

Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals responding to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*

This template is intended to support you (and your colleagues/organisation) in developing a written submission in response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Please e-mail your completed submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Individual submission details

| | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Name | Frances Shearer |
| Date | 30/12/20 |
| E-mail | |

Organisation submission details

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|---------------------|--|
| Name | |
| Position | Former National Co-ordinator for RSE and SPHE Support Services (2001- 2014) Qualified .B and MindUP facilitator |
| Organisation | |
| Date | |
| E-mail | |

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

Yes

No

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

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 Framework is clear and comprehensive. It outlines an exciting and positive way forward for primary education.

The greater flexibility given to teachers to plan their work in response to the needs of the students is very welcome. An online toolkit with regular updates and examples of best practice will support this.

Dividing the primary curriculum into Stages 1+2 and 3+4 is an excellent idea. The broader curricular areas in Stages 1 + 2 will make the transition from pre-school to primary easier and will put the teacher under less pressure to teach a wide range of 'subjects'. This in itself will have a positive effect on wellbeing. Moving to more specific subjects in Stages 3 + 4 will help to prepare children for the transition to post-primary schooling.

I welcome the fact that Fostering Wellbeing is one of the seven key competencies and one of the three core subjects to be taught weekly. This will ensure consistency with Aistear and the new Framework for Junior Cycle, both of which have Wellbeing as a core element.

The increased awareness of the important role played by schools in supporting the wellbeing of children is welcome. However, wellbeing itself is a concept that is not always easy to define. Practice can vary greatly in how SPHE is currently implemented. Teachers can view SPHE as a series of 'programmes' which they feel under pressure to teach – RSE, Stay Safe, On My Own Two Feet.

Attention will need to be given to developing a clear framework for Wellbeing. It should have an overarching whole school dimension which integrates with a clearly defined strategy for teaching the different elements of Wellbeing.

I strongly recommend that the NCCA consider incorporating mindfulness as an aspect of Wellbeing in the new curriculum. There is growing evidence * that mindfulness enhances a child's ability to regulate his or her emotions and can improve cognitive function. Children who are stressed find it very difficult to focus on learning.

From my experience of delivering workshops on Wellbeing to school staff I am aware that many teachers are already including mindfulness type activities in their classrooms and self-report the benefits for individual children and the overall atmosphere and environment of the classroom. It would strengthen the learning outcomes for Wellbeing and would be better for teachers, parents and school managers if there was greater consistency in the rationale, content and methods used.

* Katherine Weare, Professor of Education at Southampton University has reviewed the growing body of research on the efficacy of mindfulness based interventions in schools. While acknowledging that this is a relatively new field of study and that more work needs to be done, she states:

‘There is a growing and promising quantitative evidence base on mindfulness in schools, which has continued to emerge over the last two years and which consistently suggests small to moderate impacts across a range of outcomes, most strongly and reliably on psycho-social health and well-being, especially mental health problems, with less definitive but promising evidence for small effects on behaviour, cognition, learning, and physical health.

The overlapping field of ‘contemplative education’ is less concerned with measurable outcomes, aiming instead to put the learner, and their self-reflective mindfulness at the heart of the teaching and learning process. Interest is growing on how best to implement mindfulness and integrate it into the policies, practice and ethos of the whole institution, with some promising early findings, mainly from qualitative data. There is a particular and growing emphasis, supported by some emerging quantitative evidence, on the need for teachers to learn mindfulness themselves and establish their own practice if they are to cultivate mindfulness in schools effectively.’

(‘Current Opinion in Psychology’ 2019. This report and other research papers on mindfulness in schools can be found at mindfulnessinschoolsproject.org)

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.

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.

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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.

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.

Given that the new curriculum is likely to be in place for many years I recommend that the NCCA give serious consideration to including mindfulness as an element of Fostering Wellbeing.

There is clear evidence that the regular practice of mindfulness is of benefit to adults. Evidence is growing for the effectiveness of mindfulness in schools, especially when it is taught in the context of social and emotional learning (see Section One).

In Ireland in recent years at least three organisations have been training teachers to introduce mindfulness in primary schools – Mindfulness Matters, MindUP * and the Mindfulness in Schools Project (teaching Paws b and .b). There may be others. These organisations are responding to a perceived need.

The Mindfulness in Schools Project (MISP) requires teachers to have attended an 8 week teacher led secular mindfulness course and to have an established mindfulness practice before attending a training course. Mindfulness Matters and MindUP do not. While the value of mindfulness being taught by a practitioner is obvious, it is not realistic to expect every teacher to be a mindfulness practitioner.

Both Mindfulness Matters and MindUP take the approach that any teacher can introduce simple practices which encourage children to pay attention in a mindful way. The attention can be to their breath, to a sound, to something they look at. The benefit is gained from the regular repeated practice of learning to be still and focus the attention. Mindful breathing in particular is known to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system and promote calm. An integral aspect of MindUP is that everyone in the school takes two or three short breaks (3 minutes long) every day to practice mindful breathing.

