

# Updating *Aistear*

## Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals

This template is intended to help you (and your colleagues) develop a written submission in relation to Updating *Aistear*. Please e-mail your completed submission to [aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto:aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie)

### **Individual submission details**

|               |                             |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
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### **Organisation submission details**

|                     |      |
|---------------------|------|
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**Do you consent to this submission being posted online including your name and organisation\*?**

Yes

No

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

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured according to the Principles, Themes and Guidelines for Good Practice. Each section is briefly summarised as a support for working on the submission.

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# Section 1

**Please outline your overall comments and observations on updating *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework***

## **Overall Feedback**

We welcome this opportunity to reinvigorate Aistear across educational settings. We believe that this is an excellent opportunity to clarify the relationship between Aistear, the Primary Language Curriculum and the new Primary Curriculum Framework.

Aistear is a comprehensive framework but can be overwhelming for practitioners. It is recommended that Aistear be presented as playful pedagogy to emphasise the complementary nature of this framework with the Primary School Curriculum and Primary Language Curriculum. Playful pedagogy is heavily emphasised in developing the PLC outcomes as well as outcomes outlined in curricula that are yet to be refined.

There seems to be confusion regarding 'Síolta' and its relationship with Aistear and the Primary School setting. Many primary school teachers are not aware of 'Síolta'. It is recommended that there be a document showing how Aistear, Síolta and the Primary School Curriculum can be used together to support the development of early childhood practice across the variety of settings in Ireland.

It is recognised that Aistear is an effective framework to enhance playful pedagogy across all educational and child-care settings. As outlined in Research Report No. 19 (2016) *“Walsh et al. (2010) argue the need for a more integrated early years pedagogy, crossing the preschool setting and primary sector, which would honour the interests and autonomy of the children in these settings.”* To support the continuity and transition across sectors as well the continuity within specific sectors, we have outlined general recommendations below that may increase and enhance the use of Aistear as a resource to enhance teaching and learning across all settings.

### Terminology

It is recommended that terminology across the Aistear framework and other DE published documents be consistent as much as possible to ensure clarity and understanding for teachers and school leaders. Some examples might include:

- ‘Learning Experiences’ - The term ‘learning experiences’ is inconsistent with the understanding of learning experiences in the Primary Language Curriculum. Would *Examples of Children's Learning* be more appropriate to be aligned with the Primary Language Curriculum and future curriculum specifications?
- As outlined in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework 2020, ‘each curriculum area will be divided into *strands* and across the strands, the *elements* will describe the essential learning’ (p.12). Would it be a consideration to align such terminology used across the new Primary Curriculum Framework with the updated Aistear framework for consistency and clarity across the sectors? Similarly with *stages* and *learning outcomes*. Would the use of *key competencies* in naming the themes be useful to align Aistear with the new Primary Curriculum Framework?
- Teachers appear to be confused with terminology on the ground - teachers often refer to their ‘topic’ as their ‘theme’ and this causes confusion then with the four Aistear ‘themes’. Also the use of the word ‘station’ is often used for ‘play area’ and this can cause confusion with literacy stations etc..Again clarification on terminology would be welcomed.

### Inclusion

- It is recommended that the use of **all** children is used throughout the document as opposed to ‘including those with special educational needs’ to echo more recent DE publications.
- More guidance in relation to children who find it challenging to engage in particular types of play would be welcomed. Similar to language, play is developmental in nature - more support material in this regard would be welcomed to ensure a

shared understanding amongst teachers and therefore a better experience for **all** pupils. Would there be an opportunity for making links to the *Additional Support Pathways* support material in this regard?

- Aistear considers this framework to be used to support children from birth to 6 years. Could this be extended? Aistear is an approach that could be made open to all teachers across all settings/stages. Support would be needed to allow all teachers to engage with the Aistear Framework in their own unique school context.

