



NCCA

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



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

Name	Emer Savage
Position	Education Coordinator
Organisation	Global Action Plan Ireland
Date	11/02/2022
E-mail	

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

No

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

Global Action Plan (GAP) Ireland is an environmental education organisation with the aim of creating and supporting sustainable communities across Ireland.

GAP focuses on people and how they can take practical action in their everyday lives for a more sustainable life, community, and world. GAP Ireland is part of GAP International – a global network of organisations in 13 countries working together to achieve this mission.

Our mission is to support people to live more sustainable lifestyles by offering practical yet creative solutions that inspire people to act. Equally important, GAP programmes empower individuals to change their long-term consumption habits with sustainable living tools and programmes.

Since being established in 1995, Global Action Plan has adopted a community-based approach, enabling people to make simple changes in their lives to live more sustainably. GAP formally incorporated in 2001 and its core work over a decade was managing an environmental programme for the community of Ballymun in Dublin, as part of Europe's largest regeneration project. Today GAP is still actively involved in the Ballymun community, with ongoing gardening at the GLAS Community Garden and environmental education initiatives for schools and community groups.

GAP has also expanded its reach further, delivering diverse environmental programmes and workshops to communities, schools and businesses throughout Ireland. Collaborations with statutory and semi-state agencies, local authorities, local partnership companies, community groups and other charities have enabled this growth.

A key part of our work is with schools and vulnerable communities. Our programmes that are relevant to this application include:

Please email your submission to PCRsubmissions@ncca.ie

- **Park Stewardship** which aims to strengthen feelings of belonging and custodianship as well as nurturing a deeper understanding of and connection to nature in local parks and green spaces.
- **Nature Explorer**, which offers outdoor gardening and nature playgroups for toddlers, school children and their families.
- **Little Green Fingers**, which teaches schoolchildren the basics of gardening in harmony with nature in GLAS, our community garden in Ballymun.
- **Just Action**, which explores themes of development, global justice and climate action through developing resources and training teachers in global citizenship education skills.
- **Climate Action for You(th)!**, which supports primary and secondary schools to take action on issues directly affecting their schools and communities, from fast fashion to litter and waste, biodiversity to water.

We have seen first hand the very positive and enriching influence regular time in nature has, and feel strongly that all sections of society should have access to quality green space every day. In many of our urban, built up areas, this access is denied. By greening our school grounds and ensuring access to green spaces during the school day, we can take the necessary steps towards equalising these access issues.

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.

Section 1

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

Global Action Plan broadly welcomes the development of a new Primary Curriculum. We commend the shift in focus from the content objectives of the 1999 curriculum towards a focus on key competencies, which promote more holistic development across and beyond the curriculum. The recognition of the agency and professionalism of teachers as expert guides best placed to plan and deliver engaging programmes suited to their particular context is also most welcome.

Global Action Plan believes that in order to attain the key competencies outlined in the draft, and to support the development of a generation willing and capable of tackling the global challenges we now face due to climate and ecological emergencies, nature and environmental education as well as global citizenship education must be key elements of the curriculum. Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is a key part of our practice. We were, therefore, encouraged to see that ‘Being an Active Citizen’ is one of the key competencies outlined in the draft curriculum. Global Action Plan is a member of IDEA (Irish Development Education Association) and we concur with their call that “any Primary Curriculum Framework reflects the importance of exploring GCE during stages 1 to 4 of the primary curriculum”. In order to become active citizens in a challenging global context, GCE is ‘critically important for young children so that they can be given the opportunity to analyse and reflect upon their own prejudices and become well informed, proactive, open minded and caring global citizens’ (Ruane et al., 2010).

Nature & the Environment

We also feel strongly that access to quality outdoor nature education should be given far more emphasis in the new curriculum. Therefore, we call on the NCCA to intensify the role of outdoor learning environments in the curriculum, highlighting their importance in the final curriculum document. As it stands, outdoor learning environments are mentioned only once in the draft document, which is extremely disappointing. We strongly urge the inclusion of a specific recommendation to utilise outdoor as well as indoor learning environments as part of the core Principle of Learning Environments.

The World Health Organisation states that “in children and adolescents, higher amounts of sedentary behaviour are associated with the following poor health outcomes: increased adiposity; poorer cardiometabolic health, fitness, behavioural conduct/pro-social behaviour; and reduced sleep duration.” (WHO Guidelines on Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour , 2020). And yet children as young as 5 are sitting indoors for the majority of their time at school. Frequent sessions outdoors increases children’s ability to focus and enhances cognitive abilities (Wells, 2000). Natural environments are a free, stimulating resource that is neglected to the detriment of children who are sedentary for large periods of time.

A survey carried out by Plymouth University into benefits of the “Natural Connections Project” found that “Learning in Natural environments” (LINE) benefited both teachers and learners (Waite,

S et al, 2016). The following percentage of responding schools agreed that LINE had a positive impact on their: teaching practice (79%), health and well-being (72%), professional development (69%), job satisfaction (69%), and teaching performance (51%). LINE further had positive impacts for pupils in their enjoyment of lessons (95%), connection to nature (94%), social skills (93%), engagement with learning (92%), health and well-being (92%), behaviour (85%), and educational attainment (57%).

Embedding outdoor learning, in particular learning in natural environments, has the potential for similarly major impact in several of the key competencies outlined in the draft curriculum. In fact, all key competencies bar “Becoming a Digital Learner” can be nourished through nature-based learning outdoors. Studies show that time in nature boosts academic performance, mental health and well-being, and develops a meaningful connection to nature which can inspire children to care for and protect the natural world. “Children who have climbed trees, rolled down hills, splashed through streams, made dens, forts, and petal perfume tend to have a deep-seated, ‘embodied’ understanding of concepts like time, space, distance, and the properties of natural materials, which is very helpful if they eventually choose to become mathematicians, scientist and engineers” (Palmer, 2016).”

At present, too many school grounds are largely grey and concreted, with patches of grass and trees which are often “out of bounds” and underutilised. Currently, there are insufficient supports and incentives for teachers to take their practice outdoors into nature, bar the occasional nature walk. It is our position that the development of an updated curriculum provides the perfect opportunity to address this shortcoming and to develop a set of guidelines and supports around nature based learning. In order to ensure that outdoor environments are incorporated into the practical application of the new curriculum, schools will require guidance and support to develop approaches for learning in and from nature, as well as practical guidance on developing school grounds to better incorporate natural environments within their grounds. We welcome the recent webinar series hosted by NCCA with guest speakers Orla Kelly, DCU, and Joan Whelan, IFSA, aimed at encouraging teachers to take their practice outdoors. We feel that explicitly naming outdoor environments in the new curriculum, coupled with this kind of support, would encourage more schools to discover the benefits of learning in nature.

Wellbeing

The increased focus on wellbeing in the draft Primary Curriculum is very welcome and necessary. Children are suffering from far more anxiety disorders now than ever before and schools have an important role to play in supporting the social and emotional development of children in a holistic way. Indeed, humans and all living things are under added stress due to a series of planetary crises that continue to impact on our collective health and wellbeing. However, we call on the NCCA to more closely connect wellbeing to nature in the final curriculum document.

To those of us who regularly spend time in nature, the benefits are part of our lived experience. Just entering a wooded area can immediately calm and soothe the senses. Increasingly, research is being carried out that explores and reaffirms the positive impact of spending time in nature and its implications for health and wellbeing. In line with the physical and mental benefits of wellbeing

identifies in the draft curriculum document (p. 9), research shows that “living in greener urban areas is associated with lower probabilities of cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, asthma hospitalisation, mental distress, and ultimately mortality, among adults; and lower risks of obesity and myopia in children. Greater quantities of neighbourhood nature are also associated with better self-reported health, and subjective well-being in adults, and improved birth outcomes, and cognitive development, in children” (White et al., 2019).

David Sobel also draws our attention to the health benefits of being outdoors, particularly for children, when he cites the fact that “(s)tudents in the Outdoors in all Weather programs are suffering from 80 percent fewer infectious diseases (colds, ear infections, sore throats, whooping cough) than children in conventional indoor programs. (...) It makes sense, of course, since putting children in close proximity to each other in containers of poorly circulated air guarantees more effective transmission of viruses and bacteria” (Sobel, 2014). Further evidence suggests that “[e]xposure to soil microbes, perhaps through digging, foraging and gardening, frequent Forest School activities, activates serotonin pathways and lowers inflammation in the blood. It can reduce depression and anxiety-like behaviour, improve stress-coping mechanisms and reduce asthma (Logan et al. 2016).”

