

## 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)

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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

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

TEPPEN (Teacher Educators Primary Physical Education Network in Ireland) is a body largely representing those responsible for delivering the physical education elements of Initial Teacher Education at fulltime undergraduate and postgraduate levels in the various universities and colleges of education across the Republic of Ireland. As a professional body with teaching and research expertise in primary physical education, our mission is to develop best practice and to advocate for quality teaching and learning on our courses and in primary schools.

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

The TEPPEN welcomes the opportunity to share our perspectives on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and offer our commitment to further engagement with the development of the revised primary school curriculum. The increased emphasis being placed on SPHE and physical education under the strand of Wellbeing is wholly appropriate and welcomed as it supports children's social, emotional, and physical development. With the increased time allocation indicated, we are keen to see that the potential of this opportunity is maximised to ensure effective teaching and learning is facilitated across psychomotor, social, affective, and cognitive domains. These points intentionally arise in varying places throughout the document as they are not only important to us but reflect the holistic nature and potential of physical education within the curricular framework.

**Developing clarity around Wellbeing** – If the potential of the new framework and curriculum is to be realised, the concept of well-being needs to be clearly and unambiguously defined. We contend that physical education is at the centre of such a definition. Within any definition of wellbeing and discussion of wellbeing as an ideology, the contribution of physical education must be clearly stated to ensure that all stakeholders understand its important contribution to the well-being of the child.

**Developing clarity around quality physical education** – If the potential of physical education within the new framework and curriculum is to be realised, quality physical education must be defined. This would include a recognition of both the unique contributions that physical education can make to the psychomotor domain of learning as well as the integrative possibilities. This would entail separate and defined learning outcomes for physical education and clearly delineated time allocations on a weekly basis.

**Developing clarity around integrated learning** – If the potential of physical education within the new framework and curriculum is to be realised, a shared understanding of integration is needed.

**The role of the generalist teacher** – If the potential of physical education within the new framework and curriculum is to be realised, the generalist classroom teacher should retain overall leadership for teaching and learning in physical education. External providers should be used with discernment to enhance, rather than replace, the class teacher. This would entail appropriately qualified external providers working within a clear school plan and working with teachers in all PE classes to ensure that children are learning according to their capacity.

**Assessment** - If the potential of physical education within the new framework and curriculum is to be realised, formative assessment for learning is necessary to ensure the outcomes of a quality physical education programme.

**Support systems around the curriculum** – If the potential of the new framework and curriculum is to be realised, teachers will need scaffolded support systems both in terms of resources and professional learning.

## 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.**

TEPPEN welcomes the agency and flexibility afforded to schools in teaching primary physical education with the hope that this allows for an increased time allocation for physical education as well as the capability of schools to more uniquely and contextually meet the needs of their students. Schools will be able to design programmes within the curricular boundaries that are indicative of the opportunities in their locality while also including opportunities to expand students' horizons. For example, schools near hillwalking areas might include more outdoor and adventure activities while those and others may make use of local parks for walking trails. While we respect the flexibility related to time apportionment, we do endorse a weekly time allocation for wellbeing to include physical education similar to the language and mathematics areas. This recognises wellbeing as a core concept of the primary curriculum. While the idea of agency and flexibility is welcomed in theory, there are potentially concerns with its facilitation. The overarching concern regards the status of physical education. Two aspects are paramount: 1) school limitations in contextualising and delivering physical education and 2) time.

Some schools could be potentially limited by funds, context, and staffing competencies to conceptualise and deliver a broad and balanced physical education programme. If such is the case, the notion of flexibility and agency could be used to rationalise or defend a "limited offering" programme for children that did not meet the Framework goals of broad and balanced. Most often this would result in an extreme dependence on external provision where someone outside the school realm makes decisions about what and how physical education is taught (Mangione et al., 2020; Ní Chróinín & O'Brien, 2019), a highly "games" based curriculum to the exclusion of dance and gymnastics (Woods et al, 2010 & 2018), or physical education that results in physical activity and exercise with no

meaningful learning – all of which lead to negative learning experiences for children (Coulter et al, 2020).