### Making Links

- Making meaningful links between Aistear's learning goals and the primary school curriculum (including the primary language curriculum) would be welcomed.  
For example under the theme 'Exploring and Thinking' - aim 2 'children will develop strategies for observing, questioning....negotiating'. These are all significant links with the 'Exploring and Using' element of the Primary Language Curriculum. By making these links, it would demonstrate that Aistear is not a separate/additional entity but rather complementary to the whole primary school curriculum.
- Would there be an opportunity to align the principles of the new Curriculum Framework with the principles of Aistear? Similarly, the principles of Aistear underpin the Primary Language Curriculum- could there be explicit links showing this?
- A link to *Aistear* in the Primary section of [curriculumonline.ie](http://curriculumonline.ie) would be beneficial for teachers to demonstrate the overlap and continuity as well as ease of access.
- Direct links with future curricula and positive dispositions as outlined in Aistear would benefit teacher's understanding of these and how to cultivate them appropriately.
- It is suggested that a link symbol (similar to the symbol used to denote Transfer of Skills in the Primary Language Curriculum) might aid teachers to identify the links between Aistear and the PLC.

- Is there a way that Aistear and its themes could be blended into Stage One in the PLC? Are there specific features of Aistear that can be developed in Primary School that may not be developed in the ECCE setting?

#### Training / CPD

- There seems to be a lack of understanding amongst teachers with regard to Aistear. For example, Aistear can often be timetabled and seen as the '*Aistear hour*' as opposed to Aistear being a framework that is part of the whole school day. Some schools also appear to have an 'Aistear' room where the pupils go to for their 'Aistear' hour. Our experience would suggest that many teachers categorise Aistear as the hour of open-ended, child-led play recommended by the Aistear framework and not something that permeates the whole infant day.

More guidance in relation to the most appropriate way to approach the hour of open-ended, child-led play would be welcomed. For example, is it recommended that children engage in their hour of open-ended play in the same learning environment surrounded by the resources / play areas in which they will be engaging i.e their classroom ?

- Teachers who have been teaching in the senior end of the school do not seem to have any awareness or understanding of Aistear. Connection with the pedagogy which underpins Aistear and the primary school curriculum needs to be made explicit.
- It is recommended that there is specific training (inservice) for all teachers so that there is a shared understanding of the Aistear framework and playful experiences and how it applies across the whole school. This would help towards the continuity and progression in relation to children's learning and learning experiences. Due to the regular rotation of teachers to different classes in primary schools, this would also be beneficial in this regard.
- It is acknowledged that Aistear is explored in the Colleges of Education and this is commended.

- More recruitment for Aistear Tutors through local education centres, where practical hands-on training could occur is recommended.
- Opportunities for support service advisors to receive the same training as is provided to Aistear tutors would be welcomed as this is a topic which is raised frequently in our work with schools.

### Scoileanna T1

Chabhródh treoir le scoileanna Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoileanna cinneadh a dhéanamh maidir le eagrú an spraoi i suíomhanna tumoideachais. Bíonn éiginnteacht ann ó thaobh na dea-chleachtais a bhaineann le suíomhanna ina bhfuil éagsúlacht cumais teanga ag na páistí, ach go háirithe sa chás is gur mionteanga atá i gceist leis an sprioctheanga.

### Support Materials

The following support materials/ guidance would be welcomed to support the effective implementation of Aistear in Primary school.

- Guidance in relation to different school settings; Gaelscoileanna, Scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht, special schools, mainstream schools with special classes, large/small schools and multi-grade settings.
- Guidance in relation to 'Play for all'. Specifically for children who find it challenging to engage in particular types of play would be welcomed.
- Guidance in relation to the integration of the Aistear framework across all subject areas.
- Practical examples (including videos with voice overs, visible prompts of key learning and reflective questions for teachers) of Aistear in action in a primary school setting, to include guidance for the teacher in relation to planning, supporting and reviewing play. In addition, guidance on when to intervene and when to step back from play.
- Guidance in relation to the best use of digital technologies before, during and after play e.g. on school digital platforms like SeeSaw.

- More expert input would be welcomed. While PDF's, videos and examples are very useful, they can sometimes be just replicated without consideration of the children or the context.
- Guidance in setting up local/virtual Communities of Practice for Aistear where teachers have the opportunities to share effective practice.
- Guidance in relation in choosing and using appropriate, cost-effective resources for Aistear.
- Guidance in relation to the role of the adult before, during and after play. For example, target language used in teacher-child interactions, recasting correct language, effective question, problem solving, etc. Teacher's awareness of what learning outcome they are developing in their interactions with children during play and this would link to assessment.

Having reviewed the Support Materials for Aistear on <https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/on> we would recommend the following:

- A more visible and prominent box/link for 'Early Childhood' on the PLC landing page is recommended, as it is currently at the bottom of the page where teachers may not see it. Additionally, this link currently takes you directly into 'Support Materials for Primary Schools' while bypassing the landing page of 'Early Childhood'. It is recommended that the link takes the user to the homepage of 'Early Childhood' <https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/>
- It is recommended to indicate in some way to the user that they need to click on each of the four coloured boxes to access the materials.
- It would be very useful to have guidance in relation to the steps to take in setting up Aistear in your school for the first time. This may encourage more schools to implement Aistear in their context.
- More information around 'Síolta' and how it relates to Aistear in the Primary School setting would be welcomed.

- The box/link for the 'Aistear Síolta Practise Guide' needs to be more prominent on the support materials for Primary School page. <https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/Support-Materials-for-Primary-School/>
- Updating of Aistear Síolta Tip Sheets is recommended.
- It is recommended that the resources from the Aistear Síolta Practise Guide be merged into curriculumonline.ie for ease of access for users.
- Link required on Play Support materials in the PLC with the Aistear homepage <https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/Support-Materials-for-Primary-School/>.
- It is recommended there would be a balance between videos of children playing and videos of expert input on play.

Please see below our priorities in relation to the addition of support materials:

**If supports for engagement with Aistear's Principles and Themes were to be added to , please indicate which supports would be most useful by ranking 1-5 in order of importance, where 1 is the most important:**

1. Examples of children learning e.g. photos and videos
2. Expert input on topics related to children's learning and development e.g. interviews and podcasts
3. Tip-sheets/Information booklets e.g. short documents discussing topics like Risky play, infant mental health, etc.
4. Sample documentation e.g. learning journals explaining what and how children are learning
5. PDF guidelines similar to those provided at present e.g. detailed information that can be downloaded



## Section 2

### **Principles of Aistear**

Aistear is based on 12 Principles of early learning and development. Each principle is presented using a short statement. This is followed by an explanation of the Principle from the child's perspective. This explanation highlights the adult's role in supporting children's early learning and development. The Principles can be accessed [here](#).

**Please give your feedback in relation to updating the Principles of Aistear. Please indicate what is working well with the principles and what might need to be enhanced or updated.**

#### **Feedback on Principles:**

In terms of layout and presentation it was felt that it was lovely that the voice of the child was being captured and presented, it was felt that this was very effective and emotive.

It was suggested that ease of access to the framework could be supported if the language was aligned with the language we use (PLC)- the groups reflect interests, needs and abilities, and could clarify the link between the framework and the PLC.

Could clarity be provided on what is meant by equity?

It was felt that the Principles could be aligned to the Principles in the NCCA Draft Framework in so far as possible to ensure clarity in continuity and synergy. Some of the existing principles could be extended to include some of the above rather than adding to the number of principles. A general comment was that the way the three groups of principles are presented is hard to access. The principles individually could be relevant up to Senior Cycle and beyond!

#### **1. The first group concerns children and their lives in early childhood:**

- **The child's uniqueness**

Cultural and linguistic diversity could be addressed here. The child's language is the first thing you must consider as a teacher to enable them to access learning at their appropriate level.

- **Equality and diversity and Children as citizens.**

Could these be merged together as one principle such as 'Inclusion'? All children have a right to be included under the International Rights of the Child. In addition to this, we all have a responsibility to include others in a meaningful way. Could the term '**all children**' be included here?

Equity is mentioned later in the themes as a possible additional theme to wellbeing. Could the messaging associated with Equity be merged with Inclusion here?

**2. The second group concerns children's connections with others:**

- **Relationships could possibly be merged with Parents, family and community**

It was felt that it should be stated that parents are the child's primary educators. Should caregivers be referenced here in addition to parents, reflecting the diversity of familial structures in society?

was suggested to mention other members of the community who are relevant to the child e.g. services- OT/SLT etc

- **The adult's role**

Adults are co-contributors to learning- knowing when to be there, and when to step back. It was suggested that the child being encouraged to lead sometimes could be addressed. Another role of the teacher is to provide opportunities for quality child-child interactions also.

**The third group concerns how children learn and develop:**

It was felt that there were very strong links with PLC in this group of principles. For e.g. active learning, multi sensory, play - hands on, relevant and meaningful, learn at my own rate, multiple intelligences, multiple styles of learning.

- **Play and hands-on experiences-** the Support Material from the PLC toolkit. Another opportunity to highlight the links between Aistear and the PLC.
- Could the four principles, Holistic learning and development, Active learning, Play and hands-on experiences and Relevant and meaningful experiences be grouped together under the name 'Playful and engaging learning experiences'? This would be reflective of the Preparation for Teaching and Learning guidance document and the PLC.

**Relevant and meaningful experiences make learning more enjoyable and positive for children.**

A suggested elaboration of this explanation could be: **On-going assessment of what children do, say and make, and reflection on these experiences helps practitioners to plan more developmentally appropriate and meaningful learning experiences for children.**

- **Communication and language (It was suggested that the group of principles could have led with this as a foundation for the additional principles?)**

Should there be a mention of continuity and progression here? It was suggested that the PLC does this quite well and this link between the framework and the curriculum should be made clear.

- **The learning environment** (and learning culture)

It was felt that this may be the overarching principle in this section and may be better placed at the top of the list.

It was also felt that the idea of inviting children into the decision making process in the learning environment was important.

**If the Principles of Aistear were to be added to, please prioritise the following additions, from 1 - 7 in order of importance, where 1 is the most important:**

1. Pedagogy
2. Inclusion (a suggestion from the PLC team)
3. Planning and assessment
4. Outdoor Learning **&** Equity (equal weighting)
5. Professional practice
6. Transitions, continuity and progression

## Section 3

### Themes of *Aistear*

*Aistear*: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework presents children’s learning and development using four Themes. These are:

1. Well-being
2. Identity and Belonging
3. Communicating
4. Exploring and Thinking.

The themes describe what children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding. Each theme begins with a short overview of its importance for children as young learners. The theme is then presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into six learning goals. *Aistear*’s Themes can be accessed [here](#)

**Please give your overall feedback in relation to the themes of *Aistear*. Please indicate what is working well with the themes and what might need to be enhanced or updated.**

Could the themes of *Aistear* and elements of the PLC be aligned in some way? Could the learning goals of *Aistear* be merged within Stage One of the PLC where applicable? Teachers need clarity to be confident in their agency. If the links and integration were highlighted and the language aligned, this would provide guidance for teachers. (See earlier point on suggestion for symbol to denote alignment). Could consistent colour coding also be considered, from the framework through to the curriculum? Careful consideration of presentation of the *Aistear* Framework could help here.

The sections are broken up into Babies, Toddlers, Young Children- could this be left more open to be more inclusive? E.g. you may have a ‘young child’ or an older child that accesses play at an earlier developmental stage. Could this be presented as a continuum in the developmental nature of play, taking all children into account?

Is there an opportunity to link to the ‘protective factors’ outlined in the Wellbeing Framework [p.12] which echo some of the learning goals across these themes?

## **Well-being**

- Aim 1- Children will be strong psychologically and socially
- Aim 2- Children will be as healthy and fit as they can be.
- Aim 3- Children will be creative and spiritual.
- Aim 4- Children will have positive outlooks on learning and on life. \*

\*It was suggested that the link to positive dispositions in the PLC be clarified here. It may help if the aims were broken down as they are quite broad and teachers may need support in how they may be nurtured in a practical way in the classroom. Fostering these dispositions is vital in the child's early years.

**If the Theme of 'Well-being' was to be added to, please prioritise the following additions by ranking from 1-6 in order of importance, where 1 is the most important:**

1. Infant and child mental health e.g. children need to be supported to form close relationships, recognise and express emotions; and explore and learn about the world around them.
2. Relationship with the learning environment e.g. children's experience of the people, places and things around them that have an impact on their well-being **&**  
Including children's voices e.g. children's opinion on what they want to do and learn is important (equal weighting)
3. Outdoor learning e.g. children learn and develop outdoors as well as indoors
4. Risky play e.g. play, within a safe and well-supervised space, that is exciting and challenging to children is important **&**  
Transitions, continuity and progression e.g. recognising the importance of all the transitions in a child's life (equal weighting)

### **Notes on suggested additions:**

In terms of the suggested additions to the theme of Wellbeing, does 'The relationship with the learning environment' encompass the others? It reads as a heading, including relationships with people and environment, fostering a positive and supportive learning culture.