Unless the curriculum highlights the importance of spending regular sustained periods outside *in nature*, its potential to instil a sense of calm and wellbeing could be lost. Teachers may solely rely on leading wellbeing-themed lessons using the interactive whiteboard, sitting indoors talking about wellbeing, and colouring in wellbeing-themed sheets. An alternative is to actually develop and really feel a sense of wellbeing, as White et al (2019) argue, is naturally promoted by spending time outdoors in nature.

We believe that there is also an important social justice consideration here. By and large, underserved urban areas have less green spaces (EEA, 2022) and as a result children in these areas have less opportunity to access the wellbeing benefits of being outdoors. Given the benefits of being in nature highlighted above, this inequality of access has the potential to result in uneven educational outcomes for students living in different areas. A curriculum document that requires time spent outdoors in nature has the potential to address this inequality, instead developing resilient individuals, despite their socioeconomic backgrounds.

Environmental Education & the Outdoors

By developing a relationship with a local and accessible natural environment with trees, the groundwork is also being laid for a sense of environmental stewardship on a local and global level. Global Action Plan believes that environmental education and climate justice education should form an important part of the curriculum. This issue, which will have a major impact on the lives of children and young people, is explored in an age-appropriate manner throughout primary stages 1-4.

A major strength of the draft curriculum is the concerted effort to develop continuity from Aistear through to Junior Cycle. See Section 3 below.

Global Citizenship

GAP recognises that the primary curriculum, stages 1 to 4, is key in supporting children to learn about themselves as developing individuals and as members of their communities, building on their own experiences and on the work of Aistear for personal, social and emotional development. During these key stages, children have opportunities to show they can take some responsibility for themselves and their environment. They begin to learn about their own and other people's feelings and become aware of the views, needs and rights of other children and people. As members of a class, school and wider community, they learn social skills such as how to share, take turns, play, help others, and problem solve. They begin to take an active part in the life of their school and its wider community. We see these stages as being particularly formative in nurturing the competencies of global citizenship in children and through this submission are advocating that any Primary Curriculum Framework reflects the importance of exploring GCE during stages 1 to 4 of the primary curriculum.

Diversity and the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework:

We welcome and support the statements made in relation to diversity in the draft framework and the recognition of how important it is to have a curriculum that enables children to feel respected, valued and engaged in learning through appropriately tailored experiences and through positive interactions within the school community and how in turn, these experiences and interactions play a role in the development of a more inclusive society in Ireland.

We support the principles as set out in the UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2006) and which are also referenced in the NCCA audit for Traveller Culture and History (2019) in the curriculum. These principles should be taken into consideration for the primary curriculum framework.

The global dimension, interdependence and the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework:

It is important that the primary curriculum framework has a focus on the global dimension. We join IDEA in recommending that the use of the word 'global' and 'wider community' be further emphasised in the framework. It is felt that there is too much of an individual focus rather than a sense of community or a collective. For example, it is important that children at primary level are able to understand the links between the local and the global community and between individuals and communities. It is important that children have the opportunity to begin to understand interdependence and can look at the wider world and see how this might link to their own lives or on a local level and indeed start to think of solutions or actions that they could take.

For example, if we look at issues such as COVID-19, climate change, or the Black Lives Matter movement, it is important that children have some understanding of how these connect with their own lives, their schools, local communities and home. We support IDEA's recommendation that interdependence be included as one of the eight overarching principles, perhaps as part of the principle on partnership, which could be called 'partnership and interdependence'. This could

also be part of the principle on relationships.

Recommendations:

- Recognise and integrate the value and importance of regular lessons and experiences in natural environments;
- Develop toolkits, guidelines and CPD for teachers in order to support them in developing their practice to integrate the outdoors and nature into their pedagogical practice;
- Utilise a resource-bank online, such as scoilnet, to support teachers in planning and delivery of quality outdoor lessons;
- Provide clear guidance to teachers on how to implement each curriculum area;
- Approaches to embracing cultural diversity to be made a compulsory feature of both initial teacher education and continuous professional development;
- In relation to the Intercultural Education in the Primary School, Guidelines for schools, NCCA, (2005). Though the NCCA has sent a copy of the guidelines to all primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland, it was up to the teachers and their school administration to implement them. A lack of follow-up strategy may result in the loss of what is recognised as a very valuable piece of work. The target audience are teachers and steps should be taken by the relevant authorities to ensure that every teacher and school principal is trained and supported in using the guidelines;
- It is recommended that actors at the various levels of education have familiarity of the curriculum at all sectors from early childhood to post-primary and that there are clear transitions from one level to the next;
- Make reference to the need for issues such as race and gender to be integrated in an appropriate way into the curriculum where relevant. We wish to stress the importance of anti-racism education in primary schools;
- Connect primary schools/teachers to available support provided by civil society groups, for example, which are already available for schools in the area of GCE and Intercultural Education;
- The provision of specific training in relation to GCE, nature pedagogy, outdoor learning and climate change education should be examined at teacher training level ITE and in CPD for serving teachers and school personnel.

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.

We welcome the recognition of teachers' agency and professionalism and the focus on inclusion. We also welcome flexibility as this allows schools to focus on projects and priorities that are important to them. It also opens up the possibility of integrating more inquiry-based learning and creative project work that is more responsive to children's intrinsic learning goals, is linked across curriculum areas and develops competencies. We feel this presents an ideal opportunity to engage more in climate action projects, programmes that incorporate personal as well as social development, and outdoor nature programmes, such as forest school. The extent of flexibility, however, could be limited by the Minimum Curriculum Time model, which still places quite tight restrictions on timetabling.

Greater flexibility would also provide greater scope for schools to embed GCE in their school communities whilst also meeting the requirements of the formal curriculum and any learning outcomes that will be developed. For example, this will provide increasing opportunities for schools to explore the **Sustainable Development Goals**, and in implementing the recommendations as set out by the Department of Education's National Strategy in relation to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), particularly in relation to **Recommendations 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14 and 39**. SDG 4 and target 4.7 is critical to any curriculum development. Target 4.7 states 'By 2030, ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development'. This is measured by indicator 4.7.1 'Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality

and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment'. As such, education is both a goal in itself and a key enabler for ensuring the achievement of the other 16 SDGs.

For a curriculum to truly place democratic practices at the centre of the learning process, greater recognition and emphasis must be given to student voice within the classroom setting. More democratic classrooms will empower students by equally distributing the responsibilities of decision-making across the students and instructors in a class. The lived experience of influencing their social environment will also create valuable opportunities for communication and negotiating others' wellbeing. More importantly, having students as co-creators in their own learning has been shown to enhance educational outcomes. The current trend in Global Citizenship Education is a good example of how teachers have used their autonomy in the classroom to explore children's voice and rights to participating in decision making in schools. However, further support is needed to help teachers organise and structure active GCE.

It is critical to emphasise the importance of the **Intercultural Education Strategy** ("IES"/ "Strategy") in devising a curriculum for primary level to ensure that:

All students experience an education that *"respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership"* (Education Act, 1998).

All education providers are assisted with ensuring that inclusion and integration within an intercultural learning environment become the norm.

GAP recommends that the Primary Curriculum Framework provides a foundation in GCE to build the key skills and statements of learning (SOL) as set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle, and principals for JC such as wellbeing, creativity and innovation and engagement and participation. The Primary Curriculum Framework can provide a foundation for the following statements of learning at Junior Cycle, in relation to GCE:

- SOL 5. Has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision making
- SOL 6 Appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives
- SOL 7 Values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts
- SOL 8 Values local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change
- SOL 9 Understands the origins and impacts of social, economic and environmental aspects of the world around her/him
- SOL 10 Has the awareness, knowledge, skills, values and motivation to live sustainably
- SOL: bringing an idea from conceptualisation to realisation-check

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.

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.

We are very encouraged by the move to link preschool, primary and post-primary through the introduction of the key competencies framework.

The role of teachers within the Aistear framework to “facilitate”, empowering children to learn “by being involved in making choices and decisions, and by feeling in control” is very empowering and extending this emphasis on agency, personal challenge, and “learning through child-initiated activities”, where children are encouraged “to take the lead or to share the lead with adults” into the primary curriculum would be very beneficial.

