



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

Name	na
Date	na
E-mail	na

Organisation submission details

Name	Laura Ní Mháille
Position	Primary Schools Coordinator
Organisation	Irish Schools Sustainability Network
Date	February 2022
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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 Irish Schools Sustainability Network (ISSN) brings teachers & students, from primary and post-primary schools together to foster discussion about the climate emergency & loss of nature. The ISSN was founded in March 2021 to provide a forum for teachers and students to work in partnership to accelerate climate action, address the loss of nature, and prioritise sustainability in the Irish Education System. In November 2021 we organised the Climate and Nature Summit which brought over 2000 Schools across Ireland together with the aim of revolutionising our education system for a more just & sustainable world. In response to this summit 66% of teachers stated that they would like to see a curricular area covering Sustainability and Climate Action.

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.

Key Recommendations

- **Inclusion of ‘Sustainability’ as a core principle**
- **Expansion of key competencies to include environmental sensitivity/ stewardship**
- **Maintaining ‘Environmental Education’ as a subject in Stage 3 and 4 or an overarching theme across many subjects**
- **Inclusion of Nature Pedagogy; learning in, about and for the natural world**
- **Enhanced scope for thematic/ concept based approaches**

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework holds huge potential in its holistic, inclusive and flexible approach, however there are glaring omissions in how it builds on these strengths to empower young people with the knowledge, action, skills and dispositions necessary to tackle the imminent crisis of climate and biodiversity loss. The most recent IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report, February 2022 states that ‘Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and *rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future*’ ([IPCC, 2022](#)). This dire report warns of the consequences of inaction and how these will impact the lives of the children for whom we write this curriculum. Action 36 in Ireland’s [Climate Action Plan](#) states that the National Dialogue for Climate Action will “build climate literacy into the national education system at primary and secondary levels, and in adult education programmes with our partners in the Department of Education and Skills, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)”. If this is to be achieved, the NCCA needs to be a key stakeholder and climate needs to feature prominently in the new primary curriculum.

The shift in focus to competency based curriculum presents huge potential in preparing our children to become creative, active and empowered global citizens. However, the lack of emphasis placed on environmental education, sustainability, connection with the natural world and climate action will leave children ill-equipped to deal with the largest threats of their generation from climate change and biodiversity loss. “ is a dire warning about the consequences of inaction,” said IPCC chair Dr [Hoesung Lee](#). “It shows climate change is a grave and mounting threat to our wellbeing and a healthy planet. Our actions today will shape how people adapt and nature responds to increasing climate risks.” It is vital that this upcoming curriculum empowers students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to be active global citizens with a deep knowledge of and connection with their local environments.

Climate literacy, connection to the natural world, outdoor learning and action skills must be given greater emphasis in this new Primary Curriculum Framework.

This is an incredible opportunity for Ireland to lead the way in world-class environmental education, creating active global citizens that are connected and empowered for decades to come.

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Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

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.

The recognition of the professionalism and agency of educators to enact the curriculum is a clear strength of this framework. The empowerment of hope and agency in students should also be a key element of the curriculum.

Flexibility of time and curricular areas allows for greater in-depth study and meaningful engagement with thematic or concept based approaches. Acknowledging the fact that active, inquiry-based-learning learning is not easily sequestered into subject areas, ISSN would favour maximum flexible time in relation to subject timings. The options presented within the framework present very little variety and it is felt provide little meaningful divergence from the 1999 curriculum in how they could be applied.

In acknowledging teachers' agency and professionalism, it would be beneficial to engage with teachers in rigorous professional development equipping us as professionals with greater awareness of how to approach concepts and themes as units of inquiry across subjects rather than the unnatural siloing which can take place in a subjects focused curriculum as is proposed. It appears that the rigid subject adherence becomes more pronounced in senior class and thematic integrated planning may be more challenging.

Emerging priorities for children's learning

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.

The Principles

The principles provide a clear overview of the key philosophies integrated into the curriculum. However, certain key principles, present in the 1999 curriculum, have unfortunately not been given the same emphasis in this draft.

- The integrated nature of the curriculum, including the integration of all secular elements of the curriculum should be highlighted (Religious instruction should NOT be integrated).
- Acknowledging that 'social and emotional dimensions are important factors in learning (1999 Curriculum) could be supported through including under the 'Relationship' principle the importance of **relationships to self, others and the world** around them is central to the curriculum.

