



**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>	Teaching staff of Clonbullogue NS
<b>Position</b>	Primary school
<b>Organisation</b>	St Patrick's NS, Clonbullogue
<b>Date</b>	28/01/2022s
<b>E-mail</b>	

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

Yes

No

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

We are the staff of a small, multi-grade, co-ed primary school located in a rural setting. The points made in this submission provide an approximate synopsis of issues discussed during the formal and informal conversations we held as a staff during February 2022 with regard to the Draft Curriculum Framework. They do not necessarily reflect the views of any individual staff member.

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*.

- Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in such important work. We acknowledge and appreciate the time, effort and energy that has been put into the preparation of the Draft Framework, and we recognise the challenges involved in curriculum construction.
- The curriculum's move towards a recognition of teacher professionalism is very welcome and appreciated.
- p26 of the framework references learning from the PLC rollout – we would argue that there are a lot of lessons to be learned from that e.g.

\*Have the curriculum finalised before it is rolled out officially and do it as a whole school rather than stage based.

\*There were lovely teaching ideas offered for PLC in the PDST seminars, but in a form that didn't tie them into the elements of the curriculum framework.

\*Teacher concerns about recording /planning not adequately addressed in the early stages at least

\*The long wait for sustained support for individual school context, even pre-Covid issues, was frustrating and created a sense of a disjointed/bitty approach.

- There is a very nice vision expounded at the start. Perhaps 'child-centred' and 'holistic' have become clichés, but their absence from it noticeable none the less. Much emphasis placed on building on the personal experience of the child, which is laudable, but surely that needs to be balanced by an aspiration to expose children to the wider world, particularly given the 'echo-chamber' nature of a lot of modern discourse.

# 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.**

- We wonder how is it going to work in practice.
- Do individual teachers or the whole staff decide on the planning and timetabling, and what guidance will be offered for this process?
- Reference on p 4 to teachers as 'curriculum makers' - this acknowledges the highly educated, dedicated professional teaching body in Irish primary education, and is supportive of teacher agency and professionalism -but it's important that the challenges of acting as 'curriculum makers' be recognised. Have teachers the expertise/ time/ emotional energy for that? Particularly relevant in the case of small schools, where there are not other 'curriculum makers' to share the challenge. Will there be a vacuum if the curriculum is not specific enough to allow ease of access, a vacuum that will surely be filled by publishing companies, interested parties etc. perhaps with unintended consequences that narrow rather than broaden curricular provision?
- p2 references 'Broad content objectives' (such as those of the PLC) rather than 'detailed content objective based curriculum' -re above point which in pragmatic terms is the more user friendly? Certainly we are not arguing for something that is 'teacher-proofed' or that overly constrains teacher professional agency, but nor does it seem practical to have a curriculum that is overly aspirational and difficult to implement on the ground. Is there

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scope for a tw- prong approach – a limited set of detailed core objectives, and then broader ones that allow more teacher discretion?

- Idea of planning at the level of the curricular area rather than subject mentioned on p 19 - seems very helpful in terms of allowing an integrated approach, one that isn't constrained so much by specific subject objectives, but again needs to be supported e.g. with plenty of examples in teacher toolkits of how/where this can easily happen at each class level, rather than each individual teacher having to 're-invent the wheel' in their own practice and this needs to be recognised and supported by the Inspectorate.

### **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.**

- There is currently a disconnect between what we are teaching and secondary schools are teaching and it would be beneficial to narrow this gap. We feel that the preschool and primary schools are well connected via *Aistear*.
- We agree that curriculum definitely needs to provide a clear vision for children's learning across the eight years of primary school – that is one of the core functions of a primary school
- We feel that literacy, numeracy, good learning habits, intrinsic motivation etc. are the basics that are more important than actual curriculum connections for all school levels.
- Mention of the 'mo scéal' and 'education passport' transition documents. How widely used is the former? Is the latter actually consulted/ used in second level? Sense of superficiality about these documents, done to tick a box, but depends on the individuals involved as to whether they actually have any impact. Layout of the 'passport' document needs re-

consideration -some spaces not the right size, confusion over the 'likes to be known as' box etc. – minor quibbles admittedly, but suggest that a teacher-informed review would be useful.

### **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.**

- Very nice ideas in the key competencies, and they cover very important aspects of learning at primary level.
- Is there some confusion though between 'competency' and 'approach'? We feel measuring competency in well-being is impossible and therefore would it not be better to have 'Fostering Wellbeing' as an underpinning approach of the entire curriculum?
- 'Being Mathematical' is a key competency. We feel greater emphasis needs to be placed on 'being literate' as well, as literacy underscores every aspect of learning. Arguably, literacy should be a competency. The skills of literacy are admittedly included under 'Communicating and using language' – but could literacy be the competency, whereas 'communication and language use' are a more overarching approach element?

- In terms of a 'key competency' what about 'developing criticality' ? While this may be implied in 'Active Citizenship' or 'Digital Learner' it is notable that it is not specifically listed among the attributes of either. Arguably preparing children for the modern world must involve developing their critical thinking skills – that in the era of the internet, recalling and retaining facts is much less important than being able to evaluate facts/messages/sources etc.
- Is there scope for the introduction of Modern Foreign Languages into the Primary system? Where will the time come from and how will the teachers be upskilled? What's coming out of the curriculum to allow Modern Foreign Languages in? Obviously this is a very contentious and emotive area, with a lot of different opinions, lobbies etc, but maybe hard decisions need to be made about what skills and concepts are no longer relevant for the modern world.

### **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*.

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**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 idea of curriculum areas at junior level and subjects in the senior half seems practical
- Very important to bear in mind that re-structuring and re-presentation won't solve curriculum overload. Danger that reducing the amount of detailed curricular objectives into broader more general outcomes would actually increase rather than decrease curriculum demands.
- Science being moved away from SESE and into Maths and Technology – is that indicating a greater emphasis on the physical sciences? There is a sense that nature study was downgraded by the 1999 Curriculum, is that being compounded here? Social and Environmental Education develops into History and Geography at the senior level. That caring for our environment means that nature etc. should be central element of primary ed, especially in the junior years?
- P 13 mentions presenting learning outcomes side by side (as in the PLC) to help planning in multi-grade contexts- we appreciate the rationale, but as a multi-grade school we find this very broad and potentially unwieldy.

### **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.

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**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.**

- Great to see Intuitive assessment recognised – given the reality that so much of the assessment teachers do every day is unplanned, unrecorded and yet very informative for teaching and learning. The absence of that intuitive assessment one of the huge challenges of teaching remotely during the pandemic.
- We also welcome the acknowledgement on p 25 that assessment is for teaching and learning rather than reporting and recording – as a focus on the latter has taken precedence in terms of what assessment looks like in schools
- The emphasis on the active nature of learning implied in the ‘learning to be a learner’ competency is very welcome. Takes further the idea of the 1999 Curriculum of the teacher as a scaffolder/facilitator of learning rather than a ‘pourer’ and recognises the agency of the learner too – teaching as much about learners as teachers.
- P22 comment re integration ‘moving from curricular areas to more defined subjects supports an integrated approach’ – while we are in agreement with the need for subjects at senior level, surely the subject specific approach is less supportive of integration than the curricular area approach?

**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.

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- 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.**

- Use of strands and elements ties in nicely with the 1999 curriculum that teachers are already familiar with, and seems a useful model to continue with.
- That many aspects of the 1999 curriculum are still fit for purpose and working well in schools - so important not to change them just for the sake of change. That subject strands etc might need to be moved around to fit the new structure, but don’t necessarily need to be abandoned entirely. Teachers like structure.
- Lessons need to be learned from the original approach of the 1999 English Language Curriculum, and the difficulty teachers found using ‘Emotional and imaginative development’ etc. etc. ....quickly re-jigged so that the far more practical Oral, Reading and Writing strands were foregrounded. A curriculum has to be user-friendly in language and approach if it is to be the reference point it should be for every teacher.
- If overload is one of teachers’ main gripes about the 1999 curriculum then please don’t replace it with an even more overloaded one.
- Initiative overload contributing to the sense of overload teachers experience, especially in larger schools where there are lots of competing priorities ....strong message needs to come from the NCCA/ Dept etc that it is the primary curriculum that should guide what is taught and learned. Curriculum needs to be strong enough to withstand the external pressures that suggest schools need to teach whatever the current topical issue is, while also flexible enough to be easily updated so issues that are genuinely crucial can be incorporated (but on the understanding that there is not an endless supply of time in schools).

## 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*.

- That the challenges of Covid leave very little emotional or intellectual energy for considering new initiatives, engaging with Curriculum consultation etc – sense that a day-by-day approach has become the norm, and it's very hard to think about ten years down the road or wider issues when there is so much to think about in the immediate.
- But Covid has shaken up so many things that we took for granted in schools (some positive, some negative) – and that this might allow space and energy for change in a way that wasn't possible beforehand. Schools often seen as places that were resistant to change, where ideas had to percolate for a long time to be achieved etc. -we have seen that not to be necessarily true, in that schools underwent huge changes in a matter of days and weeks in March 2020, Aug/Sept 2020 etc.
- Related to above, the huge CPD advancements that took place in relation to digital teaching and learning – that the 'digital learner' competency (for pupils and teachers) has probably advanced in three years far beyond what would have been deemed possible in 2019. Surely lessons here re how teachers will engage effectively with, and without resistance to, topics that are of meaningful relevance to their everyday work.
- Covid brought a reminder to the current generations that nothing is certain or fixed, and so a curriculum must always be a fluid document to a degree. A curriculum will never be perfect as the ideal circumstances for its implementation, if they ever in fact exist, will be fleeting.
- Point made about initiative overload above – that some schools and teachers have benefitted from peeling back to a more basic approach, and have seen the benefits of that. All work undertaken in schools has to be evaluated in terms of the learning gained for pupils from it.

## **Data Protection**

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**Thank you for your submission.**

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