



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

Names	Vanessa Lacey & Hannah Solley
Position	Health and Education Manager and Family Support & Education Officer
Organisation	Transgender Equality Network of Ireland (TENI)

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Date	19/01/2021
E-mail	

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

Yes No

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

Our mission is to advance the rights and equality, and improve the lives of trans people and their families.

Under Goal 2 of TENI Strategic plan; Trans people are able to access all the services they need, and for those services to be trans friendly and inclusive.

- Promote timely, appropriate and accessible healthcare for all trans people; care which is person-centred and based on international best practice.
- Work with the education system to ensure that trans people have the same educational outcomes as everyone else.
- Ensure that information on gender identity and gender variance is included in the school curriculum.
- Remove barriers to accessing public and private services.
- Build awareness and understanding in service provision of what respectful and effective services are for trans people.
- Build and maintain strong strategic partnerships with key stakeholders such as service providers and the NGO community.

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured to align with the six key messages related to the framework. Each message is summarised as a support for you in working on the submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

- In reading the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework the first thing that struck us as an organisation is that gender identity and gender expression is not mentioned. It is important that if gender diverse youth are to be recognised and accepted within Irish primary schools, they need to be represented in this document. Gender and sexuality are mentioned and therefore Gender Identity and Gender Expression should also be mentioned when speaking about the diversity of Irish society. From the 2017 research study *Exploring Gender Identity and Gender Norms in Primary schools* conducted by Dr. Aoife Neary and Catherine Cross “In Ireland, the most common age for people to become aware of their sexuality identity is 12 years of age — the average age of a sixth class child in primary school (Higgins et al 2016). However, as this study suggests, awareness of gender identity appears to happen much earlier.”
- There is a lot of scope for engagement and teaching of LGB and especially trans lives and identities but without clear guidelines around this many schools will opt out or give minimal time allocation to such themes. Since 2013 in Ireland, all schools must include homophobic and transphobic bullying in their anti-bullying policies and document and implement ‘prevention’ as well as ‘education’ strategies within the classroom.
- The guidelines so far look quite vague and open for interpretation, we would hope that schools are given clear guidance around expectations of what should be taught in regards to LGB issues and gender identities.



Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

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

- Be for every child.
- Recognise teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context.
- Give more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling to identify and respond to priorities and opportunities.
- Connect with different school contexts in the education system.
- Give greater opportunities for flexibility and choice for children's learning.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to agency and flexibility in schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

- The idea of being for every child is absolutely key to our work. Every child also means that gender diverse children need to be included and represented in the new curriculum. We are seeing many young people disclosing their gender identity in primary schools or before they even start primary school. The parents interviewed in the study *Exploring Gender Identity and Gender Norms in Primary Schools* outlined how their children were strongly gender non-conforming from the time they could communicate. Most were strongly identifying as a gender identity other than they had been assigned at birth. It is necessary that their peers are given the opportunity to understand these lives and experiences so that the risk of bullying and harassment is diminished.
- Recognising teachers' and principals' agency to enact the curriculum in their individual school context could be concerning because through our organisations' experiences, we know that some schools would not teach about or include gender diversity or LGB issues in SPHE and RSE due to school

ethos, lack of training or because of the age of the children. In fact in the study conducted by Dr Aoife Neary and Catherine Cross it was noted that ‘an absence of national education directives, exacerbated by confusion and fear about the age of children, religious affiliation and religious ethos, caused reluctance and inaction among educators.’ It is necessary for curriculum guidelines to be clearly defined and outlined so that schools understand that they must engage with these topics to a satisfactory degree.

- Flexibility in planning and timetabling is beneficial because it allows for spontaneous engagement and conversation in the moment. Through our experience we know that gender diverse youth and their peers respond positively when their questions are answered in the moment. This is particularly affirming for a gender diverse child who may have opened a conversation about gender diversity brought on by another topic. It is key that the conversation is not put on hold but engaged with at the time.

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.

- As an organisation TENI believes that, gender and gender identity should be taught in an age appropriate manner throughout a child’s entire school experience. Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post primary would allow for a flowing continuum of engagement around the theme of gender identity,

allowing for all children to have a true understanding of what gender identity and diversity is. When taught all the way through schooling gender diversity is normalised and considered as a normal part of development and Irish society. This in turn would alleviate a lot of anxiety for gender diverse young people as they would feel much safer in disclosing. The risk of harassment and bullying would lessen as the level of understanding amongst peers and staff is increased with education in this area.

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.

- Focus on developing children’ skills, knowledge, disposition, values and attitudes is vital to a tolerant society. Children need to be given the skills to build resilience and tolerance of others. They need to be given the knowledge about all people in society including the LGB and especially the trans community. Values and attitudes should be developed to align with the reality of Irish society which includes a vibrant LGBTI+ community.
- Ethics learning is a perfect opportunity to teach about the rights and equality of marginalised communities within Irish society including the LGBTI+ and Traveller communities.

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

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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 Patron’s programme should not affect the teaching of trans topics and experiences. It was noted in the study *Exploring Gender Identity and Gender Norms in Primary Schools* that the educators who worked in Catholic schools often felt constrained by the ethos of the school in teaching of LGBT issues. It was also noted that some Patrons actively “ridiculed gay and lesbians” and refused to sanction material that taught about sexual orientation and gender identities. It is therefore important that the curriculum guidelines are clear and state that the curriculum is separate to the patron’s programme and should not be changed or affected in any way, but also that there should be clear guidelines given by the patrons of these programmes.
- In a keynote address to JMB/AMCSS 31st Annual Conference in Galway, 3 May 2018, Archbishop Eamon Martin stated that ““Given that many Catholic schools have already been sensitively offering support to pupils who are beginning to express same sex attractions or raising personal questions about gender identity, it is timely to identify, develop and disseminate best practice in this area across all our Catholic schools”. He also addressed the issues that face religious schools, “While recognising the challenges at the interface between the Church’s moral teaching and

pastoral practice, it would be helpful for us to share learning about: inclusive school structures and relationships; sensitive pastoral outreach and support for students; age-appropriate pastoral programmes together with curricular methodologies and resources; quality professional development and training for staff.” Working together with patrons it is possible to teach a religious and moral ethos whilst still remaining inclusive and sensitive to all students and families.

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.

- Making meaningful connections with children’s experiences provides scope for true inclusiveness.

- Transgender and gender diverse young people often feel excluded and isolated from education settings. Primary schools can be a very gendered place and this can be extremely distressing for gender non-conforming children who do not fit neatly into a binary box. This must be taken into consideration within the new curriculum framework and teaching methods in order for all children to feel valued and have a sense of belonging. As was stated in the research conducted by Dr Aoife Neary and Catherine Cross, ‘The rigid architecture of gender extends to all aspects of primary school life through both overt and subtle means. Such systems have restrictive effects for all children, limiting current lives and future pathways.’

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.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

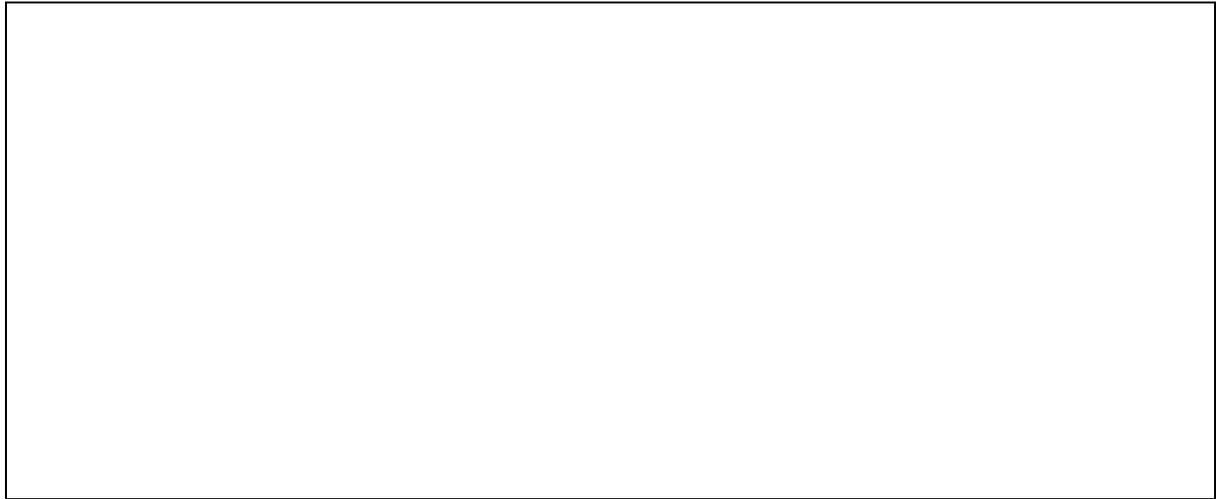
- Address curriculum overload at primary level.
- Take stock of strategies, initiatives and programmes and clarify priorities for children's learning.
- Link with *Aistear* and *the Framework for Junior Cycle*.

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.

- It is important to take into consideration the changing landscape of Irish society and Irish families, and to understand and include this diversity as a priority of children's learning.

All children will become active adult citizens and as such will need to acquire the social and life skills to accept and include all races, ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations and the diversity of families that live and work in Ireland in 2021 and beyond.

- Up till now, most schools deal with the subject of gender diversity in a reactive way when supporting a particular student. As noted in the study *Exploring Gender Identity and Gender Norms in Primary Schools* 'because, gender identity had not been addressed in most schools, either as part of the formal curriculum or informally, it was inevitable that any training about gender identity became about supporting that individual child as opposed to learning more broadly about gender, gender norms and gender identity. Subsequent changes in gender practices were perceived to be about supporting the individual child and this brought unwanted attention, causing upset for many children and their parents. These experiences draw further attention to the need for proactive and embedded education in relation to gender identity diversity and equality both formally and informally. In that way, the presence of a transgender or gender variant child in the school would not be so out of the ordinary.

**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