NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Report on the consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*

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Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* was published for consultation in February 2020. The consultation was carried out over two phases between February 2020 and the end of March 2022. The aim of the consultation was to ensure that any person or organisation that wished to express their views on the draft framework would be enabled to do so, and this was achieved through a range of methods for providing feedback. A robust and rigorous research design was implemented and a significant amount of data, the basis for this report, was gathered through a variety of methods, outlined in the Methodology section. This data was subsequently analysed, again through a rigorous and robust process, by teams that included independent analysts. The purpose of the analysis was to identify the significant themes associated with the six key messages across all data types, with each data set analysed and reported separately.

This report presents the findings from this extensive and comprehensive consultation process. It details the research design, data collection methods and data analysis process in section 2. Section 3 presents the findings from the bi-lateral meetings, focus groups, questionnaires (educator and parent/guardian), and workshop materials. Section 4 provides background information on the written submissions received. Section 5 presents the Executive Summary of the consultation with children, and section 6 draws conclusions based on the findings from the consultation.

There are two published alongside this report, including:
- a technical report detailing the original verbatim questionnaire responses
- the *Report on the Consultation with Children on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*.

In addition, the submissions for which permission to publish was given are published on the NCCA website along with the above documents.

1.2 Development Process

The process of developing the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* engaged stakeholders from across the system in its design and it emerged through four broad areas of activity including:
1. **Research:** the proposals drew on an extensive body of contemporary national and international research located here on the NCCA website.
2. **Networks:** the Schools Forum, a network consisting of 60 primary schools, post-primary schools and preschools from across the country worked together to tease out ideas from research, bringing their school experiences to discussions.
3. **Deliberations:** close work with the education partners through the representative structures of the NCCA, and with wider stakeholders through events such as curriculum seminars held in 2018 and 2019, and the *Leading Out* seminar series.
4. **Consultation:** findings from many consultations have helped to shape the proposals for a redeveloped primary curriculum. These include proposals for a curriculum for Education

about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics (2017); curriculum structure and time (2018); and language and mathematics (both 2018).

Based on these broad areas of activity, the proposals in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* were framed around a set of six key messages which, taken together, represent the main features and significant changes proposed for the redeveloped primary curriculum. The key messages that underpinned the draft framework included:
1. Building on strengths and responding to challenges
2. Agency and flexibility for schools
3. Supporting connections
4. Emerging priorities for children's learning
5. Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented
6. Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning[1].

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[1] For the text of the six key messages, please see the Frequently Asked Questions document.

Section 2: Methodology

2.1 Design

The purpose of the consultation was to ensure that any person or organisation that wanted to express a point of view on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* would have a way of doing so. The initial plan was for the data gathering strand of the consultation to take place between January and June of 2020. However, the impact of COVID-19 required a sequence of adaptations to the design, with the data gathering ultimately taking place over two phases between February 2020 and March 2022. The original research design was based on the six key messages associated with the draft framework and this aspect of the design was maintained throughout the changes to the research timeline.

These key messages were the basis for all data gathering carried out in the consultation and the data gathering is detailed in the next section. This ensured consistency across all the data gathering methods as well as contributing to coherent communications related to the consultation. For example, the questions posed at both the bi-lateral meetings and the online focus groups were based on the key messages; the questionnaires were structured to align with the key messages; and the submission template was also structured in line with the key messages. The one exception was the workshop materials (referenced below) which focused on the sections of the draft framework document.

To maintain the focus on the voice of the stakeholder, the research design included measures to '...effectively manage large datasets while drawing upon diverse perspectives and counteracting individual bias' (Richards and Hemphill, 2018, p. 225). To address the risk of researcher bias, NCCA personnel worked in teams that included independent researchers for both data gathering and analysis to enable peer evaluation and reflexivity (Chenail, 2011). For example, at each bi-lateral meeting, the NCCA team consisted of a facilitator and a note-taker, in addition to an independent note-taker. Following each bi-lateral meeting, a de-briefing meeting of the facilitator and note-takers took place to ensure that the notes captured the participants' feedback. Analysis of the bi-lateral and focus group data and the materials from the workshops was undertaken primarily by independent analysts. Additional measures, such as consulting with parent representative groups on the questionnaires designed for parents, were taken to enhance the accessibility of the data gathering processes and instruments.

2.2 Data gathering

Data was gathered through bi-lateral meetings, online focus groups, questionnaires for educators and parents, and submission templates. In total, 51 bi-lateral meetings were held with stakeholder organisations in Phase 1 of the consultation between June 2020 and the end of January 2021. In Phase 2, between October 2021 and February 2022, 13 online focus groups for teachers, school leaders and parents were organised with a total of 181 participants.

For each phase, NCCA hosted two online questionnaires – one for educators and a second one for parents. In Phase 1, the questionnaires were hosted on the Microsoft Teams platform, but for Phase 2 and based on the experience of Phase 1 respondents, the questionnaires were moved to

the Survey Hero platform to improve accessibility and user experience. Also, in Phase 2, having evaluated the response rate for Phase 1, the number and complexity of the questions were reduced. In Phase 1, there were 208 completed educator responses (205 in English and 3 in Irish) with 158 completed parent responses (154 in English and 4 in Irish). In Phase 2, the educator questionnaire recorded 320 completed responses (315 in English and 5 in Irish) with a total of 930 completed responses to the parent questionnaire (926 in English and 4 in Irish). 174 submissions were received from both individuals and organisations. The majority were received in Phase 1, but all authors were offered the opportunity to update their submissions for Phase 2 to reflect the passage of time and the impact of the pandemic. A very small number chose to do so. While the majority of authors gave consent for their submissions to be published, a small number did not, therefore the number of published submissions is less than the number received. 147 submissions are published on the NCCA website.

In addition, consultation workshop materials to support whole staff engagement on key proposals in the draft framework were published online for any school that wished to use them. Each workshop included a facility for feedback from schools to be submitted using the Survey Hero platform. In addition to general availability of the workshop materials, schools in the Schools Forum used the workshops and, of the 60 schools in the Forum, 51 completed those workshops and submitted feedback.

Table 1: Overview of data gathering activity

Consultation method	Respondents/Participants	Number
Bi-lateral meetings	Stakeholder organisations and interest groups	51 meetings with 95 attendees
Online questionnaire Phase 1	Educators	208
Online questionnaire Phase 1	Parents	158
Online questionnaire Phase 2	Educators	320
Online questionnaire Phase 2	Parents	930
Focus groups	Teachers, school leaders and parents	13 focus groups with 181 attending
Written submissions	Individuals and organisations	174
Workshop materials	Teachers and school leaders	51 schools

2.3 Data analysis

As the data gathered included both qualitative (bi-lateral meeting/focus group data/submissions) and quantitative (educator and parent questionnaires) data, different methods of data analysis were used.

2.3.1 Bi-lateral and focus group data

The purpose of the analysis was to identify patterns (themes) in the data collected through online focus groups with teachers, school leaders and parents and bi-lateral meetings with stakeholder organisations. Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), is the methodology adopted for the analysis, given its wide applicability and flexibility, and the six-phase process was adapted for the different contexts. The raw data (notes taken during the focus groups/bi-lateral meetings) was initially analysed through the lens of the six key messages referenced above. For the separate bi-lateral and focus group data sets, a master document of the data for each key message was prepared and each was analysed to identify the main themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). 'Reflexive dialogue' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82) was built into the analysis process, with NCCA personnel working with independent researchers for discussion and decision making in theme identification, in addition to mitigating against the risk of researcher bias.

2.3.2 Questionnaire data

In Phase 1, the questionnaires were hosted on the Microsoft Teams platform and for Phase 2, the Survey Hero platform was used. While the questionnaires in both phases were structured to align with the key messages associated with the draft framework, the questionnaires for Phase 2 were shorter and had more quantitative response types than in Phase 1 which made them easier to complete. This was in response to a lower-than-expected response rate in Phase 1 and in acknowledgement of the pressure being experienced by educators and parents/guardians during the pandemic. Analysis of the responses was built into the question type; for example, for questions based on Likert scales and ranking processes, the software in both Microsoft Teams and Survey Hero generated charts and graphs. The qualitative material was analysed using the Braun and Clarke (2006) process and the main themes are represented in bar chart or word cloud format. This enabled a summary representation of large volumes of text responses. The original verbatim responses along with the report for each questionnaire from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 are published in the Technical Report which accompanies this document.

2.3.3 Workshop materials

The workshop materials were published on the website and available to all schools, with feedback being channelled through either a 'general' link to Survey Hero or through a 'Schools Forum' dedicated link. While 51 members of the Schools Forum submitted their feedback on the various elements of the draft framework through the Survey Hero platform, no school completed the suite of workshops through the 'general' link. Data analysis, therefore, is based on the feedback from the members of the Schools Forum.
The workshops were designed to gather feedback predominantly in text format. All the text was downloaded in PDF format and compiled into master documents for each of the seven sections. Each section was analysed using thematic analysis adapted from the Braun and Clarke (2006) process and carried out by an independent analyst working with NCCA personnel as was the case in the analysis of the qualitative data from the bi-lateral meetings and focus groups.

2.3.4 Submissions

A total of 174 submissions were received, with consent to publish given in the case of 147 of the total. A number of submissions had no indication of whether or not the author consented to publication, and those authors were contacted prior to publication. There are a number of submissions for which there is still no indication of consent either way and these, along with the

submissions whose authors have specified that the submission is not to be published, have not been published. The submissions for which permission to publish has been given are published on the NCCA website. A profile of all submissions received is included in this document, with an overview of the broad categories of topics addressed in the submissions, based on the key points raised in each submission. This includes, but is not limited to, inclusion; diversity; ethos; language; and curriculum area. The categories are provided for ease of navigation, given the large number of individual submissions, but is not intended to indicate that each individual category represents the only topic addressed in individual submissions. While many of the submissions used the template provided by NCCA, which was based on the six key messages that are the basis for the consultation, many more have not used the template and the text is presented in a variety of ways.

Section 3: Findings

3.1 Bi-lateral meetings

Data gathered through bilateral engagement with stakeholders was recorded by two note-takers at each meeting. Following a review of the notes to confirm that they reflected the discussion, independent analysts carried out an initial triage of the notes through the lens of the six key messages, which were also the topics discussed at each meeting. Subsequently, all the data associated with each key message was compiled into a master document, and each was analysed by a team of three using the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic data analysis process. In the course of this process, it was noted that participants also raised issues that did not relate to the key messages, but which spoke to considerations for curriculum enactment. This material was collated and analysed using the same method and is also included in this section.

3.1.1 Key message 1

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* is designed to build on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum such as children's enjoyment of learning and teachers' increased use of active learning methodologies. At the same time, the draft framework responds to key challenges which schools have identified such as curriculum overload and using assessment in a meaningful way to inform teaching and learning.

Analysis identified four themes related to key message 1:
1. The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* builds on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum
2. The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* acknowledges and addresses challenges identified in the 1999 curriculum
3. The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* responds to a changing education context
4. Considerations for implementation.

Theme 1: The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* builds on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum

In general, participants spoke very positively about the strengths of the 1999 curriculum and how these strengths have been built on to create the draft framework. In particular, the spiral approach of the 1999 curriculum and the strong emphasis on skills were pointed out as strengths. Terms such as 'groundbreaking' and 'respected all over the world' were used to describe it.

Overall, the 1999 curriculum was deemed to have had a positive impact on children and learning. The significance of relationships was a key area where participants felt that the draft framework built on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum. It was strongly suggested that the draft framework builds on past experience and looks to the future as the country continues to move with the times. It was noted that the draft framework continues to emphasise knowledge, skills, attitudes and enquiry and to promote life-long learning. Following on from the 1999 curriculum's promotion of integration, many felt that the draft framework continues to promote an integrated approach to learning and the inclusion of broad curriculum areas was indicated as an example of this. Some participants suggested that the draft framework builds on the 1999 curriculum's child-centred message with a focus on inclusion and competencies. It was also stated that the draft framework includes key pedagogical developments which have come about since the introduction of the 1999 curriculum, with play-based approaches being identified as one example of this.

Theme 2: The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* acknowledges and addresses challenges identified in the 1999 curriculum

Participants welcomed the publication of the draft framework, seeing it as a necessary and timely development, and described the potential of the draft framework to create alignment and draw links between early childhood, primary and post-primary education.

Curriculum overload was identified by participants as one of the main challenges associated with the 1999 curriculum. There were mixed responses towards the potential of the draft framework to alleviate such overload. Some participants expressed the viewpoint that the draft framework recognises and adequately responds to the challenge of overload through a greater focus on teacher agency, flexibility and the proposed introduction of broad curriculum areas as well as an integrated approach to teaching and learning. At the same time, concerns were raised that the introduction of new curriculum areas/subjects and numerous key competencies could potentially lead to subsequent curriculum overload all over again. It was felt that caution should be exercised around the introduction of new curriculum areas and subjects. There was welcome expressed for a greater focus on assessment for learning and formative assessment within the draft framework. The challenges of implementing a new curriculum and embedding enquiry-based and active learning methodologies were highlighted.

Theme 3: The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* responds to a changing education context

The relevance of the draft framework in the context of a changing society was highlighted by many participants who suggested that the areas of special educational needs and inclusion have been given much needed greater attention in the draft framework. In this way, it was felt that the draft framework positively responds to the needs of all children and mirrors Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and inclusive pedagogy. While many participants alluded to the relevance of digital literacy and technology, others cautioned against an over emphasis on technology at the cost of Mathematics education. There were strong positive feelings that the draft framework responds to a diverse society and reflects a multilingual and multicultural Ireland by drawing on linguistic diversity as a strength. Mixed responses to teacher and child agency were visible in participant responses. While there was welcome for the recognition of child and teacher agency within the draft framework, concern was expressed around potential difficulties in implementing a new curriculum based on greater flexibility and agency. Implementing and embedding change was identified as a challenge and the significance and importance of teacher responses to a new curriculum were also raised by participants.

Theme 4: Considerations for implementation

The theme of implementation featured strongly with broad agreement that the implementation process must be considered. A need to acknowledge the challenges in implementing a new curriculum and to analyse capacity for change was highlighted, and the point was made that it is in implementation that any change will happen. The importance of a system wide approach was emphasised with many participants anticipating challenges for schools and teachers. Implementing curriculum change was described as a very challenging endeavour, even for the most experienced teacher.

The changes in the draft framework were viewed as significant, with structural changes, the move to learning outcomes, grouping of subjects, and increased flexibility and teacher agency most noted. How teachers view, understand and respond to the draft framework was seen as crucial for successful implementation. Participants highlighted the need to build capacity for change, with a specific need for supports in understanding and implementing learning outcomes, play pedagogy and enacting agency. There were mixed responses regarding structure, with many participants welcoming the integrated approach to subjects, while others expressed concerns that introducing new subjects would lead to overload. Concern was also expressed around a potential reduction of time for specific subjects. Increased flexibility and teacher agency was broadly welcomed and seen as recognising teacher expertise, promoting professionalism and collaboration, and supporting an emergent and responsive curriculum. While teacher agency was evident in the 1999 curriculum, it was felt that this was not fully understood, and schools didn't know they could make choices. Participants were in broad agreement that schools and teachers will need supports to build capacity and confidence to enact agency. While agency and flexibility were viewed positively, the need for clear communication was highlighted, with one participant expressing concerns around ensuring equity of experience for children.

3.1.2 Key message 2

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* proposes changing how the curriculum is structured by moving from subjects in the first four years of primary school to broad curriculum areas which support an integrated approach to teaching and learning. These areas would become more differentiated into subjects from third class onwards to reflect children's growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising their learning.

Analysis identified four themes related to key message 2:
1. Structure and presentation of a redeveloped primary curriculum
2. Curriculum areas and subjects
3. Integration
4. Implications for teachers.

Theme 1: Structure and presentation of a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondents shared an informed and considered view regarding the strengths and limitations of the model. There was positive appreciation noted in terms of the proposed conceptual draft framework, its emphasis on an integrated approach, its inclusive nature, and the focus on five broad curriculum areas. However, one organisation expressed the opinion that the Patron's Programme should be formally recognised as a sixth curriculum area with each school patron having a legal right to design and develop their own.

The seamless continuum of learner experience across the child's education was strongly acknowledged. One organisation noted that the draft framework will enable continuity from *Aistear* on to the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and the emphasis on transitions between the levels was especially appreciated. There was a robust discourse on how the proposed curriculum will support quality teaching and learning. Indeed, organisations were of the view that the new curriculum framework would enable a wide range of innovative pedagogical approaches. A welcome was expressed for the positive promotion of playful approaches, engagement with the outdoors and for encouraging inquiry-based learning.

In considering learning outcomes, the general consensus was that they have the potential to drive an integrated curriculum and may be a means of addressing potential curriculum overload. Reflecting the views shared, one organisation noted a welcome shift from content objectives to learning outcomes. However, there were also some concerns expressed about how learning outcomes might be framed, and some organisations spoke of the need for clarity around the role and structure of learning outcomes to achieve the desired focus on skills, competencies, and child-centred learning.

Theme 2: Curriculum areas and subjects

In considering the five curriculum areas and subjects, there was a general welcome for the broad learning areas although some concerns were raised in relation to the subject content and the groupings. The overall responses from the bilateral meetings indicated that the finalised framework should explicitly state the interrelated relationships between the curriculum areas and subjects.

The introduction of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in Stages 3 and 4 (third to sixth class) was positively received in terms of language acquisition and diversity. However, some organisations expressed concerns about the teaching of English and Gaeilge and queried if the teaching of these languages would be compromised by the introduction of MFL.

Some respondents questioned the removal of Science from the grouping with History and Geography to Mathematics, Science and Technology Education. One group expressed the view that the links between History, Geography and Science in an inquiry approach have been a strength of the 1999 curriculum. Respondents called for the bidirectional relationship between Science and Social and Environmental Education to be foregrounded in the finalised framework.

While the proposed area of Wellbeing was strongly welcomed, some organisations raised concerns about what specific content will be included in Stages 1 and 2. The change of subject name from Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) to Social, Personal and Values Education (SPVE) in the draft framework was queried as not supporting continuity to post-primary. There was a general consensus that Physical Education (PE)should be made more visible in this curriculum area. Some organisations cautioned against moving Dance from PE into Arts Education. While there were concerns expressed that the proposed broader Arts Education could lead to a feeling of curriculum overload among teachers, Drama was seen as offering a context, situation and role for integration through which all subjects can be approached.

Theme 3: Integration

Different voices across the bilateral meetings spoke to a range of educational values and purposes. The proposed integrated learning experiences in Stages 1 and 2 received strong support from respondents. There was a general consensus that a move to subject based learning in Stages 3 and 4 could mitigate against older children experiencing positive integrated learning experiences and therefore some respondents recommended an integrated approach for all stages. However, one group cautioned against a move towards greater integration as they felt this may lead to subjects becoming diluted, reduced and not being given their own instructional times. There was some concern expressed that the draft framework currently presents curriculum areas or subjects as the default starting point for integration. One group commented that the visual

representation of the curriculum areas and subjects in structured pillars does not lend itself to the idea of integration. Indeed, it was suggested by many organisations that there is a need for greater clarity on the type of integration that is envisioned in the draft framework. Reference was made to the fact that a move from the current understanding of multi-disciplinary integration to inter- and trans- disciplinary approaches to integration is a significant culture shift and this needs to be recognised.

Theme 4: Implications for teachers

In general, there was positive recognition for teacher agency and flexibility proposed in the draft framework. A typical response noted was that teachers can be more responsive and develop plans when children's needs and interests emerge, thereby affording teachers the flexibility to engage in a meaningful way. Although agency and flexibility were welcomed by many respondents, in particular, in relation to achieving integration, many respondents expressed their concern over the need to provide teachers with further support in this area. Some suggested that there was a need for a greater understanding of the concepts of an 'integrated curriculum' and 'integrated teaching' and called for clarification, so no ambiguity exists. It was considered significant that teachers would be supported in planning for and teaching an integrated curriculum. This, according to some respondents, would require an integrated approach to teaching and learning to be embedded in initial teacher education (ITE).

The theme of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers featured strongly in almost all bilateral discussions. Respondents were clear that the introduction of a redeveloped primary curriculum would require ongoing, planned CPD to ensure lasting, effective change in teachers' practice, knowledge and confidence. There was much interest in the need for teachers to have a deep foundational knowledge of the curriculum areas and subjects, integration approaches and learning outcomes in order to work successfully with the redeveloped primary curriculum. Concern was expressed about the level of sustained support, resourcing, and guidance that schools and teachers would receive to successfully implement changes set out in the draft framework.

There were some references to the need for systemwide learning to take place to enable dialogue between all stakeholders. This would facilitate the examination of multiple perspectives on decisions relating to issues such as interpretation or meaning of integration, learning outcomes, and teacher agency within the curriculum.

3.1.3 Key message 3

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* makes proposals in relation to a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning. The draft framework emphasises the importance of curriculum integration, inclusive practice, inquiry based-learning and playful pedagogy. Assessment is presented as a central part of teachers' daily practice.

Analysis identified three themes related to key message 3:
1. The vision of pedagogy and assessment
2. Adjustments for consideration
3. Enacting the vision of pedagogy and assessment.

Theme 1: The vision of pedagogy and assessment

This theme captures stakeholders' views on the vision of pedagogy and assessment set out in the draft framework. A significant majority of contributions were positive regarding the approach to pedagogy detailed in the draft framework. The inclusion of specific pedagogies such as inquiry-based learning, social-constructionism, active learning and outdoor learning was commended. Broader approaches such as technology, inclusive practice and integration were also commented on favourably, while the overall vision for pedagogy in terms of the dispositions, values and affective dimensions of learning came in for approval. Reactions to other pedagogies such as play were more mixed. While many organisations specifically welcomed the proposals on play, other stakeholders commented that there was little to promote child-led play in the draft framework, not enough emphasis on play-based pedagogies in senior classes, not enough direction to allow all children to access play, and a dissatisfaction with some of the terminology used, for example, the difference between pedagogy, pedagogical approaches and pedagogical content knowledge. Stakeholders held diverging views in terms of how well the draft framework aligns with *Aistear*. The child agency piece in the draft framework attracted a mixed reaction too, with differing views on how effectively the draft framework places the agentic child at the centre of the learning. In terms of how relationships are represented in the draft framework, some respondents indicated satisfaction with the content, while others suggested amendments. With reference to the section on parents, there was some disagreement with the prominence afforded to parents in the draft framework.

Regarding assessment, there was strong welcome for the vision presented in the draft framework. Respondents supported the conceptualisation of assessment as an essential and critical part of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the vision of the child as the central and most important stakeholder in the assessment process was widely supported. The continuum of assessment presented in the draft framework was welcomed. The re-conceptualisation of assessment to include intuitive, planned and distinct assessment events in the primary school classroom was viewed as aligning well with the rich assessment used in *Aistear* across early childhood settings. This broad approach to assessment was commended for its flexibility, both in terms of capturing rich data to progress learning across the entire curriculum and in terms of the assessment tools that can be used.

Theme 2: Adjustments for consideration

Among the suggestions for additions to the draft framework were pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), rote learning, a glossary to clarify more technical terms, constructivist models and a reference to theorists. Suggested amendments included recommendations for expanding references to play by having more examples of play-based learning and better conceptual clarity regarding the value of play for teaching and learning with all age groups; moving from differentiation to UDL; clarifying parents' role as partners in education; and making adjustments to the piece on relationships to strengthen reference to teacher-child relationships and to include more detail on peer relationships. In terms of assessment, respondents felt that the draft framework needs to include information on teachers' planning and recording of assessment, as well as more clarity on teachers' use of assessment data. In particular, assessment portfolios were suggested as a useful tool. Specific details on the design and language of the graphic for assessment in the draft framework were also highlighted as points to reconsider.

Theme 3: Enacting the vision of pedagogy and assessment

Participants identified key enablers or constraints in enacting the vision of pedagogy and assessment as set out in the draft framework. One frequently mentioned aspect of these enablers and constraints pertains to teacher beliefs and mindset. One major area of concern noted was the importance of teachers reconceptualising assessment in terms of its function, purpose, scope, use and forms. Stakeholders felt that the current perception of assessment will inhibit the vision for assessment in the draft framework becoming a reality.

Teacher self-perception, self-efficacy and agency were mentioned frequently in terms of teachers exercising professional judgement in making decisions regarding pedagogy and assessment. While welcoming the vision of a teacher as a skilled, agentic professional, stakeholders cautioned that teachers will need to have greater confidence and trust in their own judgement and in its value in planning for and progressing children's learning. In this regard, textbooks, as well as expectations and misconceptions on the place of standardised tests were raised as constraints to teachers exercising professional judgement. Other teacher-related factors identified as enablers or constraints included teachers' knowledge of curriculum, of children and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK); teachers' current practice in terms of the range of pedagogies currently in use; practices in relation to reporting, using and sharing assessment data; and parent-teacher and teacher-child relationships.

While welcoming the vision for pedagogy and assessment set out in the draft framework, many stakeholders noted that supports for teachers will be crucial in order for the draft framework to be enacted successfully. Supports identified included the provision of CPD, personnel issues (pupil/teacher ratio, support staff), the content and extent of the toolkit which will accompany the new curriculum and adequate technology resources.

The role and expectations of parents were also singled out as constraining or enabling factors. Stakeholders felt strongly that parents need supports in understanding both the curriculum and the place and function of assessment, particularly around standardised testing. Issues pertaining to parental values and how this might impact on teachers successfully enacting the draft framework were also mentioned as a potential constraint.

Existing norms in schools such as textbooks, leadership style and more traditional methods of assessment (for example, the 'Friday tests') were also flagged as potential enablers or constraints. The impact of standardised testing on the assessment process and in particular on intuitive assessment was repeatedly highlighted as a constraint. It was felt that the validity, use and status of this area of assessment will need to be addressed to support a renewed understanding of assessment.

Other less frequently mentioned but important factors identified by stakeholders which may impact the enactment of the draft framework included the extent to which it aligns with practice in ITE, the extent to which lessons have been learned from rollouts of other curricula and the alignment of the draft framework with the current *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum - Guidelines for Schools* (2007).

3.1.4 Key message 4

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to curriculum connections and transitions between home, preschool and post-primary by providing a vision for children's learning across the eight years of primary school which links with learning experiences provided through *Aistear* and connects with learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle.*

Analysis identified four themes related to key message 4:

1. Transitions
2. The potential of *Aistear* to inform a redeveloped curriculum
3. Pedagogy
4. Supports.

Theme 1: Transitions

In relation to key message 4, there was general appreciation for the consistency in the text and terminology; it was noted that as such it promotes connectivity and supports a clear vision through a shared language. A number of organisations, however, called for ongoing clarity around key terms, such as 'continuity', 'diversity' and 'inclusion', to support transitions across sectors. In considering transitions, the general consensus was that the focus on connectivity between and across all sectors is both a welcome and important educational premise. It was noted that the commitment to connectivity has the potential to ensure a real continuum in education from *Aistear* through to post-primary.

Similarly, the focus on transitions at various stages in a child's educational journey was generally well received. It was noted that awareness of transition points already exists but now needs strengthening, more shared resourcing and communication. The various transition points were the focus of much comment, between *Aistear* and the early years of primary, between Junior and Senior schools, between Primary and Post-primary and even the transition from curriculum areas to subject at Stages 3 and 4 of the draft framework. Reflecting the views shared, it was noted that transitions are now given more prominence across all sectors, but that stronger emphasis, better links, and more clarity is now needed. Such transition points were noted as positive, welcome, tense, challenging and problematic. Resources such as *Mo Scéal* and the *Education Passport* were noted as positive developments supporting transitions, but in need of review.

Some concerns were also expressed about how transitions might be framed more clearly, and the disconnect in the teaching, experiences, and attitudes between primary and post-primary was referenced. Another issue noted was that connections between primary and post-primary appear fragmented. The issue of time, to achieve the desired focus on transitions, was noted together with concern about the impact of such a focus on pupil learning at transition points.

Theme 2: The potential of *Aistear* to inform the redeveloped curriculum

Many organisations expressed the belief that the draft framework positively reflects *Aistear*'s pivotal role in fostering continuity between early childhood and primary education. Some organisations highlighted the fact that the draft framework promotes positive clear links between *Aistear*, the draft framework, and the *Framework for Junior Cycle.* While a number of organisations felt that *Aistear* can help to foster effective continuity from curriculum areas to subjects in the senior classes, others expressed a concern that moving from the themes in *Aistear* to curriculum areas and consequently to subjects may pose a challenge. A small number of organisations

expressed the belief that *Aistear* is not adequately reflected or embedded in the current draft framework and that there is insufficient emphasis on overlaps between *Aistear* and the draft framework. It was also suggested that *Aistear* should no longer be a separate framework or entity within the new primary school curriculum, with the principles of *Aistear* embedded in the redeveloped primary curriculum.

Reflecting on the current implementation of *Aistear* within early childhood and primary school settings, concerns around ongoing misinterpretations and misunderstandings of *Aistear* were elucidated by a number of organisations. These concerns centred around teachers' interpretation of *Aistear* as playtime or a play hour. It was also suggested that schools have different interpretations of *Aistear* and in this way, there is a lack of consistency in its successful implementation across primary schools. There were calls for additional CPD and training to be provided for educators to ensure that there is a greater shared understanding of the importance of *Aistear* and its use in the context of links, connections and transitions across and between sectors. It was suggested that such a greater understanding of *Aistear* is needed to avoid discontinuity between *Aistear* and the primary school curriculum. As referenced earlier, it was also suggested that shared resourcing and improved communication between early childhood and primary sectors could lead to improved practice of *Aistear*.

There was a call for additional and clearer statements about the implications and centrality of *Aistear* in a redeveloped primary curriculum and across all stages of learning. The importance of curricular and pedagogical continuity across the early childhood and primary school contexts was raised by a number of organisations and overall, *Aistear* was seen as an effective means to foster this continuity across both early years and primary sectors. It should also be noted from the bilateral data that the role of *Aistear* in primary schools and in relation to the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum was interpreted and understood differently across the organisations that participated in the bilaterals.

Theme 3: Pedagogy

A range of voices addressed the fundamental relationship between pedagogy and the intended interconnectedness of the education sectors proposed in the draft framework. There was positive support for the development of transferable skills and concepts building the capacity to reinforce transferable skills and concepts across subjects. There was a call for the inclusion of transversal themes and a focus on the social aspect of learning. While there was a broad welcome for the emphasis on such new themes as climate change, sustainability and environmental awareness, others felt that these themes deserved more cognisance in the framework.

There was a general welcome for playful pedagogies and some advocated that such approaches should be retained across all Stages. There was a call for general progression continua and in particular, it was noted that there is a need for shared values across sectors to foster the learner's curiosity, to support child agency and to reinforce the concept of lifelong learning.

Some organisations with particular subject mandates made reference to the importance of specific subjects and their role in a redesigned curriculum. The centrality of Wellbeing at all stages of primary education was emphasised and the value of Arts Education was noted. Project Maths was noted as a success story and there was a call for more connectivity between Mathematics, Science and Technology Education and Junior Cycle Maths.

Theme 4: Supports

To ensure that the vision enshrined in the draft framework becomes a reality, some organisations were clear in their call for supports for teachers in terms of CPD, especially focussed on clarifying interpretations of the draft framework and *to* support the development of key competencies. Some suggested that there should be joint and shared CPD between ECE and Primary Sectors or across all sectors to develop a sense of partnership. Other suggestions included the need for resources such as exemplars and toolkits and the need for time for teachers to engage with transition points and to foster connections. Reference was also made to the need to support parents in terms of terminology and the process of transition.

3.1.5 Key message 5: The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to emerging priorities for children's learning, such as the key competencies, with a focus on children's skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. The draft framework also proposes an increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning and new aspects such as MFL, Technology, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, and a broader Arts Education.

Analysis identified three themes related to key message 5:
1. A curriculum which responds to today's world
2. Implementation of a new curriculum
3. Enabling change

Theme 1: A curriculum which responds to today's world

There was a general consensus that the draft framework is relevant to contemporary society and adequately responds to emerging priorities for 21st century inclusive learning through relevant key competencies and curriculum areas which reflect society today and children's needs. There was a broad appreciation among organisations for the presentation of seven key competencies which were described as welcome, holistic and useful for transition points, providing an important over-arching focus beyond subject areas. The key competency 'Being a digital learner' was seen as particularly relevant and timely. However, a number of organisations highlighted the many ethical and resourcing challenges associated with technology and digital learning in schools. The key competencies 'Fostering wellbeing' and 'Being an active citizen' were also highlighted as significant for contemporary society, though some suggested 'Being well' as a more child-focussed phrasing. At the same time, it was felt that careful thought is needed around the definition of an active citizen and the parameters for fostering wellbeing. There was also a particular welcome for the inclusion of the key competency 'Learning to be a learner' as this was seen to support children's agentic, creative and self-directed learning.

