

# 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](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

### *Individual submission details*

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	

### *Organisation submission details*

<b>Name</b>	Primary Health and Wellbeing
<b>Position</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	PDST
<b>Date</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2020
<b>E-mail</b>	

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

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**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*.

- Positive and encouraging for Primary education to see a framework that builds on the 1999 curriculum but also gives autonomy to schools and teachers to be professional in adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of the children in their particular context - this can only enhance the teaching and learning experience for the children
- Transition can be very challenging for children and the framework recognises this and has identified pathways of connection between preschool, primary and post primary. To ensure continuity of learning from pre-primary to primary education, we believe that it is essential for primary teachers to receive CPD in the Aistear framework and to have knowledge of the Framework for Junior Cycle to enhance continuity of learning from primary to post-primary education.
- The eight overarching principles identified in the framework not only convey what is valued in primary education but also what should be valued in life. The focus on relationships, partnerships and inclusivity show that education can only begin when people feel valued and have a sense of belonging.
- Having the key competencies embedded across all curriculum areas and subjects from junior infants to 6th class will ensure continuity for both children and teachers and will enable teachers to support children to develop according to their own circumstances and life experiences which are many and continue to evolve.
- The addition of Wellbeing into the category of minimum curriculum time along with languages and mathematics is very welcomed by the team as well as the inclusion of 'Fostering Wellbeing' as a key competency. However, we would have concerns that without guidelines, teachers might be inclined to allocate more time to a preferred area of Wellbeing. Including PE under the umbrella of wellbeing may result in the curriculum objectives not being taught, placing a focus on physical activity over learning. Something we have fought to promote is that pupils first move well in order to move often.

# 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.**

### Positives

- The framework recognises the variety and different contexts of schools which allows them to create bespoke learning opportunities that are meaningful to the pupils in each school community.
- Schools are afforded the capacity to take account of their particular needs, and interest of children, parents and wider school community, and the characteristic spirit of the school.
- Minimum curriculum time and flexible monthly time allocations gives schools and teachers greater flexibility in deciding how best to utilise time in working towards the learning outcomes in the different curriculum areas.
- Flexible Time means schools can decide how best to use available resources to meet children's learning needs, interests and abilities and the needs of teachers and schools in terms of planning, teaching and assessing.
- Flexible Time is responsive to schools' own present and future educational priorities. It is intended that this flexibility will allow for greater integration and provide opportunities for teachers to use more substantial blocks of time in their curriculum planning to enable project work and involvement in local initiatives.

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- The framework provides opportunities for teachers to make choices and to be flexible in how they work with the curriculum framework, for example, in their use of time, the pace and sequence of teaching and learning, and in how they support all children to make progress in their learning across the curriculum.
- Including 'Fostering Wellbeing' as a key competency on the foundation of the pupil's ability to be as physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually healthy as they can be.
- The flexibility afforded to teachers and schools to embed wellbeing across all curriculum areas as reflection of the importance of wellbeing across all areas of life.
- The addition of Wellbeing into the category of minimum curriculum time along with languages and mathematics. Also, the additional and weekly nature of time allocation for wellbeing areas is very welcome and should be maintained

Concerns/Questions:

- Fear that PE will be lost within the Wellbeing categorisation. Under the key competency of Wellbeing, the attribute states "participating with growing confidence and skill in physical activity". This is the only 'active' attribute within the wellbeing competency.
- Without guidelines for schools/teachers to plan time allocations for wellbeing, teachers might be inclined to allocate more time to their preferred subject (i.e. PE or SPHE). Within these subjects, teachers may also spend more time on their favoured areas rather than what is most beneficial to the children, without guidance.
- Integrating PE into and under the umbrella of wellbeing may result in the curriculum objectives not being taught, placing a focus on physical activity over learning. Something we have fought to promote is that pupils first move well in order to move often.
- If wellbeing is now prioritised alongside numeracy and literacy under the minimum curriculum time allocation, should wellbeing also have progression criteria?

## 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.**

- In the framework it states that 8 principles in the curriculum build on those in Aistear and connect to the principles in the Framework for Junior Cycle. That would require all Primary schools using the Aistear Framework and all teachers trained in Aistear. It would also require Primary schools to be familiar with the Junior Cycle Framework.
- The fact that the seven key competencies extend children’s learning through the four Aistear themes and that both provide a foundation for junior cycle key skills will possibly require a joined-up thinking approach and training for all teaching personnel who deliver curricula in each level of education mentioned.
- In order to provide a smooth and effective transition from one educational setting to another it would require an understanding of the childrens’ learning experience at each level which reinforces the need for a joined-up thinking approach and collaboration between professionals in each education setting.
- A question that arises is due to the emphasis on state examinations at PP level, how can the transition be more effective to meet the needs of all the learners?
- It is noteworthy that recognition is given to the fact that children make progress at different rates and that these rates are influenced by circumstances, experiences and abilities.

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- In addition, integration across strands, subjects and curriculum areas is also recognised as an integral part of the redeveloped curriculum, which is also welcome.
- The information sharing at the various transition points is regarded as being especially important to help teachers provide experiences that enable children to continue to make progress in their learning in a seamless manner. It is crucial therefore that this sharing is based on the values of trust and authenticity, and establishing a relationship between each institution would be seen as being helpful in aiding this process. Objectivity in recording is also an important consideration and the emphasis on professional conversations is welcome. Would time be allocated to allow for these professional conversations to take place and how is it envisaged that this will happen?
- The Mo Scéal and Education Passport materials support transition. In transition to Post Primary school it would be important that relevant information would be shared with teachers (on a need to know basis) where it would support the student's wellbeing and ability to engage with the learning in the new environment.

## 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.**

Embed seven key competencies across children’s learning outcomes from junior infants to sixth class.

Positives: There is an emphasis on both the academic and holistic development of the child. This is interwoven through all subject areas. It will seek to equip children with the essential knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values which enable them to adapt and deal with a range of situations, challenges and contexts in support of broader learning goals.

Challenges: Schools are at a variety of levels with regards to the key competencies e.g. ‘Being a digital Learner’. In order to narrow this gap, there will be a strong need to invest in both hardware and CPD.

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.

Positives: An emphasis on dispositions will give teachers an opportunity to showcase their own autonomy when planning work for their class. A teacher is well suited to knowing the dispositions within the room and this bodes well for children to access learning opportunities suitable and relevant to their needs while at the same time promoting the development of other positive dispositions that may be needed for some children.

We applaud the emphasis on values which has not been evident in previous iterations. We believe these should be fostered from a young age.

Challenges: Some sections of the teaching profession may not wish to have too much autonomy and would prefer a more structured/ measurable/ didactic approach. Teachers will have to experience exploring their own values before exploring it with their own students.

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.

Positives: Increased time allocated for wellbeing. This is critical and will serve the children well. Fostering wellbeing is a lifelong process and this understanding needs to be delivered from an early age. The NCCA supporting this will lend weight and strength to the message.

Challenges: This is a move away from the norm and teachers will need to be supported to deliver on this. Evidence based research will have to be disseminated in order to support and strengthen the understanding as to why this change is needed.

Schools will need to be given opportunities to question and explore their values and ethos in order to embrace this shift towards a greater focus on wellbeing.

## 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 welcome the Curriculum components of Principles, Competencies, Curriculum areas and subjects, teaching learning and assessment which are all interconnected

### Positives

- We consider the Key Competencies to be a welcomed change to the Curriculum as they embrace the holistic development of the child. We particularly value the additional focus on developing pupils as Digital citizens and learning to be a learner. The Learning to

be a learner competency will support children with their journey from Aistear through to Junior Cycle.

- The increased priority on Wellbeing will be of great benefit for all aspects of the child. Wellbeing looks to foster the physical, emotional, social and spiritual elements of the child.
- The new focus on pupil creativity provides opportunities for pupil autonomy and voice which is greatly welcomed in the Primary school setting.
- The consultation time frame (2020 - 2024) provides for thorough ongoing communication with all stakeholders.
- Weekly and monthly allocation of time is another welcomed change. Also, the inclusion of 'flexi time', will support teacher and school flexibility to support pupils' diverse needs, interests and work on chosen school initiatives.
- The introduction of New and Modern Foreign Languages from 3rd - 6th is very welcomed, it provides a foundation for Post Primary subjects and helps with a smooth transition to Post Primary school.
- The inclusion of coding in the Maths curriculum is welcomed as it brings a new and exciting component to the Maths Curriculum.
- Religion is renamed to Patrons programme which will be more inclusive of all.
- We welcome the new online toolkit which will include the use of themes and examples
- Language and Maths will use progression continua which is a step by step approach.

