

# 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](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

### *Organisation submission details*

<b>Name</b>	PDST Literacy Team
<b>Position</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	PDST
<b>Date</b>	26/11/2020
<b>E-mail</b>	

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Yes

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

The PDST Literacy Team (including Reading Recovery) consists of 24 advisors. We provide professional development for teachers in Ireland, in a variety of formats, across all areas of literacy, supporting teachers to implement the Primary Language Curriculum.

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](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

# Section 1

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

The Literacy Team welcomes the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, acknowledging that the full redevelopment of the curriculum is in the infancy of its development. Research by McGuinness would indicate that a child-centred agentic classroom is one which prepares children for the future. (*Research informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Curriculum*, pg 5) We welcome the fact that teachers are being recognised as skilled professionals who are best suited to make decisions on what the children learn, how they engage with the information and the pace at which they work.

We welcome the connections from preschool right through to post primary school and find assurance from international research of the need for the introduction of the key competencies. “The future, by definition, is unpredictable; but by being attuned to some of the trends now sweeping across the world (OECD, 2019[1]) we can learn – and help our children learn – to adapt to, thrive in and even shape whatever the future holds. Students need support in developing not only knowledge and skills but also attitudes and values, which can guide them towards ethical and responsible actions. At the same time, they need opportunities to develop their creative ingenuity to help propel humanity towards a bright future.” (*OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030: OECD Learning Compass 2030*, pg 5)

We are enthused by the interconnected nature of the learning outcomes and key competencies as outlined in Professor McGuinness’ 2018 report. (*Research informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Curriculum*, Figure 1, pg 12)

The Literacy Team also welcomes the restructure of curricular areas to include Modern Foreign Languages, Health and Wellbeing and technology. In particular, we appreciate the opportunity for a thematic approach and the emphasis on the integrated nature of the curricular areas.

Preliminary research suggested that focusing the primary curriculum on broad areas of learning as opposed to discrete subjects and improving curricular continuity, enables effective

interdisciplinary teaching and learning and reduces curriculum overload. (*Primary Developments: Consultation on Curriculum Structure and Time, 2018, p.61*)

We welcome the aims of the *Draft Framework* which acknowledges the findings of the *Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics*. Our educational landscape has changed dramatically in the last decade. “While changing classrooms provide a richness to our educational landscape they also provide challenges for schools and for teachers in their provision of education.” (p.9) We commend the aims to move away from “thinking in terms of ability and disability, to thinking about variability, competency and opportunity” through learning outcomes, teacher autonomy and student agency. (*Draft Framework, p. 20*)

We welcome the focus on continuity and transitions from preschool to primary to post-primary.

The proposals within the draft framework around curriculum changes, timetabling and flexibility will serve a child’s learning well, empowering teachers to become agentic practitioners, with a deeper understanding of integration, differentiation, assessment and inclusion.

It would be prudent to proceed cautiously in rolling out a new curriculum which is underpinned by teacher agency. *Research informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Curriculum* recommends “giving teachers time to fully engage with the philosophy and expectations of a new curriculum—a deeper form of teacher engagement than perhaps often happens with curriculum rollout” (p.37) Investing time in introductory professional development exploring the key principles and values in the curriculum framework, in advance of the publication of curricular specifications, would greatly support the success of an outcome based curriculum.

The addition of MFL and Technology, while welcomed, require clarity in terms of expertise and expectations. The rollout of the *Primary Language Curriculum* has served as an excellent indicator of the need for clarity and consistency when introducing a new curriculum. This roll out has also demonstrated the need for policymakers within the education to be responsive to the needs of teachers and challenges, foreseen and unforeseen, which can emerge during times of curricular change. Teachers’ response to the updated PLC in 2019 was significantly more favourable as teachers felt valued knowing their concerns were listened to and acted upon. This experience echoes with the recommendations in *Research informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in*

*a Redeveloped Curriculum* to “invest substantial effort and resource into creating, and co-creating with teachers, sufficiently detailed descriptions of the meaning of each key competency so that teachers can know ‘what it looks like’ in their classrooms and for formative assessment.” (pg 41)

In order to have a truly inclusive, agentic classroom unfold, systemic changes are needed and therefore interagency collaboration is essential. It would be important to articulate how curricular change will impact other agents and policy within the education system, as well as how it may change the practice of teachers.

To summarise, the Literacy Team is excited about the evolution of our curriculum, a curriculum that will equip our children to thrive in a modern society, “to tackle societal changes that we cannot yet imagine and to use technologies that have not yet been invented”. (*OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030: OECD Learning Compass 2030, pg 5*) It is our belief that preliminary time and support will be essential for the successful adoption of the key messages by teachers. This should occur prior to the launch of any further curriculum specification. Support offered to teachers should include:

- Curriculum Rationale (teacher agency, Learning Outcome based curriculum)
- Differentiation, Universal Design for Learning and Assessment
- Effective and meaningful integration
- Pedagogical approaches espoused in the *New Draft Framework*

We look forward to the development of the curricular areas and supporting teachers in realising the full potential of this curriculum.

## 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 Literacy Team welcomes the proposals to give schools and teachers more agency and flexibility in terms of timetabling and enacting the curriculum.

We welcome the definition of an agentic teacher as “reflective, competent and capable of exercising professional judgement in response to individual learning needs in a variety of contexts”. (*Draft Framework*, pg 5) The terms ‘teacher agency’ and ‘flexibility’ may be new concepts to many teachers and we propose that the definition provided be given more prominence in the curriculum framework. Clarification on child agency and how it might be evident in an outcome based curriculum would also be welcome in the document.

It is our view that a culture of openness and dialogue both within schools and the wider school community will be an asset to the development of agentic practice. Teachers need to be supported and feel confident in their ability and understanding of the curriculum, in order to act as agentic professionals.

While working closely with schools during the ongoing PLC rollout, our team has noted challenges

and barriers which exist in supporting teachers in exercising their agency. The wider education system may need to make visible changes in order to adapt to support teachers' agency. Without system and policy changes, teachers may be reluctant to utilise their agency and the admirable goals of the curriculum will not be reached. The previous Interagency Video published in Sept 2019 which was accompanied by Circular 45/19 offered assurance to teachers with regard to their agency and professional judgement and a similar system-wide approach would be very beneficial in empowering teachers to exercise their agency.

We can see both benefits and challenges associated with all the proposed timetabling options regarding language learning. The preferred option for a school may depend on their individual context, the needs presented by the children and values present in the school. The Literacy Team would caution against imposing specific time allocations on languages 1, 2 and 3 across all schools and contexts, as this would not be in keeping with the principles of schools and teachers being agentic professionals. We welcome the reduction in roll call and assembly time by 50%, thereby increasing teaching and learning time across all school settings.

The following key points should be considered regarding timetabling options;

- There is value in using flexible time allocations to support teachers' sense of agency, and utilisation of their professional judgement.
- There would also be value in schools having discussions about how to best use time allocated for language learning to meet the needs of children in their context.
- If teachers are offered flexibility in allocating language instruction time across three languages, a minimum instruction time could be offered instead.
- Time is essential for effective language teaching. In order to become proficient in a language, children need time to read, to write and to speak. (What I've learned about effective Reading Instruction, Allington, 2002)

## 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.**

The Literacy Team welcomes the proposals to make curriculum connections and transitions between home, preschool, primary and post primary.

In particular, we welcome the Principles of Transitions where children’s prior learning, self-worth and identity are built upon as they move from home to preschool and on to Junior Infants, and as they progress through primary school. This provides important foundations for learning as they move to post-primary school. (*Draft Framework*, pg 6)

The Eight Principles in the *Draft Framework* build on those in Aistear and connect with the eight principles of the Framework for Junior Cycle. We find assurance in the research which shows there is continuity and progression right through from preschool to Junior Cycle as is evidenced in *Research informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Curriculum*.

The curriculum’s seven key competencies extend children’s learning through Aistear’s four themes and provide an important foundation for the Junior Cycle key skills. The *OECD Future Of Education and Skills 2030: OECD Learning Compass 2030*, highlights that “the future, by definition, is unpredictable”... but creating a curriculum that transcends all sectors will “help our children learn - to adapt to, thrive in and even shape whatever the future holds”. (pg 5) This continuity and transition is welcomed by the Literacy Team.

The Literacy team recommends consideration of the following points to further support continuity and progression;

- Consideration should be given to supporting consistency across preschool settings with a focus on school readiness. We also welcome the addition of the Mo Scéal document and anticipate it will be effective in guiding parental expectations in preschool.
- Continuity and progression from Preschool to Primary, and Primary to Post Primary can be supported by allocating time for collaboration between stakeholders at local level.
- In order to support continuity, CPD for early educational providers should be considered.
- Explicit information on how the curriculum framework links to the post primary specifications should be a feature of the support provided for teachers during the introductory phase.
- Consideration could be given for the inclusion of informal Gaeilge in preschool settings to offset the reduction of Gaeilge teaching time in Primary school.
- While the transition practices from Preschool to Primary and then onto Post Primary are clear, it is the Literacy Teams' recommendation that stronger structures are in place for transition from class to class. In order for the proposed year-to-year transitions to be successful, allocation of time for teacher discussions and sharing of information within the new time framework is necessary. Whole school plans which may in the past have dictated content, could now shift to have a stronger emphasis on in-school practices and structures to support transitions throughout the primary school.
- In order for curriculum continuity to exist, schools need time and support to determine their values, priorities and content.

## 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.**

The Literacy Team welcomes the inclusion of the key competencies, enhancing the interconnectedness of our education system. McGuinness’ research (*Research Informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Curriculum*) on the proposed classification system for the key competencies clearly showed the importance of critical thinking as a cognitive competency. We feel that more clarity could be given to this in the *Draft Framework* and we would welcome further development of this.

We welcome the broad nature of the learning outcomes and key competencies which support teachers’ agency and give flexibility to respond to the needs of their students. We also welcome the proposals for new subjects, which are relevant and essential additions to a modern curriculum.

We welcome the increased focus on Wellbeing as well as the Values strand within SPVE.

Consideration should be given to the following questions:

- The Literacy team welcomes the inclusion of technology in Maths, Science & Technology Education. In order to strengthen the connection between primary and post-primary,

could consideration be given to including explicit mention of areas such as materials, construction and design as a part of the 'Technology'? There is a danger that stakeholders may only interpret 'Technology' as relating to IT.

- The Literacy Team recommends opportunities for engaging with learning experiences which would address life skills such as cooking, gardening, sewing etc. These represent excellent opportunities for meaningful integration across a variety of key competencies including language learning.

## 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.**

As mentioned earlier, the Literacy team welcomes the inclusion of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in the *Draft Framework*. In particular;

- We welcome the suggestion of emphasising Language Awareness as part of the teaching of a Modern Foreign Language in the Background paper: *Integrating Modern Foreign Languages in a Redeveloped Primary Curriculum*.
- We welcome the proposal that the level of competency to be reached by the children at

the end of stage 4 would align to CEFR A1 level (breakthrough).

The initial reference to MFL has the potential to cause anxiety among teachers. In order for this to be successful, a number of key questions will need clarification in conjunction with the publication of a Modern Foreign Language Curriculum.

We propose an examination of the practicalities arising from the following questions:

- Is it envisioned that class teachers will take on the primary responsibility for teaching MFL or will there be provision for external specialist teachers?
- Do teachers need a qualification to teach a third language?
- What would the criteria be for choosing a schools' third language?
- Will children learn one MFL in stages 3 and 4 or be exposed to many foreign languages depending on teacher competence and interests?
- Could the percentage of a particular nationality in a school be a factor?
- Will the choice of language impact on public perception of the school?
- Would there be a mechanism to encourage continuity from Primary to post-primary schools, particularly feeder schools?
- Would existing language exemptions currently relating to Gaeilge in Primary school, extend to MFL also?

Finally, the Literacy Team aired their concerns that teachers may be anxious about the addition of three new subjects to an already subject-rich curriculum. Although the document makes clear the intention to use flexible timetabling and thematic approaches to help reduce the issue of curriculum overload, initial appearances give the impression of subjects being added, with little being removed. We envision that it will be important to reaffirm the practices of integration as advocated in the *1999 Curriculum* so that teachers can successfully engage in a meaningful and manageable way with all subject areas.

## 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.**

The Literacy team welcomes the active, child-centred methodologies proposed in the new *Draft Framework*. We agree, having supported teachers in the implementation of an outcome based curriculum, that assessment is central. We are heartened to see the recommendation that “assessment should be included, where possible, in all discussions relating to teaching, learning or pedagogy within initial teacher education and indeed in professional development programmes”. (*Aligning Assessment, Learning and Teaching in Curricular Reform and Implementation*, pg 4) It is our observation that assessment culture in schools sometimes centres around standardised testing. This can be for a variety of reasons, including parental expectations and national reporting policies. We feel that greater emphasis should be placed on continuous assessment where pupils are active agents in the process. The team welcomes the addition of the Continuum of Assessment graphic. However, it may be worth considering changing intuitive assessment to ‘invisible assessment practices’, which may be more in line with upcoming guidance on preparation. A recommendation may be to redesign the original semi-circle continuum using the Colours of Figure 4 and include both in the new *Draft Framework*.

The Literacy Team welcomes the importance of “Inclusive education and diversity, Pedagogy and Integration as central tenets of high-quality teaching and learning in the primary curriculum” (*Draft Framework*, pg 20). A challenge identified by the Literacy Team is the creation of content within text books which reduces teacher agency and school autonomy as well as removing the child from the heart of this curriculum. The Literacy Team would welcome increased focus on how to preserve the integrity of the curriculum without an over-reliance on textbooks.

The Literacy Team welcomes the proposal to develop the curriculum specifications drawing on the principles of Universal Design for Learning, thereby creating an inclusive learning environment for all. We recommend greater clarity and development on the concept of Universal Design for Learning as this may be a new area for many teachers.

We are pleased to note that the *Draft Framework* gives great scope for play and a thematic approach to teaching and learning. The Literacy Team highlighted that support for implementing Aistear and/or play based methodologies was never universally rolled out for teachers. CPD was optional and teachers approached its introduction and implementation in various ways. Notably, research by Ring et al in 2016 found 52.7% of a sample of 500 primary teachers were implementing Aistear. (*An Examination of Concepts of School Readiness Among Parents and Educators in Ireland*, p.128) The value assigned to play and its use as an effective methodology can vary considerably. It is our proposal that introductory CPD for the new curriculum would include concepts such as assessment, integration and playful approaches which should provide teachers the opportunity to examine and explore the foundation blocks in advance of engaging with curriculum areas. Time must then be provided for schools to collectively reflect on their current approaches to integration, inclusion, inquiry based learning and play etc. and improve their practices.

**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 Literacy Team welcomes the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* and we are pleased to see it builds on the success of active methodologies and collaboration as key pedagogies in the teaching, learning and assessment of children.

Having supported teachers in the implementation of the PLC to date, we have experienced many challenges and anxieties in schools moving to an outcome based curriculum. To fully embed the principles of autonomy and student agency, teachers need support in becoming agentic, therefore it is the view of the Literacy Team that CPD exploring the key principles underpinning the curriculum is essential before the rollout of the curricular areas. The Literacy Team also proposes Professional Development for teachers on the rationale in the interim period, in order to support

teachers to transition from the mindset of the '99 curriculum to the outcome based 2024 curriculum, so that teachers are invested in the reasons for change.

There needs to be consensus from all stakeholders on expectations around preparation for teaching and learning. We hope that the upcoming guidance for preparation for teaching and learning will support this process.

This draft acknowledges curriculum overload and attempts to reduce this through flexible time and meaningful integration through the five major curricular areas. However, teachers will need to be effectively supported in their own contexts to have the confidence to use this flexibility and agency. We envision that it will be important to build on the exemplars of integration from the 1999 Curriculum Teacher Guidelines which would support teachers to meaningfully integrate across subjects, ensuring explicit and focused teaching occurs across all subject areas and strands.

### **Data Protection**

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**Thank you for your submission.**

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