



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

Individual submission details

Name	
Date	
E-mail	

Organisation submission details

Name	Sixmilebridge National School
Position	Teaching Staff
Organisation	Sixmilebridge N.S.
Date	24 th February 2022
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 email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

Sixmilebridge (St. Finnachta's) N.S. is a large, co-educational, vertical primary school located in Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare.

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*.

Overall, there is a positive response to the proposals for a new monthly time allocation as it is felt that it is needed and overdue to give autonomy back to schools and provide for professional discretion that is specific to the school's own unique context/ circumstances.

In light of Covid-19, the needs and well-being of children and school staff are of paramount importance and so the additional time allocated to well-being is a very welcome development.

Some reservations have been expressed in relation to the time allocations for some subjects/ areas at certain class levels, for example Arts Education for Stage 2 Option 3 and STEM for Stage 1 for all three options.

Another time allocation that has raised concern has been the 1 hour being allocated to Language 3- an additional language. There has been no clarity regarding the teaching of this language. Will teachers be required to upskill; will it be integrated into teacher training or would it require external teachers which in turn would require additional funding.

Furthermore, the absence of learner outcomes/specifications makes it difficult to determine how the 'curriculum overload' problem is being addressed and we are not confident that the time pressures linked to the existing curriculum will be eased. It is felt that much more clarity is needed regarding this area of the draft framework. In addition, we also believe that there is insufficient time being allocated to fundamental skills and the curricular areas of Literacy and Numeracy. Although there is additional time for Numeracy in Stages 3 and 4 of the new draft frameworks, more time is required especially in the Senior Classes and as the Maths content becomes more challenging and time consuming.

Overall, option 1 is the most favourable as it's time allocations and presentation/ accessibility are more attractive. That said, we still feel that the format of the existing curriculum is still more accessible and prescriptive in comparison to the broad learner outcomes of the new language curriculum. Also, there is an overall feeling that the time allocations for 'STEM' are not feasible, and there is a question of whether sufficient resources would be forthcoming to implement this curriculum proposal in full.

Lastly, it appears while the presentation of assessment is different to the existing 1999 Curriculum, it does not appear to propose any substantial/material changes to teachers' practice and so the introduction of a redeveloped primary curriculum can simply build on existing good assessment practices in schools.

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.

- It is agreed amongst our staff that the new monthly time allocations give more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling and this is a welcomed feature of the new curriculum. Furthermore, Option 1 provides additional flexibility to schools in the distribution of time allocation to Languages – depending on school context.
- Our staff recognises the benefits that learning outcomes (as opposed to objectives) provide to flexibility in teaching and learning. We feel this approach acknowledges that teachers teach in various contexts and that children are on their own individual 'learning journey'. We suggest that in the 'toolkit' provided to teachers and school leaders, that a sample school plan and yearly scheme be provided to support changes in planning approaches.
- We were pleased to read your acknowledgments that time is required for schools to adapt to and plan for the implementation of the new curriculum and that professional development will be a priority.
- It was noted by our staff that 'flexibility time' is lower in this curriculum than the 'discretionary time' in the 1999 curriculum.
- Drawing on the principles of Universal Design for Learning was welcomed by our staff.

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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.

It is widely accepted that Aistear is an integral practice embedded within primary schools. Aistear is an opportunity to integrate subjects and provide a thematic based approach to teaching. However, there is no formal training for Aistear and it is not contained within the Primary School Curriculum. There is currently no requirement in infant classes to include the Aistear framework. In primary schools that do incorporate Aistear, there is no clarity on the timetabling of the Aistear curriculum i.e. how is the time quantified and allocated for each subject.

With a new Primary School Curriculum being drafted one would expect that there would be more clarity on the Aistear framework and the teaching of Aistear in infant classes. Before agreeing the final draft of the new curriculum, consideration should be given to specific time allocations for Aistear.

Aistear uses four important interconnecting themes to describe children’s learning and development: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking. Aistear was introduced in 2009 to provide a curriculum framework for all children from birth to 6 years. Therefore, it is vital that this curriculum is incorporated into the Primary School Curriculum to ensure proper guidance and training is available to primary school teachers.

Mó Scéal tells the story of the child’s learning and development. Mó Scéal is a valuable resource that would be welcomed by primary schools, to support the child’s transition from preschool to primary school. This sharing of information about the child’s learning and development would be

very beneficial for teachers of infant classes to enable them to adequately plan future learning experiences. This in turn would support children to continue to progress in their learning across the Curriculum.

The Education Passports are very much supported in primary schools to ensure a child's continuity and progression in learning in post-primary, while also alerting if any additional supports are needed. However, primary schools receive no formal information back from post-primary schools. Feedback from post-primary schools would be beneficial to primary school teachers and could provide insight into the effectiveness of the Education Passport.

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 seven competencies and attributes mentioned in the document are valuable and will build on the children's learning experiences developed from home. Each skill and attribute are interlinked and complement each other. They are relevant from early years onwards and will be used going forward to second and third level education and into the child's adult life.

As seen from the time allocations given in the Draft Curriculum Framework, the greatest proportion of time is given to literacy, numeracy, and well-being. This is a positive and welcome adjustment. The importance of these three areas cannot be overstated. It is vital for students to

have strong foundations in literacy and numeracy for them to be successful in other areas of the curriculum.

It is also clear that covid-19 has impacted students in many ways especially children's emotional and well-being. Prioritizing this area in the curriculum is extremely beneficial and will aid students to be more aware of how they are feeling, mentally and physically, as well as equipping them with strategies they can use going forward into their teenage and adult years.

There is some concern regarding students studying a foreign language from stage three onwards. Given the already overloaded curriculum, will schools have the time and resources to implement this successfully for their students? Students will need to be encountering the foreign language regularly each day to learn it successfully. Therefore, as seen in option 2 from the draft proposal, encountering the language one hour per week would not suffice to become competent in acquiring it. As well as this, there are other questions to be fleshed out. For example, who will be teaching the foreign language to the students and what resources will be available to schools to aid them in implementing it effectively?

Given the proposal of adding a foreign language to the curriculum at stages three and four, and the more prominent use of science and technology in today's world, it might be beneficial to adjust the area of arts education. This could be integrated into other areas instead of as stand-alone subjects.

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).

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- 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 curriculum framework outlines five curriculum areas – Language, Maths, Science and Technology Education, Wellbeing, Social and Environmental Education and Arts Education. The broader curriculum areas are more comprehensive. They will allow for the natural integration of subjects. They would also help with the curriculum overload as teachers can integrate many subjects rather than teach them as stand-alone lessons.

As mentioned above, the draft primary curriculum framework proposes the use of broad learning outcomes. Broad learning outcomes would be welcome in the new curriculum. Broad learning outcomes should describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes that all students should develop. They can be used easily in curriculum planning, in teaching and learning and assessment. Long lists of objectives with a huge amount of detail would obscure the overall aims of the curriculum. Broad learning outcomes emphasise an extensive overview with a design down approach. Schools will have more autonomy to devise more school specific plans for each curriculum area. The development and use of broad learning outcomes can engage teaching staff and will reflect a more student-centred approach. They will meet the needs of schools and guide educational planning. Similar to the broad learning outcomes in the Primary Language Curriculum, schools can narrow these down to suit their unique circumstances.

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.

Firstly, our greatest concern is that the significant problem of curriculum overload (and the associated time pressures), which has created very substantial challenges for teachers and schools over a long period, remains unresolved. The school week comprises of 25 hours of instruction (20 hours for infant classes). Our primary response to the draft curriculum framework is that the apportionment of time to each of the proposed curriculum areas/ subjects across all options requires further consideration.

We believe is an inadequate proportion of time allocated to the fundamental areas of language (L1 and L2) and numeracy. Language and numeracy skills are crucial for accessing the broader curriculum and they enable individuals to participate meaningfully in society. The deficits in many

children's language skills means that more time is required to achieve the outcomes in the Primary Language Curriculum.

The proposal of a third language at stages 3 and 4 compounds our concerns regarding time pressures and curriculum overload.

We warmly welcome the increase in the time allocation for Wellbeing. As we continue emerge from the pandemic, the need to prioritise physical and emotional/ psychological/ mental health has never been more necessary. Our collective aim of supporting children to become well-rounded individuals requires schools to devote substantial time and energy into fostering and promoting these foundational competencies.

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.