



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	
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Organisation submission details

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Organisation	Mindfulness Teachers Association of Ireland (MTAI)
Date	19th December, 2020
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Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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 Yes No

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

The MTAI is the professional body in Ireland who represent qualified teachers of Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBIs) which are evidence-based and internationally recognised as such. These include courses like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy among others. The MTAI has drawn up guidelines for good practice, is committed to upholding the ethical foundations underpinning the teaching of MBIs and supports continuous professional development for mindfulness teachers. Within the MTAI, the Mindfulness in Education special interest group comprises members who are qualified to teach mindfulness in educational settings. The MTAI encourages high quality training and support for teaching mindfulness in a wide variety of settings as well as in education, and seeks to raise awareness of the positive potential of mindfulness in school settings. Please click the link for more information about our organisation: [MTAI](#).

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.

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Section 1

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

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework is clear and comprehensive. The Key Competencies model of the proposed new curriculum framework offers a strategic pathway to achieving pro-social objectives not only for the wider society into the future, but also for the individual learner in the here and now.

Since the benefits of mindfulness practice are often associated with increased wellbeing, we welcome the fact that **Fostering Wellbeing** is one of the seven key competencies identified as a priority for the new curriculum framework. We are also pleased to see that other key competencies such as **Being an Active Citizen, Communicating and Using Language** and **Learning to Be a Learner** are featured, and propose that mindfulness can play a particular role in developing certain of the attributes (described in the framework document), that are related to these competencies. In fact, mindfulness can also be targeted across the whole school community in relation to the other competencies as well, such as **Being Creative, Being a Digital Learner** and **Being Mathematical** in the way that it supports readiness for learning through increased attentional capacity. In our view, mindfulness as a combination of attitudinal skills, dispositions and attentional capacities has the potential to unite the disparate elements of the new curriculum. In addition, it has the capacity to transform the culture of schools so that the conditions for learning become optimised.

The MTAI also welcomes the acknowledgement that schools are a ‘critical site for responding to national priorities or needs and for addressing societal problems’, and the calls for increased time allocation for SPHE and PE/ Wellbeing.

The decision to increase the time allocated for Wellbeing in primary and post-primary schools stems, at least in part, from the recognition that young people in recent years are experiencing significant and growing levels of stress, anxiety and depression¹. Therefore we welcome the

¹ Dooley, B., O’Connor, C., Fitzgerald, A. & O’Reilly, A. (2019) My World Survey 2: The National Study of Youth Mental Health in Ireland <http://www.myworldsurvey.ie>
Devine, D.; Symonds, J., Sloan, S., Cahoon, A., Crean, M., Farrell, E., Davies, A., Blue, T. & Hogan, J. (2020). Children’s School Lives: An Introduction, Report No.1, University College Dublin. <https://cslstudy.ie/news/>
See Irish Primary Principals Network on the spike in anxiety in children reported by school leaders in 2017 <https://www.ipgn.ie/index.php/advocacy/press-releases/7197-26th-january-2017-bullying-levels-down-but-children-s-emotional-wellbeing-is-still-under-threat>

statement in the Draft Curriculum Framework that it is important for children to see themselves as ‘capable and resourceful’, able to deal with ‘the normal challenges of life, become resilient and cope in a variety of situations and circumstances’.

In line with the above, our organisation strongly recommends that mindfulness training should be considered not only as a core aspect of the Wellbeing curriculum but also as a metacognitive training that promotes the conditions necessary for clear thinking. The essence of clear thinking involves the ability to pay attention and sustain that attention. In recent years, as the effects of the digital revolution become more apparent, increasing demands are being placed on the attentional capacity of learners. There is widespread anecdotal evidence among experienced teachers that this capacity is under threat. Mindfulness training has been shown to improve key attentional skills that support critical thinking such as: executive functioning, concentration, working memory and cognitive flexibility (*See note 2 below*) Given also that the ability to think critically is fundamental to all aspects of any curriculum, it is timely to consider how attentional skills could be strengthened to allow learners greater access to the curriculum.

