Draft Primary Curriculum Framework

For consultation

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

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

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The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework

Introduction

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum. Published twenty years ago, the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) was a cutting-edge curriculum informed by extensive research of its time. It was published after a decade-long process of development and deliberation and has since been the focus of research, review and evaluation. This activity has provided insights into both strengths of and challenges with the curriculum while at the same time, spotlighting the extent to which classrooms have changed in the intervening years. We also now know more about how children learn and what it is like to be a child growing up in Ireland. Society, too, has changed and continues to change with growing expectations of a primary education. And so, we need to ensure that the curriculum can continue to provide children with relevant and engaging experiences as we look to the third decade and beyond in the twenty-first century.

The remainder of this introduction sets out, in more detail, the rationale for reviewing and redeveloping the curriculum and the process through which the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* was developed. It also provides a timeline for the next stage of work.

The rationale for reviewing the primary curriculum

Since 1999, the primary curriculum has provided a strong foundation for teaching and learning. Among the curriculum's many successes have been children's enjoyment of learning and teachers' increased use of active learning methodologies, as well as improved attainment levels in reading, mathematics and science as evidenced in national and international assessments. But challenges too have been well documented, such as curriculum overload—too much to do and too little time to do it all— engaging and supporting every child as a learner, and the challenge of using assessment in a meaningful way to inform teaching and learning as well as to report on children's progress and achievement.

The two decades since 1999 have seen an acceleration in the volume of research on children's learning and development in their early childhood and primary school years. Much of this offers fresh insights into how children learn and develop across the areas of the curriculum. *Growing Up in Ireland*, Ireland's first longitudinal study of children (www.growingup.ie), illuminates how children are developing in their social, economic and cultural environments and how these

rapidly changing environments, especially in recent years, have impacted on children's lives. The NCCA recently commissioned a longitudinal study of primary education looking, in particular, at children's experiences of school. Using a cross-sequential design and involving two cohorts in a nationally representative sample, this study charts and learns about children's experiences as they move from preschool into junior infants, through the eight years of primary school, and transfer to post-primary. Led by a research team in University College Dublin, the *Children's School Lives* study will feed directly into the NCCA's work in reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum in the coming years. Studies such as this alongside other research enables us to see and better understand children's experiences of education in Ireland today.

As well as the need to respond to curriculum challenges and to take account of new and emerging research findings, there have also been calls for the primary curriculum to do more! Schools and the curriculum, together, are often viewed as a critical site for responding to national priorities or needs and addressing societal problems. This is evident in calls for increased time to be allocated to existing curriculum areas such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and to Physical Education (PE). Additionally, there are demands to include new aspects of learning in the curriculum such as Coding and Computational Thinking, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, Modern Foreign Languages, and to place a greater general emphasis on Wellbeing.

Policy developments in other sectors are also relevant in looking again at the primary curriculum. The provision of two years of universal preschool education (2010 and 2018) and the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme (2019), the publication of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) and the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) have led to changes in what children experience before beginning primary school and in what and how they learn on leaving primary school, highlighting the importance of connections and continuity in curricula along the educational continuum. Reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum provides an important opportunity to build on what children bring to primary school and to ensure connections with their post-primary experience while recognising the uniqueness and importance of a primary education in the learning journey.

The publication in 2011 of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (Department of Education and Skills) re-adjusted

the priorities for primary education by providing more time for the teaching of language and mathematics. This change was made without further re-adjustment of time allocation across other curriculum areas. The strategy also set out a curriculum reform agenda which required the NCCA to begin the redevelopment of the primary curriculum in the area of language (English and Irish) followed by mathematics. Shaped by the timelines in the strategy, this work proceeded ahead of a review of the primary curriculum as a whole, with the publication of the new *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* in September 2019. Reflecting new thinking on curriculum purpose and design, the language curriculum adopts a different approach to describing children's learning with broad learning outcomes being central to this. In practical terms, this leaves primary schools using a learning outcomes based curriculum which is grounded in contemporary research on language and literacy, and a 20-year-old, detailed content objectives based curriculum in all other subjects.

Tomorrow's world is already taking shape in the body and spirit of our children are words spoken a number of years ago by Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General and Nobel Peace Prize winner. The words are a reminder of the importance of children's experiences in their formative years and how these experiences shape their lives as children and as adults into the future. Irish society has seen unprecedented change since the 1999 curriculum was published. Advances in technology mean that today's children are living in a world where they have ready access to information. The education system and children themselves are also shaped by different experiences of family life, different cultures, different beliefs and viewpoints, different abilities and needs. This increased diversity is reflected in the Department's Action Plan 2016-2019 in which Goal 4.2 (pp.43-44) focuses on providing greater school choice for parents and children. As part of this and in partnership with Patron Bodies, the Action Plan sets out initial broad steps for the establishment of 400 multi-/non-denominational schools. While this is a long-term action, it potentially raises a question about the role of the state in ensuring that education related to the religious and ethical aspects of human development is provided for and that respect for all members of society is promoted and nurtured in the process. O'Donnell's curriculum audit (2019)[1] shows three of the eight jurisdictions (Finland, Scotland and

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1   The curriculum audit is part of a series of research papers which have informed the development of the proposals presented in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, and is available at
www.ncca.ie/en/resources/audit-of-the-content-of-early-years-and-primary-curricula-in-eight-jurisdictions-overview-report

Wales) having religious education and/or ethics as a curriculum area or subject in their state curricula at primary level. The upcoming consultation on the primary curriculum, the first of its kind in over twenty years, gives an opportunity to further consider, in the context of what is set out for the redevelopment of the curriculum, how patrons' programmes can continue to contribute to the child's holistic development in primary school and whether or not there should be a more extended statement within the redeveloped curriculum about the religious, spiritual and ethical domain.

On a more global level, challenges such as climate change, sustainability, human migration, and geopolitical shifts illustrate the importance of dispositions and skills, such as resilience, creativity, innovation and critical thinking in the young and future generations. Schools and teachers face a growing challenge to recognise and respond to this diversity and rapidly-changing context in a way that enables all children to learn and make progress so that they can enjoy their childhoods and become equipped for the world they will inhabit as adults.

Irish society is more diverse than ever before. Mirroring society, primary school classrooms are more dynamic and busier places in which teachers support and respond to a greater diversity of learners, helping each to grow and develop. This diversity is evident in the rich kaleidoscope of ages, competencies, cultures, ethnicities, family structures and backgrounds, home languages, religions, sexual identities, and worldviews that now characterise many primary classrooms. A redeveloped primary curriculum can play a key role in

supporting schools' work in responding to this diversity and enabling children to feel respected, valued and engaged in learning through appropriately tailored experiences and through positive interactions within the school community. In turn, these experiences and interactions play a role in the development of a more inclusive society in Ireland.

Looking across these developments since 1999, the extent and pace of change is striking. Diverse classrooms, ever-increasing and changing demands of a primary school experience, a crowded curriculum, policy changes and new findings from research on teaching, learning and assessment combine to create both a need and an opportunity to revisit the primary curriculum as a whole and to ask key questions:

- What is the **purpose** of a primary education for tomorrow's children?

- What **priorities**, **structure** and **components** within a curriculum can support this?

Developing the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework

The process

Central to answering these key questions are the four broad areas of activity underpinning the NCCA's formulation of advice.

- **Research:** The NCCA is drawing on an extensive body of research. Some of this is set out in a suite of short papers authored by national and international researchers. These can be found on the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-developments/consultation-on-the-draft-primary-curriculum-framework alongside other reports on curriculum review and curriculum consultations.

- **Networks:** The NCCA is working closely with the Schools Forum, a network of 43 schools comprising of 37 primary, three preschools and three post-primary schools, and reflecting the rich diversity of school type and context in primary education in Ireland. Meeting every four-six weeks, the teachers and principals tease out ideas from research bringing their particular school experiences to the discussions about a redeveloped primary curriculum. This approach sees teachers and schools as central to curriculum development and helps to ground the ideas for a redeveloped curriculum in the reality of primary education in Ireland, while at the same time being sufficiently aspirational.

- **Deliberations:** The NCCA continues to work closely with the education partners through its representative structures, and with wider stakeholders through events such as the series of curriculum seminars in 2018 and 2019. These deliberations draw on the research and provide opportunities for all involved to bring their organisational perspectives to discussions on the directions for a redeveloped curriculum.

- **Consultation:** Findings from many consultations including those on proposals for a curriculum for ERB and Ethics (2017); curriculum structure and time (2018); and language and mathematics (both 2018) have helped to shape current work on a redeveloped primary curriculum. The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* which has emerged from work across these four areas—research, networks, deliberation, and consultation—will now be the focus of an extensive public consultation to October 2020. Findings from this consultation will help decide the purpose, structure and content of the next curriculum for primary schools.

A curriculum framework

One of the emerging points of consensus from the work across the four areas is the value of developing a curriculum framework which would set out a clear vision and principles—what's important in primary education and why—and a description, in broad terms, of what should be prioritised in children's learning. Similar frameworks have been developed for early childhood education and for junior cycle and are underpinned by the concept of teachers and school leaders as 'curriculum makers' (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015). This role sees teachers and school leaders using broad learning outcomes in the various curriculum areas and subjects alongside the curriculum vision and principles to devise a curriculum that is tailored to, and appropriate for the children in their school community. This thinking has informed the development of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*.