There was a welcome for broader curriculum areas and subjects, with praise for the visibility of an extensive Arts Education curriculum area in the draft framework. Greater emphasis on Wellbeing in the curriculum was viewed as a positive and much needed development for the child, the school and contemporary society. However, several organisations reinforced the importance of PE provision for children and cautioned against PE being subsumed into Wellbeing. Alongside many positive responses to the Patron's Programme within the draft framework were questions around its implementation and a need for greater clarity around what constitutes religious and ethics education. There was an openness to the introduction of MFL on the part of some

organisations who saw this as an opportunity to embrace cultural and linguistic diversity in schools. This was, however, juxtaposed with concerns of other organisations around the practical challenges of introducing additional languages in the primary school. A focus on attitudes, values and dispositions in the draft framework was seen as an important recognition of the affective aspects of learning and the development of the child as a social, moral and active citizen in contemporary society.

Theme 2: Implementation of a new curriculum

The analysis of responses from participating organisations highlighted a widespread welcome for the focus on key competencies and the broader focus on understanding the learning process. The continuity and flexibility evident in highlighting this approach were greatly appreciated and there was a general welcome for the integrated learning model in the draft framework.

Against this backdrop, respondents also turned their attention to the implementation process itself. Based on the comments there was a clear recognition of the link in the draft framework to *Aistear* and the possibilities that it embodies to foster a continuity of conversations between the Primary and Post-primary sectors. A few organisations stressed the importance of continuing the dispositions acquired through *Aistear* into the Primary level classroom and further noted that there will be a very good overlap and multiple synergies in the future between Primary education and the Junior Cycle but clarification on key knowledge and cultural capital is needed. Some organisations who hold particular mandates called for more connections within the draft framework. They advocated for addressing these at the implementation stage, e.g. between Geography/Science and sustainability, and between 'Being mathematical' and 'Being a digital learner'.

The issue of equity across schools in the roll-out of the new curriculum was noted by a few respondents. Equity of access for all children to the broad range of competencies, dispositions, values and attitudes together with access to the range of new and expanded areas is critical. Questions were asked about whose priorities, whose decisions would inform what happens in each school? And where will the competencies meet the real-life experiences of all children? In summary, at curriculum level, there was a call made by several organisations for clarity in the interpretation of the new framework. It was suggested that a creative approach to the integration of all elements will be needed to ensure a balanced, successful and equitable implementation of the framework across the Primary education system.

Theme 3: Enabling change

In the course of providing their considered and informed views on the emerging priorities for children's learning, respondents explored the practical issues for teachers and schools in the implementation process. One view was that operationalising the key competencies will be a big challenge while another perspective identified the challenge for teachers in bringing together all the new approaches and features. A summary of the issues that emerged include many around how the curriculum will be organised, what it will look like and what content and knowledge will be included? The challenge of assessment in moving from content to learning outcomes was noted and the recurring issue of curriculum overload was cited by some respondents, including a concern about what areas might suffer as a consequence. The issue of time allocation was raised and how the greater focus on different aspects of the curriculum will likely result in competing

demands on the system and on teachers in particular. Some questioned the integrity of the school if outside teachers would have to be employed in order to teach new subjects such as MFL. Concern was expressed about how teachers will manage the time to teach and integrate the range of themes proposed in the draft framework. To enable change in teaching and learning, the critical importance of both high quality CPD and ITE that recognises the changing demands of the curriculum was noted. Such support should address both the new subject areas, such as Digital Learning, ERB and Ethics and MFL, and the additional emphasis on existing subjects, for example PE, SPHE and Arts Education. It was noted that teacher knowledge may come under pressure because of new areas having to be implemented. There was a call that the ambiguity that exists around the new areas, and where certain subject areas will sit in the new curriculum, be addressed. In essence, schools and teachers need to be empowered to meet the many changes and new thinking required to sustain effective pedagogy and an environment conducive to learning.

3.1.6 Key message 6

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to agency and flexibility in schools in terms of, for example, teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context and giving more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling. The draft framework is intended to be for every child, and the proposals on agency and flexibility are also about giving children greater opportunities for flexibility and choice in their learning.

Analysis identified three themes related to key message 6:

1. Welcome for child and teacher agency
2. Significance of time and timetabling in a redeveloped curriculum
3. Considerations and challenges associated with agency and flexibility

Theme 1: Welcome for child and teacher agency

There was a broad welcome for the recognition of children as active agents of their own learning and inquiry. Many respondents identified the benefits of supporting children to exercise their agency in the context of individual choice and personal learning experiences. These benefits included the development of children's decision-making skills, children's involvement in their own learning and improvements in children's metacognition and critical thinking skills. Recognition for child agency in the draft framework was seen as appropriate and reflective of modern society as well as potentially supportive of inclusion and diversity in schools.

The recognition for professional agency of teachers and principals in the draft framework was also welcomed by respondents. The affordance of flexibility and choice for teachers was interpreted as professional empowerment and teacher agency was seen as necessary for teachers' personal and professional development. It was felt that this promotion of agency, choice and flexibility is a recognition of teachers' capability to enact the curriculum in their individual school contexts.

Respondents highlighted the interconnected nature of child agency and teacher agency, with agency being described as key in the relationship between teachers and their pupils. According to one respondent, teacher agency cannot exist in isolation of child agency. Overall, respondents

expressed the viewpoint that school, teacher, and child agency is a central message in the draft framework.

Theme 2: Significance of time and timetabling in a redeveloped curriculum

There was a broad view shared by many organisations that the concept of flexible time in the draft framework is a positive development and that it will facilitate change. There was a general welcome for the prospect of discretionary time as a means of enabling teacher choice and agency. One view expressed was that flexible time provides opportunity to maximise the development of teaching and learning and some saw benefits for Arts Education, or the scope for play and playful learning that flexibility would afford. Concern was expressed, however, that flexible time might be given to the Patron's Programme or be overly influenced by teachers' own interests.

The model of time allocation was challenged in light of the diverse nature of schools within the education system. Concerns emerged around the time available for L1 in the Senior classes, a perceived reduction in time for literacy and numeracy, or that Mathematics will have more allocated time than all of the Arts put together. While welcoming the weekly time allocation for Wellbeing, a number of suggestions were made regarding the need to also give a specific time allocation to subjects such as PE and SPHE.

There were a number of calls for time to be made available for professional conversations and collaborative discourses in order to fulfil the aims of the draft framework itself. Further to this was the suggestion made that planning time needs to be incorporated into Staff time – again to realise the new spaces that will be available for teaching and learning.

On a wider issue, the importance of time being made available for the implementation of the framework was stressed, especially in the light of all the change and demands in schools post-COVID-19. There was a call for support for the many changes proposed and it was noted that exemplars are needed around flexible time and perhaps some projects that could be organised in the time available.

Theme 3: Considerations and challenges associated with agency and flexibility

A welcome for agency and flexibility in a redeveloped curriculum was juxtaposed with caution and consideration for their inclusion in the draft framework. While respondents were predominantly supportive of such agency and flexibility, they outlined concerns and challenges around the interpretation and implementation of a curriculum which fosters agency and choice. Many questions were posed, including how will children be given choice and what will teacher agency look like? Specific reference was made to the possibility of different assessment choices being offered to children as a reflection of child agency and voice

Supports needed to enable teachers to implement a curriculum based on agency and flexibility were highlighted by various organisations. Specific examples of supports included exemplars of agentic practice in schools, bespoke CPD for teachers and support for professional agency. It was also suggested that scaffolding and support around the use of flexible time would be needed within school communities. Respondents illuminated the fact that teachers need reassurance that they will be supported in enacting change and this support must come from the system, but also from leadership in schools.

Some respondents argued that a more explicit definition of child agency is needed and that the concept of agency needs to be expanded and teased out with teachers. There was a concern expressed that a balanced curriculum may not be implemented if teachers lean towards favouring specific areas of the curriculum over others when implementing a curriculum based on agency and flexibility. Other areas of concern related to ensuring that basic literacy and numeracy skills would continue to be prioritised, despite the introduction of a curriculum which promotes flexibility and choice. With regard to SEN contexts, the point was made that suitable and recommended methodologies should be drawn upon when promoting child agency. There were recommendations for UDL to be described and further discussed in the document and the need for clarification around assessment methods in the context of teacher and child agency was addressed by respondents. The need to provide practical approaches for teachers was highlighted in relation to agency as it has been consistently across all key messages. The importance of sharing a common understanding of agency across primary and post-primary sectors was also alluded to by respondents.

While freedom and choice were seen as positive assets in the draft framework, the concern that autonomy and agency can be misunderstood was also evident. It was clear that respondents felt that ongoing professional support will be needed to help teachers foster agency and flexibility in the context of a redeveloped curriculum.

3.1.7 Considerations for curriculum enactment

The consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* was designed around the six key messages associated with the proposals in the framework. In the course of the bi-lateral meetings on the draft framework, some participants addressed issues which did not fall within these six key messages, but which generally addressed 'Considerations for curriculum enactment'. To acknowledge the investment of the stakeholder groups that attended for bi-lateral meetings, this data was analysed along with the data situated within the six key messages using the Braun and Clarke (2006) method of qualitative data analysis.

Analysis identified the following themes related to 'Considerations for curriculum enactment':
1. Time and space for professional reflection and dialogue
2. Professional development
3. Support structures
4. System and infrastructure issues
5. Policy alignment to support and enable curriculum realisation
6. Timelines for curriculum enactment

Theme 1: Time and space for professional reflection and dialogue

Respondents and participants suggested that school leaders, teachers and school staffs will require time and space to reflect, to plan the process, to analyse the capacity for change and to examine how the new proposals can be implemented in their context. It was considered important that school communities would have time to explore, experiment and become familiar with the new curriculum. Time for professional collaborations and conversations with colleagues was also mentioned, as was time for whole-school planning and time and opportunities for teachers to process the 'messy discomfort of change', as it was described, while being supported as to how to go about change. An initial low stakes environment in schools was suggested to allow time for new developments to embed.

Theme 2: Professional development

As a high level of initial support was considered by respondents to be critical, it was suggested that supports to schools, teachers and school leaders be front-loaded, with national high-quality CPD beginning in advance of the publication of curriculum specifications. It was noted that the spirit in which the framework is introduced is very important in order to lay strong foundations for the curriculum specifications that will follow. Scaffolded and sustained support from the professional development services to schools to help to lay the groundwork, to mitigate any perceptions of overload, to lead conversations about curriculum change and development and to guide this process with context-specific support were reported as necessary. The importance of school-based support and the potential of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) as a powerful mechanism to support teachers and school leaders with many of the proposals contained within the draft framework were also mentioned.

Respondents were clear on the need for both Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses and CPD for in-service teachers to include a focus on the new curriculum areas and new terminology. Child voice and responding to children's emerging interests were clearly emphasised. Respondents recommended serious consideration of teacher agency as a feature of professional development.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

Embedding curriculum changes in ITE was noted as critical. A need for ITE colleges that span the sectors was also expressed, particularly the Early Childhood and Primary sectors with some suggestion that Post Primary should also feature, suggesting an altered structure within the system. More systematic shared CPD development between the primary school sector and the early childhood sector, aimed at developing an overlapping/shared understanding of child-led pedagogy with young children including play-based and child-led inquiry pedagogies was suggested. Communication and learning across sectors, it was suggested, might begin at school leader level. Respondents highlighted that teachers will require resources and guidance on resources to support play-based pedagogy. It was also mentioned that students beginning ITE should attend the Gaeltacht for the first few weeks of their course in order to enhance their standard of Irish.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Feedback from respondents indicates that school leaders, teachers and school staffs will require ongoing access to and opportunities for high-quality and school based CPD for necessary upskilling, including upskilling in technology. It was also suggested that CPD will be required to develop teachers' knowledge and expertise in the areas of pedagogy and assessment, with explicit detail regarding how best to approach planning and teaching in an integrated, cross-curricular manner. Noted also was the support required to help the transition from 11 subjects to five curriculum areas. Specific mention was made as to how teachers will need targeted support and CPD to enhance their content and pedagogical knowledge in PE and Wellbeing to ensure a balanced, consistent understanding of Wellbeing. CPD with a focus on differentiation, inclusion, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), celebrating diversity, and emphasising that 'the curriculum is for every child' was proposed, as was full CPD on play and playful pedagogy. The possibility of CPD and support via Zoom or Teams to check in regularly with teachers and schools was also raised. Another idea suggested was to consider using CPD summer courses as a way of giving teachers time to explore the redeveloped curriculum.

Exploring new ideas such as 'the agentic teacher' was mentioned in terms of necessitating meaningful mediation, reflection and in many cases a shift in mindset to embed change. It was suggested that such a mindset shift was needed among the teaching profession and across the system taking in matters such as learning, teaching and assessment. Also mentioned was teacher coaching and mentoring. The importance of giving ownership to teachers was acknowledged, to engage with them on developments and to listen to what they have to say. The view was also expressed that opportunities for teachers to re-discover and develop their own skills (e.g., creativity) and competencies through CPD will be helpful. The point was also made that teachers will need to be supported with explicit explanations and examples of how to develop choice and agency for children. Consideration and training around what homework might look like in the new curriculum was also recommended. It was commented also that textbook dependency issues will need to be addressed early on.

Theme 3: Support structures

Peer collaboration and learning within schools and extended communities of learning on a local / regional basis were identified as necessary supports. It was pointed out that this will involve connecting and creating a network of teachers across schools so that they can share new approaches and current developments in terms of, as referenced previously in relation to ITE, good classroom practice in curriculum enactment.

A well-equipped online toolkit, updated annually, with examples of children's work, examples of how the key competencies translate into practice and how they are going to be embedded in Learning Outcomes together with examples of effective, purposeful integration was suggested to support teachers' practice. Support through Irish for all teachers but especially for teachers who are teaching through Irish was also mentioned. Some respondents also thought it necessary that support materials be published in Irish and New Languages.

Support for schools and boards of management on how best to use and promote agency and flexibility was proposed as was support for schools to undertake whole-school planning to create and make the most of the learning environments available to them, learning environments that reflect the implicit messages of the curriculum framework.

Theme 4: System and infrastructure issues

The point was made that the physical infrastructure of schools may need to change in some circumstances with, for example, larger rooms to promote active and collaborative learning. Respondents considered that appropriate facilities and physical space will be needed to accommodate the increased time for PE. Mentioned also was that the pupil-teacher ratio needs to be further reduced to implement the *Primary Curriculum Framework* in the way intended, facilitating play-based pedagogies and active learning effectively.

The view was expressed that Digital Learning will need to be adequately resourced with greater investment in the digital infrastructure and hardware in schools. Respondents also noted that resources to facilitate and encourage the use of the outdoor environment for learning will be required as will support in how to maximize resources already available in schools. It was suggested that careful consideration will need to be given to how new areas of learning will be taught and whether to recruit specialist teachers in certain areas e.g., MFL, Music and PE. Also

mentioned was that classroom assistants for every school would help to facilitate this level of change. Respondents also considered that communicating the importance of CPD days for teachers to the general public will be important.

Theme 5: Policy alignment to support and enable curriculum realisation

Respondents and participants noted that a certain level of system-wide change will be required – for example working with the Department of Education (DoE) and other stakeholders to share clear, consistent messages e.g., regarding what the new expectations are in relation to planning, inspections etc., with inspection models reflecting the new framework. The point was made that a move from the term 'inspector' to 'consultant', where the emphasis is more on advice and support, would be helpful. In terms of inclusive practice, respondents indicated that clear language and thinking in this space needs to be decided at system level. It was stated that the rights and views of parents need to be taken account of.

Respondents suggested that the link between *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the new *Primary Curriculum Framework* needs to be very clear. It was also proposed that Mo Scéal and the Education Passport be reviewed to ensure coherence with the priorities of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*. A need to move towards a more child-centred approach to assessment that is of benefit to the child, parent and teacher was stated as was the need to change the policy on standardised testing. It was further suggested that alignment across all documentation and policy in terms of assessment will be necessary.