Other reasons why mindfulness training can act as a cohesive element across the curriculum include:

- Mindfulness training has been shown to lead to greater calm, enhances the ability of a child to regulate their emotions and can play an important role in improving cognitive function.² Stress impairs cognitive function thus children who are stressed find it very difficult to focus on learning.
- The current interest in mindfulness is closely linked to the recent findings in neuroscience that show that the brain can be changed in positive ways that promote both cognitive functioning and increased wellbeing (*positive neuroplasticity*). Simplified explanations of how the brain processes stress, are now being taught to young children to enable them to understand the science underpinning the benefits of mindful attention. For example, two

² For example, Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Lawlor, M. S. (2010). The effects of a mindfulness-based education program on pre- and early adolescents well-being and social and emotional competence. *Mindfulness*, 1, 137–151; Zelazo, P. D., & Lyons, K. E. (2012). The potential benefits of mindfulness training in early childhood: A developmental social cognitive neuroscience perspective. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(2), 154-160. Rempel, K. D. (2012). Mindfulness for children and youth: a review of the literature with an argument for school-based implementation. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 46(3), 201–220. Maynard, B.R., Solis, M.R., Miller, V.L. & Brende, K.E. (2017). Mindfulness-based interventions for improving cognition, academic achievement, behaviour, and socioemotional functioning of primary and secondary school students. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*

such approaches are known as ‘Paws b’ and ‘MindUp’. While these topics are still relatively new, they are gaining acceptance at a rapid rate and serious consideration should be given to including them in the new curriculum.³

- As it stands teachers are already including a multiplicity of mindfulness type activities in their classrooms and self-report the benefits of these activities for individual children and for the overall atmosphere and environment in the classroom. It would strengthen the learning outcomes for Wellbeing and the other key competencies and would serve children, teachers and school managers if there was greater consistency in both the quality, structure and content of the methods used. It would also address the need for a whole-school approach that can better respond to local needs.⁴

Given the widespread use and misuse of the term ‘mindfulness’ in recent years, it is worthwhile pinning down this term: The definition of mindfulness is varied in nature and no one definition can claim consistent usage. ‘Mindfulness is awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally’ is the definition most commonly used and most widely accepted by trained teachers of mindfulness⁵. Confusing mindfulness with relaxation techniques or with positive thinking is a common misperception and undervalues its power to promote both improved cognitive function and a greater sense of wellbeing⁶. What may be less understood is its equally important role in promoting pro-social behaviour by increasing empathy and respect for others.

Mindfulness as both a skill and a disposition requires time and a considerable level of training for those who teach it. Two key organisations, with a strong evidence-base for working in schools – the

³ Weare, K. (2018). The evidence for mindfulness in schools for children and young people. Systematic review report for Mindfulness in Schools Project. <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/research-papers/>

Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Oberle, E., Lawlor, M. S., Abbott, D., Thomson, K., Oberlander, T. F., & Diamond, A. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social-emotional development through a simple-to-administer mindfulness-based school program for elementary school children: a randomized controlled trial. *Developmental psychology*, 51(1), 52–66. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038454>;

⁴ Jennings, P. A., Brown, J. L., Frank, J. L., Doyle, S., Oh, Y., Davis, R., Rasheed, D., DeWeese, A., DeMauro, A. A., Cham, H., & Greenberg, M. T. (2017). Impacts of the CARE for Teachers program on teachers’ social and emotional competence and classroom interactions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109 (7), 1010–1028. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000187>
Supporting the capacity for optimal functioning in school settings. *Journal of Childhood Education*, 93 (2), 128-135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2017.13004>

⁵ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full Catastrophe Living. Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. New York :Bantam Books.

⁶ Vickery, C.E. & Dorjee, D. (2016) Mindfulness Training in Primary Schools Decreases Negative Affect and Increases Meta-Cognition in Children. *Frontiers in Psychology* 6, 2025. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.02025;

Mindfulness in Schools Project in the UK (*an educational charity*), and the MindUP project in the UK and the USA – take this more systemic approach.⁷

To conclude, the evidence base to date, for high quality mindfulness training for children in schools, indicates that classroom-based mindfulness training is acceptable to teachers and reliably impacts on a wide range of indicators of positive psychological, social and physical well-being. These indicators include cognition and flourishing in children and young people. There is also emerging evidence for positive impacts on academic performance, problem behaviour and physical health with very little evidence of harm. Given the growing understanding of the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (*ACE*) and the impact of trauma, in our view high quality mindfulness training for children, is dependent on similar high quality training for teachers. (*See Weare, K. 2018. in footnote 3 above*)

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.

The MTAI supports the redeveloped curriculum framework that is learner-focused and brings teachers and principals to the centre of curriculum design and delivery, by encouraging flexibility

⁷ <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/mindfulness/train-to-teach/>; <https://mindup.org>

in identifying, responding to, planning and timetabling according to local priorities and opportunities.

Further specification on how teacher agency and flexibility are enabled in the context of the wider cultural and structural conditions under which schools operate would also be welcome. For example, identifying the structures that will enable educators to identify and respond to local priorities and opportunities in balance with external accountability and national monitoring priorities. And identifying how educators will be supported in strengthening the skills needed to respond rather than react to the complexity of local and national pressures impacting on curriculum design and delivery, is something we would be curious to know more about.

The MTAI advocates for embedding into the curriculum the concept of teacher choice in relation to access to high-quality evidence-based mindfulness training. Such training demonstrates an effective and efficient means of cultivating foundational skills of awareness that serve to strengthen teacher wellbeing⁸ and competence⁹ as well as contribute to both individual and collective agency¹⁰. In relation to the promotion of wellbeing for children, we believe that self-care for teachers is foundational to this and should be promoted in any training initiatives for staff.

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.

⁸ For example, Lomas, T., Medina, J.C., Ivztan, I, & Rupprecht, S. (2017). The impact of mindfulness on the wellbeing and performance of educators: A systematic review of the empirical literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 61, 132-141.

⁹ Jennings, P.A. et al (2017). Impacts of CARE for Teachers Program on Teachers’ Social and Emotional Competence and Classroom Interactions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/edu0000187>

¹⁰ Bristow, J., Bell, R., Nixon, D. (2020). Mindfulness: developing agency in urgent times. The Mindfulness Initiative. <https://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org/agency-in-urgent-times/>

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.

The redeveloped primary curriculum framework shows a clear thread of connection between pre-school **themes**, primary school **competencies** and post-primary **statements of learning**, thus successfully bridging any potential for gaps, as intended.

The MTAI recognises educational transitions as key moments which are shared by children, young people, their teachers and their parents. Often such transitions are fraught with uncertainty and a related anxiety for some learners, when they are not handled sensitively.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework envisions eight overarching **principles** that promote the new curriculum vision, and it is good to see that one of these is: Transitions and Continuity. The importance of children's prior learning, self-worth and identity are acknowledged. This allows for strategic links to be made between the four organising themes of the **Aistear Early Years Curriculum Framework**: Wellbeing, Exploring and Thinking, Identity and Belonging and Communicating. All of these themes have the potential to be enriched by appropriately gauged and age-sensitive mindfulness training.

Similarly, a number of the the eight principles of the **Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF)** nicely tie in with the eight principles of the **Framework for Junior Cycle (FJC)** eg. Learning Environments (PCF) / Learning to Learn (FJC), Engagement (PCF) / Engagement and Participation (FJC), Transitions and Continuity (PCF) / Continuity and Development (FJC), Relationships (PCF) / Wellbeing (FJC). Moreover 5, 10 and 11 of the **statements of learning** of the Framework for Junior Cycle expand on the principles of the FJC and echo some of the priorities of the PCF, particularly in relation to wellbeing and pro-social behaviours that are often associated with the outcomes of quality mindfulness training i.e. 5: has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision making; 10: has the awareness, knowledge, skills, values and motivation to live sustainably; 11: takes action to safeguard and promote their wellbeing and that of others.

A number of already existing 'off-the-shelf' mindfulness programmes address many of the transitions and linkages that are addressed by the themes of Aistear (Early Childhood Curriculum Framework) the principles and competencies of the PCF and the principles and statements of learning of the FJC. These include "The Present" which is a wellbeing and mindfulness course recently developed in the UK for children age 3 - 12+, "Dots" mindfulness training for 3 - 6 yr olds,

Paws b mindfulness and neuroscience training for 7 - 11 yr olds, .b mindfulness and neuroscience training for 11 - 19 yr olds (these last three developed by the UK charity Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) as well as MindUp for 3 - 14 yr olds featuring a blend of neuroscience, mindful awareness, positive psychology and social and emotional learning (developed by the US based Hawn Foundation)¹¹. A number of these programmes are already supported by a growing evidence base for their effectiveness.¹² Professional training related to the teaching of these courses, such as those related to the [MiSP](#) educational charity has been available in Ireland through [The Sanctuary](#) in Dublin for some years.

These, and similar mindfulness-based trainings, which are broadly attuned to the strands and elements of the existing primary SPHE curriculum, attend to a vital skill for successful transition from primary to secondary school when the meta-cognitive dimensions of reasoning, regulation and reflection become more integral to the curriculum.¹³

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.

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- ¹¹ <https://www.thepresentcourses.org/about/>;
 - <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/mindfulness/train-to-teach/>;
 - <https://mindup.org>

¹² Weare, K. (2019). Mindfulness and contemplative approaches in education. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, 321–326. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.06.001>

¹³ OECD (2018). OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030. Conceptual Learning Framework, https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/skills/Skills_for_2030.pdf

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.

The seven **Key Competencies** and their related **Attributes** recognise learners as active and self-motivated in relation to their own learning. The Competencies also address the dynamic nature of child development in primary school. The MTAI welcomes the broader understanding of learning set out in the framework document that includes not only knowledge and skills, but also dispositions, values and attitudes. Perhaps these last three could be set out more explicitly. It is clear that some of the attributes related to the key competency of Fostering Wellbeing are foundational if successful outcomes are to be achieved within the scope of the other six competencies e.g. ‘being self-aware and resilient’ and ‘being persistent and flexible in solving problems’ are relevant to all of the competencies. Evidence-based high quality mindfulness training which addresses cognitive, emotional and relational aspects of the learner and their capacity to learn, has the potential to be a key ingredient in successful learning outcomes.

Since mindfulness emphasises a more embodied type of awareness, the increased time provision for Physical Education acknowledges the importance of the physical wellbeing of learners and the inter-relationship between wellbeing of the mind and wellbeing of the body.

The new curriculum framework also shows a welcome flexibility in recognising the need for subject integration particularly at the junior primary level with its description of curriculum themes which become more identifiable as subjects with specific content at the senior level, while still being broadly linked at the level of the seven Competencies. This validates the child’s perception of what it is they are learning and their growing ability to recognise subject specific content as they get older.

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

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- 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.

The MTAI welcomes the flexibility of a broad and balanced approach of the principles and competencies to curriculum design while also attending to the need for subject-specific design through the structure of the five Key Curriculum Areas in ways that bridge the gaps of concern between Aistear themes and Junior Cycle subjects with their related Principles, Skills and Statements of Learning.

