

Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals responding to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*

This template is intended to support you (and your colleagues/organisation) in developing a written submission in response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Please e-mail your completed submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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The NCCA will publish written submissions received during the consultation. The submissions will include the author's/contributor's name/organisation. Do you consent to this submission being posted online?

Yes No

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

ILSA is concerned with sharing knowledge with support teachers. Its aims include promoting cooperation between those concerned with Special Education Teaching (SET) and enhancing the quality of service given by SET teachers. It does this through Spring and Annual Conferences, through LEARN Journal and resources on the ILSA website www.ilsa.ie and through regional ILSA groups

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured to align with the six key messages related to the framework. Each message is summarised as a support for you in working on the submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Section 1

Please outline your overall response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*.

We are happy with the aspirations of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and with its balanced nature and broad encompassing approach. The inclusion of Wellbeing in these challenging times is particularly noteworthy and welcome.

The sense of continuity is welcome also in these years after the 2 year ECCE programme and Aistear at one end and the progression onto the Junior Cycle at the upper end. ILSA would consider that this latter connection should be greatly strengthened through a passport system with the Junior School teachers and post-primary teachers signing it to show that both representatives of each sector acknowledge that the information about the student has been verbally given as well as in document form and that an acknowledgement is given that it has been verbally given and received in written form (GDPR notwithstanding).

It is vital that the time allocation for core subjects such as literacy and Maths would not be reduced. Irish 15 year olds performed among the best in reading literacy and significantly higher than the OECD average in mathematics according to the 2018 OECD PISA report. If we are to maintain or improve these standards we must at least maintain or increase the present time allocation for these subject areas.

Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Be for every child.
- Recognise teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context.
- Give more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling to identify and respond to priorities and opportunities.
- Connect with different school contexts in the education system.
- Give greater opportunities for flexibility and choice for children's learning.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to agency and flexibility in schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

It is important that that the Draft Primary Curriculum (DPC) will be for every child no matter what s/he is capable of absorbing – so that potential is reached. It is excellent that teacher's agency and professionalism is recognised and that NCCA recognises the teachers' exigencies and knowledge regarding local conditions. It is vital that the Inspectorate will be particularly mindful of respecting teachers' professional judgement and agency and to actively encourage teachers to make meaningful connections with children's interests particularly in DEIS schools

The flexibility regarding planning and timetabling is heartily welcome . The flexibility regarding blocks of time is particularly suitable for integrated learning and experiences such as project-work and Art & Craft.

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

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The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Provide a clear vision for children’s learning across the eight years of primary school.
- Link with learning experiences provided through the themes of the *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and connect with the subjects, key skills and statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.
- Support educational transitions by connecting with what and how children learn at home, in preschool and post-primary school.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

It is good to see the clarity of the pathway across the whole primary school, and the narrower base at the earlier stages widening out and separating into individual subject areas.

We are particularly taken with the transition from what children learn at home to what they learn in school. This is particularly important for children who come from a different ethnic background. It is particularly important that their culture, and language would be recognised as valuable, giving such children a feeling of worth and value. When children realise that there are different words, for example, for greeting or saying “goodbye” this affirms the child using that language and broaden the horizons of those who hear it, offering the potential for children to become little philologists.

- Link with learning experiences provided through the themes of the *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and connect with the subjects, key skills and statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*

.....two huge areas of work, linking pre school, through to primary school and on to Jun Cert. Needs to be a reality check about the workload for principals !!!!!

Emerging priorities for children’s learning

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

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- Embed seven key competencies across children’s learning outcomes from junior infants to sixth class.
- Focus on developing children’s skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. The Learning Outcomes and the Key Competencies are broad in nature to describe this wider understanding of learning.
- Have increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning, and have new aspects such as Modern Foreign Languages, Technology, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, and a broader Arts Education.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to emerging priorities for children’s learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

We welcome the embedding of the key competencies across the curriculum and its knock-on effect on children’s skills, knowledge, etc.

It is important to recognise, however, that the increased emphasis on areas such as PE, and Modern Foreign Languages is not suitable for all children. For example, children who have difficulties with gross motor movement may need a restricted programme. This may be the case for children who have diagnoses of Dyspraxia and they may need a curtailed programme. Therefore, teachers need to be mindful of children’s challenges in this case. Similarly, for children who have an exemption from the study of Irish, they will need the time normally devoted to Irish, to mastering the written form of their mother tongue. **They should not be introduced to the written aspect of modern foreign languages (or any other language) until they have mastered the written form of their mother tongue. Is there provision in the framework for how these children will be productively learning during second and third language teaching time? It is very**

important that they will be actively engaged in teaching and learning at all times during the school day.

Greater emphasis should be placed on Social/life skills. The teaching of this should be part of the curriculum as this would support the inclusive classroom pedagogy. At present this is usually done by the SET but pupils with SEN need these skills to be generalised to the classroom and this can best be done by the class teacher. However, as this is not a curriculum subject teachers find it difficult to integrate this into their timetable.

In the case of Religion and Beliefs (ERB) & Ethics, it is good to have the inclusive approach, but **our Christian heritage** should still be emphasised.

Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Be broad and balanced in purpose and content.
- Be structured in five broad curriculum areas;
 - Language
 - Mathematics, Science and Technology Education
 - Wellbeing
 - Social and Environmental Education
 - Arts Education.