A related consequence of school limitations could be reflected in the allocation of time for physical education, especially when it falls within the Wellbeing strand. The implementation of agency and flexibility could result in physical education not being prioritised. Given the time allocation for Wellbeing is 2hrs 30mins for Stage 1 and 3hrs for Stage 2, this may result in schools giving a greater focus on elements of Wellbeing/SPHE and less focus on physical education when specific times are not allocated under this broad title. While we are aware of the need for a greater emphasis on SPHE, which we deem important, it is imperative that this need would not undermine the position of physical education within Wellbeing.

We recommend consideration of:

- Retaining the role of the generalist teacher for overall leadership for teaching and learning in physical education. Without discounting the ideas of others with expertise contributing, we see value in the classroom teacher with overall responsibility for the child's overall learning, directing and shaping their discrete physical education experiences (Petrie & Lisahunter, 2011).
- Teachers (and management) will need guidance and support. Some of this will be around what and how to teach and at a minimum must clearly define what wellbeing is (and isn't); what SHPE is (and isn't); and what quality physical education is (and isn't). These definitions are critical for teachers as they move to develop a broad and balanced yet integrated curriculum.
- Schools would also benefit from guidance regarding how schools and teachers could be organised to deliver quality physical education efficiently and effectively, both by using existing resources (Clohessy et al 2020) and through appropriate external provision (Mangione et al 2020; Ni Chroinin & O'Brien 2019).
- Furthermore, teachers would benefit from clear articulation of learning outcomes and progression criteria within the proposed curriculum. The combination of these could guide (rather than prescribe) for teacher learning possibilities in cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains while providing examples of the integration of that learning. These should be designed to support teachers without overwhelming them. Progression levels such as Exploring, Developing, Mastery, as used with the PDST's *Move Well, Move Often* programme would help guide teachers to developmentally appropriate learning.
- Teachers will need resources as to how to teach for all goals, but especially the affective goals. This allows them to build on many of the broad learning objectives outlined in the PE Curriculum (1999) where this breadth of learning goals was

reflected. (Parker et al in press provide a nice example of integrating affective goals into physical education).

- With regard to time, we are proposing that allocated time should be delineated, as language is in Option 2 of the proposed Framework, whereby a minimum time that teachers should facilitate for physical education is clearly specified. This would ensure that physical education is offered on a weekly basis. Allocated time for physical education should be separate to, for example, discretionary/integration time for physical activity or movement breaks. The TEPPEN support the SHPE/PE weighting as reflected in the 1999 curriculum. We do not support the notion of ‘blocking’ time so that one week schools would have physical education and the next they would have SHPE. Recognising the rationale for SHPE we would support the extension of SHPE in the wellbeing space, but not at the expense of physical education.

### **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.**

We welcome increased consideration of and planning for the curriculum connections between pre-schools primary and post-primary schools. Issues pertaining to curriculum continuity, in terms of both subject content and pedagogy, have been identified as significant barriers to successful primary/secondary transition by numerous researchers (Sutherland et al., 2010; Topping, 2011). Great links between each stage of learning are a welcome and positive development, with anticipated benefits for teachers, parents, children and those in initial teacher education. Significant investment in teacher learning will be needed to ensure that the connections outlined in curriculum documents move beyond aspiration to truly connect children’s learning across time.

We recommend consideration of:

- Complementarity in the aims and aspirations of each of the curricula, which should echo the educational value of the subject, affirming the unique emphasis on physical learning, acknowledging the potential for holistic learning, and the contribution of the subject to the child’s overall educational journey.
- Consistent use of language in terms of the principles and components of physical education and wellbeing from Aistear, through Primary School and following on through Junior cycle. Careful attention to language use is needed to avoid confusion. For example, the aims and learning goals for Wellbeing in Aistear uses terms such as ‘fit’ and ‘healthy’. In contrast, ‘physical activity’ is used at primary level, and ‘health related fitness’ is used at Junior Cycle level. Consistent use of terminology as well as clear explicit connections between ideas will be important in ensuring continuity and progression.
- More explicit attention to progression within the area of physical development. Subject-specific learning outcomes related to physical development should be articulated for each stage. For example, physically active play is not currently explicit, and related learning outcomes are lacking, in the Aistear framework. This leaves a muddiness around expectations of children’s physical skill development in Aistear contexts. The Aistear Framework explores the context of vigorous play and exercise, but evidence exists that the development of physical literacy and foundational movement skills needs to be targeted in Stages 1 and 2 (Behan et al, 2019). We do not see articulation of learning outcomes as incompatible with the play-based spirit of Aistear. Instead, we suggest that ensuring children master fundamental movement skills is essential to their continued successful engagement. The DES (2016) conclusion that current implementation of the Physical Education curriculum was weaker in the lower end of the primary school is noteworthy. We believe that specifying the curricular area and learning outcomes will be essential to address this finding.