Mental health was described as a priority area, supported through face to face close relationships with trusted adults and peers.

Children's voices within this theme may need to be expanded upon for e.g. hearing children's opinions back, allowing for the space for this. Their voice is more than opinions, expression of need, accomplishments, likes and dislikes etc.

### **Identity and Belonging**

The importance of giving children a voice to relay interests was noted - and the time to play according to these interests.

Identity and belonging is recognised as relevant to the interests, needs and abilities of all children. Specialist input would need to be given to teachers here in relation to language around gender identity as well as providing non-specific gender play resources.

- Aim 1- Children will have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories. Could this be amended to: language is central to self identity, should this be made more explicit? Could the message of the home languages be made here and made a little clearer? The 'how' can this be done needs to be explored - how does this look within the classroom, small bites? 'When you bring in the home language, the lights come on'. Look at the languages as a lens of opportunity rather than a deficit.
- Aim 2- Children will have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.
- Aim 3- Children will be able to express their rights and show an understanding and regard for the identity, rights and views of others. A link was noted here with Critical thinking within the PLC, conflict resolution at an early age.
- Aim 4- Children will see themselves as capable learners. This is a really rich potential connection with motivation and choice outcome. This is rooted in the child and links with home community and culture. Could this be extended to act as an overarching aim and could capable and reflective learners be included here?

**If the Theme of Identity and Belonging was to be added to, please prioritise the following additions by ranking from 1-6 in order of importance, where 1 is the most important:**

1. Cultural awareness/Inclusive practice e.g. an awareness, celebration and understanding of all children's cultures and abilities.
2. Language diversity e.g. different languages are acknowledged and celebrated.
3. Social justice e.g. children learn about equity, fairness and decision-making through play.
4. Partnerships with parents e.g. parents and practitioners share information to promote full participation of all children
5. Children's rights e.g. children have rights, such as the right to play and the right to be educated, that must be respected.
6. Linking with the community e.g. children learn from interacting with the community around them.

**Notes on suggested additions:**

It was suggested that these areas be prioritised: Cultural awareness/inclusive practice which overlap with voice and wellbeing from the Primary Curriculum.

Advisors felt that there was very strong, valid and relevant material here.

**Communicating**

Language could quite readily be aligned to include language of PLC as PLC is all about communication: verbal and non-verbal. It was felt that there could be misunderstanding between this theme and the element of communication in the PLC.

Some questions that arose on this theme included ; Are Listener/speaker skills mentioned? What about second/other/home languages? Could this be called an element rather than a theme?

- Aim 1- Children will use non-verbal communication skills- It was thought that this is icely broken down, can really support our continua
- Aim 2- Children will use language.

- Aim 3- Children will broaden their understanding of the world by making sense of experiences through language.
- Aim 4- Children will express themselves creatively and imaginatively.

**If the Theme of 'Communicating' was to be added to, please prioritise the following additions by ranking from 1-6 in order of importance, where 1 is the most important:**

1. Including children's voices e.g. children's opinions on what they want to do and learn is important and should be reflected in their learning environment **&** Language diversity e.g. different languages are acknowledged and celebrated (equal weighting).
2. Promotion of Irish in English medium settings e.g. learning simple Irish words and phrases through play.
3. Creativity e.g. children using their imagination and thinking about how to solve problems.
4. Emergent language and literacy e.g. talking, playing, painting and sharing storybooks are important for emergent literacy.
5. Digital learning e.g. using technology to support children's learning and development.

**Notes on suggested additions:**

**Prioritising:**

It was discussed that the individual school context may steer us to prioritise one area over another? All of the above have value and will depend on current practice.

