

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

Organisation submission details

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Date	March 2021
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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 provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

Marino Institute of Education (MIE) is a teaching, learning and research community committed to promoting inclusion and excellence in education. We are a focused and dynamic institute, which has kept pace with the contemporary educational landscape, while remaining committed to our founding principles of social justice and excellence in education. We have a long and proud involvement with education, specifically initial teacher education (ITE), dating back over 120 years. MIE's programmes incorporate the continuum of teacher education, providing a BSc in Early Childhood Education and initial and in-service teacher education for primary and further education teachers, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This is complemented with a commitment to education studies encompassing non-traditional education settings and the wider education environment in a pluralist context. MIE currently educates approximately 1200 students, providing high quality programmes, which are validated by Trinity and, where appropriate, are accredited by the Teaching Council. We are committed to quality and excellence in all areas of Institute life with research and review informing all our programmes and initiatives.

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*.

MIE welcomes the publication of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. It is over twenty years since the launch of the 1999 Curriculum. Ireland has changed a lot in the past twenty years. The social fabric of our country has changed and technology is an integral part of daily life. Wellbeing of students has taken on a huge importance and in that regard lessons being learned during the COVID-19 pandemic should enable schools to respond to unforeseen circumstances in the future.

The emphasis on 'community' throughout the document is important and we would recommend that this should be extended to include a sense of belonging to a global community, as well as a school or local community. The framework considers the needs of all children and supports them in realising their potential through a provision of different subjects and opportunities for engagement. There is strength in building on what they already know and ensuring that there is a progressive model from Aistear right up to post primary entry. It is also cognisant of the autonomy of teachers.

The move from a prescriptive curriculum to a curriculum framework is welcomed and has the potential to ensure greater integration of subjects for students. Calls for increased time to existing curricular areas such as SPHE and PE are a welcome proposal and will be required even more so following the COVID-19 experience, particularly in terms of pupils' physical and mental wellbeing.

Under the heading of developing agency and flexibility it is outlined that the redeveloped curriculum will connect with different school contexts in the education system. We welcome this proposal. In Ireland approximately 30% of children learn in multi-grade contexts and this was not explicitly recognised in the 1999 curriculum.

The commitment to inclusive education within the curriculum is welcome. Although we agree with the aim of providing a 'strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish, supporting them in realising their full potential as individuals and as members of

communities and society during childhood and into the future' we are mindful that in order for this aim to be realised, additional practical support will be required by children in schools, particularly those with Special Educational Needs. Necessary supports for schools in this regard are seen as critical in offering equity in opportunities in the context of an inclusive curriculum.

KEY COMPETENCIES

Being an Active Citizen

Scientific literacy is an integral component of being an active citizen and it is vital that schools support students in developing their scientific literacy, so they develop the requisite knowledge skills and attitudes that will enable and empower them to understand different issues and to make informed decisions / choices as young citizens. This scientific knowledge is particularly important in relation to issues regarding sustainability and climate change. Environmental awareness and eco-literacy needs to be highlighted. We recommend that reference to scientific literacy be included in this competency. In addition, the inclusion of critical thinking skills is recommended as a key competency. In an age of information overload, it is increasingly important that children are equipped with the skills and understanding to evaluate and critique the information available to them. One way to achieve this is to create a culture of inquiry within the classroom and this should be highlighted in the Principles of the curriculum.

Being Mathematical

The draft curriculum suggests that being mathematical involves children drawing on a range of knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions as they recognise, interpret and apply real-world information presented mathematically. Given that scientific thinking is considered a key competency in the 21st century (DES, 2019), we suggest that the renaming of 'Being Mathematical' competency in the curriculum framework to 'Being Mathematical and Scientific' be considered and that the descriptors would be adapted accordingly.

Being a Digital Learner

This competency looks at supporting children to become curious, creative, confident and critical users of digital technology. We broadly welcome the provision of ‘being a digital learner’ as a standalone key competency. In addition to this, however, we also recommend a more integrated understanding of all competences as being fluid and interrelated. This could be better managed with a clearer infographic. This is to ensure that there is an understanding that one must have a digital education and digital practice embedded across all disciplines, as per the goals of the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020. In this context, we urge that consideration be given to the implications of introducing coding into the curriculum. Some key questions related to this include how to address the perennial issue of funding to address the digital divide and device poverty across the primary sector. Furthermore, this will have implications for content delivered through programmes of Initial Teacher Education.

Although the competency recognises that children develop their knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions through problem-solving, experimenting and creating, there may be implications for “science and technology” being misconstrued as only referring narrowly to digital technologies. In relation to SESE, experimentation and investigations will be hands on, and may not *always* include a digital entity. Some thought about this would be useful, as it may limit the value of problem solving and experimentation outside of a digital context.

Fostering Wellbeing

We broadly welcome the expanded focus on Wellbeing as a key broad curriculum area and the inclusion of Fostering Wellbeing as a key competency. The framework proposes an increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing). However, the question arises as to whether this area is sufficiently clearly defined and delineated, or should it rather constitute a learning outcome instead of a subject. It remains very important in this regard to keep a focus on physical and mental health, separately, to allow for sufficient focus on PE and children’s physical development and not to reduce it to a more general concept of well-being.

We strongly urge that consideration be given to increasing the focus on critical media literacy. Following Torres and Mercado (2006), we understand one of the key components of critical media literacy is to “develop a critical understanding of how corporate for-profit media work, driven by their political and economic vested interests”. Given the proliferation of online media sources and the increased commercialisation of childhoods, equipping children with the skills and dispositions necessary to critically engage with messages targeting them, needs to be a core component of the primary school curriculum. In addition to the importance of this regarding personal development, this is critically important in developing active citizens who can engage with the public space in a critically informed manner. We welcome the emphasis on integration across the curriculum and see strong potential synergies between the key competencies of “being a digital learner” and “communicating and using language”, but would urge that a strong message pertaining to critical media literacy be embedded in proposed content and exemplars.

Communicating and Using Language

The focus on Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) within the primary school experience is welcomed. It has been established that the early learning of modern foreign languages from pre-school holds multiple advantages for learners, from enriching their skills of socialisation, to developing their sense of language, and increasing motivation for learning another language. The background paper: Integrating modern foreign languages in a redeveloped primary curriculum (Keogh-Bryan, 2019) provides a very strong rationale for the inclusion of a focus on language learning outside of L1 and L2. A particular element of this to be recognised in any introduction of L3, are the linguistic resources within the pupils of individual schools, and their families and communities (Cummins, 2004). We urge that the introduction of MFL robustly recognise the breadth of linguistic diversity across the Irish state and within many Irish primary schools and adapt offerings to reflect the reality of classrooms. This will mean that offerings extend beyond traditional modern foreign languages, but also that offerings are flexible, year-on-year, to reflect the linguistic capitals within Stages 3 and 4. This will make a solid contribution to the transition point across primary into post-primary. Furthermore, it will address issues of intercultural education,

identified as important in the framework document. We also urge that consideration be given as to how first languages of minority language children (L3) are encouraged in Stages 1 and 2. For many migrant populations, this will be an important element in maintaining and developing the linguistic capitals, which they can then more formally engage with in Stages 3 and 4. Embedding this respect for linguistic diversity across the full range of primary school will provide a helpful foundation for MFL teaching and Learning.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In keeping with European norms, MIE advocates that Religious Education (RE) would be seen as a broad-based encompassing term that does not exclude areas such as ethics, wellbeing, education about religions and beliefs. For this reason, we advocate that Religious Education would hold its title as a curricular area in the draft curriculum framework, rather than separating out areas such as ERB, ethics, wellbeing, the patron's programme, etc. and thus splintering the term. We need to expand our understanding of religious education in line with many of the competencies and dispositions named in the draft curriculum and approach it in a more expansive, educational understanding of the term religious education, with the holistic education of the child as its aim.

The current absence of the moral and spiritual dimension of educating the child inhibits the promotion of a holistic education because of the narrowing of the understanding of Religious Education. If we accept that the child has the right to be nurtured spiritually and morally, then it behoves us to take that responsibility seriously. That seriousness begins by including Religious Education (with its multi-faceted components) as a curricular area in the draft curriculum, rather than its current position, either fragmented into different components or as an add-on. In this way, the curriculum will be in keeping with second level where Religious Education is already in use as the title of a curricular area and, as previously mentioned, with Europe in general where Religious Education is the accepted title throughout.

SCIENCE

Science provides a key way of understanding the world around us, and how we share the

planet. Research indicates that the time allocated for science in the current Irish primary curriculum (DES 1999) (at 4% of overall instructional time) is the lowest primary curriculum allocation for science amongst OECD countries (Clerkin et al 2016; Eivers, 2013 ; Murphy 2013; Clerkin, 2016). Concerns were already raised by the STEM Education Review Group in their 2016 report regarding the small amount of time allocated to Science in the 1999 curriculum. There is potential for an under representation of Science teaching on the primary school timetable without a weekly allocation. There is a danger that teachers will cover limited science content by ‘back loading’ science to the end of the month. Perhaps fortnightly, instead of monthly allocations may work better. This can allow teachers to implement ‘double lessons’, while also preventing science being forgotten about and left to the end of the month. Furthermore, we encourage the inclusion of computer science in the form of coding in the primary school classroom. If adding more content to the curriculum, then it is important to allow time for it.

STEM

A succinct definition of the “science and technology” is required. Many teachers interpret the ‘technology’ in ‘science and technology’ as ‘digital technology’ rather than the application of science knowledge and skills. It may be preferable that the technology within the primary curriculum would be positioned as an application of science and thus be represented as a strand unit or set of skills. Perhaps one way to address the potential confusion over ‘science and technology’ would be to keep the term ‘design and make’ in the descriptor and maintain “science” rather than “science and technology” as the subject/discipline within STEM. A definition of what STEM education as a curricular area constitutes for junior classes is also required along with a rationale for integrating the different disciplines of STEM in senior classes. In the graphic presentation for Stages 1 and 2, Mathematics, Science, and Technology are all given equal weight, and yet, for 3rd to 6th class, Mathematics has been separated out from Science & Technology. The reasoning behind this change is not quite clear, and it may also lead to the impression that Mathematics has a higher weight as a standalone subject, while Science and Technology have a lesser importance in the curriculum and are thus, being amalgamated into one broad

area.

In various iterations of the curriculum, mathematics is continually given a weekly allocation, while science & technology education is given monthly allocations. By combining science & technology, it may lead to a situation wherein some teachers give more time to science, and others to technology. Thus, more clarity around the hours to be dedicated individually to mathematics, science, and technology would be welcomed in the document.

SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

There is some concern about separating Science from SEE, creating a false dichotomy. The concept of 'environment' is integrally linked with geography and science. The role of Environmental and Sustainable Development Education in the framework needs to be explicitly stated. In the absence of a holistic understanding of the connections between humans and the environment, there may be a risk of a skewed perception of technological progress as the answer to environmental sustainability issues.

In addition, history is so important to understanding who we are. Lack of explicit mention of history in the early years is a concern. Thinking and working as a historian is essential from a very early age. Empathy is a key competency for all members of society that is developed in this way. A wider exploration of the development of such a key competency within the curriculum would be welcomed.

ARTS EDUCATION

Creativity and arts are immensely important for student learning and wellbeing and underpin many of the principles and learning goals of the draft curriculum framework. A holistic arts education, with equal emphases on creating and making, appreciating and performing across artistic disciplines such as dance and drama would offer integration opportunities. It is a concern that so little time is allocated to arts, in particular in the senior classes where new subject areas are proposed to the area of arts.

INTEGRATION OF SUBJECT AREAS

The greater integration of subjects, as well as the focus on agency and ownership, are welcomed and are important aspects of the new curriculum framework. We recognise that

this proposal has implications for areas where teachers will need a lot of support in order to implement the curriculum effectively. Substantial resources and training will need to be put in place in order to support such implementation. Exemplars in the curriculum specifications would be an addition in this regard.

TIME ALLOCATIONS

We welcome the monthly and weekly allocation of time as it gives teachers more flexibility. For example, this model offers scope for the teaching of discrete science concepts, within a thematic space that allows for cross curricular connections to be made with other subjects. It is important to recognise that planning and teaching in a more integrated manner is complex, and appropriate and adequate supports need to be in place to support this proposal.

There are some concerns in relation to time allocations, in particular with respect to arts, science and languages. The time allocation for language and especially the breakdown of time allocation for L1 and L2, especially in the third option proposed need further clarification. Clearer rationales for such time allocations are warranted.

Clarification is needed in terms of the time allocated in the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) for both English and Gaeilge across the different school contexts (both Gaeilge and English in English-medium schools, and in Irish-medium schools, in Gaelscoileanna and in Scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht).

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 in terms of teachers' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context and giving more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling. We recognise that there is a variety of school contexts. No two schools in the country are the same, no two classes in a school are the same and each individual child is unique. Children are active and demonstrate agency as the capacity to act independently and to make choices about and in their learning. Curriculum experiences provide them with opportunities for decision-making, creativity and collaboration. It is important therefore that the education received by the individual child meets the needs of that child and that there is sufficient flexibility in the implementation of a curriculum to respond to individual difference. At the same time, the hallmarks of a national curriculum should remain intact and no child by virtue of his/her circumstances should be deprived of receiving the full breadth of that curriculum.

The draft framework is intended to be for every child, and the proposals on agency and flexibility are also about giving children greater opportunities for flexibility and choice in

their learning. Teachers exercise their professional judgement and agency through knowledge of children’s prior learning and experience, as well as knowledge of the curriculum, to support progression. The approach outlined in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* recognises teachers as curriculum makers, which comes with both rights and responsibilities. The skill, knowledge, confidence, and experience required for a teacher to create a well-balanced and bespoke curriculum for his or her class is considerable. It depends, among other factors, on the pedagogical content knowledge of the teacher. Hence, content knowledge and CPD needs to be provided to teachers across the different curriculum areas to ensure that informed choices are made by teachers in this regard. Time needs to be provided to principals and teachers in schools so that they may meet and be enabled to become these “curriculum makers” in their own schools.

The first key message regarding agency and flexibility in school is welcomed. It enables a sense of autonomy, empowering teachers to use their professional judgement and make decisions around lesson planning and delivery. There is more opportunity for peer and self-assessment, reducing paperwork and pressure on teachers. There are some practical concerns raised in relation to the implementation of this message regarding agency and flexibility. It will be important to clearly articulate how child voice is going to be supported and how teachers will be upskilled to underpin their teaching with a genuine and authentic concern for children’s voices and agency in relation to learning. This key message represents quite a substantial shift from the existing 1999 curriculum and remains an area that can often be challenging for teachers to implement effectively. The move from a tight structure to a framework based on agency and flexibility is a radical shift for many. It may perhaps be that important lessons can be learned from the implementation of Aistear in ECEC and primary school settings over the last decade.

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.

Transition and continuity are important principles within the draft framework. These principles inform the seven key competencies outlined in the draft framework and are relevant from junior infants to sixth class. They link closely with *Aistear’s* four themes and the eight Key Skills in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* in order to make connections with children’s prior learning in preschool and future learning in post-primary school.

While we agree that it is important to be aware of curriculum connections across the continuum of education, this should not mean trying to anticipate/meet the objectives or outcomes of a later stage. The focus in primary must encapsulate reasonable expectation for primary level.

We posit that a more unified conceptual base of a pedagogy of play could be presented in relation to *Aistear*. Namely, how the child-led free play to an adult-led playful pedagogy (and variations in between) might manifest at the various ages between 0-6 years. There is a need to be cognisant of the playful pedagogical experiences of children in their two free preschool years, and how these might be build up effectively, utilising *Aistear* throughout the day in the junior infants and senior infants classrooms. This requires a more coherent understanding and shared recognition of the process of the learning outcomes, the role of the educator in supporting children’s playful learning, how teachers navigate

more and less structured play experiences with a view to developing a coherent conceptualisation of curriculum and learning in junior and senior infants.

There is a welcome emphasis on home learning environments but this is mostly in relation to early childhood and appears to diminish in the senior end of primary. This needs to be expressed in a more coherent fashion in relation to older children within the new curriculum framework. This is also the case in relation to homework. Covid-19 has brought this more into focus for everyone but it needs to be more strongly conceptualised and brought out in the curriculum framework. This is particularly the case in relation to challenged home learning environments.

TRANSITIONS

Much emphasis is placed on the preschool to primary but less focus on primary to secondary. The Education Passport is not used widely, and operates as an end of year report card, which does not always assist the child in making a smooth transition. The primary to secondary transition should be dealt with explicitly with transitional activities embedded within curriculum subjects.

Alignment of curricula happens only at very local level through relationships between teachers rather than at structural/formal level. It is recommended that more focus be placed on this alignment at a structural level. Good examples of how this alignment has already happened is between Aistear and the new Primary Curriculum Framework and in relation to maths from primary to secondary. It would be very appropriate if this is applied across all subject areas.

Mathematics in the new curriculum draft has been aligned with Aistear in the junior end and secondary curriculum in the senior end as good examples of how it can be done. This is hugely important as it allows the child to progress seamlessly from one setting to another with consistency and growth. It also aids teachers with planning and continuity. This bridges the gap between preschool, primary and post-primary, the latter sometimes being a daunting journey for children.

The (re)-introduction of Modern Foreign Languages provides a strong bridge across two key areas of transition – from primary into post-primary school and from home and community into school. In the context of migrant minority language children, drawing on key linguistic resources within the home in the context of L3, will make the most of this bridge.

The transition between preschool, primary and post-primary sectors should be as seamless as possible. It is positive to see transitions between these sectors being formally embraced in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, with a focus on how best to support the child as he/she grows and his/her identity emerges and subsequently develops. Fundamental principles with regard to how learning should take place should underpin the different stages and age-appropriateness of approaches should be a key feature. The overlapping of *Aistear* themes between preschool and primary should be further developed as should alignment between primary school senior classes and the Junior Certificate Cycle. Good communication in practice between the levels is essential to smooth transitions.

There is a very welcome emphasis on the relational side of teaching and the importance of secure relationships at each level of education, particularly during the transition from early years' education to primary school, and from primary school to secondary school.

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.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to emerging priorities for children’s learning, such as the key competencies, with a focus on children’s skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. We welcome the concept of embedding these key competencies across children’s learning outcomes from infants to sixth class. Given the recognised centrality of sustainable development and education for sustainability at government level both nationally and internationally, we feel that it is an omission that sustainability has been omitted as an emerging priority for children’s learning.

There needs to be greater emphasis on inquiry as a stance, or approach, to curriculum (see Short, 2009). Inquiry-based learning is a pedagogy central to science, history and geography education. Emerging priorities must always be addressed but in making way for those priorities, elements which were once regarded as being priorities themselves should not be side-lined without due consideration. The competencies highlighted are interlinked and

contribute to the holistic development of the child. In relation to Communicating and Using language, the integrated nature of different skills could be better reflected in the wording.

The presentation of key competencies while not presented in a hierarchal format, could have greater emphasis on 'Learning to be a learner' and 'Communicating and using language' as priorities. The clear specification of skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes should remain important so that attainment and progress can be measured.

The focus on skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes rather than just skills and knowledge is welcomed.

The draft framework also proposes an increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning and new aspects such as modern foreign languages, technology, education about religions and beliefs (ERB) and ethics, and a broader arts education.

The notion of 'digital' learners: introducing digital tools is not enough to make children curious but rather constitutes a tool towards that, as part of wider approach i.e. how is 'digital' conceived in relation to the junior end of the school especially? iPads should be seen as not to just replace text books; rather IT and creative technology has to be used in creative ways to support learning.

It is vital that subjects such as wellbeing are addressed at primary level and children have an opportunity to engage in the new aspects such as digital learning, modern foreign languages, technology, ERB and ethics and Arts. However, the draft curriculum as it stands has narrowed the holistic development of the child by reducing its value and emphasis on the spirituality of the child.

PHYSICAL LITERACY

We recommend that consideration be given to including Physical Literacy as one of the key competencies, with particular emphasis to be placed on developing children's fundamental movement skills which are considered to be a core component of the accepted physical literacy model (Behan et al., 2020).

The rationale for this recommendation is drawn from a consideration of Ireland's current physical health status.

A WHO report (2015) projected that Ireland was on course to become the most obese nation by 2030. Looking at children specifically, the Healthy Ireland Survey (2015) found one in four children in Ireland to be overweight or obese. Research shows that the best way to combat this childhood obesity epidemic, apart from optimal nutrition, is increasing children's physical activity (PA) levels (Heinen et al., 2016). However, the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (2018) found that only 17% of children met the National Physical Activity Guidelines of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous PA every day. This makes for worrying reading, especially considering the volume of research that now exists, documenting the many benefits of PA and how it is important to children's current and future health (Woods et al., 2010, Janssen and Le Blanc, 2010, O' Brien et al., 2018).

Physical Literacy is purported to be a pathway towards PA and health (Behan et al., 2020). Physical literacy is the ability to move with competence and confidence in a wide array of physical activities (Whitehead, 2001). In children, developing physical literacy is referred to as motor skill development. For a child to develop their motor skills, they must first master the fundamental movement skills (FMS). While investigating the factors that motivate children to partake in physical activity, the existing research emphasises the importance of developing FMS in children (Peers et al., 2017).

Stodden et al. (2008) describes FMS as 'the equivalent of the ABCs in the world of physical activity' and it's suggested that these skills form the foundation for future movement and PA (Clark & Metcalfe, 2002; Seefeldt, 1980). Significant evidence now points towards a strong relationship between FMS mastery and PA levels in children and adolescents (Barnett et al., 2009; Jaakkola and Washington, 2012). However, recent findings from an Irish study into children's FMS, the largest study of its kind in Europe, found that children lacked proficiency in FMS (Behan et al., 2020). Surveying more than 2,000 children from across the country, it demonstrated that one in four students between the ages of five and twelve in Ireland cannot run properly, one in two cannot kick a ball, and less than one in five cannot throw a ball. While previous research had shown that children can master all FMS skills by the age of eight, this study found a large proportion of children had not mastered these skills by the age of 10. In an interview with the *Irish Examiner* in January of

this year, Sarahjane Belton, of DCU's Department of Health and Human Performance and one of the lead researchers on this study, said that "It is now time for action" and that "we need to focus our attention nationally on developing physical literacy capacities and capabilities in our children and young people" (Casey, 2020).

It should be acknowledged that developing physical literacy in children is about more than just physical competence. It also includes the motivation, confidence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life (The International Physical Literacy Association, May 2014). Hence, although one can be excited about the amalgamation of PE and SPHE under the one common umbrella of wellbeing which will hopefully bring about a greater focus on the later mentioned elements of physical literacy, one can harbour a reservation around the fact that the word 'physical' is not mentioned in any of the key competencies and this may create an opening for teachers to place the majority of their focus on SPHE and ultimately neglect PE. Given the fact that the overall allocation of PE in Ireland is set to increase from being the lowest in Europe at one hour per week, to three hours under the new model, this would be extremely disappointing. This increased allocation should enable teachers to facilitate a greater opportunity for children to reach their daily minimum of sixty minutes moderate-to-vigorous PA in school, ultimately aiding to raise the low percentage of children in Ireland not reaching their daily target of PA (CSPPA Study, 2018).

ECOPEDAGOGY

Climate change is one of the defining characteristics of the contemporary, anthropocene era. It is generally agreed that global society faces unprecedented environmental challenges. As the urgency to address these challenges increases worldwide, education is identified as a core component of the solutions for sustainability. Sustainable development itself is conceptualised as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Bruntland Commission Report, 1987)". Goal 4, part 7 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals aims to ensure that by 2030 "all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for

sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" (UN, 2015). It is important to recognise that challenges, on a global level, "such as climate change, sustainability, human migration, and geopolitical shifts" are mentioned in the Draft Framework. The attribute, "Developing capacity to make choices in favour of a sustainable future", located within the Key Competency "Being and Active Citizen", will work to address some of these concerns. It would be helpful to bring a more critical component to this work, if the Framework was rooted in an "ecopedagogy" (McNaughton, 2010) which focuses on teaching and learning about the causes and effects of environmental ills. Without this deeper engagement, the curriculum runs the risk of dealing with these issues on a superficial level, which will not empower future generations of children to address properly the challenges outlined above.

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 *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* proposes changing how the curriculum is structured by moving from subjects in the first four years of primary school to broad curriculum areas which support an integrated approach to teaching and learning. These areas would become more differentiated into subjects from third class onwards to reflect children's growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising their learning. We

welcome this proposal particularly in terms of theoretical integration. It is important that the time allocations allow for this integration, especially in the senior end where, for example, there are more subjects but less time in arts. We consider that time allocated to drama needs to be revisited to reflect the use of drama to support wellbeing and transitions.

The structure of the curriculum needs to identify to which curriculum area Aistear will belong. If Aistear belongs to Language, how will that be interpreted by teachers? Will the inclusion of Aistear under Language erode further the proposed time allocation for Language 1?

Notwithstanding the language development which is fostered through playful experiences in Aistear, there is also a need for explicit language teaching. A balance needs to be struck between the playful experiences of Aistear and explicit language teaching. Progress made in literacy and numeracy in recent years through increased time allocation in those areas should not be jeopardised by reducing time allocation in those areas.

The introduction of modern foreign languages in senior classes is welcomed, as is the link made between learning a second language in school (Gaeilge) and other additional languages. Support materials to help teachers and learners in exploring transferable language skills and pedagogies would be very beneficial in this regard. The rationale for a modern foreign language (MFL) needs to be provided. If it happens, when will it happen and under which curriculum area? Would the introduction of Language 3 have a detrimental effect on the time being given to L1 and L2? Would it not be better to exploit the language diversity in the typical Irish classroom at present in order to explore language in general, to foster language awareness, and to foster respect for all languages and cultures in a multicultural Ireland. The Primary Language Curriculum was introduced in 2019; many schools are still coming to terms with new modes of planning and new terminology and the 'tweaking' of the Primary Language Curriculum to accommodate MFL may jeopardise the integrity of the current document. With a MFL, how will teachers be assigned to classes? Will teachers have a choice? Will it become imperative for interviews

for teaching position that teachers possess competency in another language? Will it be a matter of funding and will certain schools pay for external language teachers?

‘New aspects of learning in the curriculum such as Coding and Computational Thinking, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, Modern Foreign Languages’ are welcomed but should be included cognisant of the essential demands of other curricular areas - in particular, literacy.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is highlighted as a key methodology in the Primary Language Curriculum. The potential of CLIL should also be highlighted in the framework, especially in cases where subject hours have been reduced. CLIL offers a practical way to explore content related to a particular curricular area through Gaelige. This affords children another meaningful context in which they can use and develop their language skills while maintaining the integrity of the subject area.

Early immersion practices in Gaeltacht and All-Irish schools should be officially recognised. 30/35 minute lessons do not facilitate language activities such as writing workshops. Although it may appear developmentally appropriate to move to a more differentiated approach to subject areas from third class, it is important to remember and emphasise the connections across subject areas, particularly conceptually. This is most apparent when considering history, geography and science, where children explore the big ideas of where we are in time and place, how the world works, sharing the planet and how we organise ourselves (IBO, 2007). These need to be addressed holistically, as do the burning issues around sustainable futures.

This structure incorporates more subjects and opportunities to learn current and relevant topics. The stages are also well organised as there is more emphasis on a learning experience in stage one which is vital for development and ‘learning to learn’.

ERB belongs in Intercultural Education because children need to learn about other cultures. They need to take an empathetic approach that is respectful to those of that religion or worldview rather than a phenomenological approach that just teaches facts about different beliefs. Ethics needs to be taught through the lens of the characteristic

spirit of the school. It should not be surface dressing but rather (taking account of Rossiter 2006 and Ota and Berdondoni 2006) should be viewed across the curriculum. ERB and Ethics should not be brought in at the expense of Religious Education. RE is a vital part of the curriculum, a space like no other, where teachers have the opportunity to work with the children on meaning-making, matters of spirituality and depth. This time is when, as Goleman says when writing about Social Intelligence, the teacher does the most important thing that any teacher can do - make real and meaningful connections with the children.

Infographics issue

Figure 5 on stakeholders for whom assessment provides information is problematic. Families should not be on the same line as other professionals and policy makers.

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.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* makes proposals in relation to a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning. Assessment is presented as a central part of a teacher's daily practice and this key foundational message is welcomed. The recognition of time as a necessary resource to support teacher collaboration in assessment is welcomed, along with the emphasis and relevance on collaboration when working with learning outcomes especially in the context providing a breadth of evidence and shared professional judgements to assess and report on progress and achievement.

The three assessment types *Intuitive Assessment*, *Planned interactions* and *Assessment Events* are described as complementary and necessary to gain a comprehensive picture of a child's progress and achievement. This continuum of assessments is wide and there is an acknowledgement of the shared nature of assessment and its core role in what happens in the classroom. The move away from focussing on standardised testing as the main

evaluation of children's learning is welcomed. The importance of screening and monitoring in children's learning in literacy in the early years is very important. The key role of assessment for learning should also be emphasised. There seems to be an overall sense of working from the strength of the child and enabling the child to engage in assessment implicitly. There is an emphasis on teaching, learning and assessment as a combined effort which is meaningful and collaborative. The draft framework emphasises the importance of curriculum integration, inclusive practice, inquiry based-learning and playful pedagogy. The national and international research literature frequently cites the effectiveness of inquiry-based methodologies in supporting the development of students' understanding of the world around them. Hence, an even greater emphasis on Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) in the revised curriculum framework is warranted. Ideas of children's voice, choice and agency could also be emphasised in the framework. Effective sustainability education demands participatory pedagogies and therefore these must be supported within the new framework.

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 *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* builds on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum such as children's enjoyment of learning and teachers' increased use of active learning methodologies. At the same time, the framework responds to key challenges which schools have identified such as using assessment in a meaningful way to inform teaching and learning.

One of the strengths of the 1999 curriculum is that it is very explicit but it is limiting in some ways. It is therefore positive that there is a move towards a broader and more holistic curriculum framework. In this regard, however, it is important to be mindful of not making it too broad and 'free'. The draft curriculum framework will require immense upskilling of

teachers. It will be very difficult to implement because it represents a radical shift and some tension is to be expected.

The Arts are central to the 1999 curriculum but this has been lost in the new draft curriculum framework, it is no longer being prioritised to the same extent. Rather there has been an overloading of arts in new draft curriculum because less time is allocated and more subjects/topics are being added. Introduction of discretionary time, now flexible time, is important but time has been eroded for literacy and numeracy.

The 1999 curriculum was visionary and reflected a major progression from the previous one. CPD focussed mostly on structure of curriculum rather than pedagogy and subject matter. Such CPD needs to be there this time.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum* draws on the 1999 curriculum by integrating many methodologies and drawing on the theories that underpin the teaching and learning approaches. It furthers this thinking by combining new methodologies and embedding inclusion and diversity as a core tenet in teaching and learning. Unfortunately, the emphasis on the spiritual, moral and religious development of the child, as part of their holistic development has been lessened considerably.

Marino Institute of Education welcomes the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* and the opportunity respond to it under the headings provided herein.

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