The diversity of primary schools in Ireland

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* sets out the proposed purpose, structure and content of the next curriculum for primary schools. Diversity of school type and context is one of the hallmarks of primary education in Ireland. This diversity encompasses school size, demographics, structure, location, language, and designated status. The patronage model underpinning Irish primary schools is also a defining feature of the system and a key aspect of its diversity. Patron Bodies and the Boards of Management which they put in place, are central to the day-to-day organisation and ethos of a school. In line with the provisions of the Education Act (1998), the directions for curriculum change set out in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* are intended for all schools, and have the capacity to take account of the particular needs and interests of children, their parents and the wider school community, and the characteristic spirit of the school.

Timeline for developments

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* forms the basis for extensive consultation to October 2020. The document is intended to encourage and support discussion and debate about a redeveloped curriculum for primary schools. Informed by the consultation findings, the framework will be finalised and published in early 2021. At that point, it will inform and guide the NCCA's development of a specification for each curriculum area—Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, Social and Environmental Education, Wellbeing, and Arts Education. In the case of the Language area, the new *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* was published in 2019 and is currently being implemented. Schools' experiences with this part of the curriculum will continue to feed into and help shape work on the wider curriculum.

While detailed planning on resources, structures and processes is yet to take place, the NCCA envisages the completion of the development of all curriculum area specifications by summer 2024 after which they will be presented to the Minister for Education and Skills for approval. A timeline for schools' work in implementing the redeveloped curriculum will be set out by the Department of Education and Skills.

The remainder of this document presents the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework

Vision

The curriculum aims to provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish, supporting them in realising their full potential as individuals and as members of communities and society during childhood and into the future. Building on their previous experiences, the curriculum views children as unique, capable and caring individuals, and teachers as committed, skilful and agentic[2] professionals. It supports high-quality teaching, learning and assessment that is inclusive and evidence-based supporting each child to make progress in all areas of their learning and development.

2   An agentic teacher is reflective, competent and capable of exercising professional judgement in response to individual learning needs in a variety of contexts.

Principles

There are eight overarching principles of teaching and learning that schools need to consider in pursuing the curriculum vision (see Figure 1 and Table 1). The principles convey what is valued in primary education and what lies at the heart of high-quality teaching and learning in the primary curriculum. They are broad in nature to reflect varied school contexts and children's different circumstances, experiences and abilities.
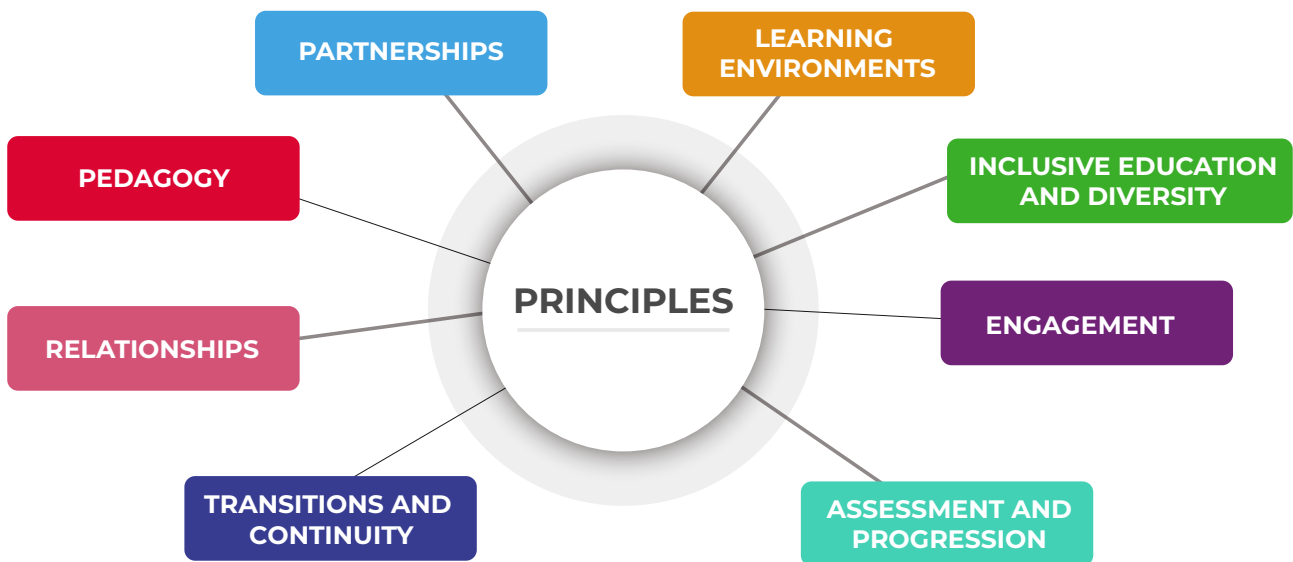
Figure 1: Principles

Table 1: Principles

Transitions and continuity Children's prior learning, self-worth and identity are built upon as they move from home to preschool and on to junior infants, and as they progress through primary school. This provides important foundations for learning as they move to post-primary school.	**Partnerships** Partnerships and collaboration between schools, families and communities enrich and extend children's learning by acknowledging and supporting their lives in and out of school.	**Engagement** Children are active and demonstrate agency as the capacity to act independently and to make choices about and in their learning. Curriculum experiences provide them with opportunities for decision-making, creativity and collaboration.
Relationships Caring relationships within the school community support and impact positively on children's engagement, motivation and learning.	**Learning environments** Children's learning is shaped and nurtured by the physical environment, indoors and outdoors. These diverse environments encourage children's independence and stimulate and support their learning across the curriculum.	**Assessment and progression** Meaningful assessment is collaborative and integral to high-quality teaching and learning. Involving children, teachers, parents and others, it provides information which enhances teaching and informs and supports progression in children's learning across the curriculum.
Pedagogy Teachers use appropriate and evidence-based pedagogical approaches and strategies to foster engagement, ownership and challenge while connecting with children's life experiences and their interests.	**Inclusive education and diversity** Inclusive education provides for equity of opportunity and participation in children's learning. Inclusive education celebrates diversity and responds to the uniqueness of every child.	

Key competencies

As children interact and engage in the social world of their home, community and school, they need to be able to navigate a wide variety of contexts and situations, not only in childhood but as they mature into adolescence and adulthood. Children also need to be able to interact and engage with the natural world around them and come to an appreciation of its value and their responsibilities as custodians of it. To support and enable children to do this, the redeveloped primary curriculum will build on and further develop children's early learning experiences in the home and preschool. It will seek to equip children with the essential knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values which enable them to adapt and deal with a range of situations, challenges and contexts in support of broader learning goals. These 'capabilities' are presented as seven inextricably linked key competencies that are relevant from junior infants to sixth class (see Figure 2). They link closely with *Aistear's* four themes and the eight Key Skills in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* in order to make connections with children's prior learning in preschool and future learning in post-primary school.

The competencies support the curriculum's vision. As such, they extend beyond skills and knowledge. For example, the emphasis is on locating, critiquing and using knowledge as well as appreciating knowledge for its own sake. In this way, the competencies enable and foster deep learning while also contributing to the holistic development of the child.

As the competencies play a significant and central part in children's learning, they will be embedded across all curriculum areas and subjects from junior infants to sixth class through the learning outcomes. In this way, the curriculum areas and subjects contribute to the development of the key competencies. This gives them relevance across the curriculum while providing continuity and connectivity in children's learning as they move through primary school. Like all learning supported through the learning outcomes, it is acknowledged that children's progress towards the key competencies will be influenced by their varying circumstances, experiences and abilities. Each competency is described below.

Figure 2: Key competencies

Being an active citizen

This competency fosters within children the knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions that motivate and empower them as citizens to take positive actions to live justly, sustainably and with regard for the rights of others. It helps children question, critique and understand what is happening in the world within a framework of human rights, equality and social justice. It places democratic practices at the centre of the learning process. This competency develops children's capacity and motivation for active and meaningful participation in society at local, national and global levels, and fosters their ability to contribute positively and compassionately towards the creation of a more sustainable and just world.

Being creative

This competency recognises children's innate creativity. Children have creative energy and require lots of opportunities for creative behaviour. The focus is on nurturing and promoting children's interests and opportunities for meaningful creative experiences through exploring, clarifying and expressing ideas, feelings and experiences. Creativity is expressed in many ways, in all areas of human activity and culture, and involves originality. Creative learners are curious, open-minded and imaginative. Through creative activity, children can produce works that are original and of value across the curriculum. As children develop this competency, they come to understand that creative activity involves enjoyment, effort, risk-taking, critical thinking and reflection. Unlocking and promoting children's creative potential impacts positively on their motivation, self-esteem and overall development.