Sustainability as a key principle

Including sustainability as a key principle of the new curriculum would give a clear message of the importance of engaging critically and creatively as educators and students in shaping our futures and the future world the children will live on. Interweaving this with the draft principles will prove of most benefit to the future students for whom this curriculum is being developed and the planet they live on.

Key Competencies

The shift towards key competencies is a very positive one, particularly the inclusion of 'being an active citizen'. The description of this competency is commendable and the reference to sustainability with its description, ought to be built upon throughout other competencies is fundamental and needs to be built upon throughout the curriculum.

Knowledge alone will not embolden children to become stewards of the earth, children will care for that with which they have a deep connection. Therefore, we would welcome the inclusion of a competency which incorporates this connection to the natural world eg. environmental sensitivity/ learning to live sustainably/ environmental stewardship.

Wellbeing as a key competency is crucially important. The potential role of the natural world, through outdoor learning, outdoor play and reciprocal protection of the natural world should be acknowledged in the curriculum. Similarly the threat posed to our well-being by 'eco-anxiety', overwhelm and a sense of helplessness in the face of major crises should be made clear to educators and professional development provided to ensure that we can inspire students to action as a key strategy for improving well-being.

Curriculum Areas and Subjects

ISSN agree broadly with the curriculum areas as set out and as stated previously believe strongly in a thematic, action-focused inquiry approach incorporating subjects in explorations of concepts rather than an isolated subject approach. The potential for integration and in depth exploration of topics could provide the most fundamental

pedagogical shift of this curriculum framework and best align with the competencies based approach and engagement as active citizens.

We are concerned by the exclusion of Social and Environmental Education in Stages 3 and 4 in favour of solely History and Geography. Environmental Education is a key component of geography, science, ethics and other subjects but must feature independently also. It would be remiss of the NCCA to remove 'Environmental Education' from senior classes in light of the environmental emergency in which we are immersed. ISSN would like to propose two potential solutions

- a. Sustainability Education (*Incorporating Nature Connection, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) or Climate Change/Climate Justice/Climate Action*) forms its own core subject alongside History and Geography in 3rd-6th Class.
- b. Sustainability Education is a core theme running through Geography/ Science & Technology/ SPHE/ Ethics/ Wellbeing ; or indeed all subjects.

However, these themes need to be entirely overarching and not necessarily all covered in one subject. Limiting discussion of nature, sustainability and climate change to one subject diminishes its importance.

Ethics or Values based education will be an important cornerstone upon which key competencies and attributes are enabled. An ethics programme should NOT be dependent on a school's patron programme, all students are entitled to an impartial, non-denominational ethics programme.

Nature pedagogy, including education in, about and for the natural world can provide a firm basis upon which to develop competencies of wellbeing, active citizenship, creativity, communication, mathematical learner and many more. The principles of this draft curriculum set out the centrality of a children's environment to their learning, this should go further in emphasising the importance of sustainable use of outdoor spaces, both within and outside school grounds.

Practical as well as theoretical professional development will be crucial in embedding these pedagogies in our schools, as they have been internationally in Norway, Sweden and parts of Canada. Facilitating children to develop a relationship with nature, rooted in the local and building upon local heritage, natural and built can be facilitated through CPD, development of centres of excellence, mentors and extensive toolkits.

Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

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.

Our opinions in this area have been stated through other sections.

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

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.

ISSN welcomes active, participative, and experiential learning methods that engage the learner and make a real difference to their understanding, thinking and ability to act.

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

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.

ISSN acknowledges and welcomes the potential for enhanced flexibility and agency which this framework proposes, building upon the potential of the 1999 curriculum for integration and drawing on teachers' individual strengths.

The continued separation of subjects rather than exploration of topics, themes and concepts in a more holistic fashion is regrettable, as well as the lack of focus on play-based learning, nature pedagogy and local studies, particularly in the older classes.

The aim as set out above to reduce curriculum workload, does not appear to have been alleviated in this draft, although this may become more apparent in the development and expansion of individual elements of the curriculum. Communications and genuine consultations with teachers will be tantamount to the success of this objective.

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*.

Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of the following areas

- Outdoor Learning; Covid-19 encouraged teachers to get outside more for health reasons and many other benefits became clear. Our eyes were further opened to; the benefits of outdoor learning to children's wellbeing, the increased affordances of space, material, pedagogical approaches and opportunities for connection and communication were highlighted as well as our role in protecting our natural space, rather than seeing it as merely another resource to be 'used'.
- Centrality of wellbeing and relationships in children's learning.

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.

Please email your submission to PCRSubmissions@ncca.ie