



**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>	Peadar O'Dwyer / Bríd Girard / Mary Rose Cleary / Luke Murtagh
<b>Position</b>	Principal / Deputy Principal / Assistant Principal / Chairperson BOM
<b>Organisation</b>	St Mary's Primary School, Nenagh. 16112A
<b>Date</b>	16/02/2022
<b>E-mail</b>	

The NCCA will publish written submissions received during the consultation. The submissions will include the author's/contributor's name/organisation. Do you consent to this submission being posted online?

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

Yes

No

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

We are currently a girl's primary school, of 398 pupils. We are transitioning to co-education in September, 2022. We have 15 mainstream classes and 2 ASD Special Classes. Our school is progressive and developmental, with a very dynamic approach to teaching and learning.

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured to align with the six key messages related to the framework. Each message is summarised as a support for you in working on the submission.

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# Section 1

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

- Vision: As a school, we strongly support the idea that every child needs to be afforded the opportunity to flourish and thrive in the primary school setting. We recognise our teachers as being committed, skilful and agentic professionals, but need further guidance and input, as to how this agentic approach would look in practicality in a primary school setting.
- Principles: The overarching principles of teaching and learning are meaningful and relevant, and therefore do convey what is valued in primary school education.
- Key Competencies: We agree that the key competencies are essential for providing a high quality educational experience for every child. We believe that many of these key competencies are already embedded in the current curriculum, and have evolved since the development of the 1999 curriculum.
- Curriculum Areas and Subjects: The redeveloped curriculum will be presented in five broad curriculum areas. It appears to our school, that the new curriculum contains all of the current curricular areas, under renamed headings. Additional aspects such as modern foreign languages, film and digital media have been added. We have concerns that the current curriculum is already extremely overloaded, and this will need to be addressed before a new curriculum can be implemented.
- Time Allocation: We agree with allowing teachers additional flexibility while teaching the curriculum. This affords the teacher the opportunity to focus on a particular topic, theme or project, which is integral to a thematic approach. We have examined the three options presented in the framework consultation document. We would have a preference for Option Two. In our school context, Language 1 needs more curriculum time than Language 2. We favour a more structured approach to the set time allocation for each curriculum area.
- Transitions, Continuity and Progression in Children’s Learning: The transition from pre-school to primary school currently lacks an effective handover procedure. This can negatively impact the initial transition period, as the school is often unaware of needs that the child may have. Transitions from year to year are currently undertaken very effectively, however there is insufficient time allocated for this. We recommend that the new curriculum address this issue and allow for extra time for consultation and handover procedures. The Education Passport is proving very effective. As a school, we strive for effective continuity as the children progress through our school. The redeveloped curriculum must include a minimum requirement of content in each curricular area, at each stage alongside the subject based learning outcomes, in order to ensure effective continuity. This will ensure meaningful progression throughout the school.
- Transition from the ASD Special Classes to the mainstream, is not referred to in the transitions section.
- Teaching and Learning: The vision and principles outlined, place an emphasis on high quality teaching and learning being central to this curriculum. This is a welcome development. To ensure this happens in a meaningful way, adequate resources and training must be provided to all teachers in all school settings and initial teacher training and through a comprehensive CPD programme.

- Assessment: The redesigned continuum of assessment is very similar to what is currently taking place. It is a very successful and collaborative process.
- Supporting Schools, Teachers and School Leaders: We welcome the recommendations from the Forum's discussions. We acknowledge the need for the restoration of management posts and for the retention of Deputy Principal's administration days, recently made available in light of the COVID 19 pandemic. This is necessary in order to provide effective leadership in the implementation of this new re-developed curriculum. School leaders will require additional training and support in all subject areas, in order to oversee the transition to this new model.
- The Board recognises the key role of the PDST Leadership Team in providing support for implementing the new curriculum.
- There is not enough emphasis placed on the child's place in the community and the importance of the community both as a stakeholder and an agent for education. The situation of learners with special needs and those in ASD Special Classes gets scant attention.

## 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.**

- Children will benefit greatly from the approaches recommended, the majority of which are already embedded into our school environment.
- As committed, dedicated professionals, we acknowledge and welcome the recognition of the already existing agency in our schools. The Primary Curriculum should indicate how links with pre-schools, other primary schools, and second level schools work/could be developed further.
- Greater flexibility in terms of planning and timetabling, will prove beneficial in our school environment. This can only happen if the existing, overloaded curriculum is addressed, prior to the implementation of the new curriculum. Under the current time allocations, this flexibility could not happen.
- Greater connection and communication with different school contexts in the education system would be greatly beneficial for all involved.
- We are supportive of providing schools with additional flexibility and choice for children's learning. This is a welcome development. **However, we believe that it is essential, that every stage has a minimum requirement of content in every curricular area. This will ensure an effective level of educational equality throughout the Irish State.**

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## 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 provides a very clear vision for the children’s learning throughout their primary school lives. However, it fails to provide any information on the level of prescribed learning that it will contain. A mix of agentic teaching and a minimum requirement per stage, will be necessary in order to ensure equity for all.
- Aistear has proved to be very successful in our school. However, no training or funding for this programme was provided to us. We relied on our Board of Management to support the programme, which involved a significant monetary outlay. Going forward these programmes will need to be funded for every school by the Department of Education and resourced accordingly.
- A formal transitioning document needs to be compiled by the Department of Education, and a requirement placed on childcare providers and parents to share information on pupils enrolling with their primary school. Information about the child, which is required for a smooth introduction to Primary School, would be greatly beneficial in advance of the child’s enrolment and allow for planning for pupils in Junior Infants. This would be hugely beneficial to the child and the school, especially where a child may present with additional needs and require immediate support. The transition from primary school is proving effective through utilising the Education Passport material. As a school, we actively

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encourage a strong level of communication between school and home. The quality of this link is determined by individual family circumstances, enthusiasm and willingness. The school cannot be held solely responsible for the quality of this link, as there must be efforts from both parties. Support provisions should be put in place by the SENO in Primary School for the first day of term in Junior Infants, in consultation with parents and Childcare Providers. At present a pupil is not considered for supports until they are in attendance in Junior Infants, which is too late for a smooth transition or to facilitate effective and immediate inclusion for the pupil with needs. Not having the required provisions in place can be disruptive for the entire class.

### **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 new Draft Primary Curriculum Framework will continue to support the children’s learning outcomes, through the embedding of the seven key competencies. We support the understanding that children will progress towards these key competencies at varying levels.

- The child is clearly at the centre of this curriculum, with the major emphasis being placed on their holistic development.
- As society has evolved, it is clear that additional curriculum time is necessary in school, in the areas of Wellbeing and PE. This has been very challenging over the last numbers years, where curriculum time has not been sufficient. Children will require to become proficient digitally, in order to function successfully in a digital age. We hold a Digital School of Distinction award, and have recognised the importance of digital learning for a number of years. In a school climate, where many children already are proficient in three languages, we would question the need of an additional foreign language in all primary school settings. Our concern is that the addition of foreign languages, will adversely affect curriculum overload. Adequate training is essential. Further focus on technology will be a positive development for pupils. In a diverse, multi-cultural world, it is essential to equip the children with knowledge of the wider community. Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics would provide children with accurate information and knowledge. Enhanced focus on Arts education, with adequate training and resources will enrich the children’s experience, and allow them to express themselves creatively and imaginatively.

### **Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented**

*The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:*

- Be broad and balanced in purpose and content.
- Be structured in five broad curriculum areas;
  - Language
  - Mathematics, Science and Technology Education
  - Wellbeing
  - Social and Environmental Education
  - Arts Education.

(In addition to the five areas above, the Patron’s Programme is developed by a school’s patron with the aim of contributing to the child’s holistic development particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective and in the process, underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school. These areas connect to the themes of *Aistear* and to the subject-based work in Junior Cycle.)

- Provide for an integrated learning experience, with curriculum areas in Stages 1 and 2 (junior Infants – second Class) and more subject-based learning in Stages 3 and 4 (third class – sixth class).
- Use broad learning outcomes to describe the expected learning and development for children.
- Incorporate the new *Primary Language Curriculum / Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*.

**The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to changing how the curriculum is structured and presented. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.**

We support the thematic approach in the new Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. This recognises and encourages our existing practices. Placing the subject areas into broader curriculum areas, should support the learning focused curriculum, and support thematic planning on a practical and integrated level. A minimum base level for learning is required, at each stage in order to ensure effective teaching, progression and equity of access to education for all. While each school must focus on their own priorities, within each stage, equality of education throughout the country must be maintained.

### **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.

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- 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.**

As a school, we recognise the essential role assessment has in the child’s learning experience. We utilise a wide variety of formative and summative assessments. As a result, class teachers and SET work together to differentiate aspects of learning appropriately. As professionals, we regularly review our assessment strategies and share insights and successes with each other in order to enhance whole-school assessment practices. Information gathered from assessment helps stakeholders to make informed decisions on how best to support progression in the children’s 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 has acknowledged and further developed the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum. We support the retention of the positive aspects of the curriculum.
- Having engaged with this consultation process, a focus group and the documents provided, we have not received any clarification on how curriculum overload is being addressed. While on paper, the curriculum framework gives us more time, in reality adding the new learning areas suggested will ensure that the curriculum is more overloaded than ever.
- While we appreciate that each school will have the autonomy to prioritise initiatives, beneficial to the needs of their school, the addition of these extra programmes and initiatives will require management support. Over the last decade, the size of the Middle and Senior Management team has been decimated. Urgent review and increase of Posts of Responsibility is required, in order to action the changes that will be necessary in planning for and implementing of a new curriculum effectively, particularly in larger schools.
- We have embraced the Aistear programme in our school. We feel that further training needs to be provided to all staff in this area. As a progressive and developmental school, we encourage staff movement. It is imperative that all staff are provided with training when a new initiative is launched, and not merely to teachers in that class at that time. A separate grant should be provided yearly for the purchase of resources, in addition to the school capitation grant. Grants should also be index-linked and compensation built in for fuel/lighting expenditure increases.

## 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*.

- Over the COVID-19 pandemic and particularly during school closures, access to education was dependent on individual family circumstances. While the school endeavoured to engage with and support all pupils, we were heavily reliant on parental engagement. On return to school, we found that there were greater needs and that the levels of differentiation necessary were greater than we had ever experienced before.
- As a result, we have prioritised literacy and numeracy initiatives in our school. The introduction of the CLASS scheme has proved very beneficial. CLASS hours are a much needed support for those most affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic. These need to be extended as many teachers employed for this purpose have been placed in substitute placements as shortage of substitutes is widespread.
- The current challenge for teachers is to enable the children to engage with the curriculum at their level. We feel that the introduction of the new curriculum should be delayed to allow teachers and schools to further analyse and assess the impact of COVID-19 on our schools. As the pupil is the centre of the curriculum, we need to acknowledge the upheaval that children have, and still do experience as a result of school absence. We need to allow them time to re-adjust in a consistent, structured school environment.
- The Department of Education should release data on the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on pupil attainment in English and Mathematics. New national norms for Standardised Testing should now be developed.

## 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

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with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit [www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement](http://www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement) or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at [dpo@ncca.ie](mailto:dpo@ncca.ie).

**Thank you for your submission.**

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