



THE COUNTESS

Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

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

Organisation submission details

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Organisation	The Countess Advocacy CLG is a non-profit company limited by guarantee with an incorporation number 714196 and trading as 'The Countess'.
Date	27/2/22
E-mail	

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).

The Countess is a voluntary, non-partisan advocacy group. We advocate for, and centre women & children. Specifically, we are campaigning to amend the Gender Recognition Act to include medical gatekeeping and safeguarding. We are calling out the harm posed to women & children by

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trans/gender ideology. We are campaigning against policy capture across the public sector including schools & the HSE. We are a grassroots political movement.

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Section 1

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

We are happy to see that the draft framework does not reference gender identity and has a strong focus on developing children's wellbeing by developing an appreciation for their wellbeing and developing their own ability to be as physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually healthy as they can be.

We are concerned that currently resources including the BeLonGTo '[All Together Now](#)' programme, the INTO LGBT+ teachers group '[We All Belong Resources](#)' and training video '[Facilitating a social transition](#)' are widely promoted to schools. These resources, and others like them, present an ideological belief as fact - that humans can change sex. This is untrue.

Teachers and external facilitators can have a [powerful impact](#) on influencing students' attitudes, values, and behaviour. Anyone who introduces concepts of gender identity to children in primary school such as "[a girl can change into a boy](#)" is interfering at a crucial time in the [natural development](#) of a child's understanding that sex is constant, invariable and stable across time i.e. they learn they are either a boy or a girl, that if they are a girl they will grow up to be a woman (or if a boy they will grow up to be a man) and that sex does not change just because a person expresses themselves in ways which do not conform to sexual stereotypes.

Resources that teach gender identity ideology undermine child protection and safeguarding. They directly contradict the S.P.H.E. primary curriculum *Safety and Protection Strand* unit that states throughout that children should be able to;

- identify situations and places that are safe and those where personal safety might be at risk
- realise how other people can persuade him/her to engage in unsafe behaviour
- discuss and practise appropriate strategies for dealing with these situations e.g. being assertive

Gender ideology teaches children to accept a person is "whoever they claim to be", despite appearances to the contrary. This puts them in an invidious position. For example, if a girl finds someone that she believes to be male in a space that is exclusively for women e.g. the bathroom of their local shopping centre or cinema, her instinct to protect herself is disrupted by the demand that she 'validate' the identity of a male person who calls himself 'female'. The girl's instinct and her early learning to recognise 'stranger danger' is overridden when taught to 'be kind' and to prioritise the boy/man's feelings. The use of pronouns supports this by forcing children to state the opposite of what they see.

We oppose the teaching of gender identity ideology to children and welcome the fact that gender identity is not referred to in the draft framework.

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 refer to the point to recognise teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context and wish to ensure that this point encompasses parents' rights as the primary educators of their children and hence their children should not be taught gender identity ideology without parents' explicit knowledge and consent.

[The Education Act \(1998\)](#) recognises schools shall promote the moral, spiritual, social, and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents.

The [Department of Education Circular 0042/2018](#) states that school management, principals and teachers '*have a duty to provide best quality and the most appropriate education in order to promote the wellbeing of their students. They also have a duty to protect students in their care at all times from any potentially harmful, inappropriate or misguided resources, interventions or programmes*'.

No schools should use internal or externally produced S.P.H.E resources that espouse a particular ideological view such as children can be born in the wrong body or a girl can change into a boy or teach young children, who lack critical thinking skills, that stereotypes prove the existence of an inner gender is the textbook definition of indoctrination.

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. N/A

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.

We note that the ERB report [ERB report](#) reported that Eurobarometer survey¹⁶ (2015), Irish respondents agreed with statements about the need for the content of school lessons and materials to address diversity in the following areas: ethnic origin (88%); religion or beliefs (86%); sexual orientation (77%); gender identity (75%).

We do not support teaching of school lessons or materials in schools referring to gender identity beyond a very basic age-appropriate message that there is no right or wrong way to be a boy or a girl. Every child has a sex. No child is “born in the wrong body”. Every child should be free to express themselves. This does not change a child’s sex.

No child should feel they need to act like a stereotypical girl or boy in order to fit in at school. Individual students should be treated fairly and with sympathy and support. Children should be taught to appreciate their bodies not to believe that discomfort or social difficulties may mean that their body is “wrong” and needs to be altered medically. It is entirely normal to not be fully ‘gender conforming’, i.e. it is entirely normal to have a range of interests, some of which in less enlightened times would have been culturally or socially designated as being for men/boys or women/girls only.

We are concerned that widely promoted resources in schools that address gender identity including the BeLonGTo ‘[All Together Now](#)’ programme, the INTO LGBT+ teachers group ‘[We All Belong](#)’ Resources and training video ‘[Facilitating a social transition](#)’ are promoting gender identity concepts which are not fact based and which are harmful. These resources, and others like them, present an ideological belief as fact – that humans can change sex. This is untrue.

Teachers and external facilitators can have a [powerful impact](#) on influencing students’ attitudes, values, and behaviour. Anyone who introduces concepts of gender identity to children in primary school such as ["a girl can change into a boy"](#) is interfering at a crucial time in the [natural development](#) of a child’s understanding that sex is constant, invariable and stable across time i.e. they learn they are either a boy or a girl, that if they are a girl they will grow up to be a woman (or if a boy they will grow up to be a man) and that sex does not change just because a person expresses themselves in ways which do not conform to sexual stereotypes.

Resources that teach gender identity ideology undermine child protection and safeguarding.

According to [reporting in the Irish Times](#) from the National Gender Clinic the number of young people identifying as transgender and seeking medical transition at the National Gender Clinic has risen to an annual referral rate of 300 per year with the majority referred born female and in their late teens or early 20s. This surge in referrals is unprecedented, referral rates were 10 majority middle-aged males 20 years ago. The timeline surge in referrals corresponds to the introduction of the promotion of gender identity materials in schools where young people are taught from a young age that it is possible to be born in the wrong body and that they can change sex.

A recent legal case in the UK analysed 3000 pages of evidence and found that puberty blockers which are often prescribed to young people with gender issues to interfere with natural puberty should not be prescribed without considerable caution. A rising number of people who regret medical transition is emerging. A recent study shows that the causes of gender distress may only become clear with the benefit of hindsight: factors such as trauma and unmetabolized grief may have profound effects on young minds.

Research has found that many patients with childhood-onset gender distress who are not treated with affirmative social transition or medical interventions grow up to be lesbian, gay or bisexual with no medical burden. We believe gender non-conforming children who will likely grow up to be LGB should be supported in school to learn to love and accept themselves for who they are and be supported by their classmates.

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 welcome the proposed wellbeing competency and hope to see all children including gender non-confirming children being taught to develop an appreciation for their own unique personhood, their bodies and development of resilience and a healthy lifestyle through physical activity, healthy eating and self-care.

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.

We welcome the draft framework recognising the role and influence of parents and families in children’s education.

As stated in Bunreacht na hEireann Article 42

“1 The State acknowledges that the **primary and natural educator of the child is the Family** and guarantees to respect the **inalienable right** and duty **of parents to provide**, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, **physical and social education of their children.**”

No school should teach gender identity ideology to a child without the explicit consent of their parent as the primary and natural educator of the child.

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.

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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*.

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Data Protection

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