

Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

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

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

Individual submission details

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Organisation submission details

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Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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Yes

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

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

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Section 1

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

This is a welcome document. It is timely and accessible. As a framework for the proposed primary curriculum, it is appropriately concise. The discussion on the proposed structure and emphases is clear and informative. The theoretical influences are clearly visible in the text, and they are consistent and coherent.

I particularly welcome the continued use from the 1999 curriculum and into the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework of the word 'child' and 'children'. This is consistent with the idea of viewing children in classrooms as individuals, and with the idea of viewing class groupings as made up of individual children. It is in keeping also with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and is entirely consistent with a rights-based curriculum.

I suggest that most teachers will welcome this curriculum as current, research-led and practical. It has the potential to address teachers' concerns about issues such as overload, professional autonomy, and assessment.

For at least the last decade teacher education at preservice and in-service has been to the forefront in addressing many of the emphases now proposed in the official curriculum at primary level. The principles, key competencies, and pedagogies are all addressed in one form or another in the four-year Bachelor of Education programme and also in the Postgraduate programmes of most if not all third-level institutions. In addition, research on their impact on/in practice is a key feature of research at undergraduate level, but especially at post-graduate level. Many teachers have availed of excellent CPD to update their practice in line with developments. In my experience teachers are ready and able for the developments presented in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework.



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Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

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

- Be for every child.
- Recognise teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context.
- Give more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling to identify and respond to priorities and opportunities.
- Connect with different school contexts in the education system.
- Give greater opportunities for flexibility and choice for children's learning.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to agency and flexibility in schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

The emphasis on the exercise of agency by children and by teachers that is evident throughout the Draft Framework is very welcome. I suggest that some reference to teachers as researchers (for example, p. 24) would add further depth to the idea of teacher agency and professionalism. While a recognition of child agency is implicit in the document, I suggest a more explicit statement on this issue as early as possible in the document, for example in the vision statement. The recognition and promotion of child agency will have implications for teachers' considerations of learning, teaching, and assessment and this should be acknowledged in the Draft Framework. Perhaps a cross reference to other NCCA publications, as well some of the Teacher Support Materials that will accompany the PCF would further address this point.

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.

Continuity with the Aistear Framework

A key issue is the extent to which young children’s experiences in the junior classes should mirror those they have experienced in their pre-schools or should be an extension of those experiences. Is there an expectation in the Draft Curriculum Framework that pre-school and school does/should offer only the same experiences to children in infant classrooms? I believe that there should be incremental development in provision for children’s learning, including in how they learn in play. Incremental development in their introduction/ initiation into disciplinary learning and ways of thinking about and viewing the world is in my view a legitimate expectation of primary education.

In order to address issues as to progression in children’s learning in the early years of primary school there is a need for a preliminary paragraph in the Introduction to the PCF which references the Aistear Framework and all that it offers children (and teachers) in infant classes, and at the same time presenting the PCF in junior classes as the beginning of the next stage in children’s learning journey. It could be presented in a way that emphasises how the primary school provision will build on children’s experiences in pre-school by incorporating the main principles, methodologies and themes of the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and will introduce children to further areas of learning.



Emerging priorities for children’s learning

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

- Embed seven key competencies across children’s learning outcomes from junior infants to sixth class.
- Focus on developing children’s skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. The Learning Outcomes and the Key Competencies are broad in nature to describe this wider understanding of learning.
- Have increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning, and have new aspects such as Modern Foreign Languages, Technology, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, and a broader Arts Education.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to

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

Competencies

I very much welcome the key competencies and the way in which they are worded. They are useful high-level goals and give clarity to all regarding the values of the curriculum. But how will these be assessed?

I would like to see greater emphasis on empathy given its crucial importance across many if not all of the competencies. It seems to me that empathy is one of the more important attributes that primary school education needs to foster in children, and lack of empathy has very serious consequences for the individual and society. I suggest too some reference to the attributes of resilience and adaptability.

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

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- 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.

Curriculum Areas and Subjects

I suggest there is a need to put more substance into the discussion on Curriculum Areas and subjects Stages 1 and 2 (p. 11). The text is clear, but I would like to see some further discussion about the introduction of the disciplines and disciplinary learning, as well as some reference to the development of children's thinking skills. In my experience young children are hungry for the excitement of disciplinary learning and very engaged with it in all its forms. They are also very capable abstract thinker, but they need opportunities to think in a wide range of ways about a wide range of issues of interest to them. There is a danger that as teachers read the text here they will focus on the references to the Aistear Framework, to play and to literacy and numeracy but may not focus on the implications of concurrently addressing the wider provision recommended. What is not desirable is any room for an interpretation that suggests a contraction of the commendable and appropriate range of disciplinary learning that young children can currently experience within the primary curriculum. I detect some reluctance in the Draft Curriculum Framework to acknowledge the importance of discipline-based learning, in favour of integrated learning, especially in Stages 1 and 2. In my view it is not a case of either one or the other, but a case of judicious professional judgment as to when and why one approach is preferable over the other.

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.

Play

Currently a tension exists between what is considered good practice around play provision for young children in educational settings, and what is considered good practice in provision in disciplinary learning in the early years of primary school. Teachers continually work with this tension but further supports are needed in order that they become more comfortable with how disciplinary learning (subjects) can be furthered integrated in contexts such as play. They also need to develop confidence in making judgements as to when a play-based approach is appropriate and advantageous to learning and when other approaches such as extended discussion may be more appropriate. Such support should build from preservice through to CPD and through more formal study at post-graduate level. Thinking and planning in terms of a continuum of play provision allows teachers to place their current practice on that continuum and at the same time to consider the full range of play experiences that promote children’s learning.

Disciplinary learning and integrated learning.

The curriculum in the early stage of primary school seeks to accommodate on the one hand children’s impulse and requirement to play, and on the other hand their interest and impulse to engage with the world in an increasingly complex, multidimensional way as provided for by the disciplines. Both disciplinary learning and integrated learning opportunities are important for all

learners throughout primary education. The choice of which to focus on at any one time will be influenced by the learning goals being pursued.

Example: The case of learning and teaching mathematics at Stages 1 and 2

Mathematics is considered a gateway to many scientific and technological fields. It is essential to awaken children's interest and to build and retain their confidence, understanding and knowledge as they learn about mathematics, and how to be mathematical at school.

Mathematics can be presented to young children in both discreet time and in integrative contexts. Sometimes, an integrated approach to mathematics teaching may not serve children's conceptual and skill development well, and a discrete focus may be preferable. Integration must be clearly exemplified for teachers, and high-quality guidance is needed here. The desirability is that in integrative work one subject leads and the others are in the background.

In terms of the curricular area of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education there is a case to be made that the majority of the integrative work will lead with mathematics. Many questions then arise. What is the degree and mode of integration between the disciplines here? Is the intention one of a simple integration of subjects or is there a vision of the dissolution of subject boundaries. Given that the age focus of children at Stages 1 and 2 it is essential to keep to the fore a consideration of how specific foundational (mathematical) concepts and skills can be developed within an integrated theme. An important principle too is that in developing basic understandings of each of the disciplines involved in an integrated piece of work we must not underserve any of the disciplines involved.

Integration must be viewed as a continuum along which teachers operate in their planning of children's learning experiences. One challenge will be to plan in a way that is meaningful and coherent with the vision, principles, and the key competencies that the curriculum seeks to promote. Another will be to plan in a way that ensures key/specific skills and concepts in each of the subject areas are addressed; that children's abstract thinking is developed; and that provision always maximizes children's engagement and develops disposition. CPD must address this issue with teachers, school leaders and the Inspectorate. All involved should have a clear understanding of how learning can be integrated, and how depth, continuity and progression in learning can be addressed. Rather than looking for the right way to integrate children's learning experiences, teachers should be encouraged to find their way to work with an integrated approach to teaching and learning.

Assessment

In the introductory paragraph on p.23 I suggest a reference to assessment approaches outlined in Aistear as also providing building blocks for supporting development an learning in primary schools.

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.

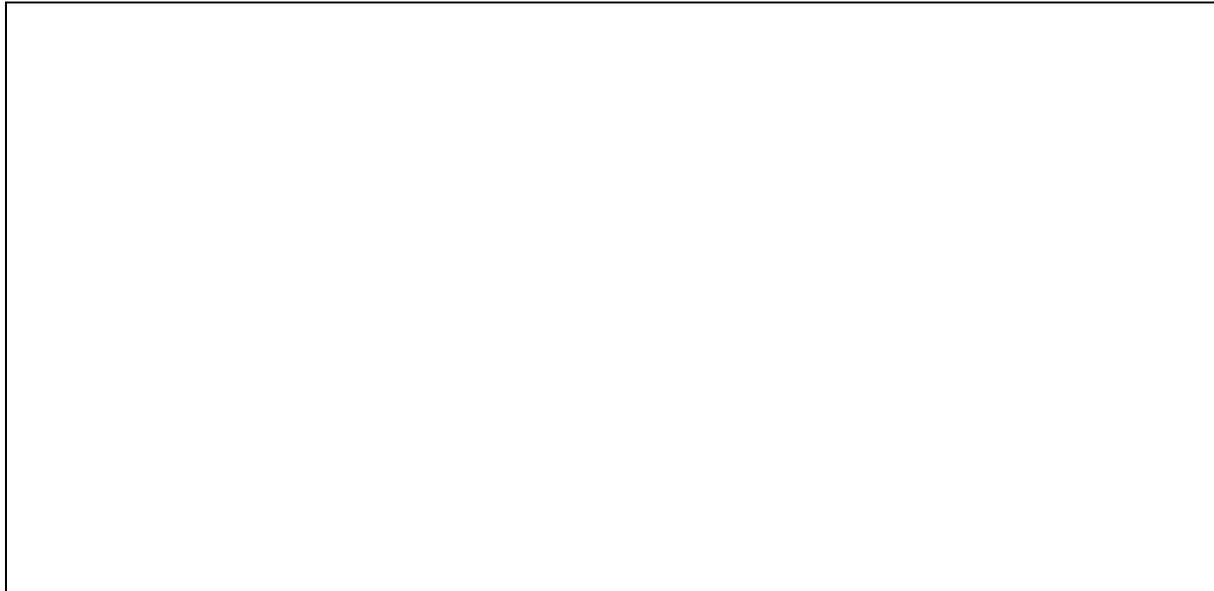
The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- 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.

Discretionary Time

This is essential for school/teacher ownership of the curriculum and for the exercise of their agency. However, its optimum use is really dependent on a culture change in schools. Teachers need to see themselves as curriculum makers, as professionals making choices as to how to organize learning and teaching in their classrooms. They will need to articulate at a local level what they are doing, why they are doing it and how it will promote key areas of learning such as the competencies. This is in contrast to the way in which many teachers may have worked with the objectives driven 1999 curriculum.



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Thank you for your submission.

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