**Exploring and Thinking**

It was felt that there are strong connections between these themes and SPHE and other cross curricular areas. We wondered if these links were being made, could they be made more explicit? (Perhaps in a similar way to the 'Making the Links' doc that accompanied SPHE)

- Aim 1- Children will learn about and make sense of the world around them.



- Aim 2- Children will develop and use skills and strategies for observing, questioning, investigating, understanding, negotiating, and problem-solving, and come to see themselves as explorers and thinkers. It was suggested that there are links with the Element of Exploring and using in the PLC in the overview - but links are not as clear in the learning goals.
- Aim 3- Children will explore ways to represent ideas, feelings, thoughts, objects, and actions through symbols. This is a very specific link to strands of the PLC .
- Aim 4- Children will have positive attitudes towards learning and develop dispositions like curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resourcefulness, and risk-taking. As mentioned earlier, there is potential for a link that needs to be made between the PLC and the Síolta document regarding dispositions (possibly a support material).

**If the Theme of 'Exploring and Thinking' was to be added to, please prioritise the following additions by ranking from 1-6 in order of importance, where 1 is the most important:**

1. Critical thinking e.g. helping children to solve meaningful problems.
2. Child agency e.g. children learn best when they make choices about, and are interested in, what they are doing.
3. Nature and the environment (Sustainability) e.g. establishing good routines around composting, recycling and waste is important.
4. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) e.g. playing with blocks, sand and water.
5. Risk-taking e.g. encouraging children to try new experiences.
6. Emergent numeracy e.g. learning experiences involving measuring, patterns or distance are important for emergent numeracy.

**Notes on suggested additions:**

The benefits to the learner of 'making mistakes' and how to react to this.

# Section 4

## Guidelines for Good Practice

*Aistear* has four sets of guidelines, focusing on different aspects of practice:

1. Building partnerships between parents and practitioners
2. Learning and developing through interactions
3. Learning and developing through play
4. Supporting learning and development through assessment

These describe how the adult can support children's learning and development across *Aistear's* principles and themes. *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice can be accessed [here](#)

**Please give your overall feedback in relation to updating *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice. Please indicate what is working well with the guidelines and what might need to be enhanced or updated.**

### **1. Building Partnerships Between Parents and Practitioners**

#### Parents

- It is recommended that the use of the term 'parents' be changed to reflect diverse family contexts in Ireland e.g guardians/caregivers.
- Guidelines in relation to GDPR and sharing of information would be welcomed.
- It is recommended that 'language' be included when gathering information about families.
- It is recommended that links with home language schools is encouraged in the document e.g many children attend Arabic schools, Polish schools etc... outside of school hours.
- It is recommended that parents use and develop their heritage language as much as possible in the home setting to enhance the children's learning of their second and subsequent languages. In addition, maintaining and celebrating cultural traditions at home and in school should be encouraged.
- Incorporating use of digital technologies in relation to links between home and school to reflect current times would be welcomed e.g use of digital platforms. In

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addition, use of the term 'screen time' instead of 'watching television' is recommended.

- Guidance in relation to internet safety at home and at school would be welcomed.
- Guidance for parents on how to interact and play with their children at home would be welcomed.
- Encourage parents to recite nursery rhymes with their children on a regular basis to help develop their phonological awareness.
- Encourage parents to be 'present' for their child e.g parents on their phones/distracted/rushing. Adult-child interactions are vital in terms of language, social and emotional development.

#### Practitioners

- More training/CPD for practitioners in relation to the links between the Primary School Curriculum and Aistear would be welcomed.
- In sharing resources with parents it is recommended that this is updated in line with current resources e.g Podcasts/ TedTalks/ Webinars.
- There has been a positive impact in parents contributing to the setting by sharing their experience and expertise. Updating guidance in relation to visitors to the classroom/setting e.g Garda vetting, Child Protection etc...would be welcomed.
- Guidance in relation to communicating with parents whose home language is different would be welcomed.
- It is recommended that practitioners share classroom management practices with parents to ensure transparency and consistency between home and school.
- To reflect the diverse nature of families in Ireland, it is not recommended to specify involvement of a particular family member (e.g 'dads', p. 15).
- It is recommended that practitioners encourage communication between home and school and let parents know how this communication can be facilitated.
- It is recommended that settings reflect the cultures and languages of all families e.g books that reflect the different cultures, posters/signposts in different languages etc...

- More recognition of the impact parents can have on the education setting would be welcomed.
- There are some excellent practices at local level in terms of links between preschools and primary schools. However, it is recommended that this is a more standardised and mandated approach across the country to enhance the transition for all pupils.
- Alignment with the new SEN Guidelines 'Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools' is recommended.

## **2. Learning and Developing Through Interactions**

- A bigger focus on child-child interactions and how the adult can effectively facilitate child-child interactions would be welcomed. This is particularly important for language development at home, in early childhood settings and in primary school. Meaningful interactions and conversations are at the heart of how children develop language. An explicit link to the Primary Language Curriculum in this regard would be welcomed.
- Inclusion of the children's home language when acknowledging children's abilities, interests, experiences, cultures, backgrounds etc.. (e.g on p. 27 and 39) would be welcomed.
- The *Thinking about my Practice* reflections are very useful and encourage practitioners to consider their current practice. Perhaps a more eye-catching graphic would be beneficial for these to stand out a bit more.
- In 'accepting and valuing children, their families and communities', (p. 29) it is recommended that more acknowledgement of culture and language be included here.
- Sample Method 'Assisting Children's Thinking' provides a great opportunity to develop critical thinking skills - more sample questions / exemplars of this would be beneficial. Linking this with the Primary Language Curriculum would also be beneficial e.g Critical Thinking and Booktalk.

- The Learning Experience samples are very worthwhile and give a sense of the unplanned learning opportunities and how the practitioner can change direction based on the interest and motivation of the children. This is also reflected in the Primary Language Curriculum and more recently in the Guidance for Preparation for Teaching and Learning where preparation is seen as an evolving process depending on how children direct the learning. Drawing links here may be beneficial for teachers.
- These learning experiences would be enhanced further with videos similar to the updated *Examples of Children's Language Learning* in the Primary Language Toolkit which might demonstrate how teachers make decisions about the types of activities, experiences and pedagogies they use etc..and these learning experiences in action in the setting.
- In Sample Method 'Modelling', more emphasis on the 'thinking aloud' strategy by the practitioner would be welcomed. This is particularly useful in developing positive dispositions as well as developing other strategies such as those used in comprehension.
- The use of **all** children is recommended throughout e.g The adult 'takes account of **all** ...children's abilities, backgrounds, interest...'
- In 'Structuring the Learning Environment', more emphasis on the 'cultural' context as well as the physical context would be welcomed. For example, is there a culture of critical thinking, high expectations, inquiry, love of reading etc... being cultivated? The use of 'home like' in the learning environment (p.42) is questioned due to the diverse home lives children may be coming from.
- Emphasis on the dialogic classroom would be welcomed in relation to setting up the environment - while there *is* currently emphasis on social play in relation to this, language is a social phenomenon. Explicit links with language development would be beneficial.
- More on children's sense of agency is recommended and how adults can support this agency. In addition, there has been increased emphasis on teacher agency in

recent times and it is recommended that there might be a section on both child and teacher agency included in the updated document.

- Highlighting different types of play e.g. solitary, spectator etc could be placed at the start of the section on supporting children who find it difficult to play. This may serve as a preamble to teachers and parents that it is a natural progression of play if children do not wish to play collaboratively. They may develop and change their ways of play over time.

### **3. Learning and developing through play**

- The tables and information presented from p. 53 - 54 are very useful and informative. It is recommended that the information in bullet points at the top of p. 55 be presented as a visual within the Introduction section which would make it more powerful and prominent.
- Outdoor play is encouraged and welcomed. However, guidance in relation to the optimum use of the outdoors when space is confined would be welcomed.
- More guidance is needed in relation to *how* the adult supports play e.g being supportive without interfering in the play - when to step in and when to step out etc..Vignettes may help bring this alive for practitioners. In addition, the importance of active participation of the adult during play needs to be emphasised.
- In relation to table 9, p. 56, it is recommended that the inclusion of the child's voice may enhance this further, similar to the approach used in the 'Principles' section. In general, it would be nice to see this table more visually appealing.
- It is recommended that adults are referred to as 'facilitators' of play rather than 'providers'. In addition, the sentence regarding 'the adult understands the importance of play for all children' needs more guidance.
- 'The adult takes time to observe, consult, plan and participate in play' (p. 56) - This is a very important point and perhaps a strong graphic may support teachers further.
- Guidance in relation to the best use of all adults in a context to effectively support the play of all children would be welcomed.

