

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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Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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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.

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Section 1

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

“Irish society is more diverse than ever before.” (NCCA, 2020). We strongly believe that the Primary Curriculum needed to be reformed to reflect our changing society.

The additional strengths seen in the draft curriculum (NCCA, 2020) in comparison to the 1999 curriculum are:

- The draft primary curriculum framework (DPCF) is broad in nature which incorporates teacher agency in the classroom.
- Through the partnership principle, the child’s learning can be supported by the family, the school and the wider community
 - Continuity is evident between the twelve principles of Aistear, the eight principles of the DCPF and the eight principles of the new junior cycle framework
- Additionally, the themes of Aistear, the key competencies of the DCPF and the key skills of the new junior cycle help children to make links between their learning, allowing for smoother transitions at different educational stages
 - Its emphasis on wellbeing
 - Children have the opportunity to learn modern languages in primary schools

Some criticisms we identified in the DCPF are:

- Figure 3 on page 11 shows that there are 6 curriculum areas and subjects (including patron’s programme) however stated above this there are only 5 which is a contradictory statement.
- Teachers may struggle to adjust to teach the additional aspects of the new DCPF such as modern languages.

Overall, we believe the DCPF will successfully contribute to 21st Century learning

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.

Having reviewed the DPCF:

We recognised the agency it provides for teachers and principals to create an inclusive and diverse classroom and school environment by appreciating the individuality of all students.

It evidently connects with different school contexts for example DEIS schools. It bears in mind the various needs of the children, through its broadness, flexibility and allowance for a teacher's professional judgement.

We think option 3, table 6 is the most comprehensive time allocation, therefore simplifying the weekly planning process for teachers in relation to flexibility and timetabling.

Due to the introduction of flexible time, teachers have the opportunity to respond to children's interests i.e. if an unexpected interest arose from a topic in a lesson then flexible time could be used to explore this interest in further detail.

- As the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland mentions, flexible time could be allocated to allowing children to flourish as active citizens (DES, 2014) through "whole-school activities and/or participation in local, regional and national initiatives and events." (NCCA, 2020) e.g. a class/school recycling project.
- As regards Communion and Confirmation classes, flexible time enables them to have adequate practice in the church before the sacrament.
- Additionally, it also allows for more practical and meaningful learning experiences e.g. trips to local historic sites which are being learned about from the children's books and other relevant resources.

Consequently, the DPCF provides for teacher agency and flexibility within the classroom.

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

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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 provides a clear vision for children’s learning as it builds upon children’s prior knowledge. This spiral curriculum allows children to make connections through their eight years of primary school.

Continuity is evident between the twelve principles of Aistear, the eight principles of the DCPF and the eight principles of the new junior cycle framework. The Aistear theme of ‘wellbeing’ relates to the key competency of ‘fostering wellbeing’ in the new DCPF and the key skill of ‘staying well’ in the new Junior cycle framework. Similarly, ‘communication’ is evident across the three frameworks’, creating continuity throughout.

At home children learn through daily interactions and educational materials which are provided by parents. This links with the Aistear principle of developing through ‘play and hands on experiences’ (Aistear, 2009).

Children develop technology skills through the use of iPads and laptops in primary schools creating a foundational understanding of IT. This is then built upon during their post-primary education e.g. basic coding skills in primary schools such as beebots and scratch junior are developed upon in secondary school for instance, by generating online projects using scratch.

Resulting from the introduction of modern languages in the DCPF, children can acquire vocabulary of foreign languages which can aid their transition into post primary language education.

The DCPF clearly establishes connections between the three educational levels in turn providing support for students.

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.

We believe the seven key competencies contribute to the child’s holistic development, in particular being a digital learner, an active citizen and fostering wellbeing, all of which are essential to 21st century learning and aren’t emphasised in the 1999 Primary curriculum.

Children’s skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes are developed through the learning outcomes and key competencies. Although the majority of learning outcomes/ attributes are broad e.g. being curious, some are very specific e.g. solving problems and making sense of the world using mathematics. We feel that the key competencies are broad in nature and are up for interpretation based on children’s needs e.g. Being creative, which allows teachers to address the “growing consensus that formal education should cultivate the creativity and critical thinking skills of students to help them succeed in modern, globalised economies” (OECD, 2020).

