



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment



Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals responding to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*

This template is intended to support you (and your colleagues/organisation) in developing a written submission in response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Please e-mail your completed submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Individual submission details

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Organisation submission details

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Yes

No

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Section 1

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

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework encapsulates a vision for the primary school curriculum that is at once informative and engaging. There are several striking factors, not least of which was that the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* was published over twenty years ago. In the interim, society has profoundly changed, and the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* endeavours to respond to changing expectations and experiences. The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* is a dynamic document and the primary curriculum is rooted in the view of education as a continuum of experience.

The education journey from the home to the post-primary experience and the commonalities between each is emphasised in the framework. The rationale for reviewing the primary curriculum is explored and *Growing Up in Ireland (GUI)* is used as a reference point in studying how children are developing in different contexts. The document provides a detailed insight into the wealth of topics covered by GUI and how the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework similarly aligns with key milestones in children's lives and recognises the centrality of their experience in creating a purposeful curriculum. Other related developments to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* are explored, such as *Language Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026 (DEIS, 2017)* and the integration of modern foreign languages for senior classes in the redeveloped primary curriculum.

The redeveloped curriculum provides a timely and relevant juncture in which to explore changes in Irish society, the view of primary education and what is best practice in this regard since the publication of the 1999 curriculum.

Since the publication of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, Covid-19 has challenged the overall framework and concept of school. Looking through the priorities and make-up of the document, it is notable that *Partnership* and *Learning Environments* are principles in pursuing the

vision of the curriculum. Diverse environments and partnership between all in the education community have proved central to enabling teaching and learning to continue as the shape of schooling as we knew it changed over the past two years. The pandemic has shown the importance of an inclusive learning environment and how primary education in particular is a benchmark for stability, normality and reassurance. The primary education experience is relied upon to provide happy and well-adjusted pupils who gain an understanding of themselves and their unique skills and talents as well as empathy and sensitivity towards others.



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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* gives flexibility and choice in children's learning, involving the child in their own learning through opportunities for decision-making, creativity, and collaboration. The redeveloped curriculum seeks to embed the changes in the trajectory of teacher training and development.

A whole school approach to the redeveloped curriculum is envisaged through facilitating leadership in the school in enacting the curriculum. This is achieved through supporting school leaders and teachers in their continuous professional development and by being mindful of the context of each school.

Diversity and variety of approaches in teaching can blend effectively with the curriculum changes in order to acknowledge the "challenges, uncertainty and disruption" in the anticipation of the redeveloped curriculum.

It is suggested that the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* makes further use of the concept of agentic teachers and learners in highlighting agency and flexibility in the redeveloped curriculum. Priestly, Biesta and Robinson (2015) are referenced in the *Draft*

Primary Curriculum Framework. They argue that agentic learners need agentic teachers who can respond, stimulate, and challenge learners. Teachers can motivate pupils using a range of interesting and relevant activities, acknowledging individual efforts and the unique ability and interests of each student.

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.

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The transitions between preschool, primary and post-primary schools are focused on in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. They link with learning experiences in *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and transition through the primary school experience and link to the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. These developments in education are connected with how children learn at home, in preschool and post-primary level.

The curriculum changes and links with the themes of the *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the connections with the subjects, key skills and statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* could be more explicitly worked out. The four themes in *Aistear* and how these are used as a toolkit to assist parents and educators could be focused on. It would also be worthwhile to consider how, similar to linking the educational experience for children as they transition into primary school, these themes and toolkit also aid parents in assisting their child with the transition.

It would be helpful if the subjects, key skills, and statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* are highlighted in the redeveloped curriculum and woven throughout the finalised document, so as to maintain their currency and relevance. In the light of this, how the key skills translate into practice and improve the learning experience should be expanded on. These set of skills are a common thread in linking the curriculum as a springboard of unity as children transition throughout the various stages of schooling and school communities in their lives.

A strong emphasis on cross-curricular education is needed at primary level. This reduces curriculum overload and provide children with a broad education which includes all curriculum areas. This is also in line with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at post-primary level, where subjects are taught through the medium of a modern foreign language. Challenging artificial borders around curriculum areas is important. It would be interesting for example to see a history project incorporate Gaeilge, drama, dance and project work.



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

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emerging priorities for children’s learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

The planning and scaffolding of various pedagogical strategies and approaches enable and empower students to avail of a personal learning experience. The rich variety of teachers’ abilities stimulate different types of learning, and the teachers can choose different strategies to support the child’s progression from junior infants to sixth class. In the redeveloped curriculum, the transfer of knowledge and the learning outcomes for each subject are embedded in the specifications for curriculum areas and subjects. It is suggested that support materials and patterns of approaching the curriculum are outlined in order to enable and encourage the integration of knowledge and skills from the particular context of the school. This would make engagement with the curriculum a more meaningful and deeper experience for the student and teacher.

It is noted that broad learning outcomes are to be used to describe the expected learning and development for children. The Coding in Primary Schools Initiative provides opportunities for “playful experimentation and investigation”. The language of playfulness linked with science, technology and mathematical proficiency is refreshing and should be highlighted throughout.

The Action Plan for education 2016-2019 is referred to in the context of the redeveloped curriculum and the aim of continuously improving and reviewing the education system. It would be worthwhile to include areas such as critical thinking; resilience and wellbeing and how to balance continuity and change, while fostering wellbeing to enable capable and resilient young learners. The benefit of areas such as the natural environment could also be explored further.

The redeveloped curriculum provides the opportunity to consider how Patrons’ programmes can maintain involvement in the child’s education and the related role of Religions and Beliefs (ERB). The terms and particular language entailed in the Patrons’ programmes should be explained clearly and how this programme forms part of the foundational spirit of the school. The issue can be problematic for parents at times and it would be useful to show

how these areas are used as a benchmark for practice. It would be ideal to consider PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) in the spirit of play and friendship and how these areas allow a happy child to take a fulsome part in school life.

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.

The redeveloped curriculum will be presented in five broad curriculum areas, gradually becoming more differentiated as a way of reflecting children’s ways of organising the world. Inquiry and investigation of the part of the child moves into conceptual and abstract thinking. In line with this, the five curriculum areas are interrelated and overlap, however they become more differentiated as children move through the primary classes.

The work on the new Primary Language Curriculum has gathered together research and best practice in language learning to form a cohesive approach to language learning and teaching. Key areas of this curriculum and how it translates into the enacted curriculum should be outlined. One such current area is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). *Research (DES,2017) shows that teaching languages as a means of communication in this way, rather than as a stand alone subject can be effective in creating transferable linguistic skills.

It is also suggested that the learning outcomes are focused on with input from the students, parents, teachers and others. This input could perhaps come from The Schools Forum (elaborated on later in this document), allowing for a broad range of meaningful contribution. Case studies could also be included, similar to the NCCA document on *Learning Outcomes: An International Perspective*.

It would be beneficial to emphasise the idea of the shared classroom space that brings together teacher and pupil. If there are to be changes in how the curriculum is structured and presented, it should not become overloaded. The classroom is a special place and for many teachers and students it is almost their second home and a hub of community activities.

*DES (2017). Languages Connect. Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026.

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.

A variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning are outlined in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. Pedagogy is supported in its fullest sense and in a variety of approaches, with assessment central to teaching and learning. Relationships and partnerships are viewed as pivotal in the circle of influence and their impact on children's learning. Relationships are viewed as impacting positively on children's engagement, motivation, and learning. The importance of relationships is also seen in encouraging teachers to make meaningful connections with children's interests and experiences.

The centrality and value of relationship in the pedagogical approaches outlined is also seen in teachers' professional judgement in supporting the progression of children's learning. Teachers are encouraged to get to know the children through their interests and experiences. This is supported in the broader picture of recognising the role and influence of parents and families in children's education.

In the light of the focus on relationship and in getting to know each individual child, diversity and inclusivity is placed in a central role in providing decisive information for navigating the curriculum.

Parents and the home are seen as key influences on children's education. The learning environment is also valued as part of a broader pedagogy whereby teaching and learning is seen as encompassing the wider context of the children's experience. Assessment is viewed as progressive and enabling, supporting a progression in children's learning across the curriculum.

In the light of this, the various stakeholders and partnerships in education should be explored further and their significance. The role of all members of the community and the role they play is interesting. It might be worthwhile to expand further and validate the learning that comes from the home and wider community.

In the redeveloped curriculum, assessment is embedded in the learning process. It is tightly interconnected with curriculum and plays a constant role in guiding the students and

checking progress. It should be highlighted not as a finite end, but as an ongoing, formative and active part of the curriculum and learning.

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*.

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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 *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* seeks to develop an enhanced curriculum that will effectively respond to challenges and the changing needs and priorities of students. This can be seen in how it is envisaged to explore key issues for children in navigating varying social contexts. Early learning experiences are highlighted as children are equipped with the key skills necessary to navigate their environments. A skillset of broader learning competencies embedded in their learning experiences is prioritised and the need to address curriculum overload is simultaneously highlighted. The redeveloped curriculum is information seeking and capacity building, recognising the role of dynamic initiatives in enhancing children's learning. It acknowledges the role of the community and the influence and role of parents and families in creating the overall educational experience.

In incorporating the new *Primary Languages Curriculum*, it is suggested that Ireland's linguistic diversity is highlighted. This broad diversity should highlight the Recognition of Irish Sign Language (ISL) for the Deaf Community Bill being signed into law. It is also noteworthy that a total of 72 migrant languages were reported to be spoken by more than 500 people each in the 2016 Census. This is in contrast with the linguistic makeup of Ireland when the Primary School Curriculum was introduced in 1999. The cultural richness and diversity implied in this data is worthy of consideration.

The tentative starting points of discussion proposed in the *Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment* provide an outline of options for the inclusion of modern foreign languages in the redeveloped primary curriculum. It is also proposed that the template used to gather details of modern language teaching and learning in Irish schools with particular reference to special education needs and the impact of a third language on English and Irish should remain a feature of the redeveloped curriculum, allowing an ongoing feedback loop between teachers and the NCCA.

In examining the characteristics of the organisation of the primary curriculum in other jurisdictions, the study has also stimulated a range of questions for consideration at the local level, such as the subjects included in the current curriculum and if there is flexibility to consider including subjects on a phased basis in the curriculum. Areas such as the Primary Language Curriculum and aspects such as CLIL enable interdisciplinary teaching and should be given detailed consideration for inclusion in the framework. O'Donnell's curriculum audit (2019) is one of the research papers that have informed the development of the proposals in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. This research points out that areas such as literacy and numeracy, digital competence, and health and well-being would be of benefit to the cross-curricular skills, values and dispositions that are essential for learning at primary level. Robust consideration should be given to these transferable skills and how they can be embedded in the redeveloped curriculum in a way that is manageable for teachers and of maximum benefit to students. O'Donnell (2019) also points out that there may be merit to explicitly differentiated curricula in subjects while also acknowledging that differentiation can remain the domain of the teacher, facilitated by a flexible, accommodating, and inclusive curriculum framework. In the light of this, it should be acknowledged that the mining of the curriculum to enable the most productive access for all teachers and students is an organic and ever evolving process.

The Schools Forum has provided an opportunity to pilot these changes and anticipate issues arising. Such a Forum would be invaluable in continuing to monitor the myriad factors and circumstances that will shape the path of this redeveloped curriculum over the course of the next few years. This would create a representative national picture in tracking the progress of the developments in the curriculum, also focusing on a pathway to resolve education and curriculum needs of students and what should be done to enable access to the curriculum in the case of closures or crises. This platform could also be envisaged as involving representatives of teachers, students and parents. It should also engage patron, management bodies, advocacy groups and other agencies of the State that are stakeholders in the area. This gathering of all involved in the work of the school would also align with the messages related to the framework for the redeveloped curriculum.



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*.

The impact of the past two years on children and schools has been enormous. We have learned that school is a safe and reliable shelter for parents, teachers and students in uncertain times. When the shape of schooling, as we know it, changes, it creates upset and upheaval for all involved. In the light of this, it is important to remember the need for flexibility and adaptability in the curriculum. The understanding of the classroom has changed. It is no longer a four walled room (perhaps it never was). Now it is understood to be a pivotal point of the school community experience, be that at home on the kitchen table or as part of a project where everyone goes outdoors. The nature of school as a finite period is changing, where the Leaving Certificate is completed, and marks are awarded and students' progress to third level in a seamless fashion.

The "Flexible Time" responds to schools' education priorities, and this will be useful in enabling learning to move into the home schooling domain, should there be a long-term absence from school.

In the Primary Curriculum Framework, there is also a focus on the key competency of wellbeing and the ability of children to be capable and resourceful. Children are enabled to

see themselves as autonomous learners. The pandemic enabled active learning and participation and fostered a spirit of creativity, thoughtfulness and teamwork in bringing school to the local environment. The pandemic challenged any notion of textbooks as the curriculum and learning saw a focus on the principles of Aistear, making a definite link with play, activity, exploration and innovation.

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Thank you for your submission.

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