### **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 framework addresses calls to physically educate children more holistically to impact on children’s attitudes towards future lifelong physical activity (Bailey et al, 2009) by 'going beyond simply developing pupils’ physical skills and further educating them in line with a broader understanding of learning, development and identity' (Atencio et al, 2014, p.245). To that end, we support the seven key competencies embedded across children’s learning outcomes from junior infants to sixth class as suggested. We are confident that physical education is central to achieving these competencies. While appreciating the overall vision of the proposed competences within an integrated learning experience, we also assert the unique contribution of physical education to each child’s education. We are concerned that physical education not be assumed as a by-product, or used solely in the service of other learning (Ní Chróinín, Ní Mhurchú & Ó Ceallaigh, 2016). While we support the emerging priorities as indicated, we are concerned about the clarity of what constitutes physical education and capabilities of teachers to deliver distinctive physical education within the overall curriculum integrated framework. Our recognition of the value of an integrated approach below comes with a caveat, that the unique emphasis on physically-based learning must be marked and outlined separately and distinctly within curriculum documents.

We recommend consideration of:

- The delineation of a clear agreed definition of well-being. This definition should include an explicit reference to and emphasis on learning through active engagement in physical education.
- The delineation of a clear and agreed definition of quality physical education within the well-being area. Discrete learning outcomes within physical education should promote the child’s opportunities to develop their physical movement skills as well as associated cognitive and affective knowledge and skills at a key stage in their formation. It is only within physical education lessons that many physical education learning outcomes can be achieved. These outcomes however can be consolidated through learning in other areas.
- A clear distinction between physical activity and physical education. There is an obvious presence of physical activity in the framework, but less evidence of

physical education. The two, physical activity and physical education, are related, but distinctly different. Physical education is an academic subject designed to help students gain the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to become and be physically active. Time dedicated to physical activity within or beyond school hours provides children opportunities to apply the skills learned in physical education. This distinction is clear in other contexts (e.g., Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence). We are concerned that using physical activity minutes and physical ‘fitness’ (however this is measured) as a yardstick may increase school-based physical activity but detract from physical education as a learning time.

- The acknowledgement that while we have emphasised the ‘physical’ aspect of physical education in the preceding section, it should be recognised that physical education is not simply about the ‘physical’. As indicated earlier in this section, the potential of physical education is the holistic contribution to the child’s education, to become physically educated includes the acquisition of cognitive and affective skills as well as psychomotor (Parker et al, 2022). Sport Australia provides a useful framework that captures the physical / social/ cognitive and psychological dimensions of physical literacy: [https://www.sportaus.gov.au/physical\\_literacy](https://www.sportaus.gov.au/physical_literacy). For example, a learning strategy that provides a straight-forward way of making learning across domains visible to both teachers and children is Vasily’s (2015) learning with the head, heart, and hands.
- Integration needs to be supported and exemplified. Furthermore, authors have found that teachers struggle to implement portions of the existing Aistear curriculum regarding integrated learning (Davern, 2020); the proposed integration of physical education with other areas would further complicate holistic teaching for many.
- If the shift toward physical education within a well-being curriculum area is to be successful, teachers will need guidance and support. The TEPPEN community recommend that support materials be developed with the assistance of those who specialise in physical education curriculum development, and we would be willing to serve in that role by offering advice and expertise in the design of such materials with the emphasis on meaningful integrated learning occurring through the medium of movement and physical activity.