Being a digital learner

This competency seeks to support children to become curious, creative, confident and critical users of digital technology. Being a digital learner fosters children's ability to collaborate and thrive in a world increasingly immersed in technology. Children develop their knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions through problem-solving, experimenting and creating. As children develop this competency, their confidence in using a range of digital technology to harness their imagination and expand their creative thinking and creative expression increases. Through empowering children to be active digital citizens, this competency develops their responsible, safe and ethical use of technology. This competency enables children to critically engage and contribute in a digitally connected and interdependent world.

Being mathematical

This competency supports children to develop and apply mathematical thinking to solve a range of problems in everyday situations. It involves having the confidence and skill to recognise and use mathematics in all aspects of life. Being mathematical involves children drawing on a range of knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions as they recognise, interpret and apply real-world information presented mathematically. Children need to be able to think and communicate quantitatively, to make sense of data, to have a spatial awareness and to understand patterns and sequences. When opportunities for using mathematics across the curriculum are identified, children can transfer their mathematical knowledge and skills to contexts outside the mathematics classroom. These opportunities help children recognise how mathematical knowledge and skills can be applied to other curriculum areas and the wider world, enriching children's experiences.

Communicating and using language

This competency develops children's understanding and enjoyment of interacting with others. Communicating and using language means being able to understand, interpret and use different forms of communication including gesture, expression, spoken language (English, Irish and other languages), printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. It also involves children engaging purposefully in the creation and exploration of different text types including spoken, print and electronic formats. Children need to be able to communicate and connect with others, in order to participate in wider society, share meaning and develop new knowledge. As they develop this competency, children's confidence in using a range of media and methods of communication suited to different purposes and audiences increases. It is about children learning how to share their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings in a variety of ways as well as learning how to observe, listen to, interpret and show respect for the perspectives of others.

Fostering wellbeing

This competency develops children's appreciation and demonstration of wellbeing and their ability to be as physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually healthy as they can be. It fosters self-awareness and promotes the importance of children seeing themselves as capable and resourceful. This supports their ability to deal with the normal challenges of life, become resilient and cope in a variety of situations and

circumstances. It contributes to children's demonstration of how they can be physically healthy through physical activity, eating healthy food and self-care. It helps children become positive and engaged in their learning and realise their own uniqueness and potential. It supports healthy relationships with themselves, their peers, their family and the wider world. It also recognises the spiritual dimension of living, which enables children to experience a sense of awe and wonder and know that life has a meaning.

Learning to be a learner

This competency helps children to develop themselves as a learner, individually and with others. It promotes the development of the knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions needed for being an active, agentic learner as well as learning with others. As children learn to be learners, they learn how to communicate, set personal and collaborative learning goals, solve problems, and manage interactions with others. It involves finding out about and making sense

of people, things and places around them and in the wider world. Through developing this competency, children also learn to reflect on their learning. This competency taps into and nurtures children's innate curiosity and involves having opportunities to interact, to investigate, to question and wonder. As children learn with and about others, their wellbeing is supported as it creates a sense of belonging and connection, as well as building awareness of the unique contribution that every child can make. Learning with and about others also enables children to develop empathy, an important capacity that allows them to tune in, to see and feel what another person is experiencing.

Table 2 provides a set of attributes for each key competency. These attributes describe the characteristic learning and development opportunities for children within each key competency which will be embedded through learning outcomes in the new specifications for the curriculum areas and subjects. Work on these specifications will begin when the *Primary Curriculum Framework* is finalised following consultation.

Table 2: Attributes of each key competency

Key competency	Attributes
Being an active citizen	• Developing an understanding and acting on the rights and responsibilities of myself and others • Experiencing learning through democratic practices • Recognising injustice and inequality and ways to take action • Developing capacity to make choices in favour of a sustainable future
Being creative	• Participating in and enjoying creative and cultural experiences • Being curious • Being imaginative • Being innovative • Using creative processes • Exploring alternative ways of communicating
Being a digital learner	• Communicating and collaborating with others through digital technology • Accessing, analysing and managing content using digital technology • Enabling content creation, problem-solving and creativity using digital technology • Interacting ethically and responsibly with digital technology
Being mathematical	• Thinking and communicating mathematically • Solving problems and making sense of the world using mathematics • Estimating, predicting and calculating • Recognising relationships, trends, connections and patterns • Interpreting and processing information and data
Communicating and using language	• Developing understanding and enjoyment of words and language • Developing oracy • Reading for enjoyment and with critical understanding • Writing for different purposes and for a variety of audiences • Exploring and creating a variety of texts
Fostering wellbeing	• Showing awareness of how to make good choices in relation to wellbeing • Participating with growing confidence and skill in physical activity • Being self-aware and resilient • Acting responsibly and showing care towards self and others • Being spiritual and having a sense of purpose and meaning • Being persistent and flexible in solving problems • Being able to assess risk and respond
Learning to be a learner	• Playing, learning and working *with* others • Caring for and showing empathy towards others • Being able to reflect on learning • Fostering and maintaining positive relationships • Dealing with conflict • Respecting difference • Learning *about* others

Curriculum areas and subjects

The redeveloped curriculum will be presented in five broad curriculum areas. These are:
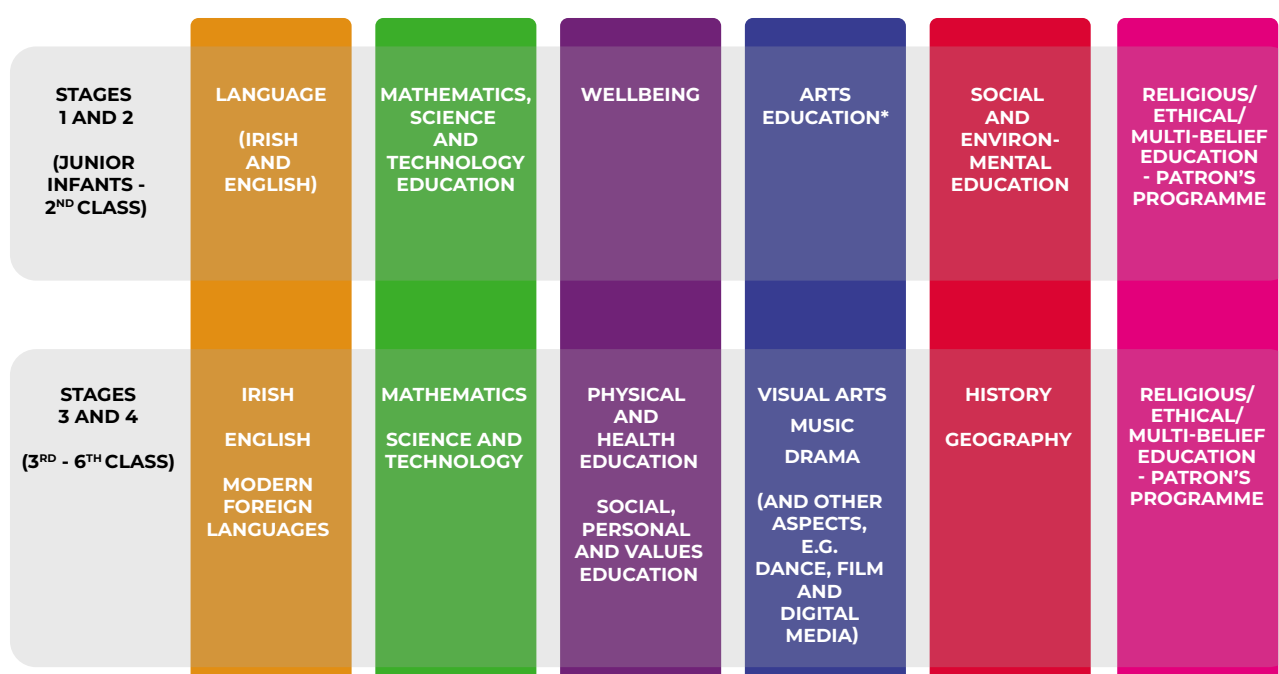
1. Language

2. Mathematics, Science and Technology Education

3. Wellbeing

4. Arts Education

5. Social and Environmental Education.

As shown in Figure 3, the curriculum areas become more differentiated by subjects as children move through the primary classes.

In addition to the five areas above, school patrons have a legal right to design their own programme in accordance with the ethos of their schools. This programme forms part of children's learning experience in primary schools.

Figure 3 sets out the proposed curriculum areas and subjects.

Figure 3: Curriculum areas and subjects

	LANGUAGE (IRISH AND ENGLISH)	MATHEMATICS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION	WELLBEING	ARTS EDUCATION*	SOCIAL AND ENVIRON-MENTAL EDUCATION	RELIGIOUS/ ETHICAL/ MULTI-BELIEF EDUCATION - PATRON'S PROGRAMME
STAGES 1 AND 2 (JUNIOR INFANTS - 2ND CLASS)						
STAGES 3 AND 4 (3RD - 6TH CLASS)	IRISH ENGLISH MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES	MATHEMATICS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND VALUES EDUCATION	VISUAL ARTS MUSIC DRAMA (AND OTHER ASPECTS, E.G. DANCE, FILM AND DIGITAL MEDIA)	HISTORY GEOGRAPHY	RELIGIOUS/ ETHICAL/ MULTI-BELIEF EDUCATION - PATRON'S PROGRAMME

* Broad learning outcomes in Arts Education would continue to support learning in visual arts, music and drama, as well as supporting other aspects of arts education such as dance, film and digital media, and enabling schools to engage with local, national and international initiatives and opportunities. The learning outcomes would also support integrated learning experiences in stages 1-2. While disciplines within Arts Education have a common creative process and share transferable skills, each has its own knowledge, concepts and skills. Subject-specific learning outcomes in stages 3-4 alongside a set of broader outcomes overarching the subjects, would ensure children experience a broad and balanced Arts Education.

