

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	Sunday November 15 th 2020
E-mail	

Organisation submission details

Name	St. Mary's Primary School, Strokestown, Co. Roscommon
Position	Principal
Organisation	Primary School
Date	Sunday 15 th November 2020
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?

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Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Yes

No

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

St. Mary's Primary School is a vertical primary school. There are currently 125 pupils enrolled. The school serves a rural village and the hinterland in North Roscommon.

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*.

I note that the Draft Primary Curriculum framework is currently at the consultation stage until the end of December 2020. I am reassured by the fact that the draft curriculum will promote active, integrated learning. The envisaged seven key competencies will develop holistic children of the future but one key element of the 1999 curriculum is absent in the key competencies and that is the spiritual development of the child. The spiritual development of the child is one way to foster child well-being. A child who develops spiritually will learn to turn to their faith regularly and when they are challenged on the journey through life.

I do not understand why the Patron's Programme time is listed as being given a weekly time allocation of 2 hours. Over 2,700 Catholic schools all over the island teach the Grow in Love programme for thirty minutes each day. This programme already teaches many of the seven key competencies envisaged in the new draft curriculum – well-being is fostered when children talk about their personal lives. They talk about family celebrations and remember the dead in this month of November. Children become active citizens by speaking about parish life and care of the elderly in the parish. Children become creative by designing art work and creating music and movement. Children communicate and use language freely in the Religion lesson. They speak from the heart and every voice is heard.

Teachers all over the island do not wish that the Patron's Programme be placed in flexible curriculum time. The thirty minutes per day, two hours and 30 minutes per week is time that pupils look forward to. It is important for their well-being. It allows them to relax, listen to a story, sing a song, and talk about life and how it is for them. It is a respite from the areas of curriculum that challenge them and where some pupils shine more than others. At Religion time all are equal.

I watched a lovely Covid friendly outdoor Morning Ritual on the NCCA website from Gaelscoil Riabach. It reminded me that I too, have a Morning Ritual in my classroom for the past 36 years. I start the day with a prayer. Pupils have just arrived in the class room for the day and they put up their hands and request that the whole class pray for a special intention they may have. The request pours from them before the busy day begins and they feel that others empathise with them at that moment. The moment is theirs.

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.

I support the movement in the draft curriculum away from 11 subject areas to 5 curricular areas where teachers can have more independence in planning for and integrating Language, Maths, Science and Technology, Well-being, PE and SPHE, SESE and the Arts.

However, this flexibility should not extend to the Patron's Programme. The Patron's programme is a stand-alone programme which integrates with the key competencies. The Patron's Programme directs learners to spiritual development. No matter what your school context is – urban or rural, disadvantaged or privileged you can connect with the Catholic ethos of the school, whether you are the cleaner, a pupil, a parent, a member of the school Board of Management or a member of the teaching staff you can embrace the key message of living the values of the gospel in your day.

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.

Transitions are a challenge to children. We see first-hand each year how certain pupils struggle with the transfer to post primary school. There is much more freedom. Gone is the 11 o’clock break supervised by a teacher and lunch break where watching eyes are nearby. In second level pupils generally move from classroom to classroom. Some pupils find this movement difficult. Those who are confident and independent transition more easily.

The Patron’s Programme dedicated 30 minutes each day is a time when children are encouraged to communicate freely and use language. They work in pairs and discuss solutions to puzzles and problems. The lesson is an opportunity for them to become more confident and independent in their thinking. The programme encourages pupils to recognise those who work in our communities, it encourages participation in the life of the parish and in activities in the community. The programme helps foster a sense of identity and self in the child. Belonging and being a part of a place helps the child become more confident and eases the key transition from primary to post primary school.

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 am glad to see an option to teach Modern Foreign Languages included in the emerging priorities. Most European schools offer English to pupils from a very young age. I feel that it is important to teach a European language from the age of eight so that pupils can attempt to be fluent by the time they reach Leaving Certificate.

The Patron’s Programme helps the child develop values and attitudes which will stay with him for life. Children learn to show respect for all, to use the talents that they are given, to learn the difference between right and wrong and to include every child in everything that goes on in the classroom and in the playground. Inclusivity is at the heart of the Catholic school.

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.

This is key as planning for 11 discrete areas is leaden and does not enhance creativity and integration in teaching material.

The ambition is to have a curriculum that is broad and balanced in content. A curriculum that does not refer to the spiritual development of the child is not balanced. It is the reality that 2.700 Irish Catholic schools see as their primary function the holistic development of the child – an aim which encompasses spiritual and moral development. The curriculum must include the spiritual development of the child and allow for it in a discrete 30 minute teaching period each school day.

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 joy for education for a child is that teachers differ and each year when a pupil moves to a new classroom they experience a change of approach with new and varied teaching methods being explored each year. I note in the draft documents that teacher assessment is well regarded. The class teacher can see how the pupils are working, what their level of understanding is and can anticipate how they will achieve in classroom and in standardised testing. It is important not to underestimate continual revision in the primary classroom – particularly in this academic year when we are trying to fill the gaps from last year’s shortened learning.

Teaching Religion involves a variety of pedagogical approaches. It can vary from teacher centred storytelling, to constructivist project work, to group and pair work, to an approach where pupil voice is at the centre. Pupils learn in a varied manner which they enjoy.

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 key point here is that there is an acknowledgment that there is curriculum overload. The 5 curricular areas for planning should ease some of that overload and present teachers with a menu to choose from.

We cannot allow a curriculum which does not refer to the spiritual development of the child. Most schools have a distinct ethos which permeates the school day and everything we do. The Catholic school reaches out to all, is caring and compassionate and treats each child who walks in the door each morning as an equal. The school praises the smile, the kind gesture and the reaching out to the child who needs help. Every child is reassured and this is the supporting block in every Catholic school. The 30 minute Religion lesson each school day affirms every child and reassures

them that there is support there for them that will stay with them when they leave the primary school and go through life.

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie