

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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Date	
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Yes

No

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

The Creative Ireland Programme is an all-of-government programme based in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media (also reporting to the Department of the Taoiseach), which is designed to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. The core proposition being that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity and contributes to individual and societal wellbeing and achievement.

One of the key strands of the Programme's work is *Creative Youth* – a strategy to enable the creative potential of every young person – which seeks to effect change in public policy and also to enhance and increase inclusive opportunities for children and young people to engage with creativity, in support of their overall learning and development.

With regard to the formal education sector, the underlying ambition is to create a place where knowledge and creativity are equal partners in the formation of our young people. However, this integration of creativity into education is not just about curriculum subjects, but using creativity as an instrument for education and learning more generally.

Delivery of the objectives of Creative Youth is underpinned by a significant and ongoing partnership with, inter alia, the Department of Education, through which progress continues on embedding creativity within the education system, supporting teacher CPD and roll-out of in-school engagement initiatives (such as the Scoileanna Ildánacha/Creative Schools programme and Creative Clusters).

For more information:

<https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/creative-youth/>

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*.

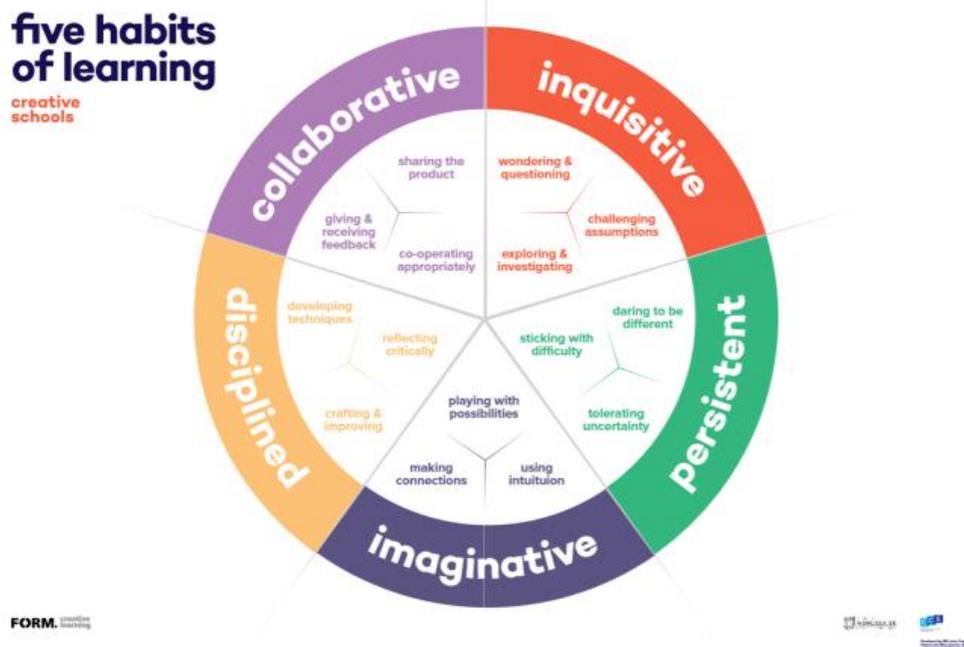
We welcome the new Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (DPCF) which brings to the proposed new curriculum the clarity of vision necessary to provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive, flourish and realise their full potential. The DPCF rightly acknowledges the changing expectations of pupils once they leave school, and that from primary school it is important that pupils are developing the skills, competencies and attitudes which will allow them to succeed in the complex world they will enter as adults. The DPCF also recognises that society wants to ensure that the curriculum allows pupils to acquire a broad range of knowledge, ensuring that it prioritises both new areas of knowledge such as coding and computational skills, while preserving the teaching of the more traditional moral and ethical values that underpin Irish society. The challenge is to maintain the balance between competing priorities, and as the ideal balance will differ between schools and between individual pupils, the DPCF rightly allows for individual schools and teachers to determine the balance that best addresses the needs of their children.

In placing more emphasis on developing the skills, competencies, and attitudes of pupils the DPCF is consistent with curriculum developments in several European education systems. In recent years, Norway, Holland, Scotland, and Wales, among others have reconsidered their national primary curricula, and have come to broadly the same conclusions. As much more emphasis is given to the development of skills and competencies, it has been necessary for all education systems to define more clearly the skills and competencies that should be prioritised. This the DPCF does effectively, as summarised in the following chart:



Given the strength of the graphic and the articulate way in which the graphic is interpreted, it may be being pedantic to make the point that the competencies are not as neatly sectionalised as the graphic suggests. Given that an objective of the Creative Ireland Programme's *Creative Youth Plan* is to help create an environment where creativity and knowledge are equal partners in the formation of our young people, we obviously welcome the identification of creativity as a key

competency. However, is it really as separate from the other competencies as the graphic suggests? The DPCF itself recognises that ‘Being a Digital Learner’ requires pupils to be ‘curious, creative, confident and critical’. It also emphasises that ‘Being Mathematical’ involves having the confidence and skill to recognise and use mathematics in all aspects of life, which in itself will require pupils to be curious, creative, confident and critical. Might it therefore be useful to consider creativity as an overarching set of competencies which support all the other key competencies in the model which would require a careful articulation of its definition. The Centre for Real World Learning at Winchester University has defined creativity in the following way:



The OECD, in their recent study of Creativity and Critical Thinking¹, used the Centre for Real World Learning definitions of creativity as their starting point. The Creative Habits of Learning have also been widely adopted elsewhere. The headings and subheadings within the Centre for Real World Learning definition, appear across all the Key Competencies and their descriptions in the DPCF. This is not to argue that creative skills should be given higher status. There is a concern however that the DPCF while acknowledging that the competencies are ‘inextricably interlinked’ does not adequately make clear that the Key Competencies are not siloed but are interdependent. Developing mathematical skills in pupils will require teachers to allow for pupils’ creativity, stimulate their curiosity, build their confidence and encourage their critical thinking, as will the teaching of all subjects. By making the cross curricula nature of all the competencies clearer in the DPCF, it will ensure that teachers emerge from their subject silos, achieving the transitions, progression and continuity that are central to the framework’s ambition.

¹ Vincent-Lancrin, S., et al. (2019), *Fostering Students' Creativity and Critical Thinking: What it Means in School*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/62212c37-en>.

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.

One of the key principles of the DPCF is that *'Children are active and demonstrate agency as the capacity to act independently and to make choices about and in their learning.'* This can only be achieved in schools if teachers and their leaders are similarly accorded the freedom and flexibility to make choices. Hence, it is essential that the agency of teachers is recognised, as it is in the DPCF's opening vision statement which introduces the idea of the agentic teacher *'who is reflective, competent and capable of exercising professional judgement in response to individual learning needs in a variety of contexts.'* This emphasis on the agency of teachers and pupils is welcomed.

This stress on the agency of teachers and pupils is echoed in many of the new curricula that have been introduced elsewhere in recent years. It was also highlighted in a recent OECD report *'Learning Compass 2030'*² which sets out an aspirational vision for education in 2030 including useful references to models of agency and co-agency that adults can deploy to support young people. However, what can be observed from attempts to implement these changes in agency in other countries is that this is very hard to achieve. Firstly, the need to plan a curriculum which responds to the needs of individual schools and pupils is a complex task which may require quite different skills from those already being possessed by teachers. This is because it is changing the role of teacher from being a 'director of learning' to being a 'facilitator of learning'. Secondly, for many teachers it will require the forging of quite different relationships with their pupils and getting to know them individually in a much deeper way. While there is no doubt from the international evidence that these changes will lead to better learning in the classroom, for many teachers it will find it a hard change to make. Thirdly, the DPCF recognises that teachers will require support in adapting to the new curriculum and refers to the advice that has emerged from the Schools Forum

² http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/learning-compass-2030/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_concept_note.pdf

regarding the need for time, on-going CPD and resources to adapt to the new curriculum and develop the new skills necessary to implement this effectively.

Lessons can be drawn from experience elsewhere:

- There needs to be a proper assessment of the time that will be required, away from the classroom, for teachers to familiarise themselves with the new curriculum, to attend CPD and to plan the implementation of the new curriculum, working alongside colleagues. Given the proposed change to curriculum design, the need for additional time away from the classroom for planning and reflection will continue beyond the period during which the new curriculum will be introduced. Planning to design and implement a curriculum based on the needs of individual pupils, while without doubt the correct approach, takes much longer than planning the implementation of a set curriculum on a whole class basis. To cover this, there will need to be additional teaching available to cover so teachers can have more time away from the classroom. The DPCF cannot be the place to estimate the time and cost of additional teaching support, but there should be a clearer commitment to delivering this to schools. In Scotland, insufficient time and support was given to teachers to adapt to the Curriculum for Excellence, and hence its implementation did not lead to the improvement in learning that had been hoped for.
- There will need to be changes in 'Looking at our Schools'. The DPCF places much greater emphasis on teacher and pupil agency, and this is not reflected in the 2016 edition of 'Looking at Our Schools'. As 'Looking at Our Schools' effectively advises schools on how they will be judged by the Inspectorate, it must be aligned closely to the objectives of the DPCF. In Lithuania, new pedagogical practices were introduced in many schools, and while successful when the practice was supported, proved to be unsustainable as the assessment and evaluation systems by which schools were judged were not changed to align with the new practices. As a result, teachers believed they did not have 'permission' to continue with the new pedagogies. At this stage we believe that a clear statement from the Irish Schools Inspectorate that there will be changes to 'Looking at our Schools', and that these will be introduced to coincide with the new curriculum, would be very helpful.
- The DPCF lays out a clear framework for the forms of evaluation and assessment which have value in educational settings and acknowledges that in time new instruments of assessment will be needed to align the new curriculum with the means of assessment available to schools and teachers. The Creative Ireland Programme supports the Continuum of Assessment laid out in Figure 4 in the DPCF and its recognition that new forms of assessment will be needed. It should be noted that internationally, many education systems have struggled to generate the new forms of assessment that are being required. In particular, the application of the full Continuum of Assessment is time intensive, as it will require considerable amounts of pupil, teacher and parent time. Again, this will have an impact on the level of staffing schools will require if this is to be done effectively.
- Given the additional demands on teachers that the new curriculum will make, it is worth emphasising the benefits its introduction will bring. The DPCF lays great emphasis on pupil and teacher agency. There is also considerable concern over pupil and teacher well-being, particularly in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, although the concern preceded the contagion. The Institute of Education at Cambridge University argues that the international

literature identifies three perceived routes to well-being.³ These are: living the pleasant life which enables an individual to experience high levels of positive emotion and gratification, living the good life, which enables one to experience absorption in activities, engagement and flow, and finally living the meaningful life, where one deploys one's strengths in the pursuit of something greater than oneself. The first, known as hedonic well-being, is notoriously elusive, while the latter two, known collectively as eudemonic well-being, are central to the purpose of school. Ensuring that education is absorbing and engaging, while developing the capacity and full potential of pupils so that they can deploy their strengths as adults to the benefit of society at large should drive the design of education. It is certainly central to the DPCF. Central to an understanding of the processes which enhance eudemonic wellbeing is Social Determination Theory (SDT). The developmental process at the core of SDT is premised on the notion that humans have three universal psychological needs: **competence** - feeling effective in one's on-going interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities, **autonomy** - being the perceived origin or source of one's own behaviour, and **relatedness** - feeling connected to others, caring for and being cared for by those others, having a sense of belonging to individuals and with one's community. These form the basis of a deep rooted and long-lasting sense of well-being. Clearly engendering a sense competence, autonomy and relatedness in pupils and teachers is at the heart of the DPCF, as it requires schools to engage pupils and teachers directly in shaping the learning that takes place. Given the anxiety that the introduction of a new curriculum is engendering in many in the education sector, it is perhaps worth emphasising that for the reasons outlined above, the DPCF is specifically designed to improve well-being despite the inevitable stresses that the introduction of new practices creates. In this sense, the DPCF is not the cause of the anxiety, it is the solution.

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 importance of managing transitions through the effective sharing of information and knowledge is well articulated in the DPCF and is welcomed. In many cases, transition can have a

³ McLellan, R., Galton, M., Steward, S. and Page, C. IoE Cambridge (2012). *The impact of creative initiatives on wellbeing: a literature review*.

negative impact on pupil progression. In many cases pupils' level of academic attainment a few months after the key transitions (from pre-primary to primary and from primary to post-primary) are lower than immediately before the transition. While the sharing of information between professionals is an important antidote, time for the teachers to build relationships with pupils is of equal importance. International meta-analyses of the impact of teacher-pupil relationships all emphasise that the quality of a pupil's relationship with his/her teacher is a key predictor of academic progress.⁴

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 DPCF correctly notes that 'Different pedagogical strategies stimulate different types of learning.' All the different types of learning should be explored with pupils. While individual pupils may have preferences or strengths in particular ways of learning, these should not be allowed to reduce the range of learning a pupil encounters and masters. There is evidence that in many schools and classrooms the Seven Learning Styles (spatial, auditory-musical, linguistic, kinaesthetic, logical,

⁴ Useful studies include: Cornelius-White, J. (2007). Learner-Centered Teacher-Student Relationships Are Effective: A Meta-Analysis. *Review of Educational Research* 77(1), 113-143.

Davis, H. A. (2013). Teacher-Student Relationships. In J. Hattie & E.M. Anderman (Eds.), *International Guide to Student Achievement* (pp. 221-223). New York: Routledge.

Roorda, D.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., Spilt, J.L., & Oort, F.J. (2011). The Influence of Affective Teacher-Student Relationships on Students' School Engagement and Achievement: A Meta-Analytic Approach. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(4), 493-529.

Wubbels, T. & Brekelmans, M. (2005). Two Decades of Research on Teacher-Student Relationships in Class. *International Journal of Educational Research* 43, 6-24

inter-personal and intra-personal) have become a means of reducing the range of learning experiences that a child encounters. A head teacher in England, for instance, was once heard to comment, on hearing that the evidence suggested a particular pupil was a kinaesthetic learner, 'Well we better ensure he takes kinaesthetic subjects'. There is no such thing as a kinaesthetic subject. The problem is accentuated because 'logical learning' is often referred to as 'mathematical', suggesting the maths has its own pedagogy, and therefore need not concern itself with the other forms of learning. Nothing is further from the truth. The recent OECD publication *'Ten Questions for Maths teachers'* summarises what 20 years of PISA has revealed about the most successful teaching strategies for Maths. The publication emphasises that the evidence shows that successful teachers:

- Provide a mix of teacher-directed and pupil-centred learning.
- Facilitate wherever possible the pupil's own enquiries.
- Know that students learn best by finding their own solutions.
- Recognise that thinking and reasoning is more important than curriculum content (competencies rather than knowledge).
- Ensure that their own teaching does not prevent students from adopting control strategies.
- Encourage pupils to reflect on how they learn.
- Focus time and energy on creating a positive classroom climate.
- Invest time in getting to know their pupils.
- In addition to what they teach, think about whom they teach and how they teach.
- Innovate.

All these aspects of teaching and learning are well articulated in the DPCF, whose own research had clearly brought it to the same conclusion. It is therefore rather jarring to find the statement 'Different curriculum areas utilise particular strategies.' (p22). The overall thrust of the DPCF is that all teachers should be using a comprehensive range of pedagogical practices. It is as important for the arts to recognise the centrality of logic, discipline and rigour as for maths and science to recognise the social and emotional characteristics of successful learning.

The following model has been deployed internationally to assist teachers in the lesson planning.



The model is **not** arguing that a low functioning, more teacher directed, classroom is of less value. It is a way of analysing a lesson plan or to reflect on its delivery to see the extent to which each lesson embodies the characteristics of different pedagogical approaches. Teachers should be able to vary their approaches over a period so that there is a balance of different pedagogical strategies being used. This supports the engagement and interest of pupils and ensures that all learning styles are encouraged and developed. A similar graphic may be helpful in the DPCF and could be part of the toolkit which the DPFC indicates will be provided for teachers.

Most new curricula being rolled out internationally are supported by on-line tool kits providing 'examples of particular pedagogical approaches and strategies to support teachers in their work with the diverse needs of the children in their classroom' as is proposed in the DPCF (DPCF p21). Although these sites are heavily visited (the education system's indicator of success) independent evaluations find that they are poorly rated by teachers. The reason is that examples are not in themselves sufficient to empower teachers to make the changes in their practice being proposed by new curricula such as the DPCF. In addition to examples, teachers need the time and the supervision to practice their new approaches ensuring that a range of pedagogical strategies are integrated in their classroom teaching.

Without proper time and support, the 'examples of pedagogical approaches and strategies' as envisaged by the DPCF become the new curriculum, rather than the inspiration and starting point for teachers to develop their own approaches as these examples are intended. Professors Timperley and Cordingley have produced metastudies on effective professional development for teachers.⁵ These studies conclude that the most successful teacher development provides:

- extended time for opportunities to learn (not continuous but spread over months or more)

⁵ *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)* by Timperley et al (2007)

The impact of collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) on classroom teaching and learning by Cordingley et al (2005)

- external expertise (regular personal contact with an external challenger)
- challenges to the prevailing discourse
- active participation in a learning community of practice
- consistency with wider trends in policy and research
- active school leadership

The support that teachers will need to implement the new curriculum will need the same characteristics.

As well as on-going externally provided CPD, school leaders will have a key role in supporting teachers to bring about the changes in teaching practice being envisaged in the DPCF. This may bring significant changes to the role of school leaders. It has been argued by some that school leaders in Ireland do not involve themselves to a significant extent in classroom practice. Whether accurate or not, the role of school leaders in directly supporting the development of new teaching strategies should be emphasised in the DPCF.

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.

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- 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.

Proposals within the DPCF for the structuring and presentation of the curriculum are clear and appropriate.

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.

The DPCF is coherently structured and well presented. International experience and research supports the highlighting of the teacher’s professional judgement in enabling children’s learning, Pupils are far more engaged, and hence progress academically faster, if teachers make meaningful connections with children’s interests and experiences. We have stressed earlier the importance of quality relationships between teachers and pupils (and among pupils) in supporting progression.

There is considerable evidence internationally that the degree of involvement of parents and families in children's education is a key predictor in academic success.

In developing a curriculum framework decisions have to be made about how to define and group subject areas. The DPCF identifies six curriculum areas encompassing a variety of subjects. These do not vary significantly from the new curricula being introduced internationally elsewhere. However, the boundaries between these curriculum areas are porous, and indeed teachers need to ensure that subjects are developed within curriculum areas. Maths and science can support learning, and be better understood, when present across the whole curriculum. How can one study the environment and how to protect it without maths and science?

In the case of the arts, it is important to distinguish between the study of an arts subject, its history and its techniques, for its own value, and the value art techniques and approaches have in enabling learning across all curriculum subjects. The arts, and creativity more generally, is central to developing the individual voice of every child, and the development of that voice is a core purpose of education. You cannot be an active citizen without an individual voice, as it gives you the ability for form your own opinions and express those ideas in diverse ways and with confidence. Without that you are lost to democracy and democratic purposes. International experience would suggest that concepts in all subjects are better learnt and better understood when seen through the lens of a creative form. It can be seen in maths (animating equations), science (representing the challenges of genetics in dramatic form), in history (creating portraits in the form of icons to learn medieval history) and social ethics (making a film to explore bullying). A significant number of examples could be provided if required.

It important therefore that the porous nature of the curriculum structure is fully understood by those who will implement it to ensure that the full value of subjects is realised by their presence when appropriate across the whole curriculum. It would be contrary to the intention of the DPCF to encourage a silo mentality in which teachers focussed solely on a narrow interpretation of their subject and did not take the opportunity where appropriate to improve understanding of other subjects. This message could be strengthened in this section

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:

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- 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.

We believe that the DPCF is right to recognise the need to respond in 2021 to society’s challenges and changing needs and priorities. In particular, the skills, competencies and knowledge that young people will require to succeed as adults, and to play their part in the creation of an ethical, inclusive and dynamic Ireland, are very different from those envisaged in 1999. A key indicator of that need to respond to the new challenges and to enable change to happen is the Creative Ireland Programme itself, an initiative intended to unleash the creativity and potential of all citizens, - an all-of-Government response to the very same challenges and changing needs.

The Creative Ireland Programme is very keen to endorse the DPCF, recognising that it is one of the initiatives that will help to transform and improve the quality of learning and achievement in Irish schools, and thereby help deliver on the Government’s ambitions and goals for young people across the country as set out in the Creative Ireland Programme.

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.

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