“Frequency of activity was positively associated with wellbeing and negatively correlated with symptoms of anxiety and depression” (DCU Research, 2020).

We agree that there needs to be a greater emphasis on PE for pupils because both their mental and physical health would benefit – according to the Healthy Ireland Survey 2015, 32% of the Irish population are not active enough to meet the national guidelines (HSE, 2020).

SPHE (Wellbeing) would particularly be important as there is a growing rate of depression among young people in Ireland. Recently, anxiety has built among children due to Covid 19 and if a virus was to arise in the future, we would hope that due to the increased emphasis on wellbeing in the DPCF, children and teachers would have the appropriate skills, support and resources to act accordingly.

Digital learning and technology enhances learning across all subjects e.g. Geogebra in Mathematics and it equips children with life skills for a growing technological world e.g. IT skills.

Depending on the school context the Education about religion and beliefs (ERB) and Ethics of all should be acknowledged and accepted by all members of the school body.

The introduction of modern languages in schools benefits children's overall communication and language skills and prepares them for their post-primary education in their future language development.

Arts education builds confidence, allows for expression and integration enabling pupils to have a meaningful learning experience across all subject areas.

The emerging priorities of children's learning are successfully embedded in the DCPF.

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.

The DPCF content is divided into five curriculum areas (excluding the Patron's Programme) which are broad and balanced in nature and contribute to the children's holistic development. Its purpose is to provide flexibility regarding both teaching and learning. This allows for a more accessible trajectory to cross curricular integration, for example in stages 1 and 2, the theme of bullying in Wellbeing can be integrated with the Arts Education (making a drama), Languages (oral language and Technology Education (cyber bullying). In stages 3 and 4, the theme of bullying in Social, Personal and Values Education can be integrated with the same curricular areas as in stage 1 and 2, being developed through the spiral curriculum.

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We acknowledge that the DPCF has broad learning outcomes which are beneficial as they provide greater scope for teachers to differentiate among students. It incorporates the Primary Language Curriculum through its vision, structure and content by using broad learning outcomes.

To conclude, the structure of the DPCF creates a more accessible framework for teachers.

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 and learning [is] at the heart of that curriculum" (NCCA, 2020, p.20) and this is evident through its:

- Expansive content allowing for more learning opportunities.
- Inclusive nature which recognises each child's individual needs.
- Attitudes and dispositions which are fostered through the hidden curriculum • Assessment methods (Intuitive, Planned and Assessment Events) which provides vital information for children, teachers, families and the wider school community.
 - Flexible time where they can make meaningful connections with school life, their interests and experiences.
 - Encouragement of partnerships between school bodies, parents and families, allowing for the continuation of learning at home

The teacher's professional judgement supports children's progression in learning e.g by carrying a running record in literacy, determining the reading ability of pupils, allowing them to read at their own instructional level.

Quality relationships between children and teachers “promote learning” (NCCA, 2020, p.21) and engagement in the classroom.

With a strong parent - teacher relationship, children’s “academic achievement, social competencies and emotional well-being” can be enhanced (Sheridan, 2016).

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 1999 curriculum did indeed contribute to many successes, for example:

- The enhanced enjoyment of learning for children by fostering their “sense of wonder and natural curiosity” (NCCA, 1999, p.8) as well as developing their “social and emotional dimensions” (NCCA, 1999, p.8).
 - Extensive learning experiences provided through active methodologies which cater for all individual needs, for instance, cooperative learning activities.
 - No doubt, reading, Mathematics and Science has improved as a result of the 1999 Curriculum - Ireland ranked 16th out of 37 OECD countries in Mathematics (Department of Education, 2019).

The DCPF addresses the curriculum overload by condensing the subjects into 5 broad curricular areas. The addition of flexible time also allows for more agency in the classroom and time for extended focus on a specific topic if needed.

The priorities of children’s learning are clarified through its strategies, initiatives and programmes. This can be seen through its competencies and principles such as the fostering of wellbeing and pedagogy. It allows for students to engage in active learning, gaining knowledge from both an academic and wider world context.

The aforementioned way in which this curriculum links with both Aistear and the Junior cycle framework allows for smooth transitions between educational levels.

In conclusion, the 1999 curriculum had many successes and strengths which the new curriculum builds upon whilst recognising the challenges, changing needs and priorities in school communities.

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Thank you for your submission.

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