MISP and MindUP also teach children very simple neuroscience – how for survival reasons the brain is hardwired to respond quickly to stress, but when stress is prolonged it can have harmful effects. The children learn to recognise their own stress responses and develop strategies to respond to them in a positive way. This is learning which clearly supports the Wellbeing competencies of fostering self-awareness and increasing the ability of children to ‘deal with the normal challenges of life, become resilient and cope in a variety of situations and circumstances’.

*MindUP ceased offering face to face teacher training in Ireland and the UK in November 2020 and now offers online training only.

Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

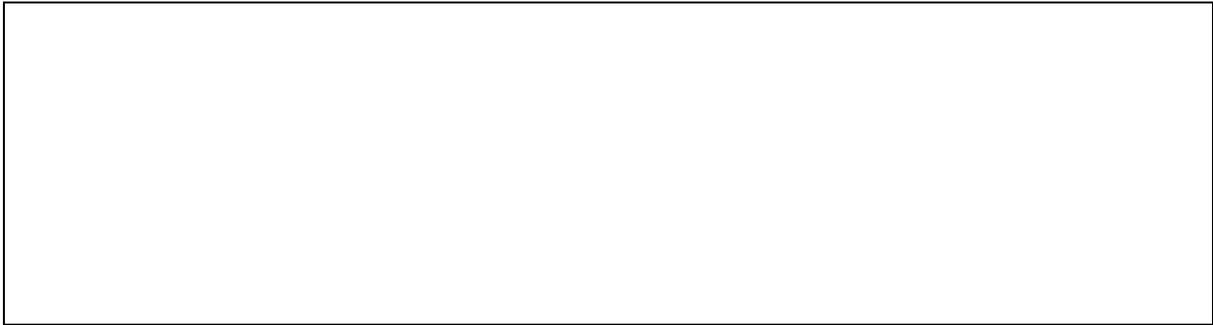
The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- 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.

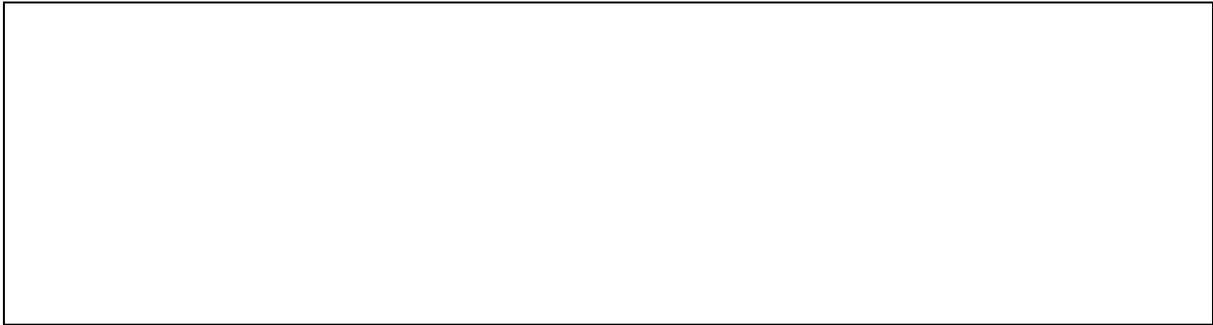


Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning

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.



Building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to the challenges and changing needs and priorities.

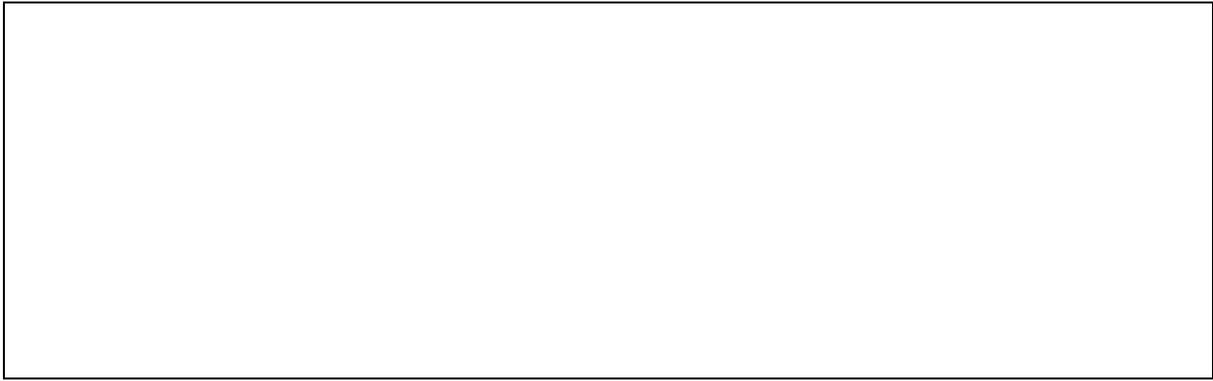
The 1999 curriculum contributed to many successes including:

- 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.



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Thank you for your submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie