



**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](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

### *Individual submission details*

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

### *Organisation submission details*

<b>Name</b>	Physical Education Team, School of Arts Education and Movement DCU
<b>Position</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	Institute of Education, Dublin City University
<b>Date</b>	February 28 <sup>th</sup> 2022
<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?

Please email your submission to [PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

Yes

No

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

The Physical Education Team is part of the Institute of Education Dublin City University. We work in initial teacher education at undergraduate and at postgraduate level with a focus on teaching and research in physical education and physical activity in primary schools. The team has a staff of four (Dr Frances Murphy, Dr Maura Coulter, Susan Marron and Dr Bronagh McGrane) and works collaboratively with staff across other disciplines in the Institute.

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](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

# Section 1

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

The NCCA Draft Primary Curriculum Framework signposts a positive direction for primary curriculum. Its key thrust in proposing a clear vision, setting out guiding principles and outlining key competencies indicates significant potential for supporting teaching and learning in a myriad of different ways and in different contexts. In particular, the emphasis on transitions and on supporting schools, teachers and school leaders is most welcome. The discussion of teaching and learning embracing inclusive education as well as emphasising pedagogy, integration and assessment are all positive indicators of possible directions for curriculum. The proposed structure based on curriculum areas and subjects and the proposed time allocation provide a range of options that merit particular attention to ensure that the vision, principles and key competencies can become recognisable features of a primary curriculum.

We are responding to the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework with particular reference to physical education (PE). As a team of teacher educators in the Institute of Education, DCU whose core responsibility is the education of teachers at initial teacher education (ITE) and during postgraduate work, we outline below our responses to particular facets of the Framework in some detail. Firstly, however we provide an **overview** of our recommendations in relation to the different aspects of the Framework.

We believe that the **vision and principles** proposed reflect our vision for PE and the principles underline our work in PE very closely. We welcome these statements unreservedly.

We are firmly convinced that the **key competencies** align very closely with those that we value within PE (see also p. 10/11 below)

We welcome the **positioning of Physical Education within the area of Wellbeing** although we have concerns about how PE will be highlighted within this area. One of our key concerns about the Framework is related to the outline of Curriculum areas and subjects. We are concerned that *Physical Education* is not identified within the junior classes (outlined further on p. 12 below) as a distinct subject. Furthermore, 'Physical Education and Health Education' will require considerable teasing out to ensure that the aspects of health education most closely aligned with physical education (e.g. importance of physical activity, nutrition and care for the body) are clear within a broader presentation of 'Health Education'. We believe that the 'health education' dimension is best encompassed within a Social, Personal and Health Education subject with the linkages to PE consistently highlighted within PE and within SPHE/SP(H)VE.

We welcome the references to **physical activity** within the discussion of 'Wellbeing' provided on p. 13/14 of the Framework. We are concerned that there is no reference to *Physical Education* within that discussion (see also p.10 below). We recommend that the importance of PE is highlighted in a convincing way in this section. The importance of a dedicated time for PE and its contribution to the wellbeing of the child needs to be strongly highlighted in this section also (see also p. 9, 13 below)

We welcome in particular the allocation of 3 hours to Wellbeing across first to sixth classes. We recommend that within that space that PE is allocated a minimum time of 120 minutes weekly (see further discussion on p. 13 below).

We welcome the emphasis on outlining **pedagogies and approaches** supported by the provision of the **online Toolkit** providing illustrative exemplars. We welcome the components identified in Table 3. p.12 and recommend that the proposed online Toolkit contains clear guidance on the **breadth** of pedagogies and approaches that are appropriate for children to progress towards certain learning outcomes. We agree that the toolkit should provide support materials that spotlight pedagogical approaches that are effective in helping every child to progress and enjoy learning (see further discussion on p. 16 below). Furthermore, the strands and elements should reflect the breadth of activities that will form a basis for devising learning outcomes.

There is an additional consideration that is crucial for inclusion in the Curriculum from infant classes through to sixth class. We strongly recommend that the Physical Education Curriculum should state that the class teacher should teach PE in the primary school. Consideration of the following to support the class teacher is merited: (i) another teacher in the school may support the class teacher by 'swapping' classes to ensure the best possible experience for children in PE, (ii) teachers with a specialist knowledge of Physical Education can support the class teacher where possible (iii) class teachers may be supported by particular external providers where responsibility lies primarily with the class teacher but where the shared expertise of the teacher and external provider can enhance the experience for the child (see page 6 for further discussion)

Finally, we believe that the transitions between Aistear and primary physical education should be examined very closely to ensure that the transition from early childhood into primary school is characterised by progression and continuity and that these transitions are described using language that is consistent and clear (see page 8 for further discussion)

## 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.**

**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.**

Providing schools local agency to design their Physical Education programmes can offer a rich tapestry for schools to create and design bespoke programmes. We believe that teachers and school leaders should clearly identify a vision for Physical Education and programmes based on the Framework embedded in the Wellbeing area. The programme should show clear links to other areas particularly to any work in dance within Arts Education. We welcome the focus on the role of the teacher in designing programmes in keeping with the proposed principles (Figure 1, p. 6 Framework).

If schools are given this opportunity for unique agency, school leaders and teachers should be encouraged to identify programmes of Physical Education avoiding any confusion with single and unstructured offerings of physical activity/physical fitness often portrayed within social media and elsewhere. The rationale for Physical Education as 'burning energy' and 'letting off steam' as well as the notion of children being 'busy and good' must be challenged within any discussion of a rationale for Physical Education as programmes are designed. The emphasis instead should be placed on learning in and through Physical Education.

Dance, which is currently a strand within Physical Education (Primary Physical Education Curriculum, 1999), lies within Arts Education in the Framework. The agentic class teacher should be planning to design a dance programme within Physical Education in Wellbeing and offered support to do this well. Reaching out and making links to other work in Arts Education will be a key consideration for the teacher.

Quality Physical Education (UNESCO, 2015) should be defined clearly, understood and valued within each school by the agentic teacher. Aspects highlighted by UNESCO include for example: ensuring

inclusive weekly Physical Education time allocation and facility booking and maximising use of the school environment, any local facilities and initiatives that may be available to schools.

Flexible design of Physical Education programmes by schools is welcomed providing a balance between activities traditional to Irish culture yet embracing activities traditional to other cultures particularly representing the nationalities and backgrounds of children in particular schools and classes. The availability of facilities in partnership with communities may be a factor to drive the design of parts of a programme in line with the Get Active Physical Education and Sport for Children and Young People: A guiding framework (PDST, 2012).

Physical Education must be planned and taught by professionally trained and qualified teachers. Supports for teachers can be offered by a plethora of organisations locally, nationally and internationally. However, the agentic teacher should select these supports judiciously. Research by Mangione et al (2020), Ni Chróinín and O'Brien (2019), Wilkinson and Penney (2016), Dyson et al (2017) and others caution of the mixed findings of schools engaging with external providers to deliver Physical Education lessons. In light of this research, an expectation that schools should increasingly make use of and cultivate links with, external providers (e.g. sports coaches, local sport organisations, sports clubs and their National Governing Bodies (NGBs) or dance teachers) to extend the range of structured opportunities in curricular and extra-curricular time for children needs to be considered cautiously. This support can be beneficial for example in providing children with exposure to a range of movement activities and sports. However, due to the interests and orientations of the various support personnel and organisations such provision may lead to an over-reliance on one movement activity or sport and 'deprofessionalisation' of the primary teacher who is no longer teaching a sustained, progressive programme of Physical Education. Perhaps after school extra-curricular time can provide further opportunities for external providers. This setting can present so many valuable opportunities for children building on their experience of Physical Education.

Drawing on the principles of Universal Design for Learning as suggested in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (p.21) planning and teaching is best undertaken by the class teacher. All children go to school (while some play sport within sports clubs) so it is most important that teachers provide children with a broad range of movement experiences to contribute to children's skill development and confidence to allow them to be confident to participate in any type of structured or unstructured sport. Children's voices and experiences can inform these activity choices where possible, always conscious however that some children's voices can become lost leading to a narrowing of choice for children. The Growing Up In Ireland Study (2018) reported the most popular sports that children participate in out of school. While useful, it is important to be mindful of each child and that minority interests also matter. Teachers should not limit what they teach in Physical Education to activities they are competent at themselves. Evidence provided by recent studies (Woods et al, 2018, 2020) indicate imbalance in the variety of activities taught to children in primary schools. Through participation in a broad and balanced curriculum, girls and boys should be socialised into a value free Physical Education programme not dependent on skill, ability, size and gender. While particular focus within CPD is always relevant and useful (e.g the emphasis on 'fundamental skill' focussed Physical Education CPD) programmes should always be interrogated by the agentic teacher with reference to the overall aims of PE.

The agentic teacher will be encouraged to integrate Physical Education with other learning experiences of children. Such integration can provide clear opportunities for physical activity within other subjects and curriculum areas ensuring that many elements of Physical Education become reinforced through learning in other subjects.

As schools and agentic teachers plan programmes of Physical Education, the PE facilities, both indoors and outdoors must be reserved and preserved for the compulsory (timetabled) PE lessons and safeguarded for the allocated Physical Education time. Schools must receive an annual DES budget for Physical Education equipment to support their programme design, planning and implementation. This budget is crucial to ensure that teachers can offer the best possible programmes to children in their care.

The programme design can identify and promote the other settings in the school day where additional physical activity opportunities can be accumulated to maximise children's daily physical activity levels in line with health guidelines (Government of Ireland, 2013).

Agentic teachers must be helped to gain confidence and competence through programme design and teaching of Physical Education and building on these experiences. Teachers must have time to collaborate with colleagues and consult with parents and children. To ensure that this planning time is most effective, teachers must be provided with

- (a) a rich toolkit illustrating content and pedagogies
- (b) wide ranging movement experience exemplars, and
- (c) opportunities for rich CPD in programme design, delivery and evaluation in line with the Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning (The Teaching Council, 2016).

Minimum time for Physical Education at all levels and an outline of elements in the programme should be clearly identified to help teachers ensure there is a place for the uniqueness of PE in programme design and for dance linked to the Arts Education space when given this agency to design their own programme.

New models of practice discussed further below to consider as a result of the re-imagined Bachelor of Education Programmes following the Teaching Council Guidelines (2017) include the availability in the system of teachers with a specialism in Physical Education who can assist in leading the design and delivery of quality PE programmes (Marron et al. 2019). Other NQTs have taken elective modules in PE. These cohorts of NQTs in particular can support the concept of teacher agency related to PE in their schools and beyond. Creative approaches such as teachers swapping responsibility for teaching PE with other teachers in their schools provides clear opportunities to play to teachers' areas of strength (Clohessy et al. 2019).

When listening to the voice of the children and parents/guardians, teachers should consider elements of the Wellbeing Policy and Framework for Practice (Government of Ireland, 2019, p.44) providing guidance on the employment of external personnel to support extra-curricular programmes

- Where an extra-curricular programme is provided, the school links with community-based clubs and organisations to ensure that it is broad, accessible and inclusive.
- Schools are guided by Circulars 0042/2018 and 0043/2018 on the use of programmes and facilitators when guest speakers are invited to contribute to wellbeing promotion in the school.
- Where an extra-curricular programme is provided, children and young people and parents are invited to actively participate in planning the programme.

## 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.**

The vision outlined in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* is broad and encompasses the role of the teacher and the child. We recommend highlighting the school and home community of the child and their role in supporting each child to make progress in all areas of their learning and development. Under the eight principles the broader context of a child’s learning and the role of their parents/carers could be understood and described with a particular emphasis linked to the two principles: *partnerships* and *learning environments*. We welcome the proposal to provide exemplars within an Online Toolkit and recommend that they be available for both teachers and parents with specific subject based learning outcomes related to physical education at all stages of the primary cycle. It would be particularly useful to develop exemplars that illustrate progression from early years through primary and on to Junior Cycle.

While it is vital that there is continuity and progression in a child’s learning and for those who support the child in this learning journey it is assumed that the principles outlined in *Aistear* are built upon and that they connect with the eight principles of the Junior Cycle, we recommend that this is clearly articulated in the document. Consistent use of language in terms of the principles and components of physical education and wellbeing from *Aistear*, through Primary School and following on through Junior Cycle must be addressed. Development in the physical domain and physically active play both indoors and particularly in the outdoors is not explicit in the Early Years’ framework and therefore it may be difficult for primary school teachers to build on this experience as children may not have undertaken ‘physically active’ experiences in the early years. We recommend that particular attention is paid to outlining a curriculum that provides children with frequent and specific opportunities to develop their physical skills and become physically literate. Exemplars are crucial at Stage 1 to illustrate the development of the Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS) towards establishing confident and competent movers who are positively motivated towards physical activity.

As suggested above, exemplars that illustrate this development beginning in the Early Years would go some way towards highlighting the importance of physically active play during these formative years.

Primary school teachers will need to be informed about the Junior Cycle Framework if they are to provide a strong foundation for young people’s junior cycle experience. In turn, it will be crucial

that post-primary teachers have a deep understanding of learning across this transition phase and indeed throughout the child's primary school years. Issues pertaining to curriculum continuity, in terms of both subject content and pedagogy, have been identified as significant barriers to successful primary/secondary transition by numerous researchers (Sutherland et al. 2010; Topping 2011).

As the child moves through primary school PE time will need to be ring-fenced from Stage 1 through to Stage 4 with the SP(H)E programme supporting learning in and through PE. JCPE documents highlight the time allocation for PE and this could be mirrored in the Primary Framework. While the proposal to link Physical Education and Health Education within Stages 3 and 4 of the primary school has some merit we recommend that the links to health should be made within the SP(H)E curriculum to ensure that such links are made comprehensively with clear emphases on aspects such as the benefits of good nutrition, regular physical activity and the importance of building strong relationships through physical education and physical activity.

### **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 welcome the emphasis of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* on seven key competencies which focus on developing skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. We believe that the Learning Outcomes and Key Competencies are broad in nature underlining this wider understanding of learning. We welcome the increased emphasis on the existing areas of physical education and SPHE under the Wellbeing curriculum area.

This articulation of emergent priorities addresses the frequent calls within physical education to physically educate children more holistically (Bailey et al, 2009) by 'going beyond simply developing pupils’ physical skills and further educating them in line with a broader understanding of learning, development and identity’. (Atencio et al, 2014, p.245).

We support the proposal that the seven key competencies would be embedded across children’s learning outcomes from junior infants to sixth class as suggested. We are confident that physical education is central to achieving these competencies. In a recent article based on the complexities of the primary physical education curriculum process, the authors highlight the need to engage in a more connected approach towards the design of learning tasks (Jess, Carse & Keay, 2016). They suggest that connected learning tasks would help children and teachers identify primary physical education as a coherent and connected experience that integrates learning across their education and their lives and we believe the approach of embedding the seven competencies through physical education will support teachers in doing this. The seven competencies identified enable and foster deep learning while also contributing to the holistic development of the child within and through physical education. Some examples of how the competencies could be embedded in physical education are highlighted below:

- *Fostering wellbeing* - We welcome the inclusion of *fostering wellbeing* as one of the seven key competencies as it provides the opportunity for specific learning of physical skills which can be further developed throughout the school day.

We recommend that wellbeing needs to be defined more clearly with a stronger emphasis on learning through active engagement in physical education where learning physical skills such as fundamental movement skills and sports skills need to be highlighted. There is reference to ‘physical activity’ in the Framework but not to physical education within the discussion of wellbeing. We are concerned this may result in a lack of learning in physical education and poor understanding of the place of physical education in promoting wellbeing. It may be interpreted that this learning can be achieved through physical activities throughout the school day. While children can have practice opportunities throughout the school day, specific teaching of skills is critical: this occurs in physical education lessons. As discussed earlier, this learning enables the child to build confidence in performing these skills in order to participate in physical activities, sport and dance.

We recommend the Framework should emphasise learning in and through the performance of physical skills. We are concerned that learning of physical skills required to participate with confidence in physical activities and indeed sports is not included in the **attributes** related to fostering well-being (Table 2: p10). We believe that this is a serious omission and

recommend that '*exploring, developing and mastering physical skills including fundamental movement skills and sports skills*' should be included as an attribute linked to the key competency 'fostering wellbeing'. Additionally, this learning needs to be highlighted in the exemplar material detailing what this aspect of learning as well as the other attributes identified would look like in physical education

- *Being Creative*- can be embedded particularly through gymnastics and dance which focus on allowing the child to express creativity through movement and on expressing ideas, feelings and experiences informed by principles of movement
- *Being a Digital Learner*- can be developed through the use of digital resources to support learning in physical education such as the use of video to assist children in peer and self-assessment of their movement skills when performing a fundamental movement, a gymnastics sequence as a group or indeed highlight spatial awareness and use of space during an invasion game such as football or basketball. Such application will assist in supporting children to become creative, confident and critical users of digital technology in a practical setting.
- *Being Mathematical*- can be embedded through the application of mathematical knowledge, skills and concepts such as through the use of measurement and time in physical education lessons when monitoring children's performance which will assist children in being active, agentic learners as well as learning with others.
- *Being an Active Citizen*- can be embedded through the understanding and appreciation of outdoor and adventure activities. By engaging in and learning about outdoor adventure activities children's ability to contribute positively and compassionately towards the creation of a more sustainable environment is enhanced. Furthermore, values and concepts such as fair play, equality and social justice are embedded throughout physical education through the development of the affective domain including the social interaction of children within partner and teamwork in the physical education setting.
- *Communicating and Using Language*- focused on developing children's understanding and enjoyment of words and language is significantly enhanced within physical education lessons. Children are required to communicate, problem solve, discuss, describe and explain their movements and experiences related to movement: for example, to figure out how to effectively defend an opposition's attack in a game of tennis or in when finding their way by reading a map in an orienteering activity with a partner
- *Learning to be a Learner*- can be embedded throughout physical education. In every physical education lesson, learning occurs related to physical, affective and cognitive domains. Learning with and about others is central to work in physical education and regular opportunities to set goals, to care, to deal with conflict and generally to manage interactions with others are provided.

Through examples including but not restricted to those above, we believe physical education can support the development of key competencies in a practical setting which will assist in deepening the child's learning connections. We recommend the provision of exemplars incorporating the seven key competencies within physical education via the online Curriculum Toolkit suggested in the Framework (p.21) to assist in their effective implementation and integration across physical education. Penney (2008) refers to physical education as the "connective specialism". While we

have highlighted the strength of physical education to develop and deepen children’s learning related to all of the key competencies, we recommend that the *physical learning* that should occur in physical education related to fundamental movement skill development and development of sport specific skills including related skills of tactical awareness in games should be highlighted.

### **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 emphasis on offering a curriculum that is **broad in purpose and content**. We believe that this principle is very appropriate in the context of wellbeing including physical education also. The purpose of physical education has been outlined as meeting the developmental needs of children (Bailey et al 2009) related to the broad physical, affective and cognitive domains. It is commonly acknowledged that physical education has a key role to play in contributing to the wellbeing of the child.

The proposed content related to physical education should offer teachers a wide variety of options to ensure that children during these formative years are offered experiences across a breadth of activities that can spark an interest for them in the short term leading towards long term interest in undertaking particular forms of physical activity and sport. Sometimes, however, the activities that they experience in the primary school may only be pursued in the long term. In other words, facilities in their locality may not currently be available to pursue an activity out of school hours but they may grasp the opportunity at a later stage knowing that they achieved success and experienced enjoyment.

**Structure of the Curriculum:** The proposal outlined in the Framework related to the **structure** of the curriculum has merit. As stated earlier, we support the inclusion of physical education in the 'Wellbeing' area. However, we believe that physical education should be listed explicitly at both stage 1 and stage 2. This will ensure that the active 'physical' learning involved in physical education will be clear and unambiguous leading to dedicated time for learning in and through physical education. This clear signposting of physical education will be unambiguous for schools, for agent teachers, for parents and for others.

We believe that it is crucial that Physical Education is allocated specific time within the broad curriculum area of Wellbeing from stages 1 to 4.. This specific allocation of time will be the most likely prompt for schools to consider timetabling facilities and planning programmes with movement at their core from the earliest days of the child's schooling. As indicated in our submission to the NCCA (NCCA written submissions 2017) in response to the document on structure and time, we recommend that 120 minutes is dedicated to PE *each week*.

**Integrated learning experiences:** Allocation of specific time for physical education should not detract from the capacity of the teacher to offer an integrated learning experience with other curriculum areas and subjects. Indeed, the exemplars can illustrate an abundance of possibilities for such an approach. Given the lack of integration evident in the review of implementation of the primary curriculum the argument for such illustrative material is very strong. It is crucial that teachers see and understand how activities generally viewed as 'belonging' to physical education can be undertaken within other subjects, hence complementing the movement experiences offered within physical education. It will be important too however to clarify the learning that should happen within PE and be strengthened in the context of other subjects. It will also be important that learning in other subjects can be identified that should be enhanced within PE. Indeed, there may be occasions where a particular learning outcome of another subject is best achieved with the PE lesson. For example some learning in mathematics related to time, distance and shape could be best contextualised within physical education as the children engage in running over specific distances, time their achievements working out speed and illustrate shape in dance and gymnastics.

**Broad learning outcomes:** expected learning and development: We agree that children's learning and development must be signposted throughout the child's learning journey. Broad learning outcomes outlined in the curriculum can in turn be adopted by schools and agent teachers with a key emphasis on ensuring that they will be contextualised and activities planned that will highlight the learning involved. It is within discussion of broad learning outcomes that teachers and all stakeholders become aware of the fine balance that is important in primary physical education. Children develop their fundamental movement skills(FMS) best during the window from 0-8 years of age, that is, they learn to walk, run, jump, throw, kick and strike at the most basic levels as well as learning to balance. It is crucial during this time that children explore the

FMS in play contexts, in after school contexts, in the home and perhaps in organised sport, outdoor and dance activities. Nevertheless, the physical education class could be the key driver for this development for many children. Caution must be exercised to ensure that this is a strong focus but within the context of a broad range of play activities. This is especially important in light of the current debate about the physical literacy of children (Whitehead, 2010). This underlines the importance of progressing from developing the FMS to development of more specific sports and movement skills. Indeed, the same principles apply to skill development right up to and including stage four. Both FMS and sports skills need to be developed within the physical education class. This and further learning is then supplemented/scaffolded by informal opportunities during the schoolday to engage in physical activity. These opportunities can occur as children travel to school (walking, cycling, scooting) or within the playground as they engage in free play or in more structured play using playground apparatus or games equipment for example.

**Incorporation of the Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile:** It is clear that the elements of language can be developed through many other curriculum areas and subjects. Indeed, they offer a very strong framework for extending work within and beyond the PE class. Firstly, throughout many elements of physical education the children can develop communicative relationships as they question, describe, explain and discuss. For example, children can describe sequences of movement that they create, they can question others about these sequences, they can explain what attributes a child needs to perform quality sequences e.g. strength to create tension in a balance or speed to move off one foot as they side step in a game [See also section 3 above: key competencies].

Within their discussion of movement (incorporating explaining, questioning and description accompanied by demonstration) children have a myriad of ways in which they can show their understanding of language [See also p. 10 above]. Furthermore, they can use words and language taught within literacy lessons in different contexts. Their listening and comprehension skills are supported and developed as they are presented with a broad range of activities. For example, children who are working with a partner to follow a map in an orienteering activity are discussing vocabulary specific to map reading as they select a route. Following completion of the task they express their satisfaction, frustration or sense of achievement. Each of these components can be undertaken orally or in written form on return to the classroom. Such activities provide a breadth of opportunities for exploring and using language. For many children their individual specific interest in sport and physical activity can provide them with rich material for prompting engagement with each of the elements of the language curriculum. Information giving related to their movement or performance explored in physical education lessons and justifications as to tactics employed during playing a game or running a race for example will provide a wealth of opportunity for children to develop their language skills. Use of a second language throughout PE lessons can be meaningfully promoted through use of a CLIL-in-PE approach for example (O Ceallaigh et al 2017).

## 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.**

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With physical education firmly embedded in wellbeing it is possible to promote *high quality teaching, learning and assessment*. High quality teaching, informed by the [UNESCO \(2015\)](#) document defining quality should be explored and defined within the Curriculum illustrating key principles. A variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies should be described briefly to set the scene for individual teachers and schools to adopt approaches and strategies that are best suited to the context of their school. This should take into consideration the expertise of the teaching staff. Some of these pedagogies, approaches and strategies will have formed part of their modules at initial teacher education. Others will be supported within CPD courses. Each approach needs to be clearly exemplified. Some models and approaches are already being explored within ITE and CPD. Examples of these are the multi-activity block approach (illustrated in the Physical Education Curriculum, 1999), meaningful physical education (MPE) <https://meaningfulpe.wordpress.com/>, the skill-theme approach (Graham et al 2013), teaching games for understanding (TGfU) (Griffin and Butler, 2005), games sense (Oslin and Mitchell, 2006), sport education (Siedentop, 2013), teaching personal and social responsibility (TPSR) (Hellison, 2003) and adventure education (Brown, 2006). It is crucial that these models and approaches are exemplified through exploration of a range of activities to ensure that schools and teachers offer a breadth of activities to children rather than specialising in one sport or activity.

**Assessment** within PE classes is clearly an *essential and critical part of teaching and learning* where teachers can use the broad learning outcomes to drive their design of appropriate activities

to suit their contexts. The continuum of assessment (Framework, p. 23) is a clear signpost of the complementary strategies that can be selected by the agentic teacher. The more specific learning outcomes that they will outline can form the basis for assessment strategies that they value. While teacher observation was highlighted as a key strategy in the PE Curriculum (1999) and will continue to be, crucial developments in assessment generally can support the learning of children within PE. This can be informed by a wealth of international literature, most recently by the AIESEP position statement on assessment in physical education driving policy and practice worldwide (<https://aiesep.org/scientific-meetings/position-statements/>) as well as significant research undertaken in an Irish context (Ní Chróinín and Cosgrave, 2013). Such research can signpost the use of other formative assessment strategies e.g. self- and peer-assessment. A small amount of assessment exemplar material has been developed to begin the process of prompting teachers to consider using these strategies by the Irish Primary PE Association (<https://www.irishprimarype.com/>). Use of digital tools to support assessment represents a significant development that merits specific attention as the role of PE in supporting the wellbeing of the child is considered

*Teachers' professional judgment will support progression in children's learning* in physical education. Research related to assessment in PE can support teachers in identifying what they should be observing and how best to observe children in PE. Their judgement can be scaffolded by the children's self- and peer- assessment. Recording outcomes of assessment is challenging for teachers given the pace of movement by children in lessons. Nevertheless, exemplars of good practice illustrated in the online Curriculum Toolkit can be used to support the important area of assessing children's learning in PE. Given the high proportion of children who express an interest in sport and physical activity it is important that *teachers make meaningful connections with children's interests and experiences*. This can mean providing similar opportunities in a school setting to those that children can engage in outside of school. However, this should not be seen as limiting the introduction of aspects of sport and physical activity that are not part of children's lived experience. PE can shape their interests and provide novel experiences for children and this needs to be harnessed by schools.

Within PE *quality relationships* can be built in many meaningful ways between children and with teachers and other stakeholders such as external providers. This is best done where schools consider ways of promoting such relationships. Sometimes this might begin with allocating sufficient time for physical education and schools might consider a range of strategies such as timetabling indoor and outdoor spaces so that teachers can use the full allocated time to develop these relationships. Often this extends to schools carefully selecting supports for the teacher within physical education ranging from building policies that promote co-teaching with external providers to situations where external providers are allocated to teachers whose classes merit this support more than others due to the need to support the teacher. Recent work by Clohessy et al (2020) , explores the concept of class swapping to ensure that teachers with particular expertise undertake teaching of PE to classes other than their own in schools.

