

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

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Date	
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Yes X No

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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 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

Section 1

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

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* seems in many respects to be building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while trying to respond to the numerous challenges and changing needs and priorities of today's world.

While I welcome the fact that the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* is attempting to make the curriculum more meaningful and relevant by reducing curriculum overload, the content of the curriculum to be taught needs to be very clear. It seems that the time available for the acquisition and consolidation of critical core skills has been eroded.

Catholic schools have a very rich tradition in the field of education. They are places that aspire to excellence in teaching and learning while also remaining inclusive and welcoming of all. Catholic schools are to the fore in embracing and welcoming diversity. However, recent years have witnessed so many new initiatives in schools, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy and all of these initiatives are competing for space in an already overcrowded curriculum. This compounds demands on primary schools to deliver more and more on a daily basis. The demands are never-ending. Schools and the curriculum they deliver can often be viewed as the fora for meeting national priorities or needs and addressing societal problems. However, schools cannot be the panacea for all of society's difficulties.

The Education Act (1998) states the requirement that schools 'promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students ... in consultation with their parents, having regard for the characteristic spirit of the school'. The Education Act, Section 9(d) very clearly outlines the responsibility of a school in providing education which should be appropriate to the abilities and needs of its pupils while it should, as quoted above, 'promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school'.

Religious education takes place in primary schools in Ireland within circumstances supported by the Education Act.

The Catholic vision of education is rooted in its Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ. The curriculum has been developed to respond to the shifting cultural and educational context in which primary Religious Education is carried out today. Religious education resembles other academic disciplines that are taught in Catholic schools. It is necessary, therefore, that religious education in schools appears as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines. It must

present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge.

A Roman Catholic school (which is established in connection with the Minister) aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person of the pupil: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual, including a living relationship with God and with other people. The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Catholic school provides religious education for the pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and promotes the formation of the pupils in the Catholic Faith.

The *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (DES, 1999) offers the following rationale for the inclusion of religious education in the curriculum for all children: The spiritual dimension is a fundamental aspect of individual experience, and its religious and cultural expression is an inextricable part of Irish culture and history. Religious Education specifically enables the child to develop spiritual and moral values and to come to a knowledge of God. (DES, 1999, p. 58)

The Education Act, 1998, section 30 (2)(d) requires the Minister to ensure that a ‘reasonable amount’ of time is set aside in each school day for ‘subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school’. The recommendation by the NCCA in the development of the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) specified 30 minutes each day as being ‘reasonable’ for the teaching of Patron programme. In the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* the NCCA has proposed a reduction in time allocated to teaching the Patron’s programme.

Is the NCCA’s proposal to shorten the time allocation for Religious Education attempting to undermine the Patron’s Religious Education programme and role in a school and to reduce a school’s ‘characteristic spirit’? This *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* document fails to capture the central role of the characteristic spirit of the school. The document needs to acknowledge the legal right of the patron of faith based schools to nurture the characteristic spirit of the school, that is the school’s ethos.

I ask that the NCCA would specify 30 minutes each day for the teaching of the Patron’s programme which in Catholic schools is the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* as taught using the *Grow in Love* programme.

Unfortunately, this *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* does not acknowledge the role of the Board of Management with regard to curriculum provision in the school. The board

manages the school on behalf of the Patron and is accountable to the Patron and the Minister of Education. As part of its core function the Education Act 1998 places a statutory duty on the Board to ensure that an appropriate education is provided for all of the school's pupils. The functions of the Board are set out in Section 15 of the Education Act, 1998.

Section 15 of the Education Act, 1998 states:

(1) It shall be the duty of the board to manage the school on behalf of the Patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents and to provide or cause to be provided an appropriate education for each student at the school for which that board has responsibility.

(2) A board shall perform the functions conferred on it and on a school by this Act and in carrying out its function the board shall-

(a) do so in accordance with the policies determined by the Minister from time to time,

(b) uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school, and at all times act in accordance with any Act of the Oireachtas or instrument made thereunder, deed, charter, articles of management or other such instrument relating to the establishment or operation of the school.

The Board of Management has a central role in curriculum provision in primary schools and as such, the NCCA does not acknowledge this in any way in their draft document. It would be good if the central role of the Board of Management in curriculum provision in primary schools could be acknowledged in the NCCA's future Draft/ Primary Curriculum Framework.

The development and oversight of religious education programmes in primary schools are the remit of the different patron bodies. The Department of Education and Science in the 1999 Primary School Curriculum: 'recognises the rights of the different church authorities to design curricula in Religious Education at primary level and to supervise their teaching and implementation.' (Department of Education and Science, 1999, p. 58) Indeed the *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (DES, 1999) sets out a definite rationale for the inclusion of religious education in the primary curriculum and there is a clear presentation of the importance and central role of ethos as the means by which Catholic schools define their purpose, their way of operating and how they foster and enrich their relationships. The objectives listed in the introduction of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum see the importance of assisting of children to 'develop the capacity to make ethical judgments informed by the tradition and ethos of the school'. However, this understanding is absent

from the current NCCA draft document and it is really important that it would be included in future curriculum documents.

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.

It is good that schools will have increased autonomy providing flexibility with regard to planning and timetabling of subjects, but all this needs to take cognisance of the school's particular ethos. It needs to reflect the characteristic spirit of the school. The Ethos of the school is the lens through which schools engage with the current curriculum and that is how I would also see school engagement with any future curriculum framework. The Primary School Curriculum (1999) was founded on the principle of integrated learning and teachers were encouraged to detect valuable connections between spiritual, moral and religious education and all the other curriculum areas. Such flexibility is central to teacher agency. In a denominational school the teaching and learning and culture will be guided by the school's ethos and Patron programme.

The numerous options regarding timetabling could be overwhelming or confusing for schools. It may be wiser to reduce or simplify the options.

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.

It is good that the proposed redeveloped primary curriculum will build on and further develop children’s early learning experiences in order to make connections with children’s prior learning in preschool and future learning in post-primary school. The continuity and connectivity of educational experience is to be welcomed. The Religious Education programme, *Grow in Love*, which is the Patron’s programme taught in Catholic primary schools, has a spiral curriculum. The outcomes in this curriculum are outlined in a spiral way so that the core outcomes return at every level. In this way the religious education outcomes allow teachers to see at a glance how the learning develops from level to level throughout the school. This sequencing across levels also assists teachers in planning learning activities to cater for varying student abilities and for assessment purposes.

The programme in the *Grow in Love* series engages with the religious education outcomes at each level to ensure that they are being developed in a pedagogically appropriate, child-friendly manner. Outcomes in *Grow in Love* for each level are built on the outcomes for the previous level, as well as from the earlier levels in the programme. So a similar approach to a “spiral curriculum” spanning the time from preschool, through eight years in primary school right through to Junior Cycle can only be beneficial and build a strong foundation for teaching and learning in the new Primary Curriculum.

It is also good to note that when pupils transition from one stage in their education to the next, the importance of sharing information and having opportunities for professional conversations about the child’s learning and how they can be further supported is

acknowledged. Information transfer provides a rounded picture of children's progress and achievement at primary school, ensures continuity and progression in learning and alerts post-primary schools if additional support is needed.

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.

I don't understand how Values Education has been added to Social Personal Education as there is no clarity about whose values or what values are intended and/or would be promoted or taught in a particular school with a particular ethos. The contemporary social and cultural context is complex and young children regularly encounter attitudes and values incompatible with those promoted in a Catholic school. Hence the importance placed on encouraging critical reasoning and real engagement with children's culture in the Religious Education curriculum as taught through the 'Grow in Love' programme.

It needs to be noted that ERB and Ethics is being provided for by the Patron's programme as it affords every pupil an opportunity to appreciate and understand the significance of religion for many people. Inculturation is an important principle for Catholic Religious Education and Catholic Religious Education always emphasises moral education which concerns the development of knowledge and reasoning, as well as the affective and motivational bases for moral action.

Catholic Religious Education develops ecumenical and inter-religious awareness and respect for the cultures and religions of others. Lessons developing this theme are well presented and taught in the ‘*Grow in Love*’ programme.

Catholic schools are places of diversity, a true reflection of the diversity of people in Irish society today. Religious Education in Catholic Schools is student focused. Children are afforded opportunities for discussion of their personal experiences and are provided opportunities during the day to reflect on belonging and being cherished as part of an inclusive school community. Religious education contributes to the religious, spiritual and moral development of the person. It has a central role in contributing to basic religious literacy about religions and beliefs while encouraging people to be sensitive to, know about and understand religion. This includes education around the religious dimension of life while also encouraging respect and tolerance for existing religious and non-religious convictions, traditions and worldviews. This provides the foundations for a diverse but cohesive society. Religious education is valued by individuals and communities who understand this vital contribution.

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.

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- 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.

I believe that a curriculum framework for primary schools in Ireland needs to uphold the status of the Patron's programme in the religious, spiritual, ethical domain. In the draft document on page 11 there is a discrepancy between the diagram on page 11 depicting 6 areas of the curriculum and the 5 broad curriculum areas listed above and throughout the draft document itself. This is a serious omission of the sixth curricular area and omits the sixth and equally significant curriculum area namely the Patron's Programme/ Religious, Spiritual, Ethical Education. Religious education in schools under Catholic patronage is determined by the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*. This curriculum, which was published in 2014, is the foundation upon which 'Grow in Love', a programme developed for Catholic schools, is based. The general aim of this Religious Education curriculum is 'to help children mature in relation to their spiritual, moral and religious lives, through their encounter with, exploration and celebration of the Catholic faith' (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2014, p. 22).

The use of Information Technology is an integral part of Catholic primary Religious Education. In the Catholic school there is also a strong ecological perspective. Also in the Catholic school, ecological respect and concern are rooted in a Scripture-based theology of creation and related ethical considerations. Children are enabled to understand the concept of patterns of consumption that relate to ecological degradation and they are enabled to develop an ecological conscience which calls for prophetic challenges to forces destroying the earth.

Religious Education affords every child the opportunity to enrich their literacy and skills through a wide range of texts and resources through words, story, art, music and drama all of which help develop knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes for lifelong learning.

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.

High quality teaching, learning and assessment are central to the priorities of Catholic schools. Assessment is an essential and critical part of teaching and learning and it is becoming a more central element of what is happening in the classroom. Assessment provides information for all the stakeholders, of whom children are central. Catholic schools will continue to embrace new and innovative pedagogical approaches and strategies to teaching and learning with assessment at its core. Religious Education includes appropriate processes for assessment and evaluation. The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* enables teachers to build on the principles of *Assessment for Learning*.

Whole school and individual planning will be vital to the implementation of the new curriculum and to assist schools in this regard, it would be advisable that the NCCA would provide planning exemplars for teachers to support curricular planning and assessment.

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.

I believe strongly that the Patron's programme, the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Programme for Ireland (Grow in Love)*, should be included as a core subject /curricular area in the proposed Primary Curriculum and should be allocated 30 minutes per day teaching time. The *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (DES, 1999) outlines the following rationale for the inclusion of Religious Education in the curriculum for all children: The spiritual dimension is a fundamental aspect of individual experience, and its religious and cultural expression is an inextricable part of Irish culture and history. Religious education specifically enables the child to develop spiritual and moral values and to come to a knowledge of God. (DES, 1999, p. 58)

I re-iterate my support for the on-going inclusion of the 'Religious, Ethical/ Patron's Programme component in the curriculum, while also requesting the consistent inclusion

of “spiritual” in this Primary Curriculum. The status of the patron’s programme in the “religious, spiritual and ethical domain” needs to be upheld in future and final drafts of the Primary Curriculum. This is central to the holistic development of any child in a Catholic ethos school.

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Thank you for your submission.

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