Theme 6: Timelines for curriculum enactment

Following the disruption associated with Covid-19, the concern was expressed that the timeline outlined might be overly ambitious in preparing the sector for the change to follow. Concerns were also expressed regarding the capacity of teachers to absorb such a level of change. However, it was also noted that school staffs adapted professionally and agentically to change during and post-Covid 19 lockdowns. The 2021-2024 window was seen as a crucial opportunity to lay down the foundations for the curriculum changes and developments that will follow.

3.2 Focus groups

Data gathered during focus groups was recorded by note-takers and each breakout room had a facilitator and notetaker. Following a review of the notes immediately after the event to confirm that they reflected the discussion, independent analysts carried out an initial triage of the notes through the lens of the six key messages, which were also the basis for the discussion in the focus groups. Subsequently, all the data associated with each key message was compiled into a master document, and each was subsequently analysed by an independent analyst using the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic data analysis process.

3.2.1 Key message 1

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* is designed to build on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum such as children's enjoyment of learning and teachers' increased use of active learning methodologies. At the same time, the draft framework responds to key challenges which schools have identified such as curriculum overload and using assessment in a meaningful way to inform teaching and learning.

Findings

The general opinion expressed by focus group participants in relation to the 1999 curriculum was one of approval of that curriculum's principles while also accepting that its implementation was not without its problems. There was also a clear acknowledgement of the social and educational changes that have occurred in the past two decades, and the need to revise thinking and approaches in our schools to meet the challenges they bring.

Among the successes of the Primary School Curriculum (1999), it was noted, was the constructivist approach it espoused, but that approach was difficult to implement because the curriculum was overloaded. However, it was also suggested that the 1999 curriculum had huge variety of learning, which could be seen as overload, but had something for every child. The curriculum's emphasis on active and discovery learning was noted but it was believed that its implementation often depended on teachers' interests/strengths, with a focus on content rather than on skills. Another view shared was that the draft framework is not radically different from the 1999 curriculum, suggesting that teachers would see the similarities to the 1999 curriculum if those similarities were highlighted more and presented as a progression that builds on what came before. The draft framework's proposals on learning areas were seen as addressing the isolation of subjects which was counter to developing deep and meaningful learning. A view was also expressed that there was a lot of repetition and overlap in the 1999 curriculum, and that the draft framework's proposals will enable teachers to dig deeper, through integration and thematic work.

The point was made that today's society is more complex and diverse, and this well-researched framework addresses inclusion issues very well. Another perspective noted the much greater diversity in the school population since 1999 and felt that these changes must be reflected in the draft framework. The influence of changes in the wider society on schools was acknowledged too, one example given being the emphasis on digital learning as reflecting societal needs. There was a suggestion that the emphasis on Wellbeing in the draft framework was a good place to build on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum. It was observed that many teachers have moved well beyond the 1999 curriculum in their practice and that in many ways schools are ahead of the framework. For this reason, a curriculum update in the form of the framework was timely.

The issue of curriculum overload was the subject of a significant number of contributions to the focus groups. There was little dissent from the view that the current curriculum is overcrowded, with some believing that it contributes to teacher stress, but opinions on whether the draft framework proposals would resolve the issue were divided. A number of participants noted the intentions of the draft framework to reduce the curriculum overload, but considerable doubt was expressed about this, if new areas of learning were being introduced without reducing or removing any of the previous content. The structure of curriculum areas was welcomed, but it was feared that this would essentially translate to the teaching of 13 subjects in practice. Another perspective was that the content in the 1999 curriculum was more specific and the learning outcomes here might be too vague. Yet another view was that the framework will not address overload because it lacks the clarity of the objectives in the current curriculum, resulting in more work for teachers outside of the classroom. The introduction of MFL was seen as potentially adding further to the overload problem, as was the increased emphasis on assessment (interpreted as written records). There were few comments on possible solutions to the overload question, but one suggestion was that thematic and integrated learning can be part of the solution, supported by flexible timetabling.

The significant provision of CPD for the 1999 curriculum was recalled and noted approvingly by a number of participants, with questions asked about the likely nature and extent of support for teachers towards implementation of the proposals in the draft framework. A few contributors expressed the view that successful implementation required that teachers firstly needed to understand the rationale for proposed change. For example, one point of view was that the research about how children learn that has informed the draft framework needs to be disseminated to teachers to support implementation of changes. Echoing the same view that emerged from bilateral meetings, the view was expressed that teachers should be given time to explore the new ideas and language before total implementation is expected, with a toolkit and supports to be made available.

Two observations noted specific concerns regarding the draft framework's proposals. One was that there had been a significant gap between the publication of the 1999 curriculum and the Guidelines for children with GLD and that this should be a consideration going forward. Another concern was that the approach to subject development in the 1999 curriculum appeared to have been designed for single class units and presented great difficulty in small schools and multiclass situations. The framework shows potential to address this issue.

3.2.2 Key message 2
The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* proposes changing how the curriculum is structured by moving from subjects in the first four years of primary school to broad curriculum areas which support an integrated approach to teaching and learning. These areas would become more differentiated into subjects from third class onwards to reflect children's growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising their learning.

Findings

Focus groups devoted a great deal of their attention to matters of structure in the draft framework. Given what is possibly the most significant structural issue – the setting out of

proposed four stages – many participants expressed their opinions on those stages, in particular the proposed thematic emphasis in Stages 1 and 2, followed by the subject-based emphasis from third to sixth classes in Stages 3 and 4.

There was strong approval for the proposed approaches in Stages 1 and 2. It was seen as a positive development, with integrated and thematic learning viewed very favourably. The freedom to plan learning in that way was considered to lessen pressure to check the box and say something has been done. *Aistear* was seen as embodying this, as the thematic approach ties in well with the philosophy and pedagogy of *Aistear*. The prominence of play-based active learning was welcomed. The thematic approach was termed refreshing and a way for teachers to focus on big ideas and to create meaningful integration. One perspective held that a focus on broad, urgent areas such as climate change is where integration works best and accommodates the richness and diversity in all classrooms.

Opinions on the greater differentiation by subjects proposed for Stages 3 and 4 were more varied. The general view was that some narrowing was advisable in the senior classes, mainly as preparation for subject-based programmes in post-primary schooling, and to ease children's transition to post-primary. Yet some participants expressed a desire for the extension of thematic learning through the third and fourth stages. To illustrate this point, for example, one school leader described it as more interesting, fun and relatable for children, while another saw it as important that cross-curricular project work would be extended into the senior classes, using the flexibility offered by the learning outcomes.

Among reservations expressed by some participants was the potential for a sharp or dramatic transition in children's learning at the end of second class. Concerns were also expressed about multi-grade classrooms where, for example, second and third class were based in the same room. An example of these concerns is that in such a setting, this could result in gaps or overlaps, and potentially a fragmented curriculum. There was also a worry that teachers might end up being seen as junior or senior teachers in the Stages structure.

A number of queries were raised about the detail of subject specifications for Stages 3 and 4. One such was that it was difficult to envisage a curriculum based on the abstract nature of the draft framework and they would like to see examples of learning outcomes from across the curriculum areas and subjects.

Regarding the learning outcomes, there was general welcome for the draft framework's proposals. One participant welcomed the focus on a finishing point, rather than on a starting point with learning objectives. The learning outcomes were considered to give teachers more autonomy and agency in planning. Another view was that broad learning outcomes would help to make the curriculum more inclusive. However, there was also the opinion that learning outcomes that were broad and vague are more demanding on teachers than specific objectives. Another expressed the view that learning outcomes were possible for most subjects, but difficult for English and languages.

The draft framework's setting out of key competencies was viewed with general approval. It was suggested that the competencies were good, reflected how life is lived in contemporary society, and are worth working towards in education. In a view that has emerged in both bilateral meetings and the focus groups in relation to several of the key messages, a school leader

commented that the draft framework takes account of changes in Irish society since 1999, and how schools might respond to the challenges these pose. 'Learning to be a learner' and 'Being a digital learner' were noted as examples of competencies that respond effectively to those challenges.

The possible introduction of MFL received a considerable number of responses. Those responses overall were favourable to the proposal, but they were qualified by two main concerns. These centred on time allocations in terms of where the time will be taken from and on human resources in terms of who will teach these languages, given that many teachers will not be proficient in them. Among suggested strategies to resolve the latter concerns, one suggestion was for generalist teachers to teach 'core subjects' while others might specialise in areas of strength or interest. Availing of the skills of parents and others in the community who were native speakers in the designated languages was another suggestion.

Fears were expressed that the teaching of Maths skills could suffer in the context of a move to more technology, to STEM as a curriculum area, to digital skills being privileged over Maths skills and to greater emphasis on social Maths.

The draft framework's proposals on 'Fostering wellbeing' met with strong support. The main issue here was whether Wellbeing should be taught as a subject or area in its own right or should it instead be integrated into the wider curriculum, where its relevance to several areas was noted. 'Being a digital learner' was another competency that attracted comment from participants, its significance in current and future education emphasised. Questions were raised about whether technology should be taught as a subject area or should be employed as a tool or methodology in the broader service of the curriculum.

A number of participants took issue with the prominence of the Patron's Programme, in particular its listing on equal footing with other areas of the curriculum. The equal time allocation to the combined areas within SESE and Religious Education / ERB and Ethics was considered inappropriate by some participants.

Finally, curriculum implementation issues were remarked upon. The main concern was that the draft framework proposals could actually exacerbate the problem of an overcrowded curriculum, unless some existing subjects / areas were to make way for newly-introduced areas. Participants emphasised the need for good models of learning outcomes, planning templates for whole-school planning, and in general, time to become familiar with the new structures and presentation.

3.2.3 Key message 3
The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* makes proposals in relation to a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning. The draft framework emphasises the importance of curriculum integration, inclusive practice, inquiry based-learning and playful pedagogy. Assessment is presented as a central part of teacher's daily practice.

Findings

In responding to the draft framework proposals on supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches, participants voiced support for the importance of play and for what might be broadly termed 'co-operative learning'.

There was welcome for what was seen as a shift to a child-led, responsive pedagogy that links with the philosophy of *Aistear*, and was characterised as a cultural shift in pedagogy. However, the point was made that there is little reference to pedagogical proposals in the draft framework. It was proposed that the role of play for learning should receive more emphasis in the framework and be often revisited. In the context of calls for more play, more movement and more outdoor learning, it was noted that play as a developmentally appropriate approach for infants is not well understood and needs to be made more explicit.

In terms of classroom approaches, it was suggested that the draft framework could be improved by placing more emphasis on collaborative work amongst children. The emphasis on integrated learning was considered very positive. The practice of team teaching was recommended for all schools, not just for special schools. The importance of enjoyment was noted, particularly by parents as a factor in how their children learned best. Use of different approaches and methodologies was affirmed as benefiting children. Among other remarks on broad pedagogical approaches, some parents said they wanted their child to be proficient in using technology but not to have technology being the main instrument of how their children learn. Language immersion was seen as a positive in increasing language proficiency. The potential of teaching aspects of subjects through Irish was highlighted as good practice by two participants and it was suggested that Irish should be benchmarked to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages.

In relation to the proposal on assessment in the draft framework, the thrust of responses among focus group participants was of strong support for assessment that is intuitive and formative. The terms intuitive, formative, informal and assessment for learning were used interchangeably by participants, despite their specific meanings in assessment terminology. However, it seemed that the range of terms were all parts of a broad current of approval for greater choice in how assessment is practised. Indeed, some contributions suggested that classroom assessment practice has already moved in this direction, and welcomed the draft framework's proposals for what, it was claimed, was in fact already happening. Intuitive assessment was particularly welcomed as a practice, in that it affirmed teachers' professional skills in assessing children's learning and it supported planning for the children's next steps.

The consideration of how much assessment information needs to be recorded also emerged as an issue in the groups. The welcome for greater intuitive and unplanned assessment was paralleled by a desire for reduced paperwork and a belief that much assessment information didn't need to be documented. There was welcome for the placing of the child at the centre of assessment. However, there was also a view that a continuum of assessment was needed, that both standardised testing and informal assessment had their place and their purpose. While child self-assessment was perceived as a positive, this was qualified by questions on children's capacity to self-assess, given their age, or level of understanding and whether it might be preferable to give feedback to the parents of younger children rather than to the children themselves. As with many issues associated with curriculum change, participants noted that CPD, exemplification and

resources will be required for teachers to engage with the vision of assessment proposed in the draft framework. Specific reference was made in this context, as in other contexts, on the particular challenges of multi-grade settings.

3.2.4 Key message 4

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to curriculum connections and transitions between home, preschool and post-primary by providing a vision for children's learning across the eight years of primary school which links with learning experiences provided through *Aistear* and connects with learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle.*

Findings

Participants in the focus groups expressed very positive views on *Aistear* and on its role in fostering continuity in young children's learning experiences as they transition from early childhood settings into primary schools' infant classes. There is some uncertainty in the data from the focus groups as to what participants are referring to when speaking about *Aistear* and whether this means something other than a pedagogy of play. It appears that the terms are used interchangeably at times, but also that participants assign different meanings to the terms. This was also the case in the data from the bilateral meetings.

The links between the key competencies of the draft framework and the principles of *Aistear* were noted and strongly commended. The draft framework was viewed as being well-aligned with *Aistear*, with good continuity between *Aistear*, *Síolta* and early primary, and the potential for facilitating a more seamless transition from *Aistear*. The presence of *Aistear* in infant classes was seen as giving children a sense of security as they are familiar with it from their early years setting. However, it was argued that a greater emphasis on play was needed, with particular reference to the junior end of the primary school. Concern was expressed about the use of curriculum areas for infant classes as set out in the draft framework. It was suggested that this hampered the transition between the preschool years and the early years of primary. Furthermore, the concern was that this would impact how people engaged in and planned for teaching and learning. Issues around the transition of children with additional needs into primary school were raised, as was the issue of school readiness. Overall, there was considerable concern for supporting successful transitions from pre-school to primary school and the ways in which curriculum continuity between *Aistear* and the new Primary School Curriculum could contribute.

When focus group participants considered the transition from primary to the post-primary school, there were two main strands in their views. One set of views emphasised the need for preparation for children's transfer to a different learning environment, while the other view was protective of the primary teaching and learning environment. The impact of this transition on children and the lack of continuity currently emerged as concerns, with particular reference to Mathematics and languages. While many suggestions emerged around how this transition might be improved, much of the discussion focused on issues outside the scope of the draft framework and related to operational matters in schools, lack of value for primary school experiences and pedagogical discontinuities. However, curriculum alignment was seen as contributing to positive transitions and MFL was noted as having potential to enhance the experience for children.

On the more general issue of transitions between sectors, there was agreement that transition processes should be formalised and standardised, though without elaboration on what this would mean or look like. The point was made that the key competencies were a great way to connect children's learning with both the early childhood sector and the junior cycle. There was approval of the links proposed between the curriculum for primary and junior cycle, but a view emerged that reform at senior cycle needed to be aligned and linked to junior cycle too. A suggestion was aired about the potential of co-professional learning across early childhood, primary and post-primary.

Finally, other transition points such as between Stages and between schools were referenced, with an acknowledgement of the need for teachers and schools to have the information necessary to support children

3.2.5 Key message 5

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to emerging priorities for children's learning, such as the key competencies, with a focus on children's skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. The draft framework also proposes an increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning and new aspects such as MFL, Technology, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, and a broader Arts Education.

Findings

Participants in the focus groups were welcoming of the broad direction of the draft framework's proposals in relation to the competencies and new areas, as well as of the particulars of specific proposals. Groups considered a number of priorities, but the focus of most participants' comments was on the key competencies, seven of which are set out in the draft framework. Among general comments on the competencies were that they reflected how life is lived in contemporary society, that they allowed for a more child-centred curriculum, that they helped to convey balance in the curriculum and that they encouraged a more holistic approach to teaching and learning. There was significant approval for and comment on a number of competencies, namely 'Being an active citizen', 'Being a digital learner', 'Communicating and using language', 'Fostering wellbeing', and 'Learning to be a learner'.

While the thrust of comments from teachers, school leaders and parents was that the competencies were key skills that will be needed for the future, comments also reflected a balance of concern between children's current learning as children, and the role of the competencies in their future lifelong learning. Regarding children's current learning, it was remarked that the competencies reflected current practice in some classrooms, but concerns were also voiced, including a degree of uncertainty around the relationship between the competencies and learning outcomes, how they are to be assessed, whether some children will be excluded with 'Being a digital learner' given as a particular reference, and how exactly they would be implemented without adding to overload.

Consequent on concerns around implementation, the issue of teachers' professional development featured prominently in observations made in the focus groups. The issue was raised in relation to ICT and digital learning and very pointedly in relation to the proposed introduction of MFL. While the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism were acknowledged, it was felt that a majority of

teachers would require specific training in teaching the new languages, as most would likely not be competent in them.

Regarding 'Being a digital learner', there was general approval of the promotion of children's digital skills, although the risk of possible over-emphasis on digital learning and concerns around online safety were raised. Across participants' responses and observations, there was evidence of varied interpretations of what the actual nature of some competencies or learning areas would be. For example, while 'Being an active citizen' was seen in some instances as reflective of a diverse modern Ireland, on other occasions queries were raised as to whether the competence was appropriate as a responsibility of primary schools at all.

Finally, the perennial question of adequately resourcing change was raised, with the funding of ICT infrastructure in schools a frequent topic. Resource implications for the introduction of MFL were also flagged.

3.2.6 Key message 6

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to agency and flexibility in schools in terms of, for example, teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context and giving more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling. The draft framework is intended to be for every child, and the proposals on agency and flexibility are also about giving children greater opportunities for flexibility and choice in their learning.

Findings

Proposals for greater agency for teachers, and increased flexibility in their planning and teaching, met with strong approval from participants in focus groups. Although that approval was qualified in some instances, a range of comments and responses noted the benefits of the proposals.

Greater agency was viewed as recognition of the skillset of teachers, as giving trust back to [the] teacher, and as building a vision of the teacher as an agentic professional. There was welcome for the teacher's decision making, especially in deciding key learning priorities, and in making assessment judgements regarding children's progress. Some responses linked agency and flexibility as dual professional actions, both giving teachers greater autonomy in their practice by, for example, allowing greater freedom from reliance on textbooks, enhancing School Self-Evaluation, and improving relationships between teachers and the inspectorate.

As with other proposals for change, some in the focus groups wondered what terms like agency and flexibility would look like in the daily life of schools and in teachers' practice, given the variety of school contexts and school culture, and demands by the inspectorate for consistency in approaches. Other concerns emerged the extent of agency, whether there could be too much agency, if such agency could be a threat to a balanced curriculum and if basic standards need to be identified for interpretation at the local level.

Flexibility in planning, in timetabling and in allocating time to curriculum areas was the subject of a number of responses. The proposed greater flexibility was largely welcomed as a further recognition and valuing of teachers' professional agency. Examples given of the beneficial uses of

time flexibility included being able to give time to local events to support links between school and community, or where a prolonged engagement with a project required extended time. Options set out in the draft framework on time allocation for languages received attention where the main issue was the local school context, for example, a school with a large population of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) where the school's priority was the teaching of English or a Gaelscoil that would welcome more choice in prioritising the language they felt needed the time more.

On the issue of time flexibility, different perspectives emerged. On the one hand, the freedom for teachers to pursue specific areas of interest intensively was welcomed, but on the other hand concern was expressed about the parameters within which schools/teachers might use this flexibility or the risk that a teacher would spend more time on areas that did not necessarily enhance learning but reflected teacher interests. Concerns about planning across the school were raised by some school leaders who noted that it would present leaders with a challenge in monitoring the individual teacher's planning where coordination across multiple class groups is necessary to ensure consistent curriculum coverage [referring to the context of a large school]. They further felt that there were implications for school leaders in managing planning for and recording the use of flexible time and establishing ways in which spontaneity could be accommodated.

In the focus groups, some contributions were of a more general nature, yet related in some way to the issues of agency and flexibility. For example, fears were expressed that a currently overcrowded curriculum could come under even greater pressure, and that one result could be to constrain teacher agency and choice. There was a plea that teachers be allowed to encounter new curriculum ideas over time, and not have to implement them all together.

The concept of the child as an agentic learner received very little attention in this set of discussions, but one contributor did raise the issue, saying that the draft framework must cater for that idea of child agency, seeing it expressed in the competency 'Learning to be a learner.'

3.3 Questionnaires

In Phase 1 of the consultation, parent/guardian and educator questionnaires were conducted using the Microsoft Forms platform. In Phase 1, there were 158 responses to the parent/guardian questionnaire and 208 responses to the educator form. Following feedback on the Phase 1 questionnaires, they were refined for Phase 2 to simplify responses and reduce completion time, and they were moved to the Survey Hero platform. To align with changes to the submission template for Phase 2, an additional question was included in the questionnaires where participants could reflect on their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. The changes contributed to a significantly increased response rate in Phase 2; 2618 parents/guardians responded to one or more questions, with 927 completing the full questionnaire; 957 educators responded to one or more questions, 316 of whom completed the full questionnaire. The findings in this section reflect completed questionnaires. For text response answers where respondents could add additional information, the number of responses is less as these were optional. The original verbatim text responses are available in the companion Technical Report.

In the following sections, a selection of graphs/charts are used to illustrate parent/guardian and educator responses. Each graph/chart shown contains an individual identifier. Different types of graphs were generated by the different platforms used for Phase 1 and Phase 2. In some instances, to enhance clarity, the original data has been used to generate new graphs. Where appropriate, data from parent/guardian or educator responses were combined to give an overview of responses from each group across Phase 1 and Phase 2. The full report for each questionnaire is available in the companion Technical Report.

3.3.1 Vision and principles

Participants were asked to what extent they would agree/disagree with statements on the vision and principles in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*.

Educator responses in Phase 1 were largely positive. For example, a majority of educators from Phase 1 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the vision presented is appropriate (72%) and that the principles will support schools in developing their whole-school plan (62%).

In Phase 2, both parents/guardians and educators gave their opinions on the vision and principles presented. The chart below (Figure 1) demonstrates that over 60% of educators 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the vision captures the purpose of primary education. When asked if the principles presented convey what is valued in primary education, over 60% 'agreed/strongly' agreed, while 12% 'disagreed/strongly disagreed'. A significant proportion of the respondents (26% and 25% respectively) selected 'unsure' in responding to these statements.

Figure 1: Phase 2, educator questionnaire, question 6

Phase 2, Educator Questionnaire, Question 6:

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements: In the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework:

Number of responses: 316

The purpose of primary education is captured in the vision

2%
13%
8%
26%
51%

The principles convey what is valued in primary education.

2%
13%
10%
25%
50%

■ Strongly Agree   ■ Agree   ■ Unsure   ■ Disagree   ■ Strongly Disagree
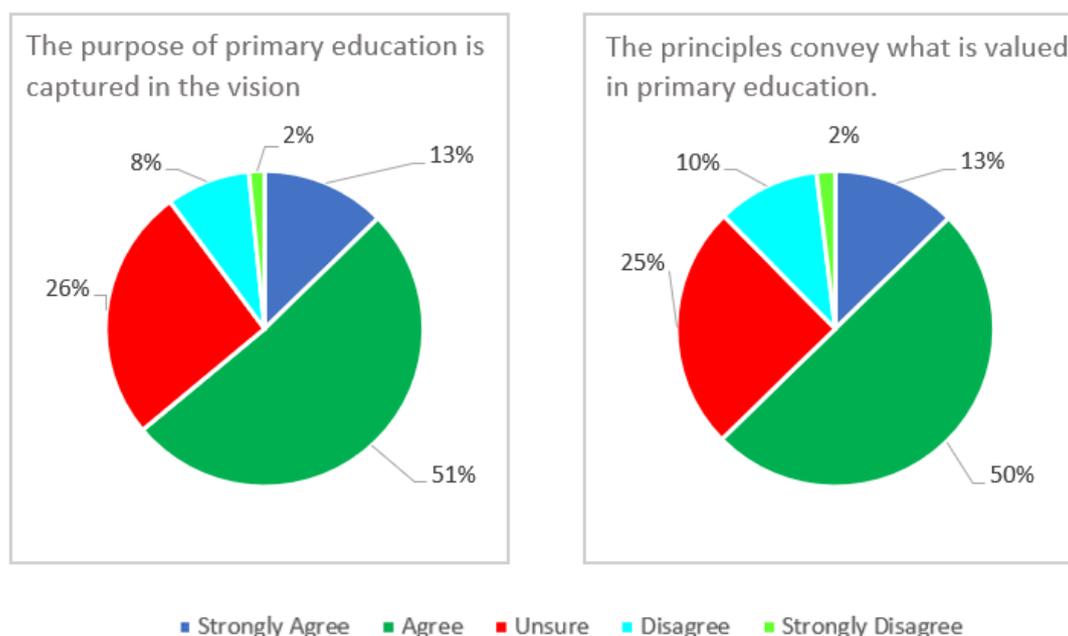
Parent/guardian responses in Phase 2 (Figure 2 below) were similarly positive; almost 70% 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the purpose of education is captured in the vision of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* and 72% 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the principles convey what is valued in primary education. Again, a significant proportion of the respondents selected 'unsure' in responding to these statements.

Figure 2: Phase 2, parent questionnaire, question 3

Phase 2, Parent Questionnaire, Question 3:

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements: In the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework:

Number of responses: 927

The purpose of primary education is captured in the vision

2%
5%
16%
24%
53%

The principles convey what is valued in primary education.

1%
7%
20%
17%
55%

■ Strongly Agree   ■ Agree   ■ Unsure   ■ Disagree   ■ Strongly Disagree
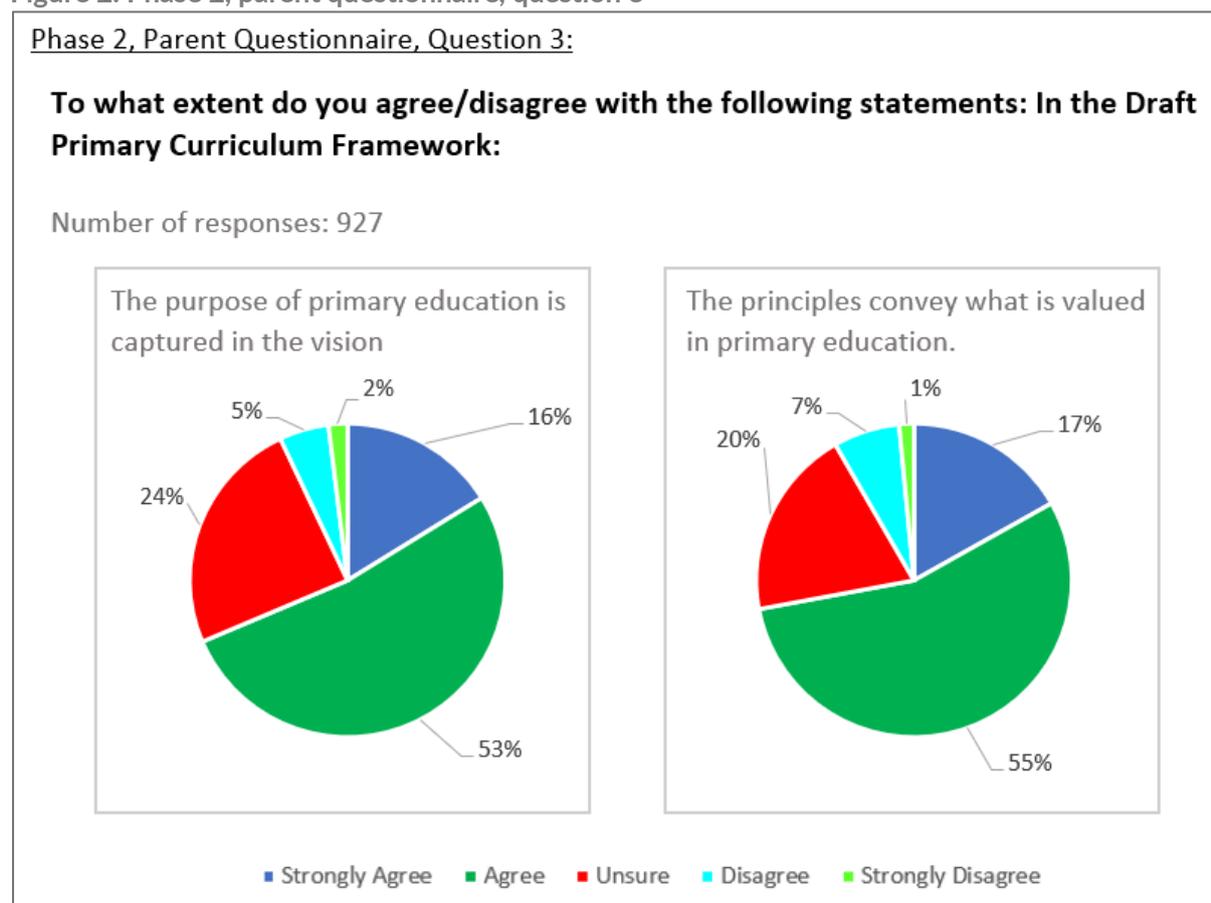
3.3.2 Agency, flexibility, and inclusion

Participants were invited to respond to statements related to agency, flexibility, and inclusion as presented in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Based on the responses to the questionnaires in both Phase 1 and Phase 2, it is evident that the majority of parents/guardians and educators surveyed believe that the draft framework supports the inclusion of all children. More than 85% of parents/guardians surveyed across Phase 1 and Phase 2 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the draft framework ensures all children are included in all areas of learning. Educators across Phase 1 and Phase 2 were less positive; 51% 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the draft framework supports the inclusion of every child in all school contexts, 27% were 'unsure' and 22% 'disagreed/strongly disagreed'.

Both parents/guardians and educators were in agreement that the draft framework promotes both child and teacher agency. Comparing responses by parents/guardians regarding agency for children to that of teachers and principals, respondents were less sure that the draft framework gives children a say in their own learning compared with recognising teacher flexibility and professional judgement. For example, Figure 3 below, which combines parent/guardian responses from Phase 1 and Phase 2, shows that 81% of parents/guardians surveyed 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the draft framework gives primary teachers greater flexibility to meet the needs of children. This compares to 67% of parents/guardians who 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the draft

framework allows children to have more of a say in the way they learn; 21% were 'unsure' and 12% 'disagreed/strongly disagreed'.