- ‘Organising’ and ‘Resourcing’ sections on p. 57 are working well in schools. A link to ‘invisible’ and ‘visible’ preparation as outlined in the new Guidance for Preparation for Teaching and Learning would be welcomed.
- An emphasis on flexibility and responsiveness to the children in preparing for play could support teachers to respond to the ‘unexpected and emerging learning opportunities that arise’ (Guidance document mentioned above).
- An emphasis on communication between home and school in relation to the topic being explored and how the adults in the home setting can support this would be welcomed e.g bringing a saucepan in from their own kitchen for the home corner / socio dramatic area, items for the shop, items for different professions etc...
- Given the recognition that children develop their play at different stages, would a continuum of development be useful? In line with the Guidance for Preparation for Teaching and Learning which states ‘Avoid assuming that children have developed certain aspects of Learning Outcomes because they have reached a certain age and/or stage of development’. Does this also hold true for the development of play? Could the table on p. 58 reflect this? Similarly, the outline of ages 0 - 6 at the bottom of p. 58 may need to be addressed in this regard.
- In relation to helping children who find it difficult to play, it is recommended that more support and guidance for practitioners be provided. Links with supports that are already there should be made explicit e.g Additional Pathways or support material on play (PLC). Could this be also linked to the developmental stages of play and how the adult can recognise and support at these different stages? Additionally, the connection between play and UDL might be useful in this regard.

#### **4. Supporting Learning and Development Through Assessment**

- There is good consistency of message in this section in relation to the primary school curriculum, including the primary language curriculum.
- It is recommended that the section on the ‘five assessment methods’ be placed at the beginning of the Guidelines for assessment as this emphasises the practical side

of assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning as opposed to it being focused on documentation.

- It is recommended that information regarding writing reports be specific to each context (i.e. preschool and primary school) as approaches to report writing are different in each context.
- Reference to Mo Scéal can be included here.
- Reference to digital platforms as a means of assessment as well as informing parents of children's progress would be welcomed.
- More information and guidance in relation to the use of Aistear in Special Classes (to include Special Pre Schools) would be welcomed.
- It is recommended that the use of **all** children is used throughout the document as opposed to 'including those with special educational needs' to echo more recent DE publications. In addition, use of 'stammer' would need to be revisited (p. 83).
- It is recommended that the 'five assessment methods' is better aligned with the continuum of assessment (2007) to ensure continuity of practices across sectors and to alleviate confusion for primary teachers.
- The sample questions in Self-assessment are helpful. It is recommended that questions around the enjoyable nature of the activity be included e.g *What part did you enjoy most?* Guidance in relation to children choosing and sharing their best work would be welcomed as this would give the children more responsibility of assessing their own work.
- It is recommended that the learning experiences are colour-coded according to the setting e.g infants classes, toddlers etc...
- More sample questions would be helpful in the section on 'conversations'. Link with 'conferencing' in the continuum of assessment (2007).
- More emphasis on critical thinking (higher order questions) would be welcomed in the section on 'conversations'.
- The visual on p. 87 on Types of Observation is very helpful.



**If the 'Guidelines for Good Practice' were to be added to, please prioritise the following additions by ranking from 1-6 in order of importance, where 1 is the most important.**

1. Inquiry-based learning e.g. asking children open-ended questions and encouraging them to investigate possible answers &  
Pedagogy e.g. how children's early childhood practitioner supports learning and development (equal weighting).
2. Supporting progression of children's learning e.g. planning learning experiences and supporting children to challenge themselves.
3. Intentional teaching e.g. purposefully responding to, and building on, children's interests to extend their learning.
4. Planning and assessing e.g. planning for, and reflecting on, learning experiences that interest children.
5. Emergent curriculum e.g. planning learning experiences around what children are interested in.

## **Data Protection**

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Please email your submission to [aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto:aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie)