

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

Individual submission details

Name	
Date	
E-mail	

Organisation submission details

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Position	Team Leader
Organisation	Primary Schools' Diocesan Advisors, Archdiocese of Tuam
Date	30 th December 2020
E-mail	

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?

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Yes

X

No

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

As primary school advisors, we visit almost 200 schools within the Catholic Archdiocese of Tuam annually to meet with, support and advise our primary school leaders and staff on their important role in delivering the Religious Education programme as laid down by the school patron. Since the implementation of the Grow in Love/I nGrá Dé programmes, we have provided training and in-service, with back-up resources, to all these schools on the role-out and implementation of the new Religious Education Curriculum and the programme approved by the Irish Episcopal Conference.

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*

As former school leaders and teachers, our team recognises the ongoing change in our society, not just in urban but in most rural areas. Most of the schools within our “catchment area” can be described as small 2, 3 or 4 teacher schools and are scattered throughout the rolling rural regions of Galway and Mayo. These schools, alongside the bigger schools in a few larger urban areas, have, by their very nature, been at the forefront of change and development. Our school leaders and teaching staff have always been “out there” in leading this change and development. They have, at all times, aimed to promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of the pupils in their care, all the while having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school. Our Catholic schools have a long and rich history in delivering a broad and inclusive education. This is proven by the high standards achieved by these students in all walks of life.

One of the common refrains we hear from teachers on our annual visits has been curriculum overload. Our teachers continue to tell us that they are expected to solve or resolve every ailment in society, whether this be a new political or government whim or a popular social catch-all initiative. In our race to appease all, are we in clear danger of losing what’s truly important? The characteristic spirit of each school should never be overlooked or taken for granted. The role and responsibility of the patron of our Catholic or other faith based schools should never be diminished or lessened.

To date, the spirit of the 1998 Education Act has been followed to a greater or lesser extent. It quite clearly states that ‘a reasonable amount’ of time be set aside each day for ‘subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school’. This has always been recognised as a 30 minute period, a time set aside to allow our schools deliver their patron’s programme, in our case, the Grow in Love or InGrá Dé programme. This has worked to the satisfaction and benefit of all involved parties. Indeed, the 1999 Primary School Curriculum clearly outlines and recognises the rights of the various church authorities to draft and implement a religious education curriculum for their own schools. It also provides a clear rationale for including a religious education curriculum, referencing the central importance of ethos as a way by which Catholic schools foster and enrich their relationships.

We wonder, and teachers have questioned, why the need to reduce this. Is it an attempt to reduce the role of the patron’s religious education programme? The obvious follow-on from this will be a far lesser role for the influence of the patron’s programme in developing and nourishing the characteristic spirit of the school.

As former school leaders, we recognise the important central role of the Board of Management in every school, each in its own unique way. The role of the Boards in defining, formulating, implementing and continually reviewing the characteristic spirit of its “own” school seems to us to be diminished, even removed, in this Draft Framework.

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.

From our initial reading of this document, we welcome much of what's included, such as increased autonomy for schools, (Boards of Management, school leaders and teachers) re planning and timetabling but these should always include and reflect the unique characteristic spirit of each school. However, there is a danger that, with such a variety and multiplicity of options outlined, too much is expected and perhaps, demanded. The whole process may lead to confusion and the defined aims and objectives may be lost. There will need to be further clarifications and thorough in-service provided to those charged with implementing these changes and initiatives.

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

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.

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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.

Emerging priorities for children’s learning

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

- 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 note the introduction of Values education on Page 11 of the draft document. What values? Whose values? Who decides what values and whose values? These are key questions and need to be discussed, debated and clarified prior to publication of the final document. There will be a clear role for the boards of management to be included and involved in this stage of the implementation of any initiatives.

The inclusion of ERB and Ethics, as an emerging priority for schools, is already being provided for in the Patron’s programmes, where they afford every pupil an opportunity to appreciate and understand the significance of religion for many people. Indeed, this has been one of the outstanding successes of the new Grow in love/ I nGrá De programmes. We know from our school visits.

Catholic schools have long been and continue to be places of inclusivity and diversity, a true reflection of our present day society. Again, the above programmes, with their lessons on “people of other faiths” ensure that diversity and inclusion is fostered.

Religious Education in Catholic Schools is student focused. Through the above mentioned programmes, children are afforded opportunities for discussion of their lived experiences and are provided with opportunities to reflect on belonging and being cherished as part of an inclusive school and wider community. The “Let’s Look, Let’s Learn and Let’s Live” section of each lesson, right through both programmes, foster that need to reflect both outwards to society and inwards towards ourselves.

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*.

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.

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.

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- 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.

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.

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*.

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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.

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.

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