Figure 3: Combined responses to parent questionnaires for Phase 1, question 3 and Phase 2, question 4

Combined Responses to Parent Questionnaires for Phase 1, Question 3 and Phase 2, Question 4

To what extent do you agree/disagree that the proposals in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework:

Number of Phase 1 responses: 158
Number of Phase 2 responses: 927
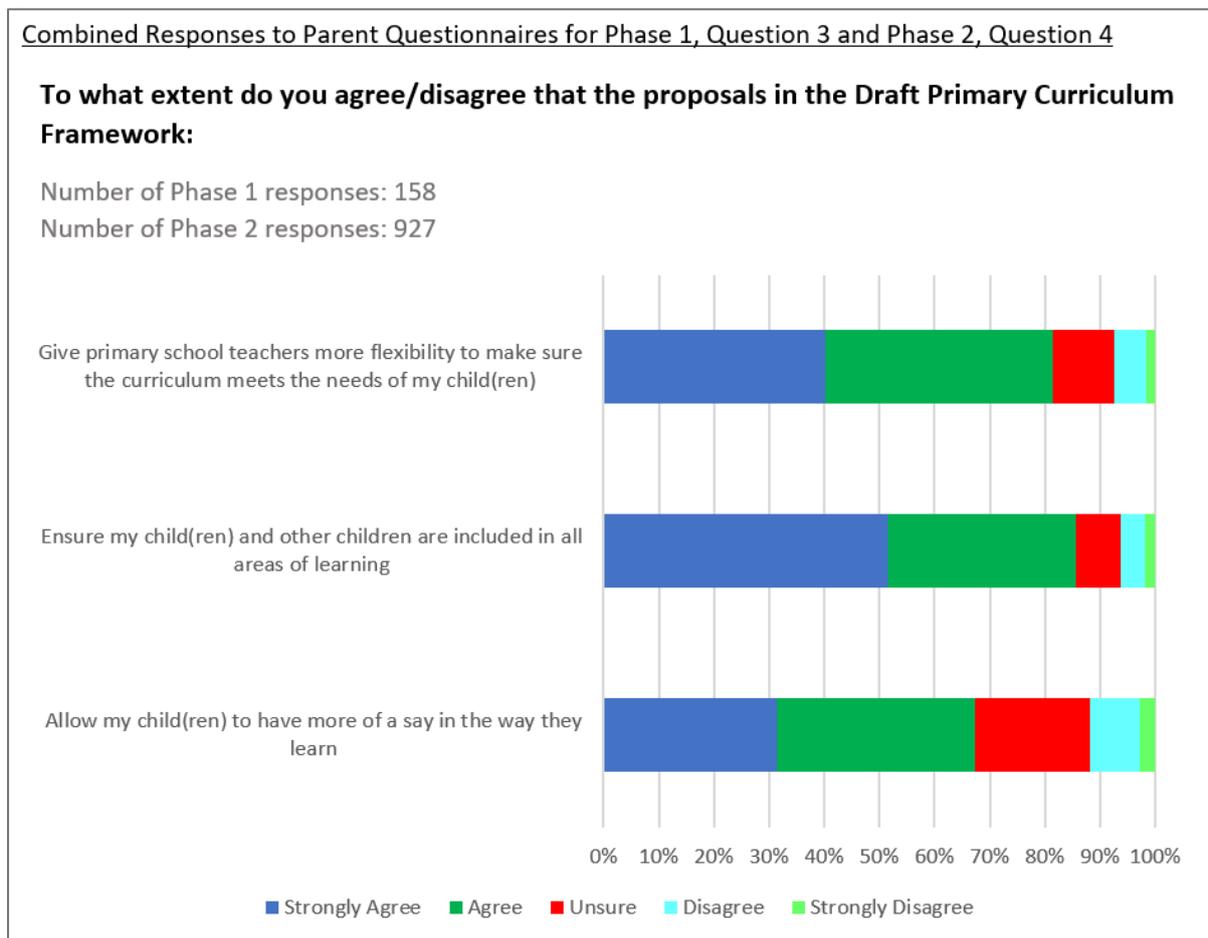
This was echoed by educators. For example, as can be seen in Figure 4 below, 68% of educators surveyed in Phase 1 'agreed/strongly agreed' that flexible time will support them in planning to suit their context. This compares with 52% who 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the draft framework will give children a say in their own learning; 34% were 'unsure' and 14% 'disagreed/disagreed strongly'.

Figure 4: Phase 1, educator questionnaire, question 16

Phase 1, Educator Questionnaire, Question 16:

To what extent do you agree/disagree that a redeveloped curriculum based on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework will:

Number of responses: 208
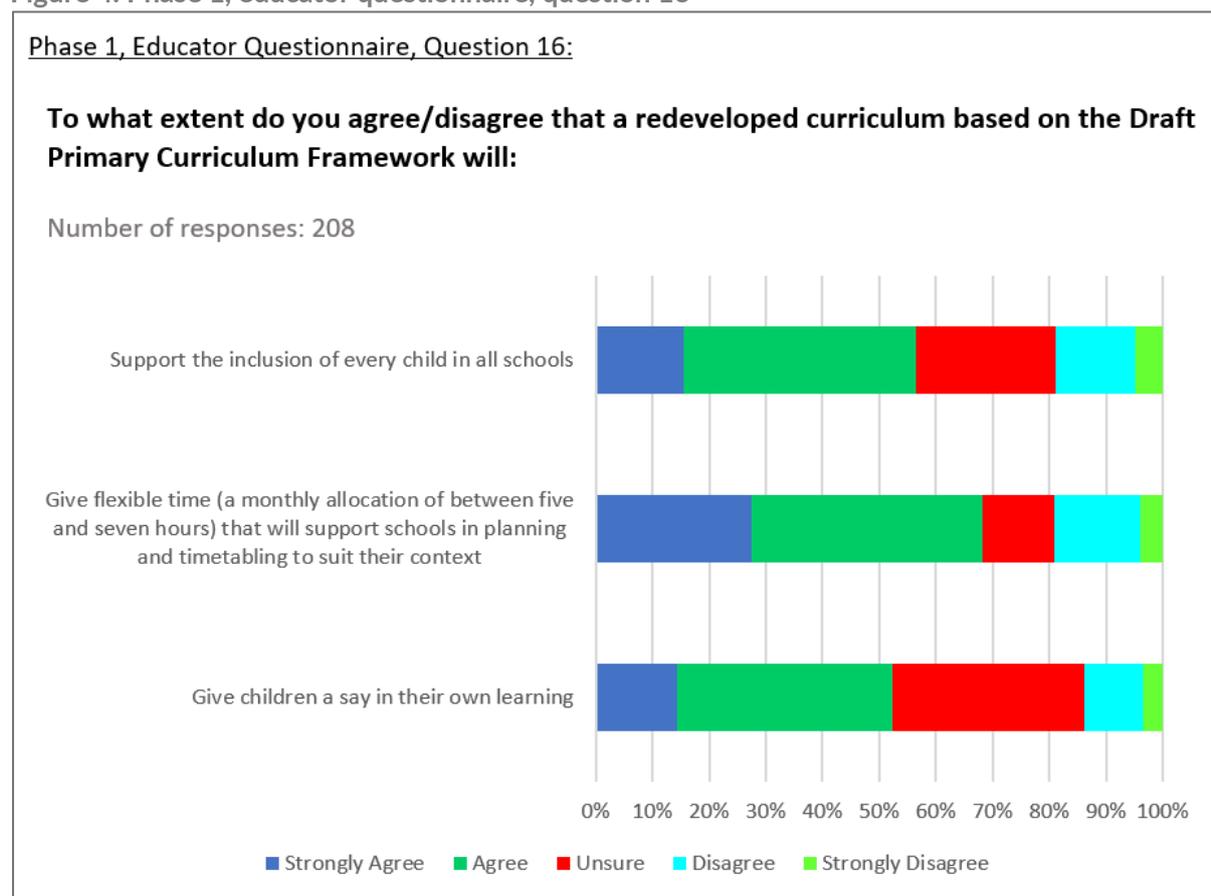
3.3.3 Transitions, progression and continuity

Parents/guardians and educators were asked to what extent they agree/disagree with statements related to transitions, progression and continuity. Parent/guardian responses for Phase 1 and Phase 2 are combined in the chart below (Figure 5) and demonstrate that the majority of parents/guardians surveyed agreed/strongly agreed that transitions, continuity and progression between home, preschool, primary school and post-primary school are sufficiently acknowledged in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. For example, almost 80% 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the draft framework connects children's learning in preschool (through *Aistear*) with learning in primary school.

Figure 5: Combined responses to parent questionnaires for Phase 1, question 4 and Phase 2, question 5

Combined Responses to Parent Questionnaires for Phase 1, Question 4 and Phase 2, Question 5

To what extent do you agree/disagree that the proposals in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework:

Number of Phase 1 responses: 158
Number of Phase 2 responses: 927
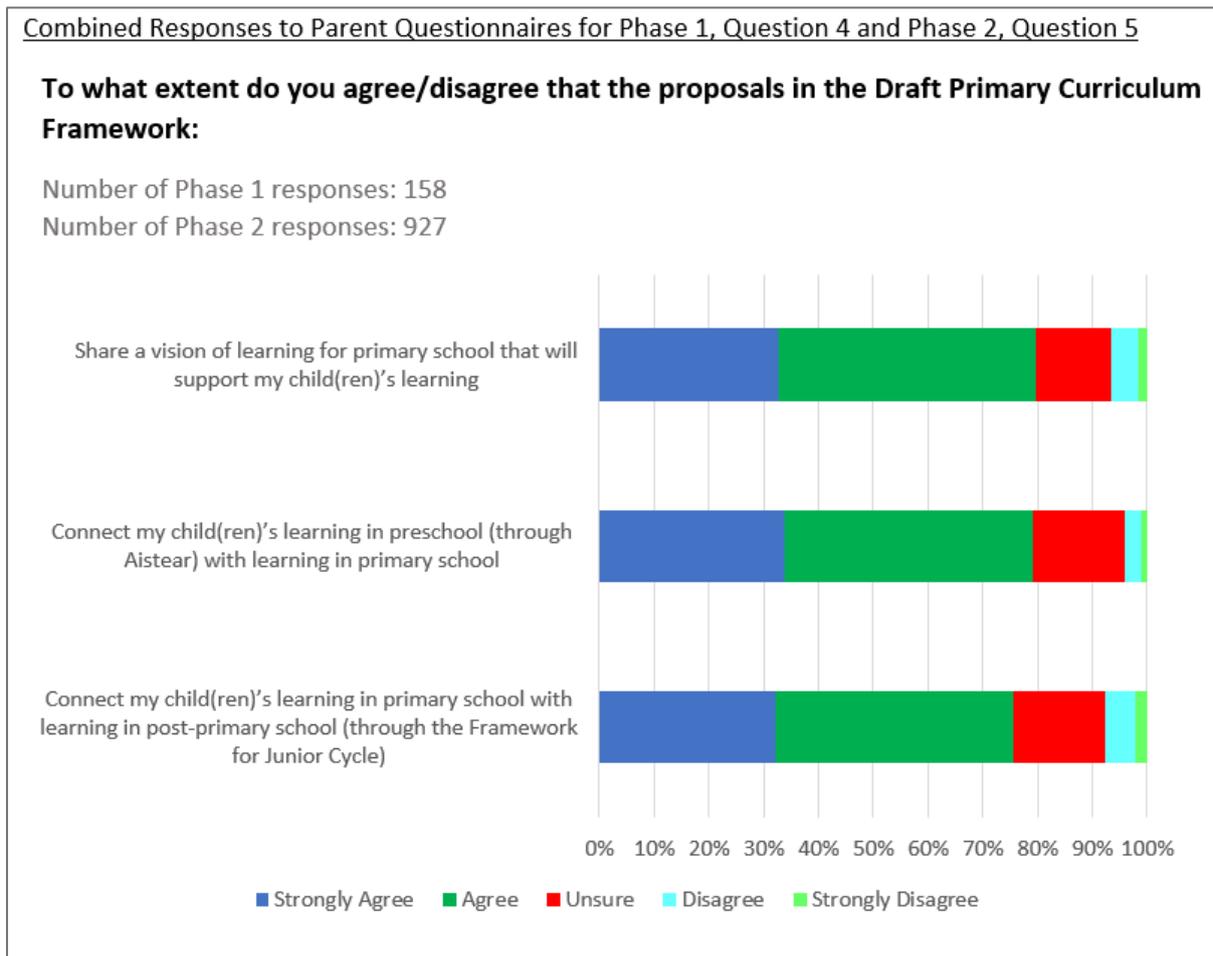
Echoing parent/guardian responses, a majority of educators (65%) in Phase 2 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the draft framework connects children's learning in preschool (through *Aistear*) with learning in primary school (Figure 6). It is notable, however, that educators were more equivocal about the connections the proposals make between primary and post-primary school experiences, with 'unsure' the most commonly selected option (37%).

Figure 6: Phase 2, educator questionnaire, question 8

Phase 2, Educator Questionnaire, Question 8:

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements: The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework:

Number of responses: 316
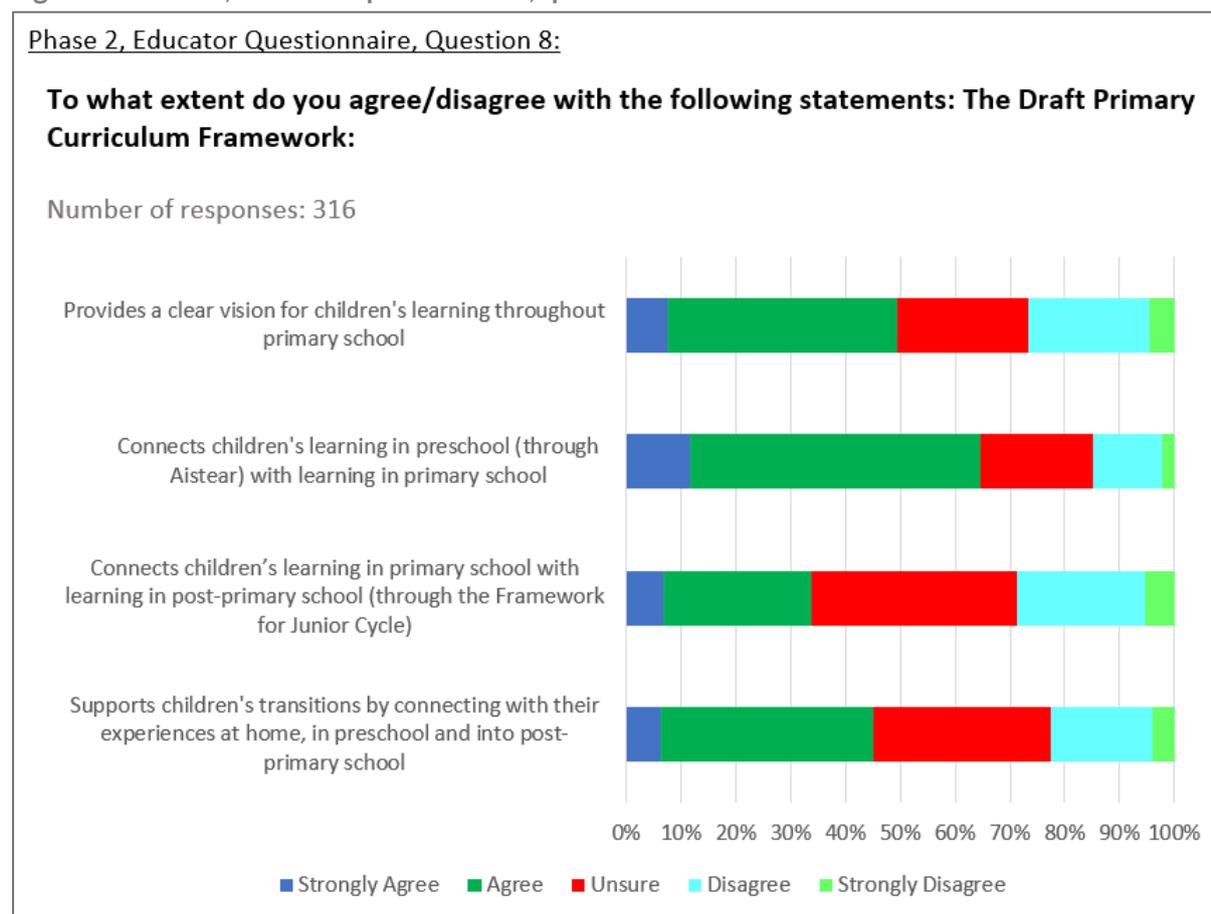
3.3.4 Key competencies

Parents/guardians and educators were invited to respond to statements about the key competencies in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. The charts in Figure 7 demonstrate that the key competencies were positively viewed by a majority of educators across Phase 1 and Phase 2; 71 % 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the key competencies reflect important skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes for children's learning; 72% 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the key competencies should be embedded in Learning Outcomes across all subjects and curriculum areas.

Figure 7: Combined responses to educator questionnaires for Phase 1, question 20 and Phase 2, question 9

Combined Responses to Educator Questionnaires for Phase 1, Question 20 and Phase 2, Question 9:

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements: In the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework:

Number of Phase 1 responses: 208
Number of Phase 2 responses: 316

The key competencies reflect important skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes for children's learning.

The key competencies should be embedded in Learning Outcomes across all subjects and curriculum areas.

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Unsure ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

Parents/guardians and educators were invited, in Phase 2, to consider each of the key competencies in turn and their responses are charted in Figure 8 below. Notwithstanding the difference in response rates between parents/guardians and educators, proportionally the percentage is similar, and responses were largely positive for all of the key competencies. It is interesting to note that 'agree' and 'strongly agree' were most commonly selected for 'Communicating and using language' in both questionnaires, whereas the largest number of participants selected 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' for 'Being a digital learner'; selected by 9% of parents and 13% of educators.

Figure 8: Phase 2, questionnaire responses for parent question 6 and educator question 10

Phase 2, Questionnaire Responses for Parent Question 6 and Educator Question 10:

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following key competencies:

Parent responses: 927   Educator responses: 316

Categories: Being a digital learner, Being mathematical, Communicating and using Language, Fostering wellbeing, Learning to be a learner, Being an active citizen, Being creative

Legend: ■ Strongly Agree ■ Aagree ■ Unsure ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

3.3.5 Emerging priorities for children's learning

Participants gave their opinions on new aspects of learning included in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, for example, Technology, MFL (3rd – 6th Classes), ERB and Ethics and Arts Education (visual arts, music, drama, dance, film and digital media).

Technology was viewed as an important area of learning in primary schools. The chart below (Figure 9) shows parents/guardians responses from Phase 1 and Phase 2 next to educator responses from Phase 1 (no equivalent question in Phase 2). While the majority of responses from both parents/guardians and educators were positive, educators were less so with 21% who selected 'unsure' and 14% who selected 'no' as to whether Technology should be included as part of the curriculum areas and subjects in the redeveloped primary curriculum.

Figure 9: Responses to parent questionnaires, Phase 1, question 7 and Phase 2, question 7 (combined) and educator questionnaire, Phase 1 question 25

Responses to Parent Questionnaires, Phase 1 Question 7 and Phase 2 Question7 (combined) and Educator Questionnaire, Phase 1 Question 25:

Number of parent responses: 1085

How important is it that your child(ren) experiences learning in Technology?

- 10%
- 4%
- 86%

- Important/Very important
- Don't Know
- Not so important/Not important at all

Number of educator responses: 208

Should Technology be included as part of the curriculum areas and subjects in the redeveloped primary curriculum?

- 14%
- 21%
- 65%

- Yes
- Unsure
- No

Comparing responses to questions about learning a MFL (3rd – 6th Classes) across Phase 1 and Phase 2 (Figure 10), we can see that a large majority of parents/guardians (81%) 'agreed' that this is an important/very important learning experience in primary school, whereas 42% of educators were 'unsure' if children should learn a MFL (3rd – 6th classes). 40% of educators 'agreed' and 18% 'disagreed'. When educators in Phase 1 were asked if MFL should be included in the curriculum area of Language, 88% 'agreed' with this proposal.

Figure 10: Responses to parent questionnaires, Phase 1, question 7 and Phase 2, question 7 (combined), and educator questionnaires, Phase 1, question 22 and Phase 2, question 12 (combined)

Responses to Parent Questionnaires, Phase 1 Question 7 and Phase 2 Question7 (combined), and Educator Questionnaires, Phase 1 Question 22 and Phase 2 Question 12 (combined):

Number of parent responses: 1085

How important is it that your child(ren) experiences learning a Modern Foreign Language (3rd – 6th Classes)?

- 10%
- 9%
- 81%

- Important/Very important
- Don't Know
- Not so important/Not important at all

Number of educator responses: 524

Should Modern Foreign Language be included for 3rd – 6th Classes?

- 18%
- 40%
- 42%

- Yes
- Unsure
- No
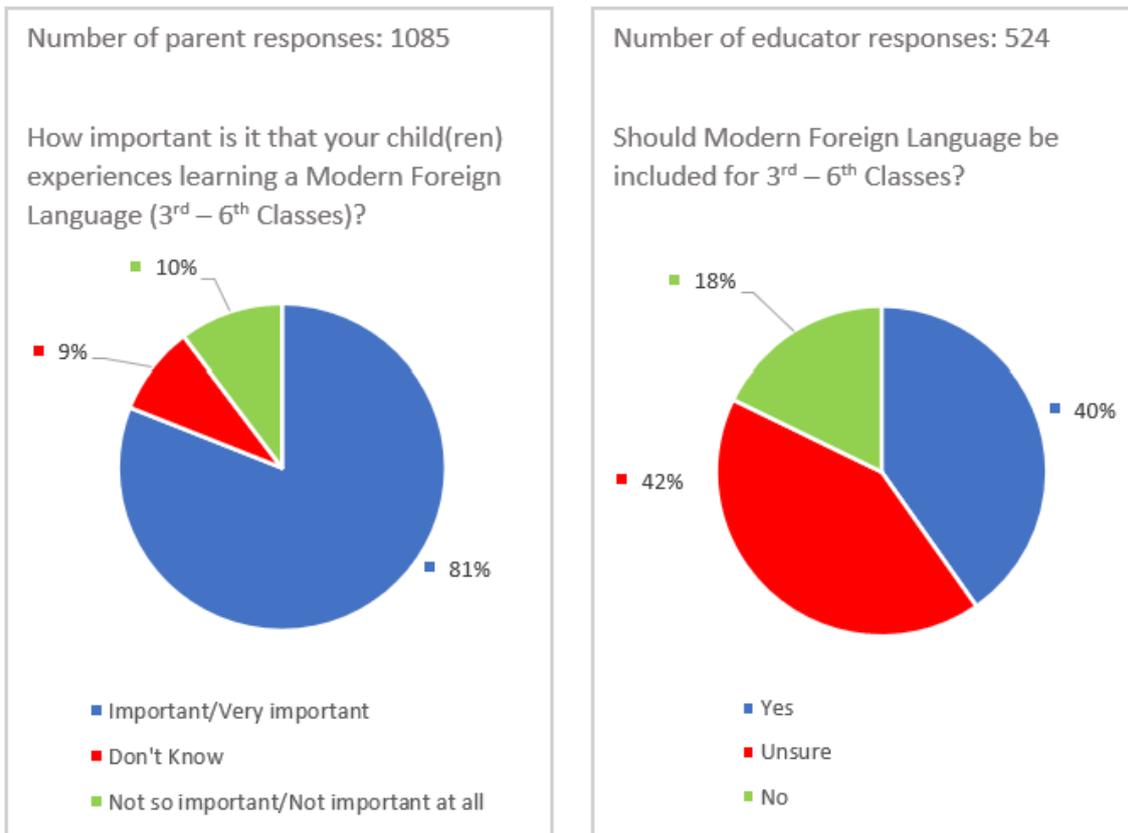
Just over 40% of educators in Phase 2 'disagreed' that learning about Religions and Beliefs should be part of the curriculum area of Social and Environmental Education. 48% 'agreed' with this proposal and 11% were 'unsure'. Regarding the inclusion of Ethics as part of the curriculum area of Wellbeing, a majority (64%) of educators in Phase 2 'agreed', 22% 'disagreed' and 13% were 'unsure'. While the majority of parents/guardians across Phase 1 and Phase 2 viewed ERB and Ethics as an important area of learning, the chart below (Figure 11) illustrated that 37% did not believe this was an important learning area and 11% were 'unsure'.

Figure 11: Combined responses to parent questionnaire for Phase 1, question 7 and Phase 2, question 7

Combined Responses to Parent Questionnaires for Phase 1, Question 7 and Phase 2, Question 7:

How important is it that your child(ren) experiences Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics?

Number of parent responses: 1085

- 33%
- 57%
- 10%

■ Important/Very important   ■ Don't Know   ■ Not so important/Not important at all
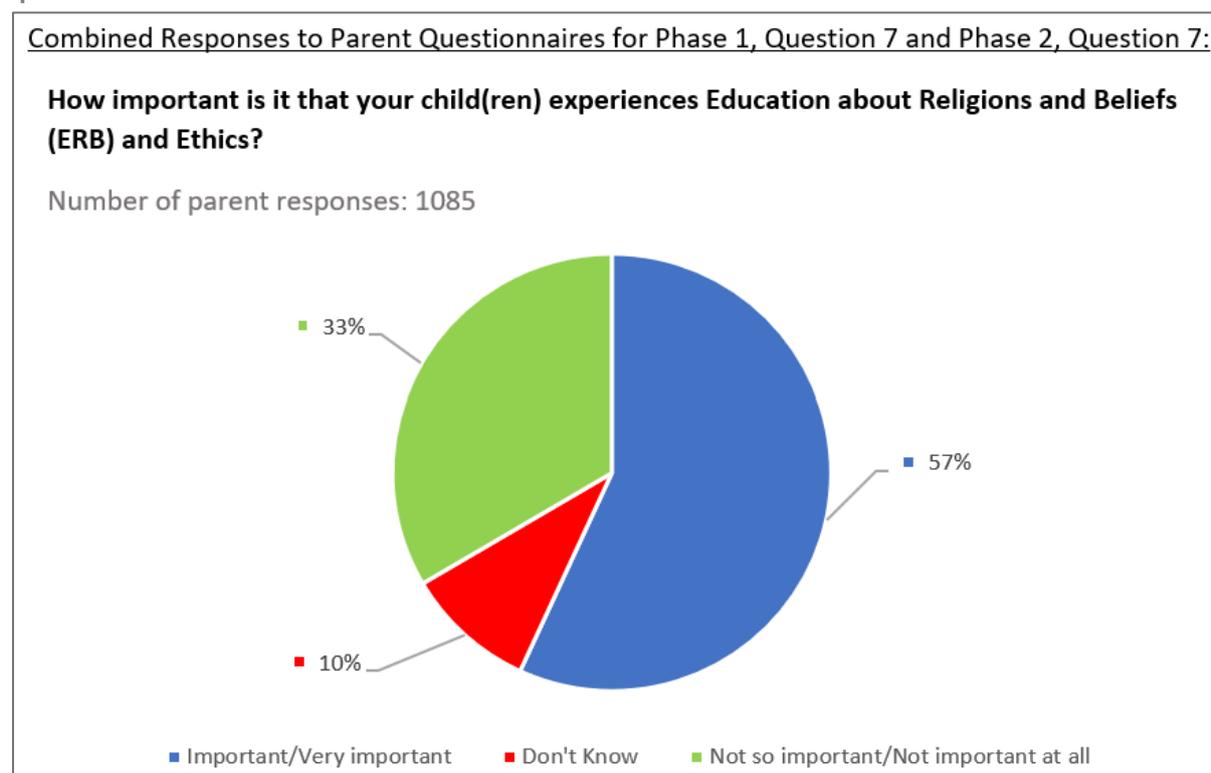
Parents/guardians and educators in Phase 2 were asked their opinions on Arts Education as proposed in the draft framework with broad-ranging experiences in the arts including visual arts, music, drama, dance, film and digital media. Their responses were used to create the charts below (Figure 12). Over 90% of parents/guardians viewed this as an important learning experience for their child(ren). While a majority (64%) of educators 'agreed' that a broad range of learning in Arts Education should be included in the revised curriculum, 25% were 'unsure' and 11% 'disagreed'.

Figure 12: Phase 2, parent questionnaire, question 7 and Phase 2, educator questionnaire, question 12

Phase 2, Parent Questionnaire, Question 7 and Phase 2, Educator Questionnaire, Question 12:

Number of parent responses: 927

How important is it that your child(ren) experiences learning in Arts Education (visual arts, music, drama, dance, film and digital media)?

- 92% Important/Very important
- 4% Don't Know
- 4% Not so important/Not important at all

Number of educator responses: 316

Do you agree that a broader range of learning (visual arts, music, drama, dance, film and digital media) in Arts Education should be included?

- 64% Yes
- 25% Unsure
- 11% No

3.3.6 Curriculum areas

Participants were asked a variety of questions about the five curriculum areas proposed in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework.* Educator responses in Phase 1 demonstrate that educators were mostly in favour of an integrated approach in Stages 1 and 2 and moving to more delineated subjects in Stages 3 and 4. For example, 63% 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the use of curriculum areas as the main structure of the curriculum from Stage 1 to 4 lends itself to easier integration in teaching and learning and 65% 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the gradual use of more subject-based learning from Stage 3, and not earlier, is appropriate.

The comment responses of parents/guardians in Phase 1 were used to create a pie chart (Figure 13), which demonstrates that a large majority of parent/guardian comments were positive towards the five curriculum areas presented. The verbatim text responses are available in the Technical Report.

Figure 13: Phase 1, parent questionnaire, question 9

Phase 1, Parent Questionnaire, Question 9:

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework presents five curriculum areas. In your view, will these work together for your child(ren)'s learning in primary school?

Number of responses: 124
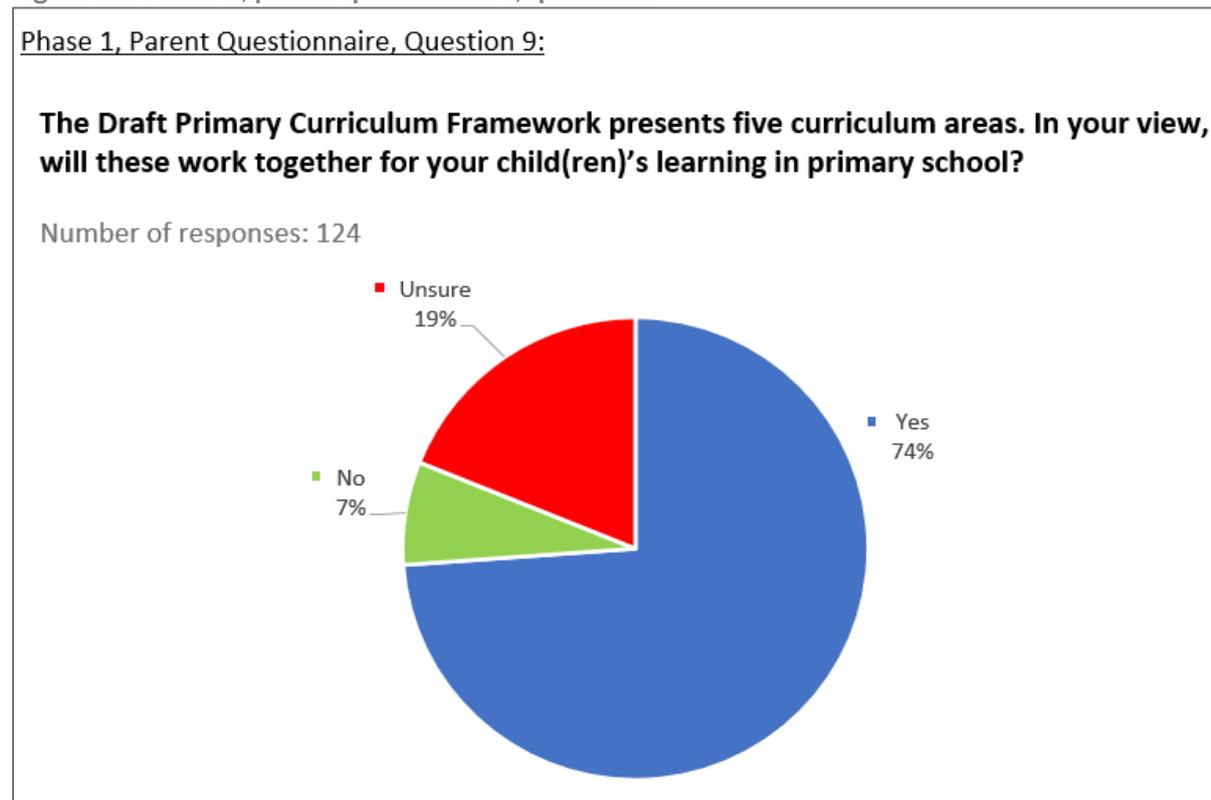
In Phase 2, parents/guardians and educators gave their opinions on each proposed curriculum area. The graph below in Figure 14 demonstrate that most parents/guardians and educators surveyed in Phase 2 agreed or strongly agreed with the inclusion of all five proposed curriculum areas in a revised curriculum. Parent/guardian responses were most positive for the curriculum area of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, where 95% of parents/guardians 'agreed/strongly agreed' with this proposed area. Educators were most in agreement with the curriculum area of Social and Environmental Education, whereas the curriculum area of Languages saw the largest number of educators who selected 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' (18%).

