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	
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Yes ✓ No

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

The PDST Digital Technologies team supports teachers in effectively embedding digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment across the curriculum.

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.

Section 1

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

The PDST Digital Technologies team wish to acknowledge the work of the NCCA in reviewing the current primary curriculum and in developing the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework, and welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on this document. Our overall response to the draft framework, framed through the lens of the work our team do in the area of digital technologies, is embodied in the points listed below:

- We feel the revised framework is more relevant to the current educational climate in Ireland. Progression is evident and builds on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while responding to challenges, changing needs and priorities of pupils. From the context of our work in the area of digital learning, the proposed framework also complements the vision of the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015 - 2020, to "Realise the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment so that Ireland's young people become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens to participate fully in society and the economy." (p.5)
- The addition of transversal competencies is both a progressive and effective development that will support integration across the curriculum. As such, we feel that it would be very important that such transversal competencies are framed as being part of each subject, and not stand alone. In the case of 'Being a Digital Learner' the focus should be on using technology as a tool to enhance teaching, learning and assessment as advocated in the Digital Learning Framework rather than focusing on fundamental digital skills, such as typing. These fundamental skills should be the stepping stones to using technology in a meaningful way. It is positive that the proposed key competency attributes reflect the CPD school support facilitated by advisors and the range of webinars and courses designed by our PDST Digital Technologies team in Communicating and collaborating with others through digital technology, Accessing, analysing and managing content using digital technology, Enabling content creation, problem-solving and creativity using digital technology, Interacting ethically and responsibly with digital technology (p10).
- It is very positive to see explicit links with Aistear and Junior Cycle . This facilitates the formation of strong principles and ideas particularly with regard to digital citizenship.

- Teacher autonomy and agency pervade the document which is a very positive development. Collaboration between teachers at a whole school level will facilitate the development of well rounded learning experiences for children as they progress through the school and promotes the dissemination of a spiral curriculum.
- Further clarification is important to differentiate between a digital learner, digital literacy, the T in STEM, digital technologies and ICT. The language of competences vs. competencies will also need to be clarified we feel.
- It is also Important that all system stakeholders should have the same understanding of agency and autonomy so that key curricular messages delivered across organisations are aligned.
- We feel it would also be of benefit if guidance could be provided to highlight policy integration and crossover with a view to avoiding curriculum overload e.g. linkage between SSE and a school's Digital Learning Plan.

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.

We feel that the proposed broader nature of the curriculum allows for increased individualisation at school level for pupils to contextualise their learning. In this manner, the learning is shaped by a school's context. Teachers and principals also become the 'curriculum makers' in their school, promoting professional collaboration. A change of culture and mindset may be needed for this to happen. Agency will need to be clarified and scaffolds provided for teachers in this area. We feel that it is important that time and space for teachers should be considered for curriculum development along with access to continuous professional development from Department of Education support services.

The new curriculum encourages teachers to engage in Project Based Learning (PBL) with the implementation of digital learning across the curriculum in a meaningful way. This will need to be modelled and scaffolded for teachers through CPD.

The flexibility of timetabling of the new curriculum gives teachers the agency and opportunity to respond to priorities within their school context. Considerations will need to be given here to the potential issues that may arise from this. The development of a number of case studies in this regard

may prove useful for teachers and stakeholders across the education system in exploring the potential of this increased flexibility.

Connecting with other schools and different school contexts within the education system through projects such as the School Excellence Fund, communities of practice and local initiatives can lead to greater opportunities for learning for pupils, teachers and schools as a whole.

The adoption of effective project-based learning links in with one of the Highly Effective Practice Statements of the Digital Learning Framework; "Pupils use digital technologies to creatively and critically develop their competence as autonomous, self-directed learners and are able to set meaningful personal goals for future learning". In order for pupils and teachers to be able to engage with effective PBL, the potential digital divide that may exist in their context needs to be considered. A spiral approach to the development of pupils' and teachers' digital skills and competencies will need to be addressed and planned for here also.

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

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

1. Provide a clear vision for children's learning across the eight years of primary school.
2. 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*.
3. 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.

Lifelong learning is a key tenet of education. It can be facilitated by the effective use of digital technologies as highlighted in the Digital Learning Framework document at both primary and post-primary level also. Digital technologies can harness meaningful learning experiences which children encounter through Aistear both formally and informally. Digital learning skills developed at each level of schooling will help learners to become active and responsible digital citizens who can effectively and safely engage meaningfully and responsibly in the online world. The constructivist approach to digital technologies

instruction and integration evident in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework will allow for students to embrace creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration which are essential 21st century learning skills, as well as lifelong skills.

