

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 | N/A |
| Date | |
| E-mail | |

Organisation submission details

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

Yes

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

Educate Together is the management body for 95 primary schools and the patron of over 100 equality-based primary and post-primary schools. Educate Together schools have been in existence since 1978 and are based on the following principles: Equality-based; Co-educational; Child-centred and Democratically-run. The patron's programme at primary-level is the Learn Together Ethical Education curriculum which emphasises diversity, inclusion and respect.

This submission has been developed in consultation with Educate Together primary schools.

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*.

Educate Together welcomes the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and congratulates the NCCA on its publication. We'd also like to acknowledge the extensive consultation process the NCCA undertook and is continuing to undertake in the development of a new Primary Curriculum Framework.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework articulates a broad vision for schools and classrooms as we move into a new decade. However, as stated in the document, 'what's important in primary education and why' needs to be at the heart of children's learning and the draft framework document clearly identifies the overarching principles and key competencies central to primary education. This is particularly relevant given the burden of curriculum overload experienced by primary teachers and acknowledged in the document, itself.

The key competencies are a particularly innovative addition to the draft framework document. They provide a holistic approach to the nurturing of 21st century learners and in particular we'd like to reference *Being an Active Citizen; Learning to Learn and Fostering Well-Being* which feature prominently in Educate Together's Ethical Education curriculum, the [Learn Together](#).

We also welcome the identification of eight principles of teaching and learning and would like to specifically acknowledge the principles of *Partnerships*, highlighting the collaboration between schools, families and communities (one of the drivers of the Educate Together movement) and *Inclusive Education and Diversity* (a key component of the *Learn Together* curriculum).

In relation to *Inclusive Education and Diversity*, we'd also like to commend the NCCA's reference to a child's 'sexual identity' when speaking of 'the best interest of every child'. Likewise, under 'Wellbeing', it is commendable to see that 'acquiring an understanding of human sexuality that is balanced', is specifically mentioned in the context of supporting children to value positive and healthy relationships. Educate Together considers sexual identity to be an important part of well-being and of recognising each child holistically.

Learning Environments is included under these eight principles and we would ask that it be acknowledged that more than 20% of primary schools within the system are in temporary, often unsuitable accommodation¹. Over 50% of Educate Together schools fall into this category, for example, with corresponding limitations on their ability to fully implement all aspects of the curriculum.

¹ Written answers November 2020 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2020-11-17a.1213>

The success of the finalised Primary Curriculum Framework document will depend on resources being put in place to support its implementation. The inclusion of an online Toolkit and Support Materials in each curriculum area is a welcome first step in this direction. We endorse the findings of the Schools Forum as outlined in the draft framework document, particularly in relation to ongoing and school-based CPD.

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.

Educate Together welcomes the recognition of teachers' and principals' agency. Trust in the professional judgement of the teacher should rightly be at the core of the new curriculum framework as they are the individuals in place who can adapt the curriculum to the needs of individual children.

Schools are flexible learning environments and we also welcome the inclusion of 'Flexible Time' in the options provided for time allocation.

Agency is also present in relation to the child specifically under the key competencies, *Learning to be a Learner* and *Being an Active Citizenship*. While these competencies are welcome additions to teaching and learning in the primary classroom we would recommend the inclusion of specific reference to the importance of nurturing, facilitating and validating pupil voices, wherever appropriate within both the classroom and school.

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

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

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

It’s now recognised that transitions are an important aspect of life and the recognition of the two main transitions associated with primary education, pre-school to primary and primary to post-primary, while also acknowledging the transitions from class to class and from one teacher to another as part of a daily/ weekly routine places the experience and needs of the child at the heart of teaching and learning. The connections made with *Aistear* and the *Framework for Junior Cycle* clearly frame the child’s educational experience in terms of a journey, which reaches beyond the realms of the primary classroom and sets the groundwork for the concept of lifelong learning.

The *Mo Scéal* template from preschool to primary and the *Education Passport* template from primary to post-primary will enhance and affirm the child’s own learning experience as they progress through the education system.

It should be clearly noted that while most children are now coming into primary school with pre-school experience, this doesn’t apply to all entrants to Junior Infants. This should be acknowledged in the draft framework document, with structures identified in future subject-specific publications to ensure that children who did not attend pre-school can access to the curriculum equally with their peers.

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.

An increased emphasis on PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and Digital Learning is a welcome addition to the new curriculum.

Investment in PE equipment as well as financial support for both travel to swimming lessons as well as swimming lessons, themselves, should be seen as a priority. Likewise, Digital Learning and the maintenance and updating of devices and laptops can often become the purview of individual staff members who happen to have an interest or specialisation in this area. Such a random and haphazard approach needs addressing in the form of financial and practical supports. A prompt and comprehensive roll-out of the National Broadband Plan is a natural precursor to the successful introduction of this subject area. Distance-learning imposed by Covid-19

has highlighted inequalities in relation to access to both devices and a stable WIFI connection and these inequalities need to be addressed in future publications.

Educate Together is concerned by the inclusion under the key competency *Fostering Wellbeing* reference to enabling children to know that 'life has a meaning'. Such an aspiration has religious connotations. Not all children belong to formal religious communities. Surely, instead this key competency should aim to enable children to appreciate that their friends, peers and families may have differing understandings of and perspectives on life which should naturally give rise to respectful discussion and dialogue.

While strongly welcoming the inclusion of a Modern Foreign Languages component in the curriculum, particularly as more than one in ten children in classrooms throughout the state speak a language other than English or Irish at home, a clear plan is needed to ensure the success of this curriculum area. This includes a definition of a 'modern foreign language' and explicit guidance on how best to support pupils' heritage languages and transferable language skills with resources put in place to ensure teaching and learning in this area is pedagogically robust.

While there is reference to critical-thinking and critical engagement throughout the draft framework document, we would recommend that a specific section be dedicated to this area. It is our experience that while these terms are often incorporated into discussions around teaching and learning, there can be a lack of clear understanding as to their day-to-day implementation in the classroom.

Educate Together supported the development of a curriculum around Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics. As such, we would be concerned that no discrete time has been set aside to explore this curriculum. The area is now to be taught under Wellbeing and Social and Environmental Education. While integration can often be a positive tool, integrated subject areas can effectively be diluted when content and time constraints come into play. We would urge the NCCA to ensure that ERB and Ethics maintain a vital and vibrant presence in both curriculum areas.

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.

Curriculum overload has long been a burden for primary teachers. The movement from 11 to 5 curriculum areas, even if those areas are broad in scope and encompass a number of subject areas, is a welcome development. Likewise the move from learning objectives to learning outcomes reflects current educational thinking and again places the experiences of the child at the heart of the process. Structurally, the use of themes / integrated learning at the junior end and a move to

more subject-based learning outcomes at the senior end is an understandable compromise given the transition to post-primary.

Educate Together notes the reduction of time for the Patron's Programme from 2.5 hours to 2 hours but also recognises the many opportunities the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework offers to augment teaching and learning in the patron's curriculum in other curriculum areas as well as the option to use Flexible Time, as needs dictate.

With regard to the three options provided for time allocation, Educate Together has no particular preference. We would suggest that schools either choose an option that best suits their circumstances or that the NCCA co-ordinate a pilot programme in a small number of schools where all options can be trialled.

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

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

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

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.

We welcome the acknowledgement of the importance of interactions and the building of the relationship between teacher and children and its recognition as a

central component of pedagogy. We also welcome the emphasis on environmental sustainability which needs to be highlighted clearly and unambiguously within curriculum areas of the finalised curriculum document.

It's refreshing to see that the assessment component of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework recognises the child as the main stakeholder, central to the assessment process. And the acknowledgement of learning as an inherently social activity in which teachers and children work together is particularly impactful.

The Continuum of Assessment is laid out clearly in the framework document and a range of assessment strategies and processes are referenced.

A whole school approach to assessment is vital to teaching and learning. Time must be allocated for whole school discussion and decision making. Standardised tests must be updated and topics covered made more relevant to the child's life experience. If standardised tests are to be used to plan resources/supports for schools, consideration should be given to having different tests every year to avoid 'teaching to the test'.

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

The 1999 curriculum contributed to many successes including:

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

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

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

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to

challenges and changing needs and priorities. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework does indeed build on the 1999 curriculum. Educate Together would caution against the use of a similar support model, however, whereby teachers were taken out of school for a number of days during the year for induction in specific subject areas. Such a model didn't allow for sustained in-school support, vital for the success of any new curriculum.

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.