Stages 1 and 2: junior infants – second class

The curriculum areas are interrelated and overlap. They support younger children's learning and development in stages 1 and 2 (junior infants to second class) by building on and extending their earlier learning experiences in preschool through *Aistear*. The curriculum areas support an integrated approach to teaching and learning, with links across areas optimising curriculum integration while supporting progression in learning. Curriculum areas recognise younger children's ages, stage of development and give

the teacher greater choice in planning for, and facilitating coherent and relevant rich learning experiences through playful and engaging approaches. Two curriculum areas include subjects for stages 1 and 2 – Language, and Mathematics, Science and Technology Education. While subjects are not specifically defined in the curriculum areas of Wellbeing, Social and Environmental Education, and Arts Education for stages 1 and 2, the learning outcomes will provide important foundations towards more subject-based learning.

Stages 3 and 4: third – sixth class

The curriculum areas support older children's learning and development in stages 3 and 4 (third to sixth class) by building on the strong foundations provided in stages 1 and 2. Curriculum areas become more differentiated into subjects to reflect children's growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising the world, while continuing to provide important opportunities for teaching and learning in integrated and engaging ways. Each curriculum area contains subject-specific learning outcomes which are complementary and draw upon the other subjects within that curriculum area. This supports connections across children's learning while acknowledging their capacity for more abstract thinking and learning through age-appropriate treatment of concepts, skills and knowledge within subject-based inquiry and investigation. Building on stages 1 and 2, the curriculum areas continue to provide opportunities for playful and inquiry-based teaching and learning.

Following the publication of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in 2011, new and updated curriculum specifications include learning outcomes. The *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*, the first part of the curriculum to be redeveloped for primary schools, uses learning outcomes. The specifications for the other four curriculum areas will include the same set of contents as the language area (see Table 3).

Table 3: Components in curriculum specifications

Section	Content	Description
1	**Introduction**	A summary of the philosophical and educational basis for the curriculum area.
2	**Rationale**	A description of the nature and role of the curriculum area within the broad primary curriculum.
3	**Aims**	A vision for the curriculum area articulated through a set of aims.
4	**Strands and elements**	Each curriculum area will be divided into strands and across the strands, the elements will describe the essential learning.
5	**Learning outcomes**	Learning outcomes will describe the expected learning and development for children at the end of a period of time.
6	**Toolkit**	An online toolkit will support teachers across the different school contexts in using the learning outcomes to support every child's learning. To do this, the toolkit will give practical support in preparing and planning for, and in providing rich learning experiences for children, as well as gathering and using assessment information to inform future teaching and learning. This support will be tailored to both whole school planning and classroom planning.
		In the case of all curriculum areas, the toolkit will include Examples of Children's Learning gathered across a variety of school contexts and illustrating the types of experiences and activities that can support progress towards certain learning outcomes in the curriculum. Drawing on research, the toolkit will also include Support Materials which spotlight pedagogical approaches that are especially effective in helping every child to progress and enjoy learning.
		In the case of Language and Mathematics, the toolkit will include Progression Continua.

As with the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*, each curriculum area for stages 1 to 4 will be presented within a single document. In the case of stages 3 and 4, this will give opportunities for creating stronger links across subjects and for minimising duplication within the area. In addition, and drawing on the new language curriculum, the learning outcomes for all four stages will be presented side by side to show progression in learning and to help differentiate learning experiences for children, for example, in multi-grade classrooms.

The following paragraphs provide a brief outline of each curriculum area. These outlines will be further teased out by the NCCA Development Groups that will be established to work on the specification for each curriculum area. These groups, which will include representatives of the education partners, will begin working on the curriculum specifications in 2021. Further consultation will take place beyond that on each draft specification.

Language

Language learning enables children to understand the world around them and to communicate effectively with others. Communication takes many forms, from the non-verbal and verbal to print-based and digital texts. Exposure to a wide variety of texts fosters children's appreciation for and enjoyment of literature from different cultures. Language enables children to engage emotionally, socially, cognitively, imaginatively and aesthetically in relationships and cultural experiences. Providing children with opportunities to be creative through language fosters a sense of enjoyment in their language learning. The curriculum acknowledges the language-learning journeys that all children are on in English and Irish. It also acknowledges and harnesses the diversity of languages spoken in Irish primary schools. It supports the introduction of modern foreign languages in stages 3 and 4, incrementally building on children's existing knowledge and awareness of language and progressing to a competency model in stage 4 (see: www.ncca.ie/en/resources/primary-curriculum-review-and-redevelopment-background-paper-integrating-modern-foreign-languages-in-a-redeveloped-primary-curriculum).

Mathematics, Science and Technology Education

Mathematics, Science and Technology Education supports children's capacity to understand and engage fully with the world around them. Mathematics provides the foundation for science and technology and is the study of the relationships, connections and patterns that surround us. The overarching aim of mathematics is the development of mathematical proficiency. Science and technology are intrinsically linked and enable children to benefit from learning about, and working with traditional, contemporary and emerging technologies. Using technologies children will experience opportunities to generate new ideas or solutions as part of a design process and through playful experimentation and investigation[3]. They also enable children to develop an interest in and understanding of the biological, material and physical world by exploring and investigating scientific concepts and processes.

Arts Education

A broad experience in the arts is integral throughout a child's experience in primary school. The arts give expression to and extend children's understanding, their imagination and their creativity through a broad range of experiences. Such experiences have the capacity to engage, inspire and enrich all children, exciting the imagination and encouraging them to reach their creative and expressive potential. Broad-ranging experiences in the arts including visual arts, music, drama, dance, film and digital media play a valuable role in children's experience of childhood and help them to participate fully in their community and in society as a whole. While disciplines within Arts Education have a common creative process and share transferable skills, each has its own knowledge, concepts, skills and intrinsic value.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing supports children's social, emotional and physical development now and into the future. It enables children to develop self-awareness and knowledge, build life skills and develop a strong sense of connectedness to their school and to their community and wider society. To develop these skills and dispositions, it is important for children to develop their own ethical understanding of the world, and in doing so learn to make good decisions. Children are encouraged to value what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts. Wellbeing provides structured opportunities for children to be as physically and

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3   The NCCA worked with 40 schools between 2017 and 2019 as part of the Coding in Primary Schools Initiative. The findings from that initiative have informed thinking in relation to Mathematics, Science and Technology Education. See www.ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-developments/coding-in-primary-schools/research for the final report on the Coding Initiative.

emotionally well and healthy as they can be. This happens by building their motivation and commitment to physical activity and informed healthy lifestyle choices. Wellbeing also supports children to value positive and healthy relationships with others that includes acquiring an understanding of human sexuality that is balanced and connected with the relational and emotional aspects.

Social and Environmental Education

Social and Environmental Education contributes to children's understanding and development of the interconnected historical, geographical and societal dimensions and processes of life. Social and Environmental Education supports children's awareness, appreciation and understanding of the world through learning about the rich diversity of peoples; their experiences, cultures, beliefs and environments in different times, places and circumstances. It also helps children to develop an understanding of the human and natural environments and the relationship between them.

The NCCA's consultation on a curriculum for Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and

Ethics showed broad support for much of the learning included in the proposals (see www.ncca.ie/en/resources/consultation_report_erbe_february2017). The curriculum areas of Wellbeing and Social and Environmental Education present opportunities for incorporating this learning in the redeveloped curriculum.

Religious/Ethical/Multi-belief Education – Patron's Programme

The Patron's Programme is developed by a school's patron with the aim of contributing to the child's holistic development particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective and in the process, underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school. There are a number of patrons' programmes in the Irish primary school system reflecting the diversity of patronage. Some of these are denominational or religious in nature, emphasising the place of children's faith, spiritual and moral development in their lives. Other patrons' programmes are ethical or multi-belief in nature and emphasise children's understanding of ethics and values and their application in the life of the child. All patrons' programmes contribute to the child's development and sense of identity and support their connection to community and wider society.

Time allocation

Suggested time allocations are intended to assist teachers and schools in their work with the curriculum. These allocations comprise two categories of time for teaching, learning and assessment. The consultation report *Primary Developments: Consultation on Curriculum Structure and Time* (NCCA, 2018) (see www.ncca.ie/en/resources/primary-developments-consultation-on-curriculum-structure-and-time-final-report) found general agreement for the concept of these two categories—Minimum Curriculum Time (weekly and monthly allocations) and Flexible Time (monthly allocations). Minimum Curriculum Time provides a weekly time allocation for Language, Mathematics and Wellbeing recognising the foundational nature of these in children's learning in the primary school years. There is a monthly time allocation (based on a period of four weeks) for Science and Technology Education, Social and Environmental Education, and Arts Education. By delineating time on a monthly basis, the curriculum gives schools and teachers greater flexibility in deciding how best to utilise time in working towards the learning outcomes in the different curriculum areas. It also provides opportunities for teachers to use more substantial blocks of time in their curriculum planning to enable the use of particular pedagogical approaches such as project work and involvement in local initiatives. At the same time, this approach reduces the likelihood of a particular curriculum area receiving too much or too little attention thereby ensuring that children have a broad and balanced learning experience.