Furthermore, the emphasis of Aistear on learning through play ought to be extended into the primary curriculum, ideally with a particular emphasis on nature play. Aistear rightly recognises the importance of play for learning. Outdoor nature education and environmental education should incorporate this play-based learning in order to develop children’s connection to nature. Play is a fantastic vehicle for learning and understanding and it opens up the natural world to children in a way that formal classroom learning *about* nature cannot. Being open to play, freedom, and exploration is key to creating a genuine connection between participants and the natural environment. Children make sense of new experiences and feelings through play, and they make friends through play. This does not stop abruptly as they enter 2nd class. Outdoor play in nature brings the natural world to life for participants and sparks great moments of creativity and connection. In our work, we regularly see children exploring nature through fun games, which develop a wealth of skills such as collaborating to solve problems, testing and challenging each other, helping and celebrating with one another. Outdoor education presents the opportunity to play out many complex ideas, feelings and relationships. The value of play also links extremely well with the core competency of Creativity, as “providing the freedom for children to play, explore and pursue their own interests leads to the intrinsic development of creativity. This approach enables judgments and decisions to be taken by the children or young people themselves, giving them back responsibility. This provides effective learning, where curiosity, creative thinking and critical thinking are combined and the children are deeply engaged and focused” (Cree & Robb, 2021).

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 welcome the work that has been done on developing key competencies, in particular in relation to **being an active citizen, being creative, fostering wellbeing, learning to be a learner, and communicating and using language.**

We reiterate our view that quality nature-based education that utilises natural environments to their full potential can provide valuable opportunities to develop these key competencies. Approaches such as Forest School foreground active learning, child-initiated and -led discovery and problem-solving, collaborating and communicating with peers, as well as fostering wellbeing. Nature and environmental education should be integrated across the curriculum. A cross-curricular approach is key. Outdoor learning environments can be utilised across the curriculum areas from language to numeracy, science, physical education and wellbeing.

Global Citizenship Education should also be explored across the curriculum. GCE provides many opportunities for children to meet the goals of the Primary Language Curriculum. It can empower children to develop their thinking, expression, reflection, critique and empathy, and it supports the development of self-efficacy, identity and full participation in society, all important parts of GCE.

We support references in the curriculum framework that recognise children as active citizens now and not just into the future. As is evidenced from research carried out by the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra and Trócaire ‘A child’s goal is not to become a successful adult.... A child’s goal is to be a successful child.... Children are not incompetent members of adults’ society; they are competent members of their own society, which has its own standards and its own culture...a children’s culture is loosely based on the majority adult culture within which it exists. But it adapts the majority

adult culture to its own purposes and it includes elements that are lacking in the adult culture ‘ (pp. 198-199 cited in Hirschfeld, 2002).

As outlined in the 2019 report, ‘Empathy, Social Values, and Civic Behaviour Among Early Adolescents in Ireland’, carried out by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre NUI Galway, one of the key findings in relation to Social and Emotional Learning in schools, was that in the Irish school system, primary school was seen as a more conducive space for values promotion than secondary school. We can definitely say that in comparison with the 1999 Curriculum space, the opportunity for a review at primary level provides a key opportunity to consider how we prepare our children for the ‘modern world’ and in particular the space we give to value-based education, in what is now a much more complex sphere of values and values contestation. It is welcome that this is recognised in the key competency, Being an active citizen, that ‘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’ (p.8).

Interdependence, the inter-connectedness of people and environments, local and global has never been so important. This includes the significant contexts of globalisation and sustainable development. Whilst the key competency *Being a digital learner*, is recognised as ‘enabling children to critically engage and contribute in a digitally connected and interdependent world’, no further reference is made to interdependence. We feel that more consideration needs to be given to this in the key competencies or the eight overarching principles of teaching and learning that schools need to consider in pursuing the curriculum vision.

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.

The restructuring of the curriculum to focus on key competencies and overarching principles is welcome. It remains unclear how the suggested shift from integrated learning experiences in early primary to more subject-based learning in Stages 3 & 4 will work in reality. A move to a more subject-based, time constrained structure in senior stages may diminish teachers' agency and result in the exacerbation of the curriculum overload which is currently experienced, particularly considering the addition of modern foreign languages and digital learning.

A more holistically cross-curricular approach would allow for more meaningful engagement with important themes through key competencies in a cross-curricular manner. For example, Becoming an Active Citizen could include project and inquiry based learning which incorporates language, science, Global citizenship, ethics, environmental care, climate action, maths, geography. On the contrary, if there are strict subject limits, climate change (for example) may be covered in a single lesson as part of geography, which limits the scope and potential for a more interconnected understanding.

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.

Please email your submission to PCRsubmissions@ncca.ie

- 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.

GAP welcomes the emphasis within the draft curriculum on an inclusive experience for all students, and the role of relationship-building between teachers and students to provide for the most positive educational experience.

