



**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>	Mary Nihill and Anna Mai Rooney
<b>Position</b>	Director and Deputy Director Primary
<b>Organisation</b>	Centre for School Leadership (CSL)
<b>Date</b>	February 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?

Yes

No

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

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

- The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) was formed in 2015 as a tripartite agreement between the Department of Education and Skills (DES), and the professional organisations for leadership in the Irish system, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)
- Over the past five years, the Centre has:
  - Placed a particular focus on the needs of newly appointed principals, working in consultation with PDST to provide a formal mentoring programme for all acting and newly appointed principals through the Misneach Induction Programme
  - Worked in collaboration with IPPN and NAPD to organise the provision of group mentors for those in their second year of principalship
  - Supported CSL mentors throughout the pandemic through online engagement
  - Provided a professional coaching service for principals
  - Provided a professional team coaching service for school leadership teams whose principal has engaged with one-to-one mentoring
  - Researched and developed a Model and Continuum of Professional Learning for Leadership in Ireland
  - Quality assured professional learning for leadership in the system which became the CSL Endorsement Process in 2019 with 26 programmes endorsed
  - Developed and published a shared calendar of provision for leadership for learning
  - Provided a post graduate diploma in school leadership (PDSL) for those aspiring to senior leadership roles with Cohort Six participants beginning in September 2022
  - Worked collaboratively with stakeholders to oversee leadership support in the system
  - Collaborated with other stakeholders on projects that inform system development in educational leadership
  - Developed the Middle Leadership Action Research project with Clare and Kildare Education Centres
  - Organised and facilitated the Excellence through Collaborative Leadership and Management Cluster Initiative in 2019-2020

- Researched and collaborated with leadership centres and initiatives in other jurisdictions
- Lead on leadership initiatives and data collection to inform the Irish system
- Engaged with HEIs to gather research to further inform system leadership development
- Provided policy advice on leadership to the DES

The Centre has a national director, two deputy directors, two coordinators and an administrative base in Clare Education Centre.

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*.**

CSL congratulates NCCA on the draft curriculum and welcomes its timely appearance in the Irish primary education system. Of particular benefit is the way in which the starting point for the new curriculum is based on a critical examination of both the successes and challenges of the 1999 curriculum. The fact that this draft bases its evidence on two very pertinent studies of children's learning and development, and their journey from preschool through to post-primary school adds extra merit. Of particular note is the consideration given to policy development in other sectors, specifically those of the Aistear Framework and the Junior Cycle, ensuring that a long awaited focus on a child's entire education development from three years to 18 years is highlighted. Additionally, CSL welcomes the focus on the diverse classroom in which a plurality of family types, cultures, traditions, beliefs and values, abilities and needs are evident, and in which the responsibility of the teacher to cater equably to every child's needs is becoming increasingly demanding.

Due to the current focus on teacher leadership in Irish schools, CSL is particularly impressed with the emphasis placed on 'committed, skilful and agentic professionals. CSL views teacher leaders as those who are willing to work alongside others to build a better school community, to overcome challenges and obstacles, and who desire to improve the learning for the students in their care. The trust placed in teachers in the draft curriculum lends itself to the CSL's vision for the role and reinforces the importance of positioning teacher leadership as one of the six stages of leadership on the CSL Continuum of School Leadership.

The focus on children's capabilities presented as key competencies is a significant strength of the framework and will serve to ensure that children are prepared for the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the confidence, well-being, and key skills to be responsible citizens and to achieve personal fulfilment and success in a complex and uncertain future.

In relation to the overarching principles underpinning the draft curriculum, CSL urges an explicit focus on the significance of leadership. In fact, CSL advocates for the inclusion of leadership as a key principle in addition to the eight principles already suggested, or as a significant addition in some other way to the graph presented as Figure 1. (p. 6). It is a widely held belief both in research and practice that leadership of learning is a key role in any school leader's remit, and that effective leadership in this area is essential to successful teaching, learning and assessment

approaches. Agentic teachers need the support of good leaders to utilise and optimise the trust placed in them by this draft curriculum. Likewise, school leaders need to trust their agentic teachers to adopt the new curriculum to the needs of the children in their schools. This partnership of collaboration is paramount to the success of this curriculum. As well as being included as a principle or represented in another manner in Figure 1., CSL recommends that leadership is referred to and made more explicit right throughout the draft document. This could be achieved in the following ways:

- Including a paragraph on school leadership and its significance to successful teaching, learning and assessment on pages 1-4
- As already stated, including it as an underpinning principle on page 6
- Mentioning school leaders in addition to teachers. Here are a few examples:
  - ‘An online toolkit will support teachers and **school leaders . . .**’ p. 12.
  - ‘Suggested time allocations are intended to assist teachers, **school leaders** and schools. . .’ p. 15.
  - ‘. . . is important that those teachers have opportunities for professional conversations about the child’s learning’ **instead ‘. . . is important that school leadership ensures that those teachers have . . .** p. 19.
  - Top of page 20, there should be an inclusion here about the importance of leadership **perhaps ‘Effective school leadership and relationships are central to this . . .’**
  - ‘. . . with the help of appropriate resources **and effective school leadership**, p. 20.
  - Supporting schools, teachers, and school leaders: The five bullet points here must be enabled, facilitated, and empowered by school leadership. **Suggest: ‘In particular, the Forum has highlighted the need for school leadership to facilitate the following:’**

It is not suggested that the concept of school leadership is mentioned everywhere, but CSL recommends its inclusion where appropriate to highlight its significance to the success of a school’s teaching, learning and assessment work.