## **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

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- 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 believe the proposed structure for ‘Curriculum areas and subjects’ has the potential to allow for a broad and balanced curriculum. Yet, additional information is needed to make further judgements. Three points are important:

1. How integration is understood and taught
2. Defining physical education learning within the structure
3. Resources and CPD

***How integration is understood and taught.*** Jess, Carse and Keay (2016) suggest that connected learning tasks would help children and teachers identify primary physical education as a coherent and connected experience that integrates learning across their education and their lives. Penney (2008) refers to physical education as the ‘connective specialism’ and the proposed Curriculum Framework ‘encourages and supports integration in a number of ways’. Along with the physical, social, and affective aspects of a child’s learning and wellbeing (UNESCO, 2015), the potential of physical education to achieve integrated learning across the other key competencies such as being creative, communicating and using language, learning to be a learner, and being mathematical for example are very significant. TEPPEN welcomes these concepts that reflect the holistic education of the child.

The proposed curriculum and structure (NCCA Curriculum Draft Framework, 2020, p.11) has the potential to maximise teachers' strengths. The structure allows for integration at the younger ages where curricular areas overlap with themes allowing teachers choice in planning and facilitating rich experiences. While some teachers with deep subject knowledge and experience, including newly qualified teachers with a specialism in physical education, have the potential to do this well; we are concerned that others, without such knowledge, will struggle and areas in which they do not have sufficient content knowledge or pedagogical content knowledge will suffer from 'policy slippage' and be neglected. Lynch and Soukup (2016) have highlighted challenges in integration even within health and physical education as part of Wellbeing alone not to mention other curricular areas. Interdisciplinary challenges have been reported by McCuaig et al (2020). Therefore, clear guidance should be provided on all content areas within a curricular area so that one is not prioritised over others. As with the inaccurate equation of physical activity and physical education, we specifically worry about physical education being used only as a bridge to integrate other content without having learning outcomes in its own right (Ní Chróinín, et al., 2016).

We recommend consideration of:

- Integration may be across content areas such as maths and physical education or more broadly across areas within well-being, e.g., physical education and social responsibility. It is important to acknowledge that this concept was proposed in the 1999 Curriculum. Hence, teachers are familiar with the concept of integration, but clear exemplars of the 'how to' must be provided. This illustrates 'building on' something familiar and acknowledges that this is not something new. There were some exemplars of this in the *Teacher Guidelines* (e.g., Maths and Olympics), but this is not an easy task for a teacher. Class size, poor resources, at times coupled with the lack of leadership in schools to 'drive' the resourcing of integration, often make these links particularly challenging. Other examples include Parker et al. (in press) of how physical education might also teach to and assess social and emotional learning goals and the New Zealand curriculum for integration across areas. In any case, both curriculum/content areas must be clearly defined, overtly taught, and assessed based on what was taught.
- Clear principles and devoted time allocation to physical education be established to ensure rich integration and the identification of deep rather than tokenistic possibilities for holistic learning. It should be led by teachers (Clohessy et al, 2020). For example, gymnastics and dance has the potential to contribute to developing children's learning in story telling in language, shapes in dance can be linked to mathematics, tension in gymnastics in science, to name but a few examples. At the same time, the use of mobile and relatively inexpensive technology provides possibilities for analysis of children's movement and allows self and peer assessment. Likewise, the integration of digital technology to physical education has immense potential to develop children's movement and celebrate achievements.

- The framework documents state “support materials and examples of approaches to integration, on planning for integration and on practical strategies for the classroom, will be provided”. These are welcomed and will be much needed by teachers.

***Defining physical education learning within the structure.*** From a physical education perspective, we see huge potential within Wellbeing to promote a unique experience for children. We welcome the inclusion of physical education as a standalone area in Stages 3 and 4 and within Wellbeing in Stages 1 and 2. If delivered well, children could flourish; but if not, the spirit of the proposed draft framework and the focus on choice by the teacher, coupled with the limitations of a teacher’s competence and confidence dictating the programme design and play possibilities, the outcomes could be greatly weakened and detrimental for children’s development and learning. We physical activity-based learning presented in Aistear guidelines, without exemplars and clear learning outcomes, as well as the narrow focus on fundamental movement skills related to learning in Wellbeing and movement.

The proposed curriculum areas and subjects are logical. Yet, more clarity is needed. At present, the definition of wellbeing is not clear; nor is how the subjects in Stages 3 and 4 are to be developed. The Framework proposes Physical Education and Health Education as one subject and Social Personal and Values Education as another. Quennerstedt (2019a) reports on the different understandings of health within physical education including a biomedical model to a lifestyle model. Ensuring an educational lens is essential to avoid physical education being perceived as a break from learning, rather than a valuable learning time.

We recommend consideration of:

- The subjects within Wellbeing being more completely defined and that health and physical education, while falling under the same curricular umbrella, have separate learning outcomes and are timetabled separately. It is crucial that such a key area as health education is in turn clearly defined. In this way, clear links can be identified with learning in and through physical education without compromising the kernel of the physical education lesson, i.e. movement. We suggest looking to Scotland, New Zealand, and the United States as to how this has been done elsewhere.

A clear definition of physical education is paramount to the success of physical education within the well-being area. The definition of physical education outlined in the 1999 curriculum could easily be retained. While we fully support the identification of strands and elements to guide teachers’ work and children’s learning overall, we still recognise a need for specific detail related to children’s learning in physical education. Children’s access to a broad range of elements and experiences to ensure exposure to activities that promote lifelong physical activity opportunities must be protected.

It is important that an overarching message or vision about what children should learn and the kind of experiences they should have in physical education guide all subsequent decisions regarding the content area. We propose that a singular vision be articulated and aligned with a curricular framework that would be used to implement the teaching and learning in physical education. As Quennerstedt (2019) argues, the ‘why’ of physical

education must always precede and give direction to ‘what’ and ‘how’. We suggest that emphasis should be placed on a life-enhancing brand of physical education, with emphasis on the ways that physical activity participation can enrich and improve our everyday lives. We position this version of physical education in contrast with more utilitarian motives, aiming at a fitter or healthier population (Kretchmar, 2008). Physical education should be significant in children’s lives, carving the way for meaningful engagement in physical activity. In primary physical education around the world there are a few consistent guiding philosophies that are predominant: Whitehead’s physical literacy (see also the new all island physical literacy definitions for Ireland), meaningfulness (Kretchmar, 2000; 2008) social emotional learning, and physical activity dominate.

We recommend consideration of:

- Reviewing accepted conceptual orientations to frame physical education teaching and learning in Ireland. Our preference would be any combination of physical literacy, meaningfulness, and social emotional learning; not physical activity. This conceptual vision would be further enhanced by curricular frameworks allowing for the progressive development of physical education learning outcomes across the four stages. Physical education curricula are organised in different way in different places, but the prevailing trends represent a shift from games based, team oriented, competitive activities. This is seen, for instance, in the Australian, New Zealand and United States curricula and learning outcomes where physical education is a distinct subject and developmentally oriented. One example, is a skill themes approach in which at Stages 1 and 2 where foundational skills are taught in the context of games, dance, gymnastics, progressing to the use of those developed skills in games, dance, and gymnastics at Stages 3 and 4 (Graham et al 2020). Regardless, we recommend identifying particular structures to ensure deep learning through movement rather than simply a physical activity rationale.
- Dance (folk and creative) currently sits within the 1999 physical education curriculum. While acknowledging that a case could be made for relocating creative dance within The Arts curriculum, we would have concerns that folk dance might be lost in this reshuffle. What is important is that dance as a valued form of human expression and movement is located somewhere. We would be happy for dance to remain part of physical education but open to exploring this further, with the possibility of straddling both Well-being and The Arts as an option. The reality in schools suggests that dance needs dedicated timetabled space. This is a serious consideration when determining where dance will feature in the Framework.
- The growing international trend towards more informal participation (non-club based or formally structured involvement in sport) in out-of-school physical activity experiences (O’Connor & Penney, 2020) should also be acknowledged in the new curriculum. This shift in participation patterns could be seen in breadth (range) of activities included as well as the depth of participation at different stages. For example, while shorter units of work exploring a variety of physical activities

would be more appropriate in the earlier sampling stages, more in-depth and longer units of work might be considered at Stage 4, allowing children to move beyond introductory explorations to more expert participation.

- Outsourcing of physical education is a common trend internationally in primary physical education (Sperka & Enright, 2018). Though not a formal part of the curriculum, outsourcing is also evident in Ireland (Mangione et al, 2020). It will be important to clearly define the roles of all stakeholders and to provide guidance for practice when external providers are employed. If this is not explicit, the outsourcing of physical education, including dance, may result with no coordination, meaningful partnership (Mangione et al, 2021) or deep learning by children, especially those children with additional needs. Therefore, a clear identity about what physical education is (and isn't) and who teaches it is essential. External providers should be used with discernment to support, rather than replace, the class teacher. The class teacher must work with the external provider to ensure that the children's experience of physical education is enhanced.

**Resources and CPD.** One has to be mindful of the subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, required to teach physical education meaningfully to maximise children's learning. The proposed Framework represents a fundamental change for teachers. Fullan (2007) indicated change occurs when teachers gain new 'meaning' in relation to curriculum material, behaviours and skills, and/or beliefs and understandings and many factors influence teachers' knowledge and interpretations and enactment of new curriculum. When Curtner-Smith (1999) investigated the enactment of National Curriculum Physical Education in England, he found it did not necessarily result in a transformation of the values and beliefs guiding teachers' practices, but that most teachers tended to interpret curriculum conservatively, and adapt it to be congruent with their existing perspectives. This resulted in policy slippage (Penney & Evans 1999), and has been witnessed in Ireland with post-primary physical education (MacPhail, 2007), Scotland (Thorburn, et al., 2011; MacLean et al., 2015), Australia (Macdonald, 2013), China (Jin, 2013), and Finland (Yli-Piipari, 2014). There is no reason to believe that primary physical education in Ireland would be any different. We unequivocally support the toolkit. Within the toolkit, we contend there must be a broad range of movement experience exemplars with suggested examples of physical education pedagogical approaches presented showing progression across the four stages. The support materials must be available from the outset. There will be a need for rich exemplars and sustained CPD for teachers to plan rich programmes and share experiences to learn from each other. New Zealand curriculum is one example of how this can be done. Furthermore, recent Irish data from the implementation of physical education within the new Junior Cycle indicate that the newer CPD structures are appreciated, but still not enough (O'Sullivan, Moody, Parker, & Carey, 2021).

We recommend consideration of:

- The need for CPD to look fundamentally different than previously conceptualised. We recommend that the considerable expertise in Ireland related to the CPD of teachers in physical education (Parker, Patton, & O'Sullivan, 2016; Parker, Patton, & Tannehill, 2012) be utilised. Some generalist teachers in Ireland teaching physical education are plagued by a lack of competence and confidence (Kinchin et al 2012). They need ongoing, supportive, sustained, social, school-based CPD to

enhance and develop their practice (Parker & Patton, 2017; Parker et al 2016). Every teacher in a school needs this type of CPD; the model of sending one teacher to gain knowledge and share with others does not work. There is a plethora of resources to support the teaching of primary physical education (e.g., the PDST's *Move Well; Move Often*; Irish Primary Physical Education Association's online resources; Playing for Life (<https://www.sportaus.gov.au/p4>), the PSSI lessons recommended by the PDST (<https://www.pdst.ie/PSSI-Lessons>), and the PE Project (<http://www.thepeproject.com/index.html#ped>). Instead, what teachers need is the individual support to allow them to become discerning users of the resources that exist. This could occur in the form of communities of practice (Deglau & O'Sullivan 2006; Parker et al 2010), learning communities, and lesson study (Lewis 2009), etc. Acknowledging that generalist teachers have to engage with such a range of subjects and approaches, they need more time to learn and engage with ideas that they can take back and implement and then return (O'Sullivan et al 2020; O'Sullivan 2020; Patton, Parker & Pratt 2013).

### **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 echo the sentiments of the Framework document regarding assessment. The purpose of assessment should address the child’s learning across to the physical, affective, and cognitive domains. We see a role for intuitive assessment, and planned interactions through assessment events in physical education. Teacher observation, self- and peer-assessment should feature strongly in the planned interactions related to assessment of physical education.

We recommend consideration of:

- Recognising the importance of “building teacher assessment literacy” in the physical education context (Dinan-Thompson & Penney 2018, p.83). Assessment is an area of low confidence in Irish primary teachers (Macken et al 2020). Generalist primary teachers will need specific education in the implementation of physical education specific assessments (O’Sullivan et al 2020). They will need to develop knowledge regarding the use of assessment strategies to capture the holistic learning experience of the child – what to include, what not to include, and how. For example, some teachers will need to develop a knowledge and expertise in the observation and analysis of fundamental movement skills (O’Sullivan 2020) and learning to assess the affective domain – all aspects of a holistic physical education programme. At the same time, they will need to understand how results from formal standardised summative testing that end in normative categorising of children, e.g., assessment events such as the formal testing of fundamental movement skills or testing of fitness levels or the use of fitness testing as part of an assessment process, are not appropriate (and not something the TEPPEN support in any context). We recommend an emphasis on: (1) supporting teachers to observe children’s achievements and (2) supporting children to assess as part of planned interactions, with feedback central to any such efforts. The recording of outcomes is crucial and needs to be manageable for the generalist teacher.
- The use of assessment results in formative ways in discussion with teachers and parents.

Physical education can make a distinct contribution to integrated curriculum planning as a subject in its own right, and in conjunction with other subjects. Physical education should reflect that children want to move. The environment of physical education should be one of activity and learning coupled with delight, excitement, and intrigue (Kretchmar 2008); it should be one of productive noise (Graham et al 2020) as children engage in the exploration of movement. Following the major trends worldwide we suggest attention should be paid to some of the following ideas regarding pedagogies and approaches that support the holistic and developmental learning of children in physical education.

We recommend consideration of:

- Exploring mastery approaches to learning where the environment is adapted to reflect positive expectancy beliefs in the achievement of the learning goals (Chen et al 2008; Martinek & Griffiths, 1994); democratic approaches (Oliver & Kirk 2015) where the voice of the student is central to what happens in physical education; meaningful physical education where attention to the quality of individual

children's experiences is acknowledged (Beni et al 2017); social justice oriented pedagogies where issues of equity regardless of ability, race, class, gender, sexuality, or religion are ensured (Ovens 2020); social emotional learning where children practise and develop their skills in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision-making (Wright & Richards, in press; Hellison, 2011) and cooperative learning pedagogies (Dyson & Casey 2012) where children develop positive interdependence and individual and group accountability.

- Possible consideration at Stage 4 to introducing limited curricular models that support the transition to Junior Cycle. These models should serve to enrich the teaching of physical education, especially the intergradation of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective learning. Models for consideration might be: Sport Education (Siedentop, van der Mars, & Hastie, 2020) and Teaching Games for Understanding (Mitchell, Mitchell, Oslin & Griffin, 2020), among others. Any curriculum approach chosen must be underpinned by sound pedagogical principles. Fundamentally, we recommend that the curriculum design provides clear guidance on the selection and use of contextually appropriate models and approaches.
- The provision of a suite of exemplars that illustrate the use of these approaches and assessment practices in ways that reflect the realities of Irish primary school context. Case studies of successful practices would be beneficial for teachers in the translation of theory into practice. These would need to be 'day in and day out' programmes that stand the test of time for long-term practice and not simply reflect short-term 'interventions'.

### **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.**

Curriculum design in primary physical education requires careful attention to both what is possible for generalist teachers and what is desirable for children to experience. TEPPEN acknowledges that change is needed. We also recognise that while many ‘ideas’ are suggested in this response appear as new, it would be disingenuous to imply that all are new. It is important to acknowledge the numerous teachers who already reflect many of these principles in their teaching based on the 1999 Primary Curriculum. It will be crucial to reassure stakeholders that ALL is not to be discarded and replaced and to emphasise the ‘building on’ nature of any curriculum change. There is much of value in the 1999 physical education curriculum documents that we would not expect to change dramatically in this new iteration. The broad and balanced nature of the curriculum is important to maintain while simultaneously recognising the potential for scope in the range of activities teachers can draw on to achieve learning outcomes. Overall, we propose that the spirit of the 1999 curriculum be retained and build on its progress.

## **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*.**

The pandemic has reaffirmed and highlighted the multiple roles and benefits of physical activity engagement in enriching our everyday lives. Covid has reinforced the importance of physical education and physical activity and reminded us of the differences ... and the differences are important as children need quality physical education as well quality physical activity. Unfortunately, in response to the pandemic we have witnessed the reduction of physical education to physical activity, lacking a clear educational purpose. Physical education became less about learning and more about just watching presentations of movement that often emphasised just the performance of the movement itself. The purpose of movement was most often presented as merely ‘exercise’ and often in an adult context/underpinned by adult understandings and practices of ‘exercise’.

As indicated in the recent position statement of the Irish Primary Physical Education Association (2022), ‘Physical education at the primary level is a school curriculum area taught by qualified primary teachers. Instruction within the weekly physical education time

allocation is provided in a safe, supportive environment with an emphasis on learning and participation. It is designed to teach children the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to establish and sustain an active lifestyle. A quality physical education program provides a variety of learning opportunities, appropriate teaching pedagogies as well as meaningful and challenging content to offer joy in movement for all children. Based on a sequence of learning, physical education should not be compared to, or confused with, other physical activity experiences such as break time or sport endeavours. Physical activity is a broad term describing bodily movement that burns energy and is undertaken for enjoyment, health, or performance enhancing purposes. Physical activity programmes, both in school and out, are places where children can apply what has been learned in physical education. Physical activity includes all physical education and sport activities. It also includes indoor and outdoor play, active breaks, active travel (e.g., walking, cycling, rollerblading) and routine activities such as using the stairs, doing housework, and gardening.’

In addition, inclusion was never more important as during the pandemic as children with special needs may have been the pandemic's greatest victims. There were new challenges accessing support and being included in schooling (Inclusion Ireland, 2022). While reflected in a myriad of ways, the impacts were particularly visible with respect to physical activity, play, and socializing with friends (Barron 2022) – all aspects of physical education.

On the positive side, multiple organisations (e.g., professional education associations, sport, and government and for-profit agencies) responded to the challenges schools faced during Covid with a plethora of resources to help teachers, parents, and schools. This alone is an indication of the possibilities that exist for all sectors to work together. One example of a resource that drew from appropriate content proposed within the Primary Physical Education Curriculum (1999) is the ‘physical education at home resource’ (Coulter et al., 2021). Another, specifically targeted to children with special needs and underpinned by the Universal Design for Learning, (a key feature of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework), is a free online tool kit to help teachers include children with additional needs in physical education lessons that was collaboratively developed by DCU/IOE educators and European counterparts (Marron, et al, 2021). At the same time, the varied and indiscriminate use of other resources was one of the things that allowed the lines between physical education and physical activity to become blurred. It reminds us that education should accompany resources and resources should be used judiciously to meet the learning needs of children.

Covid also witnessed the agency of children (a core principle of the Framework) in leading and directing their own physical activity engagement and their recognition that sport can be organised in different ways. By listening to the voices and choices of children, the value of and possibilities for physical education to provide opportunities to develop skills for more informal, less structured, physical activity that may not be possible in a typical school context (i.e. hillwalking, hiking, bicycles or scooters) began to be recognised. Furthermore children began to understand that sport can complement calming and reflective activities such as yoga; that it is not an either/or proposition. In the longrun, if the purpose of physical education to teach children the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to establish and sustain an active lifestyle then the children may have taught us that there is

more of a place for valuable activities that provide a codicil to organised sport or offer alternatives where organised sport is not possible or not enjoyable for them.

From a subject matter perspective, through the use of student voice pedagogies in physical education there is a natural opportunity for children to develop agency in leading and directing their own physical activity engagement. The latest research in this area provides important direction on how to do this in physical education (Iannucci & Parker 2021) and how more democratic approaches benefit children (Fletcher & Ní Chróinín. 2021). It will be important to consider this relatively new thinking in any further discussions of curricula with a clear acknowledgement of the context of physical education and of the typical environment (facilities) within which physical education is taught.

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