The MTAI would welcome further clarity on the relationship between the 8 principles, the 7 competencies and the 5 curriculum areas. These 7 competencies could be directly addressed by well-designed activities outside of the specific subject areas. How do teachers decide what to bring with them and let go from the ‘old curriculum’ that embraces the broad-based approach and honours the subject-specific strengths? For example, as suggested earlier, mindfulness training with children in schools reliably impacts indicators of positive psychological, social and physical

wellbeing, i.e. successfully fostering wellbeing¹⁴. There is also growing evidence that mindful teaching approaches can contribute to sustainability education at the individual and societal level.¹⁵ What structures will support teachers and principals to move towards flexibility and innovative approaches while still ensuring sufficient attention to subject-specific areas? In the face of not-knowing, anxieties naturally arise and we may stay with ‘the known’ rather than risk unforeseen negative consequences on the new ‘unknown’.

The inclusion of a sixth curricular area i.e. **Religious/Ethical/ Multi-Belief Education** as part of the school Patron’s programme is encouraging, as it leaves considerable scope for what such a programme might involve. This re-enforces the stated commitment to recognising among its 8 principles that of ‘Partnerships’ and ‘Inclusive Education and Diversity’. Both of these recognise that schools need to be seen in relationship to families and the wider community in which families are embedded. The statement in the Framework document also acknowledges the increasing diversity in Irish society and the importance of the value of inclusivity as a way of promoting harmony and social cohesion in the wider society. The MTAI believes that certain pro-social aspects of mindfulness training with regard to fostering positive dispositions and attitudes, could support the Framework document’s commitment to the principles mentioned above.

At any rate, mindfulness training has the potential to act as the glue that supports a re-developed spiral curriculum.

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.

¹⁴ Dunning, D.L., Griffith, K., Kuyken, W., Crane, C., Foulkes, L., Parker, J. & Dalgleish, T. (2019). The effects of mindfulness-based interventions on cognition and mental health in children and adolescents - a meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 60 (3), 244–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12980>

¹⁵ Wamsler et al (2018). Mindfulness in sustainability science, practice and teaching. *Sustainability Science*, 13, 143-162.

- 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.

The MTAI welcomes the commitment in the Framework document to ‘high quality teaching and learning’ and the related commitment to promoting ‘teachers’ professional judgement’. In our view, both of these are more likely to be an ongoing reality when there is a similar commitment to high quality teacher training, whether it is pre-service or in-service. In line with this view, we feel strongly that teachers who might be expected to teach mindfulness, do so most effectively when they can *embody* what they teach. It is also very helpful when teachers address any aspect of the curriculum by teaching *mindfully*. To teach mindfully, (as opposed to teaching mindfulness), requires that the teacher is in themselves, capable of being mindful. This embodied relational pedagogy, involves both an *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* sensitivity to what is happening in the moment. Foundational to this quality of awareness is a cultivated disposition to being curious about the elements of experience, both intrapersonal and interpersonal and an allied commitment to patience and kindness in holding that experience in awareness.

For this reason, we would argue that any initiative to include mindfulness, whether as a *process* informing teaching in general, or as something involving more specific *content*, should take seriously the need to provide appropriate training in mindfulness for teachers. Such a training would need to have a dual focus: firstly, the teachers’ understanding and practice of mindfulness as something they apply to their own lives and then secondly a more pedagogical input on the process of mindfulness teaching, and the creation of learning opportunities that address content. As a professional body, the MTAI has set out guidelines for training bodies that ensure quality of training for adults. Please click the link to view our [Training Standards Document](#)

The MTAI notes the Framework document emphasis on ‘the significance of quality relationships and their impact on learning’. This is a heartening insight and one that mindfulness training would

fully support, since its key aspect is that of relationality: how one relates to oneself and how one relates to others.

With regard to the role of **Assessment**, the Framework document envisages three broad possibilities: 'intuitive assessment', 'planned interactions' and 'assessment events'. These recognise that the role of assessment in capturing evidence of learning, needs to be broad-based and subtle enough to gauge less tangible outcomes such as greater self-awareness or improved emotional self-regulation in the learner. By their scope, they create avenues for assessment that can overcome the potential for it to have a detrimental effect on the learning itself or on something which is foundational to any learning outcome i.e. the relationships between learners and teachers.