The draft curriculum document stops short of advocating a single recommended pedagogical approach, giving teachers the freedom to adapt their approach depending on subject area and class group. That is as it should be. However, there remains a conflict between a responsive curriculum that encourages teachers to incorporate students’ experiences and lives, and the minimum allocation models. Greater democratising education through responding to learners’ interests and being open to child-led and initiated learning could be a very positive development in terms of the knock on impact on children’s own sense of agency and the key competency of “learning to be a learner.”

Recognition of teachers’ professional judgement in supporting progression in children’s learning is a positive move. Encouraging teachers to make meaningful connections with children’s interests and experiences is also key.

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.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

- 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.

- It remains unclear how the draft curriculum will address curriculum overload, particularly at stage 3 & 4 of primary level.
- Links to *Aistear* and the *Framework for Junior Cycle* are welcome and provide much greater clarity and continuity in terms of the educational experience from age 5-18.
- The increased emphasis on wellbeing shows further development towards nurturing and supporting the whole child in an inclusive and holistic way.
- Increased use of active methodologies for teaching and learning is a very positive move. In order to support critical thinking, respect for different perspectives, equality and interdependence, children must have the opportunities to *practice* these skills and values. Active methodologies and GCE allows students to engage actively in their learning. Active methods are essential where children engage in dialogue and work together to understand the world and their place in it. Engagement with the core concepts of GCE involves the head, the heart and hands and supports new actions in the lives of children, even at a small-scale level. GAP supports the principles of engagement and pedagogy in allowing students to explore real life issues in relation to Global Citizenship Education.
- Outdoor learning environments ought to be foregrounded as a core element of active teaching and learning methodologies. Taking the curriculum outside can improve attainment, increase engagement, and develop a wide range of skills including problem solving, communication and resilience. **Outdoor learning** provides endless opportunities for experiential, contextual and applied education, such as the outdoor classrooms/spaces that have been created as a result of COVID-19. Outdoor environmental education, in particular, presents a valuable context to explore sustainability and develop student skills in engaging with and solving environmental issues that they encounter in their locality.

Covid-19

Since the publication of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, Covid-19 has presented a big challenge for schools. Please give your views on the implications of schools' experience of the pandemic for the finalisation of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*.

The Covid-19 pandemic was massively challenging for all schools, but some sections of society were more isolated and received less support during school closures. Through wellbeing, ethics and a meaningful engagement with equality and human rights education as part of developing "active citizenship" competencies, children could be guided to identify and analyse

the root causes of inequalities on a local and global level. These global inequalities have also come into stark relief during the pandemic and the many emergencies that effect the least responsible for climate change in the global south. Meaningful engagement with these issues through strong GCE and climate justice education would better equip young people to deal with these issues in their own lives now and into the future.

Many schools also discovered the importance of nature and the outdoors during the pandemic. Many teachers and school bodies have developed innovative and interesting ways of greening, integrating and utilising their outdoor space during the past couple of years. This should be encouraged and spotlighted so that other schools can learn from them and follow.

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.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

References:

Cree, J. and Robb, M. (2021), *The Essential Guide to Forest School and Nature Pedagogy*, Routledge

EEA (2022), "Who benefits from nature in cities? Social inequalities in access to urban green and blue spaces across Europe",

https://www.eea.europa.eu/ds_resolveuid/803a2dd9755941439d2f70d5fa1d2e19

Logan, A and Prescott, S (2017) *The secret life of your microbiome; why nature and biodiversity are essential to health and happiness*. New Society Publishers.

Palmer, S (2016) *Upstart: The case for raising the school starting age and providing what the under-sevens really need*. Floris Books. Edinburgh.

Ruane Brian, Kavanagh Anne Marie, (April 2010) "Young Children's Engagement with Issues of Global Justice A report by the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education," St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and Trócaire,.

Sobel. David (2014), *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities Closing the Achievement Gap: The SEER Report*, The NAMTA Journal, Vol. 39, No. 1, Winter 2014

Waite, S., Passy, R., Gilchrist, M., Hunt, A. & Blackwell, I. (2016) *Natural Connections Demonstration Project, 2012-2016: Final Report*. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number215

Wells NM (2000) *At Home with Nature: Effects of 'Greenness on Children's Cognitive Functioning*. Sage Journals.

White et al, (2019) "Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing" *Scientific Reports* (2019) 9:7730 <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3>