPHE, if any?

Methods of learning

What is the greatest *help* to your child when he/she is doing his/her homework in *Gaeilge/Science/SPHE?*

What is the greatest *challenge* to your child when he/she is doing his/her *Gaeilge/Science/SPHE* homework?

If you could change one thing about *homework* in *Gaeilge/Science/SPHE* what would it be?

General

Is there *anything else* you would like to add regarding your and your child's experience of *Gaeilge, Science and SPHE?*

Did you get the DVD for parents produced by the NCCA, *The What, Why and How of children's learning in primary school?* Did you use it? What did you think of it?

Is there anything else you would like to add about interviews like this?

Informed consent forms

Teachers and principal

I will be participating in an interview designed to gather information about how teachers and children are experiencing the curriculum for *Gaeilge, Science and SPHE*. This will help the NCCA in its ongoing curriculum review.

I will be asked to talk about my experience with the curriculum for *Gaeilge, Science and SPHE*. This will occur during a group interview with colleagues and the NCCA researcher.

The interview will take approximately 35 - 40 minutes.

The interview will be recorded.

Only the NCCA project team will have access to the recorded interview.

I understand that it will not be possible to identify an individual teacher or school in any report based on this study.

I may ask any questions about the interview/research procedure.

- I understand, and agree with, the conditions of the interview as it has been described.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I am free to stop participating in this research at any time. I also know that I may decline to answer specific interview questions if I so wish.
- The NCCA researcher has answered my questions.
- I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Name_____Signature_____Date_____

(Please use capital letters)

NCCA researcher:

- *I certify that the informed consent procedure has been followed, and that I have answered any questions from the participant as fully as possible.*

Name_____Signature_____Date_____

(Please use capital letters)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research.
We greatly appreciate your help with this work.

Children

This study hopes to find out what children like you think about learning *Gaeilge, Science and SPHE* in school.

Child:

I will be asked to talk about my learning in school with some other children.

I understand that this talk will last about 25–30 minutes.

I know that the talk will be recorded.

I understand that only the NCCA researchers will listen to the recording.

I may ask any questions about this study.

I know that I can change my mind and decide not to talk about my learning in school.

- I am happy to talk about my learning in school with other children and with the NCCA researcher.

Name_____Signature_____Date_____

(Please use capital letters)

NCCA researcher:

- I certify that the informed consent procedure has been followed, and that I have answered any questions from the participant as fully as possible.

Name_____Signature_____Date_____

(Please use capital letters)

Thank you for your help.

Parents (for children)

Please read the attached letter before signing.

Class: _____

My son/daughter: _____

[Child's Full Name]

Please tick the appropriate box

☐ *may* take part in the NCCA's Primary Curriculum Review

☐ *may not* take part in the NCCA's Primary Curriculum Review

Signed: _____

[Parent/Guardian]

Date: _____

Thank you for supporting your child's participation in this review.

Parents (for themselves)

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is reviewing the curriculum for *Gaeilge, Science and Social Personal and Health Education* (SPHE). [NAME OF SCHOOL] has agreed to help the NCCA with this review.

Parent/Guardian:

The name(s) of my child(ren) attending the school is/are

_____

_____

I will be participating in an interview to gather information about my child's/children's experiences of the curriculum in *Gaeilge, Science and SPHE*. This will help the NCCA in its ongoing curriculum review.

I will be asked to talk about my child's/children's learning experiences during a small group interview with the NCCA researcher and with parents of other children in the school.

The interview will take approximately 35–40 minutes.

The interview will be recorded.

Only the NCCA project team will have access to the recorded interview.

I may ask any questions about the interview/research procedure.

- I understand, and agree with, the conditions of the interview as it has been described.

- I understand that I am free to stop participating in the group interview at any time and that I don't have to answer all questions if I so wish.
- The NCCA researcher has answered my questions.
- I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Name_____Signature_____Date_____

(Please use capital letters)

NCCA researcher:

- I certify that the informed consent procedure has been followed, and that I have answered any questions from the participant as fully as possible.

Name_____Signature_____Date_____

(Please use capital letters)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research.
We greatly appreciate your help with this work.

APPENDIX C

Primary Curriculum Review,

Phase 1.

Summary of findings and NCCA response

Table A.1. Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 1: Findings and NCCA response

Finding	Response
The English curriculum	
The organisation of the English Curriculum was identified as a key challenge by teachers. Teachers found the four strands hard to understand. Some had abandoned them or replaced them with strand units. Teachers reported experiencing difficulty and confusion in planning for English.	The NCCA published *Additional support material: Structure of the English Curriculum* in September 2005. This provides an alternative structure for the English Curriculum. A copy of the additional support material was mailed to all primary school teachers.
Information for parents	
Parents reported that their engagement with their child's learning in the home was restrained by a lack of information about children's learning in primary schools. Their needs focused on information about the curriculum and the approaches and methods which teachers use.	In March 2006, the NCCA launched a DVD for parents, *The What, Why and How of children's learning in primary school,* to overcome the information gap about the curriculum. The DVD is presented in English, Gaeilge, French, Lithuanian and Polish. It was distributed to all parents of primary school children (via their child's school) in April 2006.
Methods of teaching and learning	
Teachers reported that they needed greater exemplification of methods of teaching and learning including: active, environment-based, collaborative and differentiated learning (especially in multi-class settings) and higher-order thinking and problem solving.	Assessment, Curriculum and, Teaching Innovation on the Net (ACTION), is being developed to show (rather than tell) what teaching and learning with the curriculum looks like in different class contexts. ACTION will provide a platform for showcasing different teaching methodologies across a range of projects.
Assessment	
Teachers asked for more detailed advice on using assessment to support teaching and learning. They requested greater support in using different assessment methods and resources and reporting information about children's learning to parents.	The NCCA is currently developing guidelines for teachers on assessment in the *Primary School Curriculum,* for completion in September 2007. Work on developing additional support for assessing literacy and numeracy will begin in 2008. In conjunction with a number of schools, the NCCA is also developing Report Card Templates to support the reporting process in primary schools.

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