The second category 'Flexible Time' is responsive to schools' own present and future educational priorities. Each school decides how best to allocate this time to teaching, learning and assessment. As the name suggests, it is designed to be implemented flexibly and creatively. Flexible Time is intended to better enable schools, at local level, to determine how best to use available resources to meet children's learning needs, interests and abilities and the needs of teachers and schools in terms of planning, teaching and assessing. Across a year, a school may decide to use Flexible Time for one, some or all of the following:

- extended periods of in-depth learning within one or more of the five curriculum areas

- whole-school activities and/or participation in local, regional and national initiatives and events

- planning and carrying out a project in the local area

- focusing on the key competencies

- using particular pedagogical approaches that benefit from extended periods of time, for example, child-led play, inquiry-based learning

- working on a particular aspect of the Patron's Programme.

To support different school contexts in making optimum use of Flexible Time through careful whole-school planning, guidelines and examples of how this time allocation can be used will be developed. This guidance will be a practical support, illustrating how Flexible Time might be organised and distributed across the primary curriculum.

Three options for 'Minimum Curriculum Time' and 'Flexible Time' are presented below. Each option provides possibilities for delineating time over a four-week period. The options are intended to support discussion during the consultation on how time might be allocated in a redeveloped primary curriculum. These proposed allocations represent a departure from the allocations currently set out in the Suggested Minimum Weekly Time Framework (DES, 1999, p.70; see Appendix A) and in Circular 0056/2011. A key consideration in the development of the options was that, with the exception of Wellbeing (PE and SPHE) and breaks and recreation, time was taken from all areas and aspects of the curriculum in order to arrive at a set of options for **consideration and discussion** as we think about the type of primary curriculum needed for children over the next fifteen years. Final decisions about time allocations will be made following the consultation.

- Option 1 (see Table 4) uses weekly and monthly allocations to suggest a minimum time allocation for each curriculum area. A monthly allocation is given for Flexible Time.

- Option 2 (see Table 5) provides further guidance on weekly minimum time allocations for Language 1, Language 2 and Language 3. With the exception of Language, the time allocations for the remaining curriculum areas are the same as in Option 1 and so they are not included again in Table 5.

- Option 3 (see Table 6) suggests a minimum time allocation for each curriculum area and for Flexible Time with additional guidance on weekly minimum time allocations for Language 1, Language 2 and Language 3. In contrast to options 1 and 2, option 3 suggests that in stages 3 and 4, more time is allocated to Language 2 than to Language 1. In stage 1, there is less time allocated to Mathematics and additional time allocated to Science and Technology Education.

Table 4: Option 1

Stage 1 (junior and senior infants)			
Weekly allocations		Monthly allocations (Four weeks)	
Language	5 hours 45 minutes		23 hours
Mathematics	3 hours		12 hours
		Science and Technology Education	2 hours
Wellbeing	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
		Social and Environmental Education	6 hours
		Arts Education	9 hours
		Flexible Time	5 hours
Stage 2 (first and second classes)			
Weekly allocations		Monthly allocations (Four weeks)	
Language	7 hours 45 minutes		31 hours
Mathematics	4 hours		16 hours
		Science and Technology Education	4 hours
Wellbeing	3 hours		12 hours
		Social and Environmental Education	9 hours
		Arts Education	9 hours
		Flexible Time	6 hours
Stages 3 and 4 (third to sixth classes)			
Weekly allocations		Monthly allocations (Four weeks)	
Language	7 hours 45 minutes		31 hours
Mathematics	4 hours		16 hours
		Science and Technology Education	5 hours
Wellbeing	3 hours		12 hours
		Social and Environmental Education	8 hours
		Arts Education	8 hours
		Flexible Time	7 hours
Stages 1 to 4 (junior infants to sixth class)			
Weekly allocations		Monthly allocations (Four weeks)	
Patron's programme	2 hours		8 hours
Roll call and assembly time	1 hour 15 minutes		5 hours
Breaks	50 minutes		3 hours 20 minutes
Recreation	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours

Table 5: Option 2[4]

Stage 1 (junior and senior infants)		
Weekly allocations		**Monthly allocations (Four weeks)**
Language	5 hours 45 minutes	23 hours
Language 1	*3 hours 15 minutes*	*13 hours*
Language 2	*2 hours 30 minutes*	*10 hours*
Stage 2 (first and second classes)		
Weekly allocations		**Monthly allocations (Four weeks)**
Language	7 hours 45 minutes	31 hours
Language 1	*4 hours 45 minutes*	*19 hours*
Language 2	*3 hours*	*12 hours*
Stages 3 and 4 (third to sixth classes)		
Weekly allocations		**Monthly allocations (Four weeks)**
Language	7 hours 45 minutes	31 hours
Language 1	*3 hours 45 minutes*	*15 hours*
Language 2	*3 hours*	*12 hours*
Language 3	*1 hour*	*4 hours*
Stages 1 to 4 (junior infants to sixth class)		
Weekly allocations		**Monthly allocations (Four weeks)**
Patron's programme	2 hours	8 hours
Roll call and assembly time	1 hour 15 minutes	5 hours
Breaks	50 minutes	3 hours 20 minutes
Recreation	2 hours 30 minutes	10 hours

4   Option 2 uses the same time allocations as Option 1 but the time for Language is further delineated into Language 1, Language 2 and Language 3. In Irish-medium schools, Gaelscoileanna and Scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht, where tumoideachas (immersion) takes place in Irish, language allocations will require particular consideration. In these contexts, Irish is the medium through which the entire curriculum is accessed, apart from the English language curriculum. In order to support the acquisition of Irish the introduction of formal English learning can be delayed until first class.

Table 6: Option 3[5]

Stage 1 (junior and senior infants)			
Weekly allocations		**Monthly allocations (Four weeks)**	
Language	5 hours 45 minutes		23 hours
Language 1	*2 hours 45 minutes*		*11 hours*
Language 2	*3 hours*		*12 hours*
Mathematics	2 hours 45 minutes		11 hours
		Science and Technology Education	3 hours
Wellbeing	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
		Social and Environmental Education	6 hours
		Arts Education	9 hours
		Flexible Time	5 hours
Stage 2 (first and second classes)			
Weekly allocations		**Monthly allocations (Four weeks)**	
Language	7 hours 45 minutes		31 hours
Language 1	*3 hours 45 minutes*		*15 hours*
Language 2	*4 hours*		*16 hours*
Mathematics	4 hours		16 hours
		Science and Technology Education	4 hours
Wellbeing	3 hours		12 hours
		Social and Environmental Education	8 hours
		Arts Education	10 hours
		Flexible Time	6 hours
Stages 3 and 4 (third – sixth classes)			
Weekly allocations		**Monthly allocations (Four weeks)**	
Language	7 hours 45 minutes		31 hours
Language 1	*2 hours 45 minutes*		*11 hours*
Language 2	*4 hours*		*16 hours*
Language 3	*1 hour*		*4 hours*
Mathematics	4 hours	Mathematics	16 hours
		Science and Technology Education	6 hours
Wellbeing	3 hours		12 hours
		Social and Environmental Education	8 hours
		Arts education	8 hours
		Flexible time	6 hours
Stages 1 to 4 (junior infants to sixth class)			
Weekly allocations		**Monthly allocations (Four weeks)**	
Patron's programme	2 hours		8 hours
Roll call and assembly time	1 hour 15 minutes		5 hours
Breaks	50 minutes		3 hours 20 minutes
Recreation	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours

5   As noted in the footnote above, language allocations will require particular consideration in Irish-medium schools where tumoideachas takes place. Specifically, the allocation of slightly more time to T2 in such settings may be challenging as they strive to support language acquisition in Irish.

Transitions, continuity and progression in children's learning

Children come to primary school with a rich and varied set of experiences shaped by their family and community and, increasingly, by their time in early childhood settings including preschools. From and through these experiences, they develop attitudes, concepts, dispositions, knowledge, skills and values. The curriculum recognises this learning and the importance of building on it as children continue their learning journeys at primary school ahead of moving to post-primary school.

Children spend eight years in primary school. As highlighted in the vision, these years provide an important foundation for them to thrive and flourish, and help them in realising their potential as individuals and members of communities and society during childhood and into the future. Throughout the primary school years, children have opportunities to learn through appropriately playful and engaging experiences. These experiences are shaped by five broad and interconnected curriculum areas. Continuity of experience and progression in learning is important throughout these eight years. The curriculum supports this in a number of ways.

- The eight principles build on those in *Aistear* and connect with the eight principles of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.

- Likewise, the curriculum's seven key competencies extend children's learning through *Aistear*'s four themes and provide an important foundation for the Junior Cycle key skills.

- Children's learning is presented in five curriculum areas. The specifications to be developed in the coming years for these areas will use learning outcomes to describe children's learning at the end of a period of time. The outcomes will recognise that children learn and teachers teach in a variety of school contexts, and that the teaching/learning journeys can be and often are different in these contexts. Importantly, the outcomes will recognise that children make progress at different rates influenced by their varying circumstances, experiences and abilities.

- The redeveloped curriculum will be presented in five documents—one per curriculum area. In the case of stages 3 and 4, each area will include more subject-based learning outcomes presented alongside the outcomes for stages 1 and 2. This approach to presentation will create practical opportunities to show where integration across strands, subjects and curriculum areas, can happen throughout the primary school experience. This, in turn, can support planning at the level of the curriculum area rather than subject.

- Primary education brings key transitions for children including, for most, the move from preschool to primary school, and the move from primary to post-primary school. Sharing information about learning and development is especially important at these transition points so that teachers can plan experiences that enable children to continue to make progress in their learning across the curriculum. This transfer of information is supported through *Mo Scéal*: Preschool to Primary Reporting Templates and through the *Education Passport*. The *Mo Scéal* templates help to tell the story of a child's learning and development in preschool and as such, can provide useful information to support teachers in preparing for children's learning in the early days of primary school. The *Education Passport* supports the sharing of information about children in sixth class with post-primary schools. This information transfer provides a rounded picture of children's progress and achievement at primary school, ensures continuity and progression in learning, and alerts post-primary schools if additional support is needed. Relationship-building between preschools and primary schools, and between primary and post-primary schools can, in turn, help to support children and their families at these two key transition points.

- Transitions also happen year-by-year during primary school. Throughout this time, teachers use information gathered through intuitive and planned assessment as well as through assessment events, to help shape meaningful and engaging activities and experiences for children aiding progression in their learning. Where children move from one teacher to another either at the beginning of a new school year or as part of the daily/weekly routine, it is important that those teachers have opportunities for professional conversations about the child's learning and about how they can be further supported in their learning.

Moving from primary to post-primary school, children continue to build on prior experiences as their learning is supported through the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. What they learn and how they learn in primary school provides a strong foundation for their junior cycle experience.

Teaching and learning

The vision and principles guiding the redevelopment of the primary curriculum place high-quality teaching and learning at the heart of that curriculum. Relationships are central to this along with the suite of pedagogical approaches and strategies which teachers draw on and use in their practice as they design, plan and provide experiences, activities and tasks tailored to the children in their classrooms and which work towards the learning outcomes in the curriculum. Teachers' decisions about what to teach, when to teach it, how to sequence and pace learning, as well as decisions about the specific experiences to use are shaped by the strengths, needs, interests and individuality of the children with whom they work.

This section looks at the importance of Inclusive education and diversity, Pedagogy and Integration as central tenets of high-quality teaching and learning in the primary curriculum.

Inclusive education and diversity

Inclusive education and diversity centres on the values and practices that enable children, as individuals, to belong, feel respected, confident and safe so they can engage in meaningful learning and reach their potential. In the context of a universally designed curriculum, inclusive education and diversity encourages a move away from thinking in terms of ability and disability to thinking about variability, competency and opportunity. It is concerned with the best interest of every child considering that each child varies in their competency, language, family background, age, culture, ethnic status, religion, gender and sexual identity. It promotes equity of opportunity and participation in which each child has meaningful engagement and challenge in learning and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community.

The curriculum supports schools in providing each child with an inclusive learning experience in primary school as they move from the home learning environment or preschool setting. Through its vision and principles, the curriculum encourages an appreciation of children's unique capabilities, interests, culture, language and background. Informed by this knowledge and with the help of appropriate resources, primary school teachers can create a respectful school climate, and build their curriculum and interactions to proactively promote inclusive principles in their school. Recognising diversity enables teachers to validate and cherish each child in their classroom. Through varied learning experiences, children make connections with diverse languages, cultures and worldviews. This helps to build school communities that nurture and respond to the variability of learners, fostering a sense of belonging for all.

Relationship to teaching, learning and assessment in school environments

Inclusive learning environments work to remove barriers to make learning more meaningful and relevant for every child, particularly those most vulnerable to exclusionary pressures. It also acknowledges that there are challenges to creating inclusive learning environments. There are a number of key approaches that schools and teachers should take to develop inclusive learning environments. These include:

- Understanding that children have individual needs, views, cultures and beliefs, which need to be recognised, understood, treated with respect and represented throughout their school experience.

- Promoting responsive pedagogies and practices, so that all children and families feel included, valued and visible.

- Working in partnership with and communicating with the child's family and the wider community.
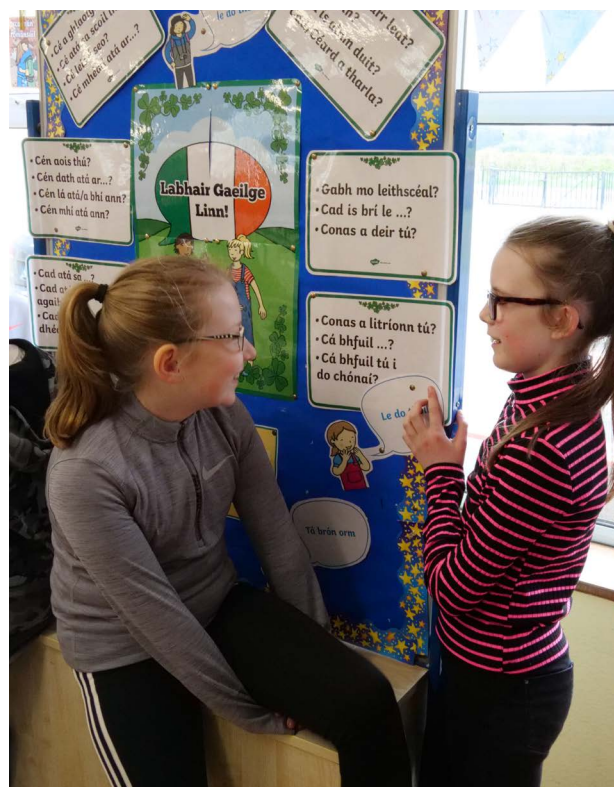
- Recognising and valuing that all children are unique and will develop and learn at their own rate.

- Encouraging children to recognise their individual qualities and the characteristics they share with their peers.

- Engaging children in making decisions about their own learning.

- Respecting the diversity of the child, their family and community throughout their primary school period.

The redeveloped primary curriculum will support schools in working towards the creation of inclusive learning environments in a number of ways:

- The process through which the curriculum specifications will be developed will draw on the principles of Universal Design for Learning which aims to provide all learners with equity of access, engagement and challenge in their learning.

- The specifications will describe children's learning through broad learning outcomes which teachers can interpret locally and which allow for variations in children's learning needs.

- The curriculum specifications will be supported by examples showcasing experiences and pedagogies that respect the diversity of children in our schools.

- The introduction of new areas of learning, such as those supported in the consultation on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, modern foreign languages, and the role of linguistic diversity in the new *Primary Language Curriculum/ Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* supports a broader educational experience for children in the primary school years.

- The *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* (NCCA, 2007) are based on the 1999 primary curriculum. As the curriculum is redeveloped and building on work with the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*, the guidelines will be revisited and used to inform the development of new Support Materials in each curriculum area for publication in the online Curriculum Toolkit. These Support Materials will provide examples of particular pedagogical approaches and strategies to support teachers in their work with the diverse needs of the children in their classroom.

Pedagogy

The curriculum's vision and principles recognise teachers as committed, skilful and agentic professionals in a complex role that includes knowledge and awareness of the diversity of children's learning journeys. The term 'pedagogy' refers to this role and takes account of the scope of teachers' practice. Different aspects of pedagogy link and interact with each other, developing into a holistic picture of teachers' professional practice.

Aspects of pedagogy

Knowledge is central to the teacher's role and her/his pedagogy:

- Subject knowledge that is to be shared with children or made available to them through learning experiences, and knowledge of the skills they need to access that subject knowledge.

- The teacher's professional knowledge of, for example, child development and a broad range of pedagogical approaches.

- Relational knowledge and understanding of the children, their families and the community.

- Knowledge of the classroom and school context.

This is not intended as a definitive description of the role of knowledge in a teacher's pedagogy, but a reflection of the curriculum's principle on the pivotal role teachers play in enabling and progressing children's learning.

Interactions are central to pedagogy that is grounded in children's experience. The curriculum recognises the value of the full range of interactions—informal and formal, planned and incidental, social or cognitive— between the teacher and children as contributing to the quality of the children's learning environment and experiences. The interactions between the teacher and children build and enhance relationships and promote learning, and all the interactions the teacher has with the child are significant. As highlighted in the principles, the quality of interactions impacts on children's learning, development and wellbeing. All relationships and interactions within the school community—formal and informal—contribute to a responsive pedagogy.

Contact time with children is the visible aspect of the teacher's role in progressing the children's learning, but the professional preparation that the teacher carries out is also a critical aspect of her/his pedagogy.