In relation to the linking of learning experiences provided through the themes of the *Aistear*: *the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and connecting these with the subjects, key skills and statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle, w*e welcome the inclusion of 'Being a Digital Learner' as one of the Key Competencies of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. From a young age it is hugely important to educate learners about the advantages and disadvantages of technology use including screen time and cyberbullying so that they can make informed decisions about their digital wellbeing. This echoes the Council of Europe's approach where they have mapped the diverse modes of interaction that learners may have with technology across three distinct areas: Being Online, Wellbeing Online, Rights- Online. Such aspects can be introduced through *Aistear* and built upon throughout the pupils primary school career. In terms of subjects at post-primary level then, it is welcome that a foundation for computational thinking and problem solving would be included in the forthcoming Mathematics, Science and Technology subject grouping which may help to lay the foundational skills necessary for subjects such as Computer Science at Leaving Certificate level and provide a full framework for its integration into the educational system.

Transitions between one school and another have been eased using technology. There is great potential to expand upon the current 'education passport' that is shared when pupils are moving to the next stage of their education, through the use of digital technologies. Formative assessment using digital portfolios offers teachers, parents and pupils the opportunity to gain a rounded view of a child's educational journey when focusing on the learning process rather than the product. It offers a more pupil centered rather than teacher directed approach to educational assessment and learning and provides a valuable source of evidence that could be included in a digitised 'education passport'.

In commenting on home-school linkage then, during school building closures in 2020 schools rapidly adopted new communication platforms to communicate with parents/guardians and to support pupils' learning from a distance. This reflected the need for a facility such as this to be put in place, thus adapting to the world around us. Building on this, and the need for schools to have a digital platform in place under Circular 0074/2020, there now exists an opportunity for schools to be proactive rather than reactive in terms of the use of a school's chosen platform going forward to strengthen home-school links. This home-

school linkage through digital means is also advocated in the Digital Learning Framework and can constitute an action of focus in a school's Digital Learning Plan.

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 feel that it will be important to clarify ***how*** the seven key competencies can be effectively and purposefully embedded through the learning outcomes for junior infants to 6th class across each of the curricular areas and subjects. For the competency 'Being a Digital Learner', for example, to be fully realised, meaningful digital technology integration versus tokenistic integration needs to be highlighted. The provision of practical ideas and examples of digital learning that promote creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking for each class level would serve as a scaffold and reference for teachers.

We feel that the structure of the new curriculum will allow for a more thematic approach to teaching, learning and assessment in the classroom. Keeping the Learning Outcomes and the Key Competencies broad will highlight for teachers that their professional judgements and agency in

this regard is not only in line with the curriculum, but truly valued by the Education System. We also feel that the integrated approach employed in the primary curriculum framework to the development of skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes mirrors more effectively how life long learning occurs within society more generally as each of these areas are developed simultaneously and not in isolation of each other. The introduction of the seven key competencies across the curriculum also efficiently reinforces the broad view of learning embodied in the revised structure of the Primary Curriculum Framework. Here, for example, the key competency of 'Being a Digital Learner' effectively models how transversal learning can be achieved whereby expansive curricular learning can be supported and enhanced through the use of digital technologies while pupils are also developing their digital skills.

Increasing the emphasis on existing subject areas will broaden the learner experiences for the pupils of the new curriculum. However, given our area of work (Digital Technologies) we feel, it is important to highlight the points below in relation to digital learning;

- The difference between digital literacy and digital learning must be made clear as the skills associated with being digitally literate (ability to navigate a device or platform, demonstrating digital citizenship awareness etc.) do not equate with the skills of being a digital learner (using digital technologies to develop critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication skills).
- Equally, digital learning does not merely equate to the use of technology. Therefore, it will be important that teachers have a clear understanding of how digital technologies can enhance teaching, learning and assessment practices. To help schools and teachers effectively embed digital learning across the curriculum and create meaningful digital learning experiences in Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3 and Stage 4, explicit connections to the Digital Learning Framework and a school's Digital Learning Plan could be made. Schools and teachers are familiar with these documents and they should enable them to build upon the effective work they have already achieved in their school settings.
- The development of teachers' confidence and competence in using digital technologies in meaningful and purposeful ways to enhance learner outcomes and experiences is crucial. The important role of Teacher CPD cannot be understated here. If our pupils are to become empowered digital learners, tailored CPD will be required to ensure that the principles and

key messages of the Digital Learning Framework and new Primary Curriculum are fully realised.

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.

We very much welcome the broad and balanced nature of the proposed new curriculum in purpose and content. Furthermore, the revised broader curriculum areas will provide teachers with increased opportunities to engage in thematic planning and teaching and in this light, curriculum overload can be somewhat alleviated at localised school level.