#### Concerns/Questions:

- In the descriptor of Wellbeing on pg. 13 it is not clearly defined how PE will look under the umbrella of Wellbeing. Additionally, in Stages 3 and 4, Physical and Health Education is mentioned but again it is not clearly outlined how this will look in a school context.
- After consideration and discussion, we are concerned that PE is now included as a subject area under Wellbeing and that PE could be side-lined and SPHE could be prioritised in some classrooms.
- While we welcome the addition of Modern Languages, we are concerned that this focus could take time from the Primary Languages Curriculum and in particular our native language, Gaeilge.
- In the area of Arts Education, we would have concerns with certain areas being lost having many aspects of the Arts under one curricular area, especially with the addition of dance, film and digital media.

- Will the important area of RSE be taught adequately in the area of Wellbeing?
- Is it possible to develop pupil creativity within all subject areas? This could be a challenge.
- Could a progression continuum be applied to PE?

## **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.**

### Teaching and Learning

- The importance of Inclusive education and diversity is evident in this framework. The moving away from thinking in terms of ability and disability to variability, competency and opportunity is welcomed.
- Key approaches that schools and teachers should take to develop inclusive learning environments are identified in the framework which will be very useful in ensuring that barriers are removed to make learning more meaningful and relevant for the child. One of the key approaches mentioned is 'understanding that children have individual needs, views, cultures and beliefs, which need to be recognised, understood, treated with respect and represented throughout their school experience'. We wonder if children's rights should also be included

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here? This is important when looking at subject areas such as RSE but also across the wider curriculum. In addition, while 'engaging children in decision making' is recognised, we wonder if the framework should specifically mention 'child voice'?

- Teacher- student relationships are given central importance, which is welcome. All interactions within the school community, formal or informal are cited as contributing to a responsive pedagogy.
- The complex role of teachers is recognised which includes knowledge and awareness of the diversity of children's learning journeys. We feel that teacher's/schools' values would be important also.
- Teacher preparedness and the time they spend working 'behind the scenes' is recognised as extremely valuable. We wonder if this will be recognised in the teachers' working week?
- The framework recognises that there are many different pedagogical approaches that ought to be used throughout a child's education at primary level. It advocates for the inclusion of integrated learning experiences to increase transferability of skills learned into 'real life' scenarios...Connecting curriculum to children's lives in meaningful ways... "Support materials and examples of approaches to integration, on planning for integration and on practical strategies for the classroom, will be provided." This would be very welcome.

#### Assessment

- The key messages with regard to assessment in the re-developed curriculum is welcomed (assessment exists along a continuum, assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning and assessment provides information for various stakeholders, and most importantly for children).
- Viewing the child as the central stakeholder who benefits from assessment information is vital and will be a significant shift in the understanding of why we assess. CPD in the area of assessment across the re-developed curriculum will be crucial.
- It will be necessary to review the suite of templates that are available to schools to align them with the developed curriculum.

**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.**

- Building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum such as children's enjoyment of learning and increased use of active learning methodologies is welcomed. Teachers will welcome CPD on the use of the most up-to-date, evidence-based, methodologies which increase children's motivation to learn.
- Addressing curriculum overload at primary level is needed and welcomed. The redeveloped curriculum is presented in five broad curriculum areas which integrate and overlap, optimising curriculum integration. Teacher autonomy is evident in giving the teacher greater choice of

learning experiences as they work towards learning outcomes across all curriculum areas. However, teacher autonomy and choice require a shift in mindset from the 1999 curriculum and teachers will need to be supported with this transition in recognising themselves as agentic professionals.

- Links with the Aistear Framework and the Framework for Junior Cycle are very welcomed which will support continuity and progression in learning, strengthening the links between pre-primary, primary and post primary education. Knowledge of both these frameworks will be of benefit to teachers as they support this continuity of learning for children. Some teachers have attended Aistear training in their own time but the majority of primary school teachers have not. Training provided for every teacher is essential to ensure that children's learning is optimised.

### **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](http://www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement) or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at [dpo@ncca.ie](mailto:dpo@ncca.ie).

**Thank you for your submission.**

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