By virtue of being 'behind the scenes', this aspect of the teacher's pedagogy can be hidden but is of considerable value. In addition, the planning and the preparation that the teacher carries out to, for example, prepare the learning environment and the resources that will provide opportunities for the children to play, explore, inquire, experiment and discover, are critical contributions to pedagogy. The curriculum recognises the impact on children's learning of the teacher's preparedness when the children are engaging independently with the learning environment.

Pedagogical strategies and approaches are the ways in which teachers tailor learning experiences. Different pedagogical strategies stimulate different types of learning and the teacher can choose different strategies to match her/his plans for learning experiences. These vary and will be adapted to suit the child's progression from junior infants to sixth class and will be informed by ongoing assessment practice. Different curriculum areas utilise particular strategies. In choosing appropriate pedagogical strategies to support, engage, motivate and progress children's learning, teachers can consider the following characteristics.

The pedagogical approach/strategy:

- Emphasises environmental sustainability in the classroom and school context and supports children's responsibility for each other's wellbeing when learning together.

- Provides for a balance between meaningful exploration, critical thinking and problem-solving in open-ended learning experiences and direct instruction by the teacher where appropriate.

- Promotes positive learning dispositions, such as curiosity, imagination, creativity and innovation.

- Includes opportunities for feeding back and supporting the children to reflect on what and how they learn.

- Balances collaborative and individual learning opportunities for children.

- Promotes wellbeing through engagement, motivation, choice and agency in the learning experience.

- Offers integrated learning opportunities across the curriculum, including opportunities that address literacy and numeracy competencies.

- Reflects the culture(s) of the school and community.

Integration

Children live their lives in an integrated world and, for most real-world problems, children need to apply knowledge and skills from multiple areas. Facilitating natural connections and encouraging a flexible use of knowledge and skills develops their ability to reflect and transfer their learning to life outside school. Consequently, they need opportunities in school to develop the disposition to use knowledge and skills flexibly and integrated learning experiences can provide that context.

The curriculum encourages and supports integration in a number of ways. Moving from curriculum areas towards more defined subjects supports an integrated approach to teaching and learning through presenting knowledge in a particular way. The key competencies, embedded in learning outcomes across all curriculum areas and subjects from junior infants to sixth class, build integration into the curriculum structure. Learning outcomes in the specifications for curriculum areas and subjects provide the opportunity for teachers and children to draw on multiple sources of knowledge and skills as they pursue learning. Support materials and examples of approaches to integration, on planning for integration and on practical strategies for the classroom, will be provided.

Additionally, in its view of pedagogy, the curriculum recognises that the teacher's interactions with children and their lived experience enables the identification of fruitful themes, interdisciplinary skills, big ideas and real-world problems that are starting points for integrated teaching and learning. Connecting curriculum to children's lives in meaningful ways is central to the rationale for promoting integration in the primary classroom and an enactment of the curriculum's principles.

Assessment

Drawing on the key ideas within *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* (NCCA, 2007), assessment in the redeveloped curriculum supports the progression of each child towards the curriculum's vision. It is a collaborative process involving children and teachers and, at times, parents and other stakeholders, as they gather, record, interpret, use, and report information about a child's progress and achievement in developing knowledge, concepts, competencies, skills and dispositions. Assessment is integral to high-quality teaching and learning across the curriculum areas and subjects, and goes far beyond activities that contribute to external accountability and national monitoring.
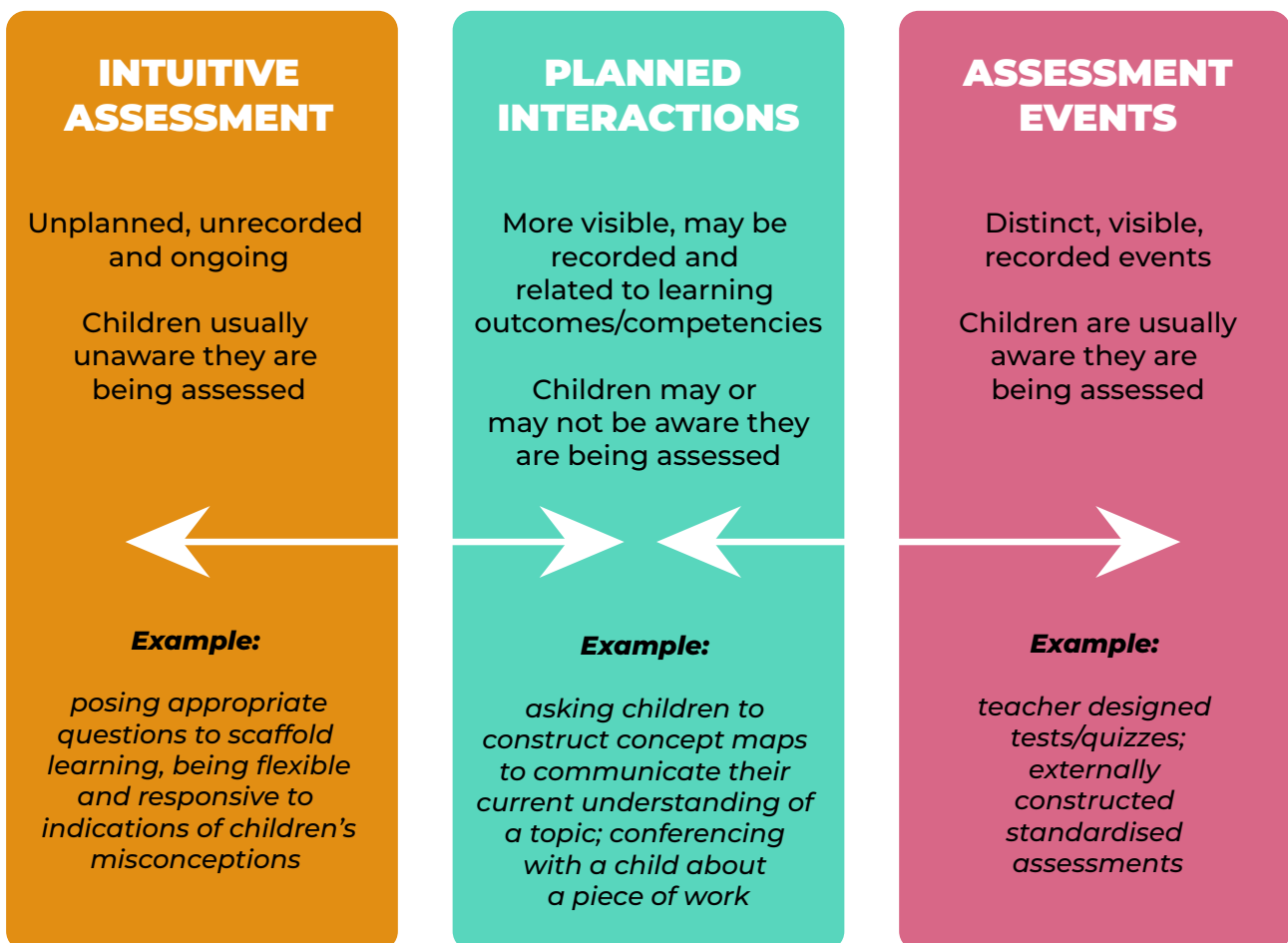
Important key messages about assessment include:

- Assessment exists along a continuum.

- Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning.

- Assessment provides information for various stakeholders, and most importantly, for children.

Assessment exists along a continuum

The curriculum supports a continuum of assessment ranging from 'intuitive' to 'planned interactions' to 'assessment events' as shown in Figure 4. The three types of assessment are complementary, and necessary to gain a comprehensive picture of a child's progress and achievement.

Figure 4: Continuum of assessment

INTUITIVE ASSESSMENT	PLANNED INTERACTIONS	ASSESSMENT EVENTS
Unplanned, unrecorded and ongoing	More visible, may be recorded and related to learning outcomes/competencies	Distinct, visible, recorded events
Children usually unaware they are being assessed	Children may or may not be aware they are being assessed	Children are usually aware they are being assessed
←	→ ←	→
Example:	*Example:*	*Example:*
posing appropriate questions to scaffold learning, being flexible and responsive to indications of children's misconceptions	*asking children to construct concept maps to communicate their current understanding of a topic; conferencing with a child about a piece of work*	*teacher designed tests/quizzes; externally constructed standardised assessments*

Intuitive assessment occurs naturally and on an ongoing basis in the classroom. By its nature, it is integrated into pedagogy and is an invisible but very real part of the process. Teachers exercise their professional judgement and agency through knowledge of children's prior learning and experience, as well as knowledge of the curriculum, to support progression. This does not require extensive planning or reporting, and it is not always implemented by the teacher alone, as self- and peer-assessment are often utilised.

Planned interactions are a little more explicit in nature. These include practices such as having engaging classroom conversations with children, questioning children at regular intervals, asking children to construct concept maps to communicate their current understanding of a particular topic, follow-ups based on previous intuitive assessments or assessment events, observing certain children for specific purposes, conferencing with an individual child about a piece of work, or using rubrics. These usually take place in relation to a particular set of learning outcomes and provide children and teachers with detailed feedback which can be used to modify the pedagogical approach or strategy and/or the learning activities in which they are engaged.