Another point of emphasis in the Framework document is the recognition that teachers need to make meaningful connections with children's interests and experience. In doing so, they build rapport between themselves and learners. Once learners understand that they are fully seen and accepted, their willingness to learn increases, an important disposition that shouldn't be overlooked. Teachers who teach mindfully, respect the individuality and uniqueness of the learners before them and engage with their felt sense of experience and interests.

The recognition in the Framework document of the role and influence of parents and families in the successful roll out of any new curriculum is to be commended. Without parental and community buy-in, curriculum innovation is likely to stall and be ineffective.

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.

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- 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 Draft Framework document shows evidence of building on the successes of the 1999 curriculum, organised as it was into broad subject areas which were then conceptualised as strands and elements. **Strands and elements** remain as part of the six **components** of the new curriculum framework. The addition of the seven key competencies and their related attributes bring into greater focus what is really essential in terms of learning and how this learning relates to priorities identified in recent years by both international and national agencies including the OECD, the W.H.O., the *Oireachtas Report on Positive Mental Health in Schools 2017* and the HSE’s *Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025*.¹⁶

It is to be welcomed that the place of Wellbeing is strengthened in the new Framework document both in terms of increased timetable allocation but also by a greater appreciation of the importance of learners becoming resourceful and resilient in the face of life’s challenges, dispositions that impact on learning across all the curricular areas and subjects. Perhaps the attributes of Fostering Wellbeing could be more explicitly linked to the **Indicators of Wellbeing** as set out in the **Guidelines for Wellbeing in the Junior Cycle 2017** (p. 45) document. The acknowledgement of a potential spiritual aspect to wellbeing related to a sense of meaning and purpose will be of particular importance to schools that have an additional Patron’s programme.

¹⁶ https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/skills/Skills_for_2030.pdf
https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_education_and_skills/reports/2017/2017-09-12_report-on-positive-mental-health-in-schools_en.pdf
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/healthy-ireland/healthy-ireland-in-the-health-services/>
<https://www.who.int/activities/improving-the-mental-and-brain-health-of-children-and-adolescents>

One concern we would have is that there might be a risk of exchanging an overloaded 1999 curriculum, with another burden i.e. a new curriculum overloaded with choice. Proper guidance in the roll out of the new curriculum should try to address this possibility.

Strengths of the new proposed curriculum

- the curriculum is in line with recent research on children's learning and development
- has a learner-focused and teacher-centred vision acknowledging teachers and school leaders as 'curriculum makers'
- addresses national priorities around tackling climate change as well as a growing mental health crisis among the younger members of our population
- the relational nature of learning is emphasised
- flexibility and agency of teachers is supported
- the position of wellbeing is raised and is more clearly conceptualised
- moves towards a learning outcomes and process-oriented competency based curriculum
- displays a strong linkage between pre and post primary themes and skills

Questions to be addressed:

- Greater clarity on the relationship between the 7 competencies and the 5 areas is needed
- The possibility that the burden of demand is replaced by the burden of choice
- Has the educational transformation potential been maximised based on the evidence base of impact on growth and learning for future generations?
- Can capacity of a sufficient quality be built to ensure that teachers have the professional competence to teach aspects such as mindfulness within the curriculum in a way that is psychologically safe, ethical and clearly understood by teachers themselves and their learners?

The MTAI as the only professional body in Ireland representing qualified teachers of Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBIs), and affiliated to similar organisations within Europe and the UK, is deeply committed to the promotion of wellbeing and improved learning outcomes for children and young people in Irish educational settings. Through its dedicated Mindfulness in Education Special Interest Group, representing members who are involved in education at primary, secondary and tertiary level, the MTAI approves this submission in response to the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. The MTAI would welcome further dialogue with the NCCA on our proposals here and

would be happy to draw on the expertise and experience of members to offer advice and training support if requested.

Data Protection

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at dpo@ncca.ie.



Thank

you for your submission.

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