



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment



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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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 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.

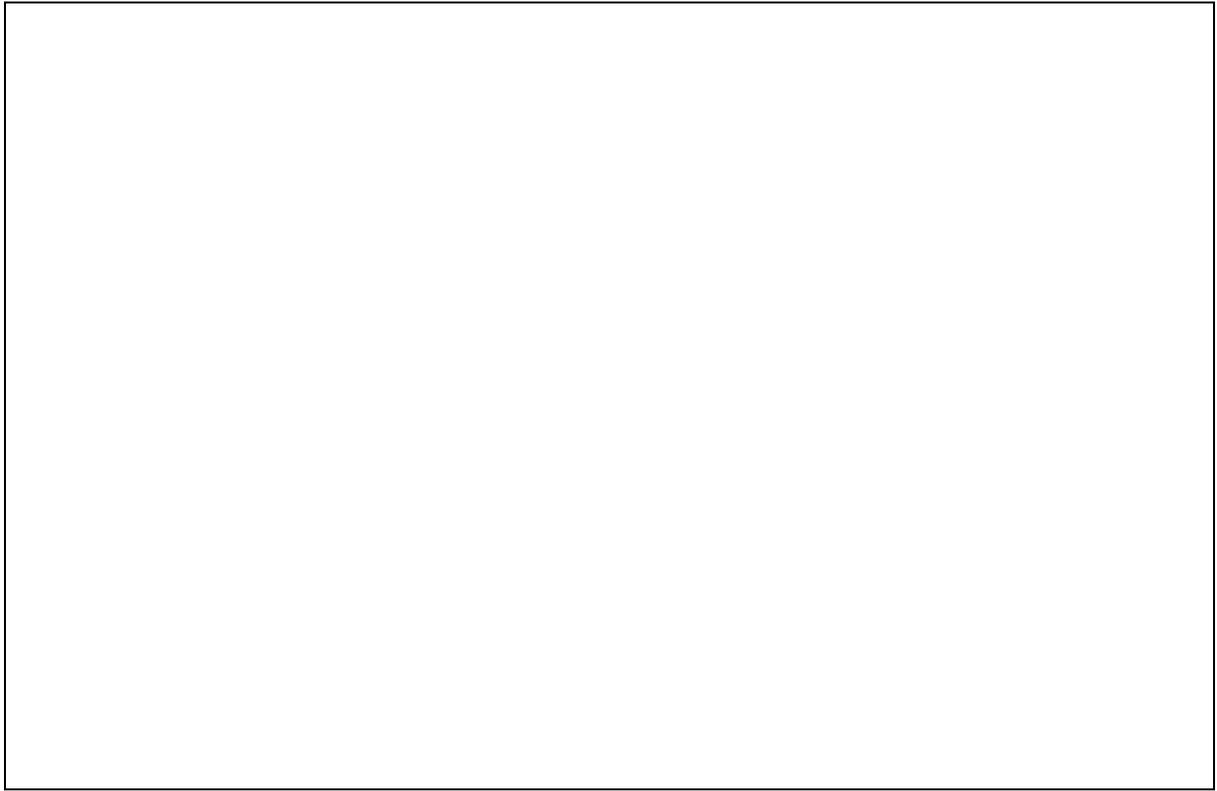
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Section 1

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

A re-conceptualisation of the primary curriculum must address the importance of preparing children for the real world. This includes a knowledge of the world including geographical and global justice perspectives. Growing up in a globalised world requires new approaches to education which develop a global dimension, a futures perspective, a zero carbon component and 21st-century competencies. We welcome the reference in the draft framework to these areas by stating ‘On a more global level, challenges such as climate change, sustainability, human migration, and geopolitical shifts illustrate the importance of dispositions and skills, such as resilience, creativity, innovation and critical thinking in the young and future generations. (NCCA, 2020). We also welcome the reference to the attribute of ‘developing capacity to make choices in favour of a sustainable future’ (NCCA, 2020) however the translation of this rationale and attribute into the curricular areas requires stronger emphasis on geography. Primary geography with a focus on global learning involves developing an understanding of contemporary issues, local/global links and power relations. By fostering optimism, personal agency and opportunities for action, global learning is empowering, dynamic and challenging. It is facilitated ‘through the development of 21st-century competencies which include critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation’ (Dolan, 2020:212).

Powerful primary geography (Dolan 2020) is about enabling children to become informed, caring and responsible citizens in their local and global community. It is about generating a sense of awe and wonder and a lifelong fascination with the world. It can only happen by facilitating children’s engagement as local, national and global citizens. Powerful primary geography involves a journey of self-discovery as much as it does finding out about the world. We need to begin with our own geographical selves, recognise the potential of powerful geography and advocate for a more imaginative approach to primary geography. Talking to ourselves will not achieve much. We need to put the message of powerful geography on the proverbial menu of teacher education reform as a matter of urgency. Our children deserve nothing less.



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Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

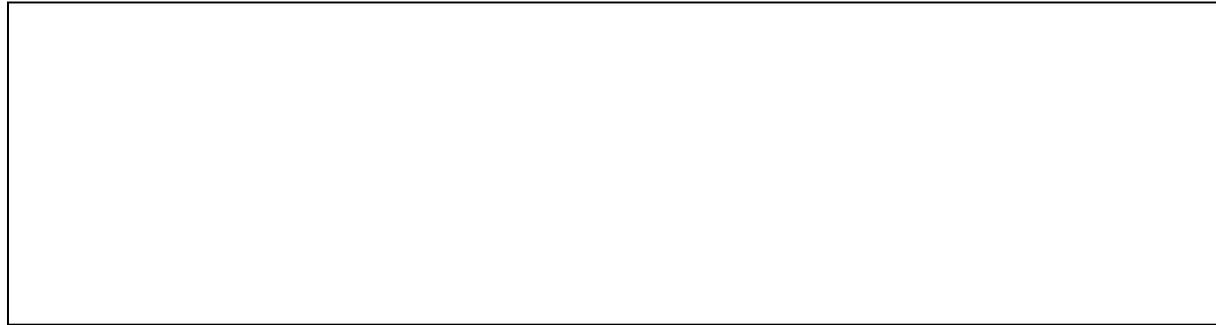
The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- 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.

In general, we welcome the framework approaches in this case and we particularly welcome the reference to diversity of learning environments. 'Children's learning is shaped and nurtured by the physical environment, indoors and outdoors. These diverse environments encourage children's independence and stimulate and support their learning across the curriculum' (NCCA, 2020).

However, when viewing the sample appendix timetable and time given to SESE and lack of mention directly to geography, it seems to not capture the importance and reference to global challenges referred to earlier in the document (NCCA, 2020).



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.

We welcome these messages and the emphasis on connections.

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.

In the draft NCCA document we would like to see powerful primary geography mentioned in the context of preparing children for real world learning.

Children are living in an exciting world. They have extraordinary questions. It is our job as teachers and educators to place children and their questions at the centre of geographical exploration in the classroom. To ignite their passion and curiosity, we as teachers need to focus on ourselves first, renewing in ourselves an awareness of the miraculous and magical nature of the world around us. Once the power of geography is recognised and appreciated by school leaders, teachers and children, the potential for meaningful learning and child advocacy is limitless.

More importantly, the power of geography needs to be recognised by government agencies, curriculum leaders and education policy makers. Unfortunately, the potential of primary geography tends to be overlooked by policy makers as current fashions in education (be that literacy, numeracy or digital learning) receive precedence in terms of funding, initial teacher education and continuing professional development.

However, as the world scrambles to find solutions to the current climate and biodiversity crises, an investment in meaningful primary geography education could reap multiple benefits. While primary geography cannot solve the problems of the world, it can help children recognise their potential as informed local and global citizens. Today, the need for informed citizens has never been greater. The term 'enquiry-based learning' is generally associated with geographical investigations. Geographical enquiry learning is based on investigations of the local, regional, national and global world by asking questions, finding solutions and presenting findings (Dolan, 2020). Enquiry is an approach to teaching and learning which extends geographical conceptual understanding, geographical thinking and skill development simultaneously. Through enquiry-based learning, the process of learning is as important as the core knowledge or concepts under exploration. Enquiry-based learning 'is an approach to learning disciplinary knowledge that enables students to develop a critical understanding of the world' (Roberts, 2013: 50). Critical thinking, investigation and analysis are key aspects of geographical enquiry-based learning.

Primary geography has the power to inspire children, student teachers and teachers to become passionate about their world and their place in this world. Through our research, we have had the honour of documenting examples of powerful primary geography in primary schools in Ireland (Dolan 2020, Dolan and Liston 2020). It was a privilege to witness geography inspired by the local environment and real life events. These examples of primary geography were meaningful, allowing children to make real connections with place and issues, thus expanding their conceptual understanding and skill development. As geographers, children can engage with their world in a myriad of interesting, educational and challenging ways, while enjoying themselves at the same time.