Given the broad nature of the curriculum, we feel that it is important that certain linguistic terms should be clarified from the outset as to avoid confusion, eg technology vs. digital technologies. We suggest that "digital technologies" be used and not be interchangeable with technology unless explicitly referencing something that doesn't have a digital element. As previously mentioned, it would also be beneficial that digital technology be described as "integrated" as opposed to a standalone subject and is linked to Learning Outcomes with exemplars or case studies to clarify for teachers how they can integrate this key competency effectively in their own practice.

It is positive that technology will have explicit time allocated to it and that digital technologies will continue to permeate other subjects broadly. Teacher collaboration will be important here so that, given the increased agency teachers will have, schools can ensure that key aspects/topics in the curriculum are not omitted. School Plans will provide a very important guide to teachers in this regard so that all can ensure that they are not repeating topics unnecessarily and that all topics are dutifully addressed at appropriate class levels.

Generally here, the provision for teacher agency and autonomy and a thematic approach is very positive. However a cultural shift will be needed. As this point is elaborated on previously, we will not repeat our thoughts again here. However, it is important to note that CPD will be vital for schools in this regard.

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.

We welcome the variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies advocated by the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework, and support for the view that assessment is a critical part of teaching and learning. Much of our work with schools focuses on embedding digital technologies meaningfully into teaching, learning and assessment strategies and approaches. As such, we explore a wide range of digital tools with teachers to help them to engage in a constructivist pedagogical approach in their classroom. As we have seen during the course of our work, digital portfolios and digital tools enable pupils to capture their learning and reflect on their learning in a rich and critical manner. The use of digital technologies can enable pupils to work collaboratively with their peers promoting peer assessment and review. Digital technologies enable pupils to demonstrate their learning in a variety of creative ways providing teachers with clearer insights, enabling them to make more meaningful connections with the pupils interests, experiences and progress. Digital technologies and the adoption of digital portfolios can lend teachers the opportunity to engage with effective formative assessment and feedback approaches which can support the progression of the pupil's learning and allow pupils to respond in a more meaningful way.

The development of an online toolkit of resources exploring a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning (with regards to digital technologies and other areas) would prove useful for teachers for the purpose of their own personal upskilling.

A whole school approach to the use of virtual learning environments (referenced in Circular 0074/2020) and digital portfolios further supports the key messages of the redeveloped curriculum in this area and promotes high quality teaching, learning and assessment. Models such as TPACK, SAMR and UDL could provide teachers with the necessary scaffolding needed to design effective digital learning experiences for all.

The virtual learning environment allows for a connection between school and the home environment also. Here, each school will need to consider their own school context and the potential digital divide that could be created due to the adoption of a virtual learning environment

to promote home school links. Teachers and pupils may require support and CPD to develop the digital skills and core competencies to engage with these technologies in a meaningful way. These digital skills and core competencies may need to be clarified for teachers and guidance around how these skills will be developed may need to be planned for.

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 broad and balanced 1999 Curriculum was of its time and certainly has its merits. The spiral approach to skill development was an effective cornerstone to the 1999 Primary Curriculum and is applicable to digital technologies going forward as we aim to keep children at the centre of the curriculum and allow them to engage in active and discovery based learning to develop as 21st century thinkers and learners.

The change in curriculum in the lead up to the introduction of the 1999 curriculum required significant amounts of time, resources and focused professional development. These will be needed again to ensure a successful implementation of the new curriculum particularly when there is an increased focus on teacher agency and flexibility. The school cultural change that will occur during

the adaptation of the new curriculum needs to be clearly communicated to all educational parties as there will be a shift in timetabling, as well as teaching and learning methodologies. As previously alluded to, given the proposed revised structure of the curriculum, we feel that this should help in addressing potential curriculum overload for teachers as they will have more agency to take a thematic and integrated approach in their practice.

Time for the adaption, integration and embedding of new digital practices and pedagogies will be needed. PDST Digital Technologies advisors are well positioned to provide bespoke support to schools in this respect. This is highlighted in Circular 0074/2020 where schools Implement a professional development plan for teachers. It leads to career long continuous professional development for teachers; the necessity for which has been identified through constructivist digital learning methodologies from the Digital Learning Framework.

In taking stock of emerging priorities in the system currently, the shift in school culture towards digital technology integration during school closures has paved the way for professional development in the area of digital technologies to be built upon going forward. An extension to the funding made available under Digital Strategy for Schools 2015 - 2020 would be welcome in terms of continuing to develop school infrastructure. The Digital Learning Framework provides a structure to any future curriculum developments with which teachers are familiar with. In addition to this, and as has been well documented, special consideration will be necessary to address the digital divide that may exist in schools, particularly in DEIS settings.

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Thank you for your submission.