(In addition to the five areas above, 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. These areas connect to the themes of *Aistear* and to the subject-based work in Junior Cycle.)

- Provide for an integrated learning experience, with curriculum areas in Stages 1 and 2 (junior Infants – second Class) and more subject-based learning in Stages 3 and 4 (third class – sixth class).
- Use broad learning outcomes to describe the expected learning and development for children.
- Incorporate the new *Primary Language Curriculum / Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*.

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The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to changing how the curriculum is structured and presented. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

It is important to use learning outcomes to describe learning at the end of a period of time and to recognise that children learn at different rates due to circumstances, abilities and experiences. The integrated approach is welcomed and good to see it broaden and separate out into different subject areas. It should be remembered that language is the vehicle which cuts across all subject areas and all learning. Therefore the new Primary Language Curriculum will be incorporated throughout the Primary Curriculum.

Cognisance must be given, however, to necessary modification in the New Primary Language Curriculum for students with Specific Learning Difficulties such as Dyslexia. How will the curriculum be changed to accommodate these students and how will time allocation be managed, bearing in mind that these students need multi-sensory over-teaching and over-learning?

Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Promote high quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Conceptualise assessment as an essential and critical part of teaching and learning.
- Highlight the importance of teachers' professional judgement in supporting progression in children's learning.
- Encourage teachers to make meaningful connections with children's interests and experiences.
- Recognise the significance of quality relationships and their impact on children's learning.
- Recognise the role and influence of parents and families in children's education.

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The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

Consistent with Inspectors Reports and DES (2011) Literacy and numeracy for Learning and life, assessment of Learning (AoL) or assessment for learning should be central to teaching and learning. However, teachers should use a variety of formal and informal assessment methods. Formal assessment instruments should be theoretically driven and current. Unfortunately, this is currently not the case. Teachers are still using the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) to assess young children who very often pass the test thus leading to a false negative decision regarding children, who then lose out on crucial intervention, causing the child to begin to fail.

The Trinity Early Screening Test (TEST2r) is available to such teachers. It is a standardised, theoretically driven test, developed in Irish schools with Irish Teachers and is available from Blackrock Education Centre. It was funded by DES and passed muster with the leading test developer in the world (Professor Rod Nicholson of Sheffield University and test developer for Pearson – the world’s leading test publishers)

Teachers need to train Junior and Senior Infant children in phonological awareness (rather than phonics) to include understanding of language as discrete words, syllabification, rhyme generation, rhyme generation at speed, alliteration, alliteration oddity, phonemic awareness (when the children have access to print) phoneme manipulation (e.g. deletion). I would like to see the importance of these areas highlighted and emphasised very much in the revised curriculum

Children who have a history of Speech & Language difficulties or disorder should not be subjected to phonics as very often times they cannot hear differences between the sounds. Also developmentally speaking many children are unable to string sequences of phonic sounds together as this is dependent on Working Memory which normally develops towards the end of the sixth year of a child’s life. For these children and all other the Look & Say method has universal reach.

Children should be taught to read using the Dual Route to reading (Look & Say – whole words from readers) while learning phonological awareness. **Teachers should desist from teaching children the Dolch list (or similar lists) as separate words.** This puts children off reading and is unsuitable for children at risk of dyslexia or children with Speech and Language issues. These are largely function words and have a function in the context of sentences. They are not content words which can be imagined, touched or heard. The Dolch list will eventually be learned by encountering them in the context of sentences.

Here is an opportunity to highlight the importance of assessment of needs for each pupil receiving supplementary teaching. This assessment of needs should include social/life skills to ensure that these form part of their pupil’s SSP plans

Building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to the challenges and changing needs and priorities.

The 1999 curriculum contributed to many successes including:

- Enhanced enjoyment of learning for children.
- Increased use of active methodologies for teaching and learning.
- Improved attainment levels in reading, mathematics and science as evidenced in national and international assessments.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Address curriculum overload at primary level.
- Take stock of strategies, initiatives and programmes and clarify priorities for children's learning.
- Link with *Aistear* and *the Framework for Junior Cycle*.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to challenges and changing needs and priorities. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

The redeveloped curriculum will need to offer strong guidance to avoid curriculum overload, what with the new facets of the curriculum (e.g. modern languages, wellness). The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework will need to take stock of strategies (for example as set out in the previous section) initiatives and programmes to clarify the priorities in children's learning. A huge challenge will be to improve children's grasp of the language of Mathematics and of

language of problem-solving and that this should be central to the teaching of Maths from the earliest years onwards to the Junior Cycle. I offer the example of the excellent Maths Programme Maths Plus, published by Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. This programme is language rich and strategy-rich and teaches the concepts and language related to problem-solving from the earliest-years.

The rollout of the curriculum will need to provide for the provision of active learning opportunities for all students throughout the school day, from the students with additional learning needs to the exceptionally able students. Careful consideration around time allocation for Literacy and numeracy, the availability of resources and sufficient manpower is essential for the delivery of a successful curriculum for all students,

Would the NCCA consider pausing this review for the present as due to the Pandemic, have people got the time to give it appropriate and full consideration? Much too important a document to be rushed ! Many of the stakeholders and education partners have not had the time to give such a vital document the attention it deserves.

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Thank you for your submission.