How might powerful primary geography be recognised in the classroom, in a school or in a community? Drawing on the work of Maude, (2016) and extensive literature dealing with 21st Century Competencies (Trilling, & Fadel, C. 2009), we suggest five signposts for recognising and facilitating powerful primary geography.

Children will become powerful geographers when they have an opportunity to:

- 1. Think geographically** (using key concepts such as place, space and the environment), i.e. testing and evaluating claims about knowledge, enabling thinking in and through the subject.
- 2. Ask geographical questions** (making connections, understanding interconnections and developing well-informed geographical understanding). This involves bringing a geographical dimension to topics and making links with other curricular areas.
- 3. Formulate geographical solutions**, i.e. using and applying the subject to contribute to topical and societal matters. Children can research a current problem or issue in the local and global community, and suggest carefully articulated solutions, along with the required resources and knowledge required.
- 4. Act geographically**, extending information and understanding about the world's environments, places, and people. Taking action can occur in many formats. Powerful geography has a clear action dimension. Children need to see the impact of their actions. For instance, children could design a school guide/map for new parents and people in the local community using school facilities. Children can share their geographical knowledge and understanding within and beyond the school community.
- 5. Become an ambassador for geography.** Here children are given a voice to articulate their hopes, concerns and choices. It is through the voice of children that the real power of geography can be articulated.

The ability to make decisions independently and collaboratively is an important 21st-century skill. The act of engaging in geography requires us to think creatively and critically. Roberts (2017) argues that geographical education is only powerful if it adopts a powerful pedagogy that values children's everyday experiences, promotes critical thinking and actively involves children through their construction of knowledge and understanding.

Geographical topics as cross-curricular themes with a specific reference to Geoliteracy

Recommendation 2: That Geo-literacy is adopted as a core integrating theme/curricular area for the new primary curriculum. This recommendation is made as a proposal to deal with curriculum overloading, increased emphasis on literacy and maths and international requirements for 21st-century learners.

What is Geo-literacy?

The Junior Cycle Geography programme in Ireland is designed to help students become geographically literate. In particular, 'it develops knowledge, skills, values and behaviours that allow students to explore the physical world, human activities, how we interact with our world and to recognise the interconnections between systems' (DES, 2018:5). Geoliteracy is the framework underpinning the Junior Cycle Geography Programme (Figure 1). In the interests of transition between primary and secondary school geography a focus on geo-literacy makes sense.

Geo-literacy is the ability to use geographic understanding and reasoning to make decisions. Whether we are making decisions about where to live, what precautions to take for natural hazards, or understanding human and natural systems, we are all called upon to make decisions that require geo-literacy throughout our lives. In primary classrooms the ultimate goal of geo-literacy is to facilitate children's participation in decision making through the use of geographic understanding and reasoning. Geo-literacy can be used to integrate literacy and numeracy into other subject areas, to improve learning outcomes in reading, and ease time pressure on curriculum implementation. The other unique feature of a geo-literacy lesson is the element of children's participation. At least 80% of the lesson is child led and child directed.

The three Is

Three central aspects of geo-literacy are commonly referred to as the three Is: Interactions (How our world works); Interconnections (How our world is connected); Implications (How to make well-reasoned decisions). Each geo-literacy lesson is constructed around these three concepts.

Interactions: A geo-literate individual is able to reason about the ways that human and natural systems function and interact. How the world works

Interconnections: A geo-literate individual is able to reason about the ways that people and places are connected to each other across time and space. How the world is connected

Implications: A geo-literate individual is able to weigh the potential impacts of their decisions systematically. How to make well-reasoned decisions.

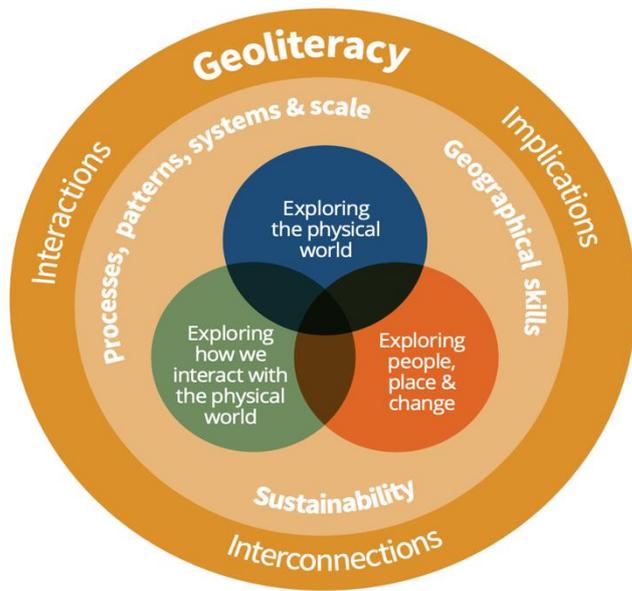


Figure 1. The structure of the specification for Junior Cycle Geography (DES, 2018, 9)

Making connections

One of the central aspects of integrated teaching and thematic planning is the forging of connections across subject areas. Geo-literacy is about interconnections and the active process of making connections. Making connections is one of the central features of a geo-literacy lesson. Each geo-literacy lesson begins with discussion and development of children’s prior knowledge. There is a strong focus on the development of children’s oral language. Children can then make connections with new material, with their reading and with the real world. Other connections which may take place during a geo-literacy lesson include the following:

- Making connections with myself and my prior knowledge
- Making connections with other children in the class
- Making connections with literacy and numeracy
- Making connections across the curriculum
- Making connections with the geographical topic under exploration
- Making connections with my school/and or local community
- Making connections with the broader global community

Geo-literacy can be used to integrate literacy and geography into other subject areas, to improve learning outcomes in reading, and ease time pressure on curriculum implementation (Burns and Dolan, 2016). Literacy experts acknowledge the importance of literacy being taught through a range of curricular areas including geography. Geo-literacy incorporates an approach to literacy whereby children develop literacy skills through a range of local and global geographical topics and themes.

There is a strong correlation between oral language and reading comprehension. Furthermore, competent oral language and reading capabilities are important requisites for young geographers especially from 9 years of age onwards. In order to be able to read, children need comprehensive knowledge about their world. According to Hirsch, (2007:12) 'while it is true that proficient reading and critical thinking are all purpose abilities, they are not content-independent, formal skills at all but are always based on concrete, relevant knowledge and cannot be exercised apart from what psychologists call 'domain-specific' knowledge'.

Internationally, there has been an increased focus on literacy and numeracy, followed by a marginalisation of other curricular areas including geography. In response to Ireland's low performance in the PISA Survey in the period 2006-2009 (OECD, 2010), literacy was identified as a 'national priority' (Department of Education and Skills 2011, 14). Ironically, the PISA test examines the ability of 15 year olds from a selection of countries to deduce from what they have learned and apply that knowledge in unfamiliar settings both inside and outside school. This idea of applied knowledge is central to geo-literacy.

In geo-literacy lessons, text includes maps, graphs, photographs, visual images and geo-spatial representations of information. According to Roberts (2014: 205) children 'need to be able to understand, interpret, analyse and critique geographical data presented in different ways: printed text; maps; statistics, graphs; photographs and film. To make sense of geography they need to make connections of all kinds: between existing knowledge and new ideas; between different pieces of information; between different concepts.'

An innovative approach to literacy

The definition of literacy by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (DES, 2011), notes that:

literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. (DES, 2011, p. 8)

While often considered to compete for time on the timetable, primary teachers can usefully develop language and literacy through primary geography in a manner which is relevant, immediate and which achieves core literacy objectives.

'Geographical education makes a critical contribution to the child's language development: the growth of the child's geographical understanding and the acquisition of language skills are interdependent and mutually enriching. It is largely through language that children describe and interpret their experience, organise their thinking and attempt to make sense of the world around them' (NCCA\DES,1999:12).

Geography and literacy are intrinsically linked e.g. good geography teaching involves the development of core literacy and numeracy skills. Literacy skills in reading, writing, talking, listening and viewing are essential to the acquisition of geographical skills and knowledge. The potential for developing literacy through geographical teaching and through the use of geographical resources, lies in the hands of the primary school teacher.

Geo-literacy with its explicit emphasis on oral language and skill development can make an invaluable contribution to literacy in general and geographical conceptual development in particular.

Making decisions

The National Geographic Education's website states that 'Geo-literacy is the ability to use geographic understanding and geographic reasoning to make decisions' (NGE). Decision making requires us to make connections with our prior knowledge, with the specifics of each context and with appropriate geo-spatial information. Making decisions requires a complex set of reasoning and cognitive skills. The more opportunities children have to make their own independent decisions the more confident they will become. Providing a well conceptualised rationale for their decision is also part of this process.

References

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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.)

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- 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.

We welcome the 5 broad areas and an integrated learning experience. We suggest integrated learning experiences should continue beyond 2nd class.

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.

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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 content in this case.

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.

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- 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.

We welcome the content in this case.

Covid-19

Since the publication of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, Covid-19 has presented a big challenge for schools. Please give your views on the implications of schools’ experience of the pandemic for the finalisation of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*.

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.

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