We also recommend that the pedagogical approach/strategy bullet points on page 22 should conclude with an extra one: Reflects the standards of the Looking at our School Teaching and Learning, and Leadership and Management Frameworks through the SSE Process. Additionally, CSL recommends that the document reflects the learning achieved in schools over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. CSL suggests the insertion of a paragraph on page 4, just above the ‘Timeline for developments’ which would reflect the challenges faced by schools since

the first closure on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and how this learning has the potential to enrich the development of the new curriculum.

The 'Timeline for developments' section needs to be amended to take the pandemic delay into account.

## 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.**

CSL welcomes this focus. Taking into consideration the current diverse circumstances of classrooms, the documented evidence of curriculum overload and the importance of catering to the needs of every child in their own school context, this focus is essential. CSL particularly welcomes such a focus because:

- It encourages the facilitation, nurturing and development of teacher leadership
- It places a focus on the professionalization of teaching
- It lends itself perfectly to working through the LAOS framework and the SSE process
- It offers specific opportunities for the empowerment of teacher and middle leaders
- It encourages a focus on school context, culture, mission, vision, and values
- It facilitates both teachers and school leaders to work towards the specific needs of the students, teachers, parents and members of their own school and local community
- It allows for a flexible approach to the choosing and accessing of relevant professional learning. Reference is needed here to the new possibilities of online or blended learning

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

To ensure that teachers are enabled and empowered to be flexible in providing for the learning, teaching and assessment needs of their pupils, and to nurture the development of their leadership capacity to become agentic professionals, they need an effective leadership structure in their school. CSL recommends that this message is explicit in all discourses and documentation around flexibility and agency. System stakeholders have a responsibility to support effective leadership structures in schools. Cohesive leadership supports, knowledge, skills and discourse are essential to this work. The proposed new integrated structure for DE support services will be integral in ensuring cohesive leadership professional learning and support from the system for agentic professionals. In reality, this will mean an extension of support for middle and teacher leaders in particular, and for senior leadership, to ensure leadership capacity is nurtured in their leadership teams.

### **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 *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.

This view of the child’s journey as a continuum through education from pre-school through primary and post-primary school is very much welcomed by CSL. Transitions from pre-school to primary and from primary to post-primary can be enormously stressful even when supports are optimised, and when transfer information such as Mo Scéal and the Education Passport are used effectively. Teachers at all levels need to be mindful of these challenges irrespective of

what level, age group or subjects they are involved in. Having a curriculum that is cognisant of beginning with Aistear and moving through the Junior and Senior Cycles is key to its success. Having teachers articulate the challenges of transition in professional dialogue with their colleagues strengthens the focus and ultimately, decreases the issues involved.

However, CSL recommends that this professional dialogue does not remain separately within each level, and that school leaders collaboratively ensure that opportunities are offered for teachers at all three levels to discuss this topic together. The objective here, therefore, is not simply a focus on the actual transition but in addition, a focus on each level understanding generally how the other two work. CSL recommends that this communication and collaboration between the three levels becomes common practice, and that the understanding of each other's work is expanded to ensure that all teachers use this knowledge in their daily teaching and assessment practices. This level of interconnection and reflection is necessary to ensure that curriculum connections are made and sustained. It will involve the development of collaborative projects and specific recommendations from the NCCA to ensure that all teachers not only see and understand the foundation one level provides for the next, but also that they advocate for it, are mindful of it in their daily teaching, discuss and reflect on it with colleagues, and spend time with colleagues from other levels during staff meetings and other opportunities to meet in dialogue. It is equally essential that this collaboration is not tokenistic. There have always been opportunities for the different levels to meet at special occasions, shared learning opportunities and in particular subject areas, particularly the arts and PE. CSL recommends that it is now timely to expand these traditional opportunities to real dialogue and reflection between colleagues at the three levels.

This approach is already expected in the Looking at Our School 2016 Quality Framework for Teaching and Learning. Teachers are expected to 'plan learning experiences that enable and empower pupils to see learning as a holistic and lifelong endeavour' and 'Teachers collaborate with relevant and appropriate outside personnel to provide meaningful learning experiences for pupils and work together to ensure that the learning is integrated' (p. 20). Also, 'Teachers are proactive in building collective expertise in the skills and approaches necessary to facilitate pupil learning for the future' (p. 21). Linking this to the Looking at our School Leadership and Management Framework which recommends: 'The principal and other leaders in the school build and maintain very productive relationships with other schools and education providers to extend learning opportunities for pupils' (p. 27), provides a strong basis to support curriculum

connections. CSL recommends that the responsibility of both teachers and school leaders in this area is made more explicit in the guidelines, specifically perhaps, in the piece on transitions on page 19. CSL recommends linking this responsibility to system supports so that opportunities can be created collaboratively in the system, especially through the Education Centre network to extend learning opportunities for students and to extend collaborative learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders.

### **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.**

CSL particularly welcomes the new focus on key competencies for children’s learning outcomes, the focus on their skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes, and the increased emphasis in particular areas for the following reasons:

- The competencies are suitably aligned to the new curriculum areas
- They promote the skills and dispositions needed to navigate the complex 21<sup>st</sup> century landscape
- They foster a sense of independence and have potential to build confidence in learners
- They are broadly based on the importance of the student voice

- Their specific areas of active citizenship, creativity, digital learning, being mathematical, communication and well-being are core to modern civil society and the diverse, pluralistic communities that children belong to
- They foster equality and inclusivity
- Proposed introduction of modern foreign languages is especially timely due to the re-construction of the curriculum and the move away from the overcrowded subject space

CSL would like to suggest:

- That there is a specific reference to the student voice and student leadership inserted on p. 7 in the introduction to Key Competencies

That a reference to leadership be inserted on page 8 e.g. line 3 ' . . . that motivate and empower them as citizens to be leaders and take positive actions . . .

### **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;

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

- 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.**

CSL welcomes the continuity and inherent flow in the curriculum structure and presentation, working from the broader base and *Aistear* in stages one and two, and encouraging the agentic teacher’s innovation, skill, and commitment to meet the needs of the younger learner in an integrated approach. We recommend the inclusion of leadership once again by simply inserting ‘lead’ as follows: Bottom of age 11: ‘Curriculum areas recognised younger children’s ages, stage of development and give the teacher greater choice **in leading**, planning for, and facilitating . . .

The balanced opportunities developed for Stages Three and Four that support learning connections across all subject areas are commendable.

## **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.**

CSL welcomes the focus on teachers’ professional judgement, making connections, quality relationships and the role and influence of parents and families in achieving high quality teaching, learning and assessment.

We recommend prefacing the Teaching and Learning section on page 20 with a reference to the Quality Framework for Leadership and Management in the Looking at our School (LAOS) 2016 document. To achieve a high standard of inclusive education and diversity, to specifically develop an appropriately inclusive learning environment, and to support a variety of pedagogical approaches, effective school leadership is key. If this section could be prefaced by a statement that effective school leadership is essential to quality teaching, learning and assessment, and that the standards of Domain One in the LAOS document should be a starting place for school staffs to interrogate their vision and principles, an impetus would be provided for professional dialogue among teachers supported effectively by leadership.

In addition, the school's work on the SSE process should be referenced here to create a structure building on work already achieved, and to plan for the school's priorities for the future, through the lens of the new draft framework.

To ensure that teachers' professional judgement is adequately supported, CSL further recommends that school leadership enables, facilitates, provides, and points to opportunities for professional learning in areas chosen by teachers to strengthen their pedagogical approaches. We recommend inclusion of such a statement in the introduction on page 26 in addition to specific mention of school leadership in relation to the bullet points. Suggest- 'In particular, the Forum has highlighted the need for **school leadership to ensure**: (Just above the bullet points).

### **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.**

CSL recommends that school leadership creates structures, time, and space to enable and empower teachers to discuss, reflect on, plan, and prioritise according to the guidelines of the new curriculum. This will mean a significant focus on context and on the needs of the local community. Now, more than ever, school leaders need to build leadership capacity within their schools to prioritise what is necessary for their children’s learning.

The importance of effective leadership is vital to the progress of the school, and the draft curriculum demands collaborative vision alongside the aforementioned agency, skills and commitment of teachers, and the development of teacher and middle leadership to assist senior leaders to successfully lead teaching, learning and assessment in their schools. CSL recommends that there is an explicit focus on this message generally throughout the document, and a focus on the system supports available to assist this work.

### **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*.**

CSL recommends that the draft document be amended to reflect the pandemic as suggested in Sections 1 and 2 above.

CSL suggests that the main implications are as follows:

- Cognisance by the NCCA of recovery time from a very stressful period with on-going challenges
- Using new online and blended learning opportunities to support the development of the curriculum e.g., online communities of practice, focus groups, exemplars, optional webinars, and local online learning opportunities
- Examination of research on teaching, learning and assessment during the pandemic and how this learning can influence the development of the new curriculum
- A closer alignment of educational ecosystems and opportunities for cohesive support
- An examination of leadership development during the pandemic and its potential to influence the development of the new curriculum

## **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.**

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