At the furthest end of the continuum are assessment events. Assessment events differ from other types of assessment in that (i) they are distinct events, (ii) they almost always involve the production of a record of the outcomes of the assessment (iii) children are usually aware that they are being assessed. Used correctly, these assessments can be used to inform and enhance teaching and learning. Standardised testing falls into this category, and can provide useful information to inform future teaching and learning. However, it must be added that while standardised testing is important, it is not necessarily more important than other types of assessment in which teachers and children are involved during classroom activity.

Teachers can use different ways to document salient pieces of assessment information gathered across the continuum, including notes, photographs, videos, and more narrative approaches such as learning stories. This documentation is an important source of information for the teacher in planning future classroom work, in feeding back to children, and in working with parents.

Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning

Assessment is a shared endeavour and a central element of what happens in the classroom. This reflects an understanding that learning is an inherently social activity in which teachers and children work together to use information to inform learning and, indeed, teaching, in the classroom. Conversations about learning between teachers and children are necessary throughout the learning process. Providing children with regular time to talk about their work and to identify and reflect on their next steps contributes to their self-identity as learners, while peer assessment and other collaborative learning enables children to support and extend each other's learning. The curriculum supports teacher and child agency by prioritising an assessment culture in which insights feed into and influence the nature and direction of teaching and learning in real time.

Assessment provides information for various stakeholders

Assessment provides information for various stakeholders, of whom children are central. Children require information that allows them to identify where they are in terms of their learning, and what they need to do to progress beyond that point. Other groups of stakeholders that require information from assessments include teachers, support staff, parents/guardians, school leaders, policymakers and other professionals (for example, NEPS psychologists, therapists). These stakeholders require information not for themselves, but in order to make decisions which will ultimately impact positively on children (see Figure 5). For the purposes of day-to-day learning in school, after children, the teacher is the primary stakeholder, who uses assessment to support progression in children's learning.

Figure 5: Stakeholders for whom assessment provides information
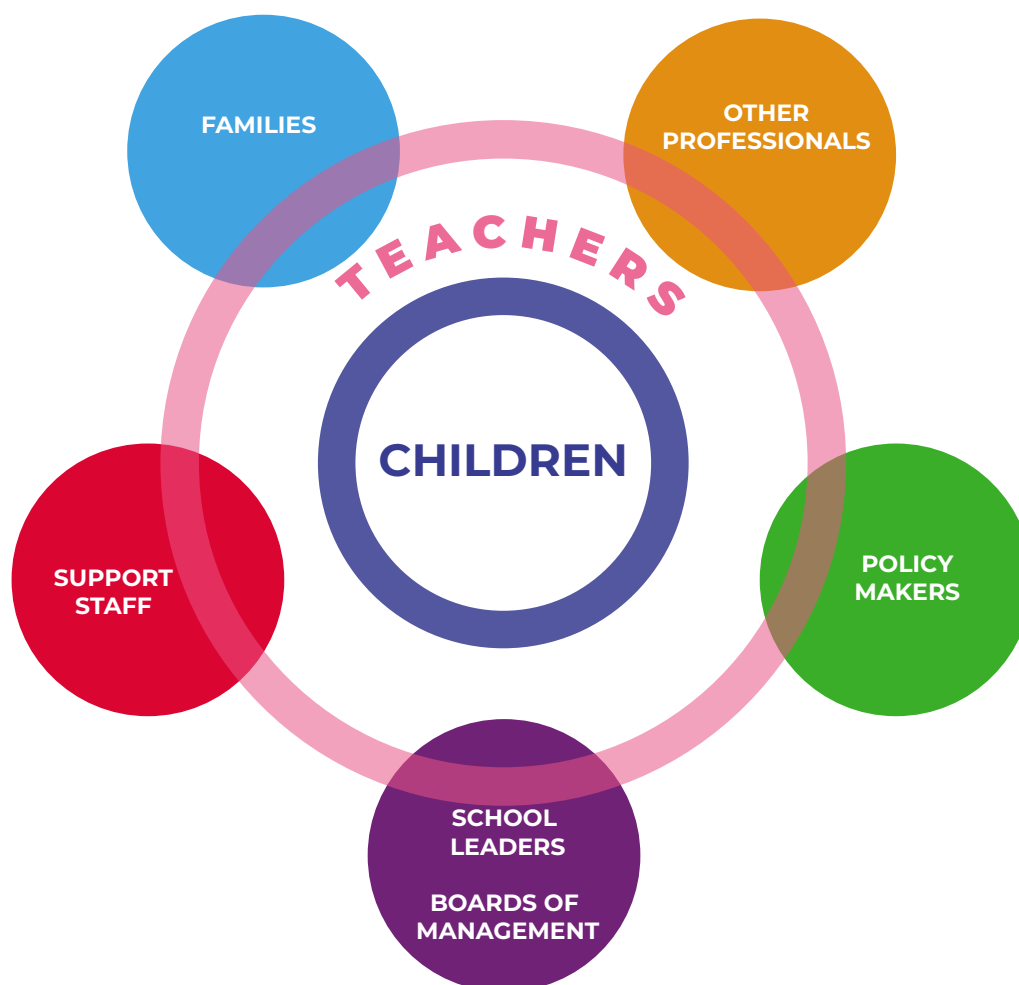
Viewing the child as the central stakeholder that benefits from assessment information, directly and indirectly, is crucial. Information gathered from teachers' everyday observations of children not only supports learning on a moment-to-moment basis, but can also be a valuable addition to narrative reports about children that are shared with parents and other stakeholders, for example, the annual written reports to parents and the Education Passport which is shared with the post-primary school to which a child is transferring.

In light of the approach to assessment described above, it will be necessary, in time, to review the suite of reporting templates that are currently available to schools to align them with the redeveloped primary curriculum. There will also be an opportunity to gather feedback on the range of supports published with the launch of the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam*

Teanga na Bunscoile (2019), including the Examples of Children's Learning and Support Materials for teachers to ensure they are consistent with the principles of the redeveloped curriculum. Similar types of Examples and Support Materials in the other curriculum areas could provide practical assistance to schools in their use of assessment to inform teaching and learning. Furthermore, teachers will require time to collaborate with each other to develop shared understandings relating to learning expectations and assessment evidence gathered. Such collaboration is especially relevant when working with learning outcomes, requiring a breadth of evidence and shared professional judgements to assess and report on progress and achievement.

Further guidance on assessment will be included within the specifications developed for each curriculum area.

Supporting schools, teachers and school leaders

Change brings opportunities, new thinking and possibilities. In addition, it brings challenges, uncertainty and disruption. The Schools Forum, a network of 43 schools and preschools, has played a pivotal role in the development of this *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* by taking ideas from research and teasing these out from the perspective of their diverse school contexts and experiences. A pervasive theme in the Forum's discussions has been that of the necessary 'conditions' to enable and support schools to work with the redeveloped primary curriculum. In particular, the Forum has highlighted the need for:

- Time to become familiar with the new ideas and changes in the curriculum, and time to work with colleagues to plan for curriculum implementation at school level.

- Ongoing access to, and opportunities for, high-quality and school-based continuing professional development.

- Enabling and supporting teachers and school leaders to identify and prioritise school-based CPD needs alongside national priorities.

- Reviewing and, where necessary, updating demands made of schools, for example, in relevant areas such as curriculum planning and documentation, and standardised testing.

- Embedding the curriculum changes across the continuum of teacher education.

The NCCA will continue to work closely with schools and wider education partners to identify practical ways in which schools can be supported in a comprehensive manner as they become familiar with and begin to use the *Primary Curriculum Framework* and the new curriculum specifications that will follow in the coming years. Albeit twenty years ago, lessons can be learned from the experience of introducing and supporting the implementation of the 1999 primary curriculum. Likewise, much can and will be learned from the introduction of the new *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* including the types, nature, timing and pacing of the supports. All of this can inform the design and operationalisation of a comprehensive approach to supporting and enabling schools to work with a redeveloped curriculum.

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In addition to the above references, the NCCA drew on an extensive research and evidence base in developing the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. This included but isn't limited to a suite of short papers authored by researchers from within Ireland and abroad. The NCCA also worked closely with the Schools Forum-a network of preschools, primary and post-primary schools. See www.ncca.ie/primary for further information on the forum and the literature informing the draft framework.

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Suggested time framework in the 1999 curriculum

Suggested minimum weekly time framework

Curriculum areas	Full day		Short day [infant classes]	
	One week		One week	
	Hours	Minutes	Hours	Minutes
Secular instruction				
Language				
L[1]	4	00	3	00
L[2]	3	30	2	30
Mathematics	3	00	2	15
SESE	3	00	2	15
SPHE	0	30	0	30
PE	1	00	1	00
Arts education	3	00	2	30
Discretionary curriculum time	2	00	1	00
Total secular instruction	**20**	**00**	**15**	**00**
Religious education (typically)	2	30	2	30
Assembly time	1	40	1	40
Roll call	0	50	0	50
Breaks	0	50	0	50
Recreation (typically)	2	30	2	30
Total	**28**	**20**	**23**	**20**

Note: Some modification of this framework may be necessary in the context of the outcome of the pilot project on modern languages.

(Source: Primary School Curriculum, 1999, p.70)