*The role and influence of parents and families in children's education* is highlighted within the Framework. Within physical education it is important that the role and influence of the family is outlined with reference to the development of the child's fundamental movement skills and the subsequent development of more specific sports skills, the role of physical education in contributing to the child's social development as they engage in appropriate movement tasks and the cognitive development that is embedded in so many of the tasks that children complete in PE.

**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 embraced principles of enjoyment of learning, using active methodologies and improving attainment in literacy, mathematics and science. It is difficult to identify the successes of the 1999 PE Curriculum as no review of implementation has taken place. However, from a teacher educator perspective some clear strengths emerged:

The 1999 PE Curriculum provided a clear set of aims and broad objectives that helped signpost the rationale for teaching PE as well as the content that might be selected to help these aims to be realised the emphasis on design of programmes offering a broad and balanced range of opportunities was a significant development for primary schools the provision of teacher guidelines was a starting point in supporting schools to plan at school level and in supporting teachers to plan PE programmes for their classes the clear statement that the class teacher is responsible for planning PE programmes provided a very clear message to beginning teachers: they had a strong rationale for engagement in quality pre-service programmes of PE to prepare them to undertake this challenge. For many, they had not experienced programmes that reflected the aims or objectives of the 1999 Curriculum. Yet, the Curriculum provided them with the rationale for

ensuring that they took on this responsibility; the allocation of one hour per week for teaching PE provided a target for schools to achieve.

**Priorities:** The teaching of physical education has reflected three key elements proposed in the 1999 Curriculum: use of active learning methodologies, the enjoyment of learning and the provision of inclusive physical education lessons. It is crucial that physical education continues to be regarded as an enjoyable learning experience where active methodologies underpin each PE lesson. The contribution of PE to development of learning in literacy, mathematics and science should continue to be emphasised within the redeveloped curriculum.

**Challenge:** Exemplar material suggested in the Framework for publication in an online Curriculum Toolkit will be important to ensure that teachers can prompt learning in these areas within PE classes. A further challenge for PE is to ensure that it maintains a central place in the daily life of the child where the emphasis is on improving literacy, mathematics and science attainment. The need to enhance the *physical literacy* of the child (built on teaching of fundamental movement skills but extending to being concerned with enhancing the motivation of the child to be active) needs to be highlighted and prioritised.

**Challenge:** It is still unclear who is teaching PE in Primary Schools. In spite of a strong statement in the 1999 Curriculum that the class teacher has responsibility for planning and teaching the programme, it is nevertheless increasingly evident that external providers are putting pressure on schools to adopt their programmes and schools are inviting individuals and groups to support teaching of PE. This can be a powerful support but situations where such initiatives dominate programmes or fail to be evaluated with reference to their contribution to the child present significant concerns. The work of Mangione et al (2020), Bowles and O’Sullivan (2020) and Ní Chróinín & O’Brien (2019) has highlighted these concerns particularly with regard to the lack of communication between schools, teachers and external providers.

**Challenge:** Woods et al (2018) has reported that the breadth of activities being taught in school has increased. Anecdotal evidence of teachers would support this finding. It will be very important that this diversity of activities is reflected in a redeveloped curriculum.

**Challenge:** It appears that children are still not engaging in the recommended one hour per week of physical education. 43 minutes is the average time spent in PE classes weekly (Woods et al 2018).

**Priority:** The time devoted specifically to PE (see p. 18 above) must be increased.

**Challenge: Teachers’ confidence and competence** to teach PE in primary schools is still unsure. However, some significant recent changes should be highlighted which have the potential to drive

PE forward. The development of specialist PE modules for pre-service teachers (building on the core modules undertaken by all students) provides additional capacity to develop deeper expertise and to lead the development of quality, meaningful programmes of PE in schools. Additionally, the PDST has invested in the production of key resources: Move Well, Move Often which are designed to help teachers teach fundamental movement skills and prompt development of physical literacy. The Active School Flag initiative has prompted schools to examine their programmes of physical education

**Challenge:** the **assessment of children’s achievement** does not appear to be prevalent although much progress has taken place in the area of assessment nationally and internationally. MacPhail and Murphy (2018) have highlighted the landscape of assessment across primary and post-primary physical education. Macken (2020) has undertaken work on the role of formative assessment in PE primary. Much work has been undertaken within initial teacher education on assessment and reporting built on by the PDST.

**Priority:** while curriculum profiles proposed within the 1999 Curriculum are no longer deemed a priority it is crucial that strategies such as teacher observation, the role of feedback, self- and peer-assessment become embedded in a redeveloped curriculum.

The Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will address **curriculum overload** at primary level. This can be supported by emphasising the learning within physical education that addresses learning in other subjects. Currently, some programmes in use in schools arguably contribute to overload as they are additional to programmes embedded in the Curriculum, other programmes in use in schools drive teachers towards focussing narrowly on particular topics. Within physical education the Framework needs to take stock of the initiatives and programmes that are in use in schools and encourage schools to examine these very carefully with regard to (a) their contribution to the child's learning guided by the broad outcomes outlined within the proposed framework (b) their usage over a school year including their potential to offer children exposure to a breadth of activities (c) their potential to narrow the scope of opportunities offered to children (d) their potential to offer children further exposure to quality teaching. The Framework, however, should provide clear messages related to over reliance on such initiatives and programmes risking disjointed learning experiences and deskilling of teachers over time.

***Link with Aistear and the Framework for Junior Cycle.***

We welcome the plan to build on the work of Aistear although (as discussed on p. 8) we are concerned that Aistear does not explicitly outline outcomes related to a child's learning through movement. While the focus on some physical activity is welcome we recommend that the primary curriculum will provide a considerably more explicit and sophisticated understanding of physical literacy, physical education and movement. The wellbeing theme with the Junior Cycle will form a 'natural fit' for children progressing into post-primary schools. The work related to wellbeing within the Junior Cycle will form a natural progression from the early work undertaken at primary level.

## **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*.**

Implications for finalisation of the Primary Curriculum Framework

(a) The distinction between provision of physical activity within the school day and the teaching of physical education as a curriculum subject has been highlighted earlier in our submission. Throughout the pandemic, many laudable efforts were made attempting to enhance the physical activity levels of children at home. Of particular relevance to physical education was the publication of materials (PE at Home <https://www.scoilnet.ie/pdst/peathome/>) that endeavoured to relate to the physical education experience of the primary school child with a linked journal article [Coulter, M., Britton, U., MacNamara, A., McGrane, B., Manninen, M. & Belton, S. (2021) PE at Home: Keeping the 'E' in PE while home-schooling during a pandemic, *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*. DOI: 10.1080/17408989.2021.196342]. More recently, a further resource

was published which sought to emphasise the holistic development of the child with an emphasis on learning [<https://irishheart.ie/schools/primary-schools/action-for-life/>]

However, some resources promoted through social media and through other media outlets presented physical activity as ‘watered down’ versions of adult ‘exercise’ activities. In any reconfiguration of curriculum, it will be important to probe the meaningfulness of any such material for the overall development of the child. Additionally, the challenges for a teacher who is teaching large class groups need to be considered carefully when any of the more recent resources are analysed for implementation in primary schools.

While understandable in the context of the pandemic, the debates about children’s activity may have skewed perceptions of the importance of providing appropriate learning opportunities that are typically provided in the context of physical education. Much of the public debate about children’s health and wellbeing during the pandemic focussed on providing opportunities for physical activity. A shift in focus is now important to reflect the importance of learning within physical education to complement the emphasis on physical activity of children. **The misunderstandings related to appropriate physical activity for children have made it more important than ever that the Framework provides a sound basis for development of clear understandings of children’s learning in the context of physical education supported by opportunities for physical activity.**

(b) The education of children with additional needs was highlighted throughout the pandemic. This emphasis was often in the context of school closures and hence, it served to highlight the extent which these children were losing opportunities for learning. During this period a relevant online resource [*Disentangling Inclusion in Primary Physical Education* <https://www.dippe.lu/>] to support teachers to include all children in physical education was published. Additionally, a linked journal article was published [Marron S., Murphy F., Pitsia V., & Scheuer, C. (2021) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03004279.2021.2002382>].

**The finalisation of the Framework should underline the importance of inclusion of all children in physical education. Implicit in any such statement in the Framework will be the need to support teachers and other support staff to teach inclusive physical education.**

(c) Throughout the pandemic, there was considerable debate within primary schools about the wellbeing of children and the importance of learning outdoors to provide safer learning environments for children. Indeed, the DES Guidelines for return to school published in July 2020 emphasised the importance of increasing time for physical education as well as prompting schools to provide regular opportunities for children to play and learn outdoors. Further guidelines issued in March 2021 urged schools to bring pupils outdoors and to promote physical activity and help positive wellbeing. It would appear that outdoor learning in general became more prevalent in Irish primary schools. This is a very positive outcome for schools over the recent period. **The continued emphasis on outdoor learning, including teaching of physical education outdoors and**

provision of regular opportunities for physical activity will be important in the Framework to build on this impetus.

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*(note that additional references relating to the Covid-19 addendum above are embedded in that final section)*

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