Figure 14: Phase 2, questionnaire responses for parent question 9 and educator question 11

Phase 2, Questionnaire Responses for Parent Question 9 and Educator Question 11:

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following proposed curriculum areas:

Parent responses: 927   Educator responses: 316

Language

Mathematics, Science and Technology Education

Wellbeing

Arts Education

Social and Environmental Education

100%   50%   0%   0%   50%   100%

■ Strongly Agree ■ Aagree ■ Unsure ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree
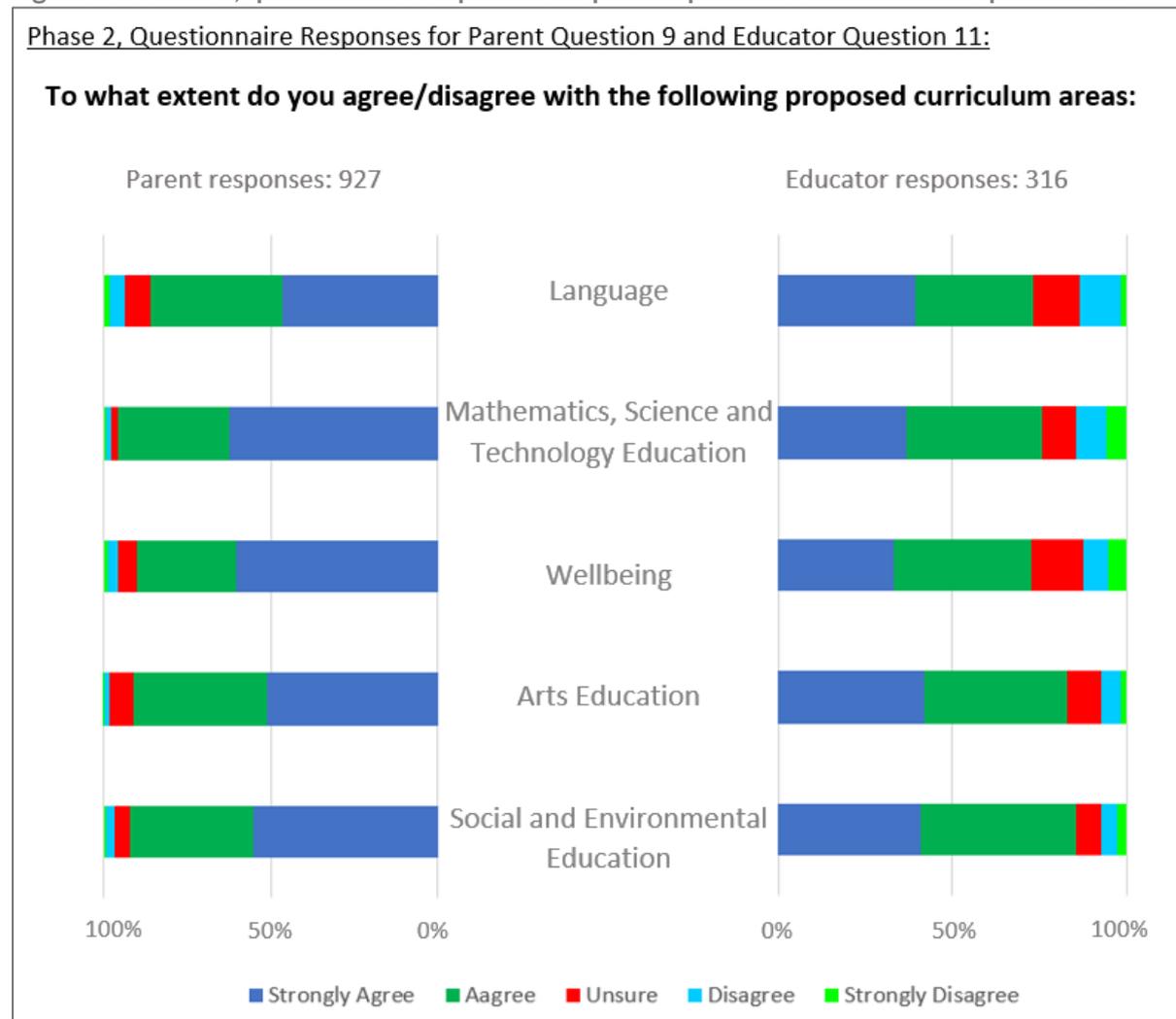
3.3.7 Time allocations

Educators in Phases 1 and 2 were asked to indicate their preferences in relation to proposed time allocations. In both educator questionnaire reports, 'Option 1' was the most popular, with 'None of the above' favoured second overall as can be seen in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Combined responses to educator questionnaires for Phase 1, question 32 and Phase 2, question 14

Combined Responses to Educator Questionnaires for Phase 1, Question 32 and Phase 2, Question 14

Which of the three options for time allocation will best support learning/do you prefer?

Number of Phase 1 responses: 208
Number of Phase 2 responses: 316

None of the above: 22%

Option 1: 40%

Option 3: 18%

Option 2: 20%

■ Option 1 ■ Option 2 ■ Option 3 ■ None of the above
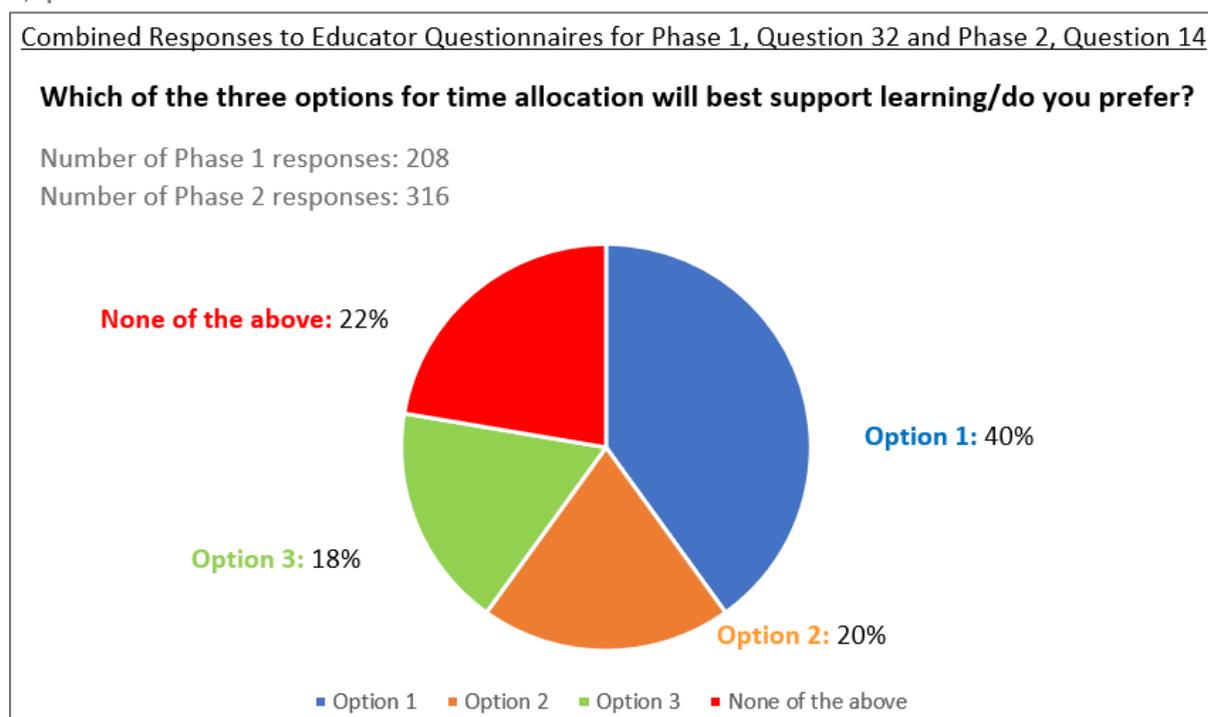
Educators in Phase 1 were asked to what extent they agree/disagree that the proposed allocation of flexible time for each stage is appropriate. The responses given indicate that the majority of educators agree or strongly agree with the proposed allocation of flexible time for each stage. For example, 64% 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the proposed allocation of five hours of flexible time per month for Stage 1 is appropriate, 18% 'disagreed/strongly disagreed' and 18% selected 'unsure'.

Educators responding to Phase 2 questionnaires were asked, in an open-ended text box, to identify a subject that should have less time than its proposed time allocation in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. There were 218 comment responses with most responses containing one word or phrase; where a response identified more than one area, all were included. The chart below (Figure 16), showing the top six most common themes identified, gives an overview/snapshot of the responses. Religion was identified in 40% of the responses. This was followed by Drama (12%) and Patron's Programme (10%). The verbatim text responses can be viewed in the Technical Report.

Figure 16: Phase 2, educator questionnaire, question 15

Phase 2, Educator Questionnaire, Question 15:

Is there any subject that should have less time than it is currently allocated?

Number of responses: 203

Religion — 40%
Drama — 12%
Patron's Programme — 10%
No/Unsure — 9%
Wellbeing — 7%
Irish — 6%

Number of responses
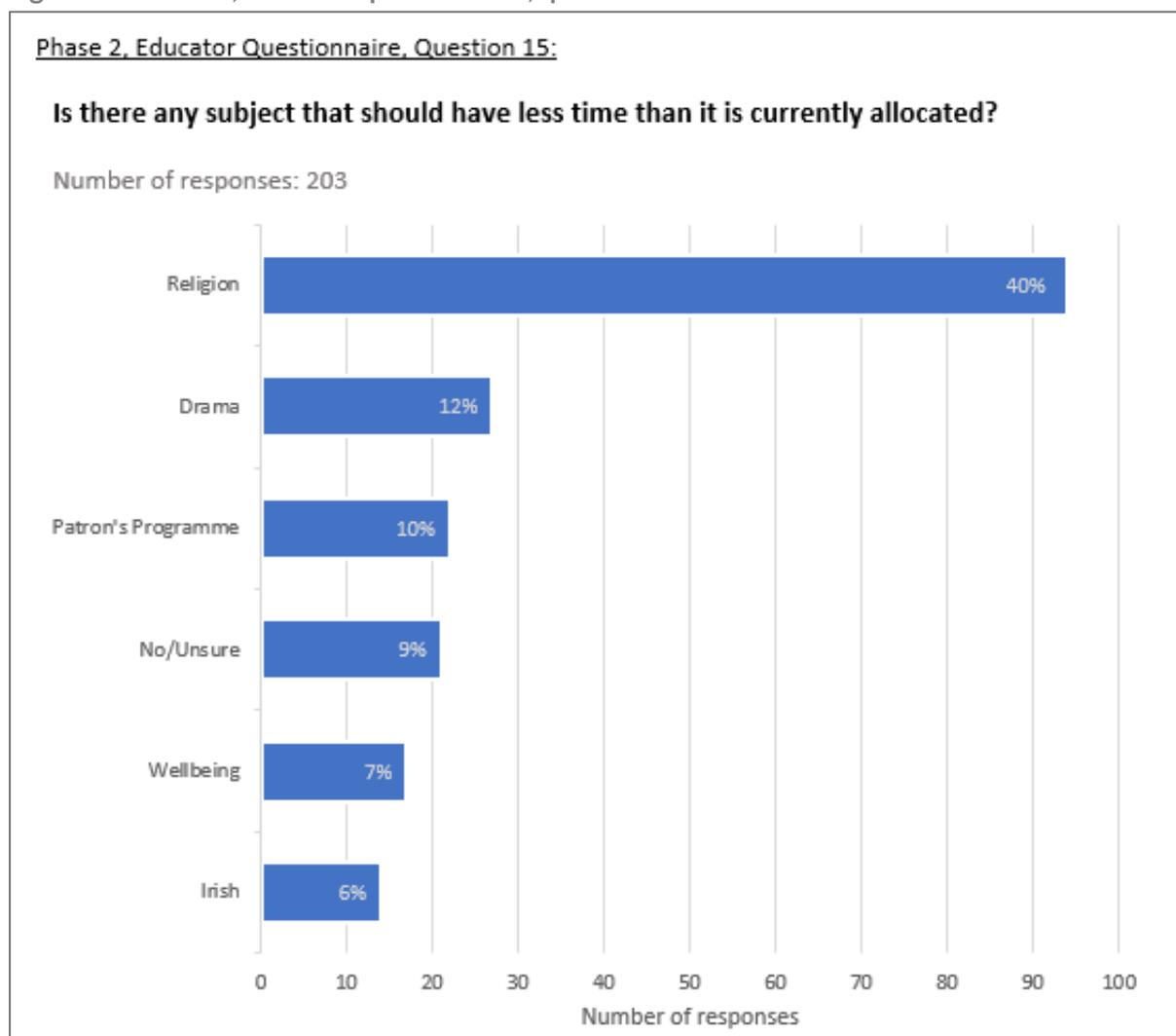
3.3.8 Assessment, teaching and learning

Parents/guardians and educators were asked to what extent they agree/disagree with proposals in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* related to assessment, teaching and learning. Comparing responses, it is evident that both parents and educators see the importance of using a variety of pedagogical approaches, for example inclusive and evidence-based pedagogy, learning that is grounded in the experiences of the child, opportunities for creativity and collaboration, and play and inquiry based learning.

Parent/guardian responses across Phase 1 and Phase 2 were combined to create the chart in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Combined responses to parent questionnaires for Phase 1, question 11 and Phase 2, question 11

Combined Responses to Parent Questionnaires for Phase 1, Question 11 and Phase 2, Question 11

To what extent do you agree/disagree that the proposals in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework:

Number of Phase 1 responses: 158
Number of Phase 2 responses: 927
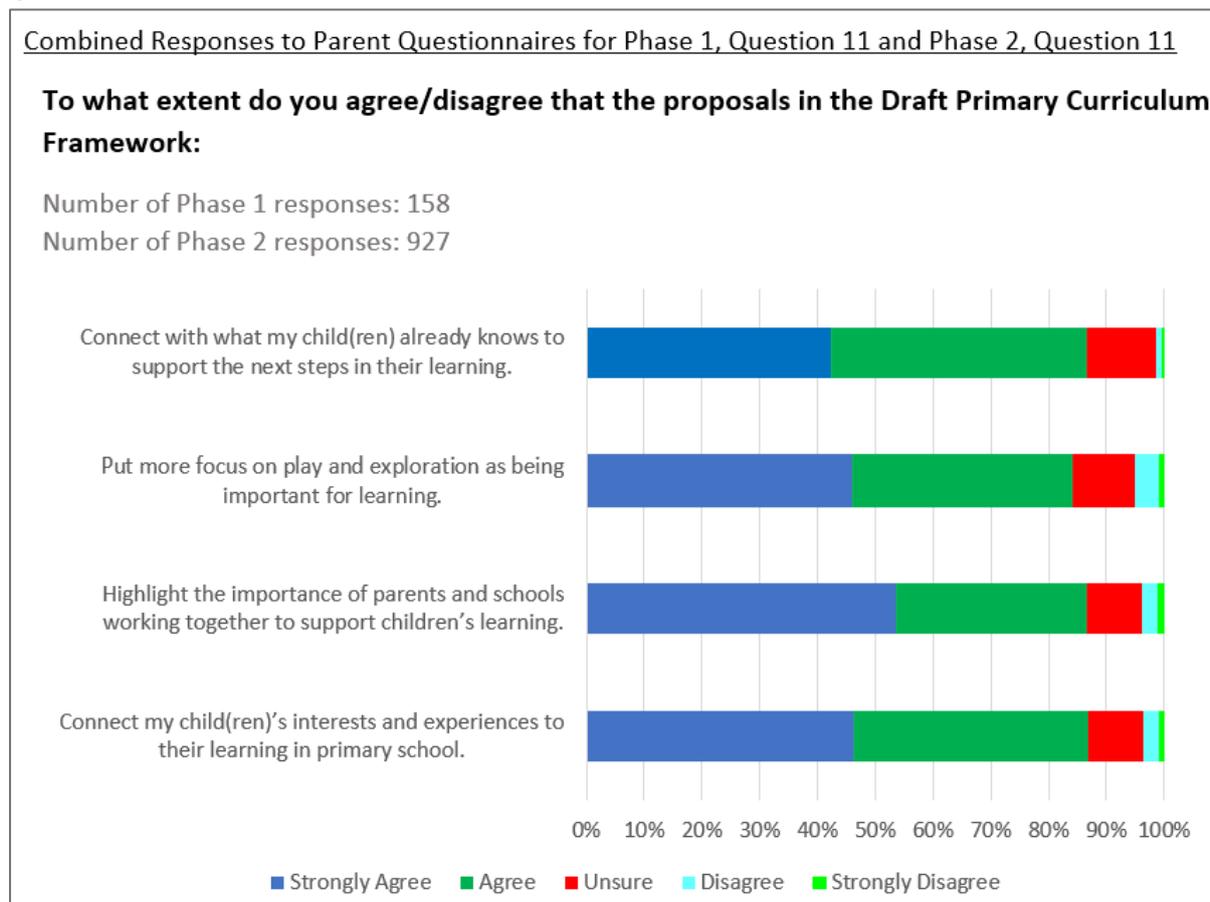
Educator responses across Phase 1 and Phase 2 were used to create the chart in Figure 18.

Figure 18: Combined responses to educator questionnaires for Phase 1, question 16 and Phase 2, question 36
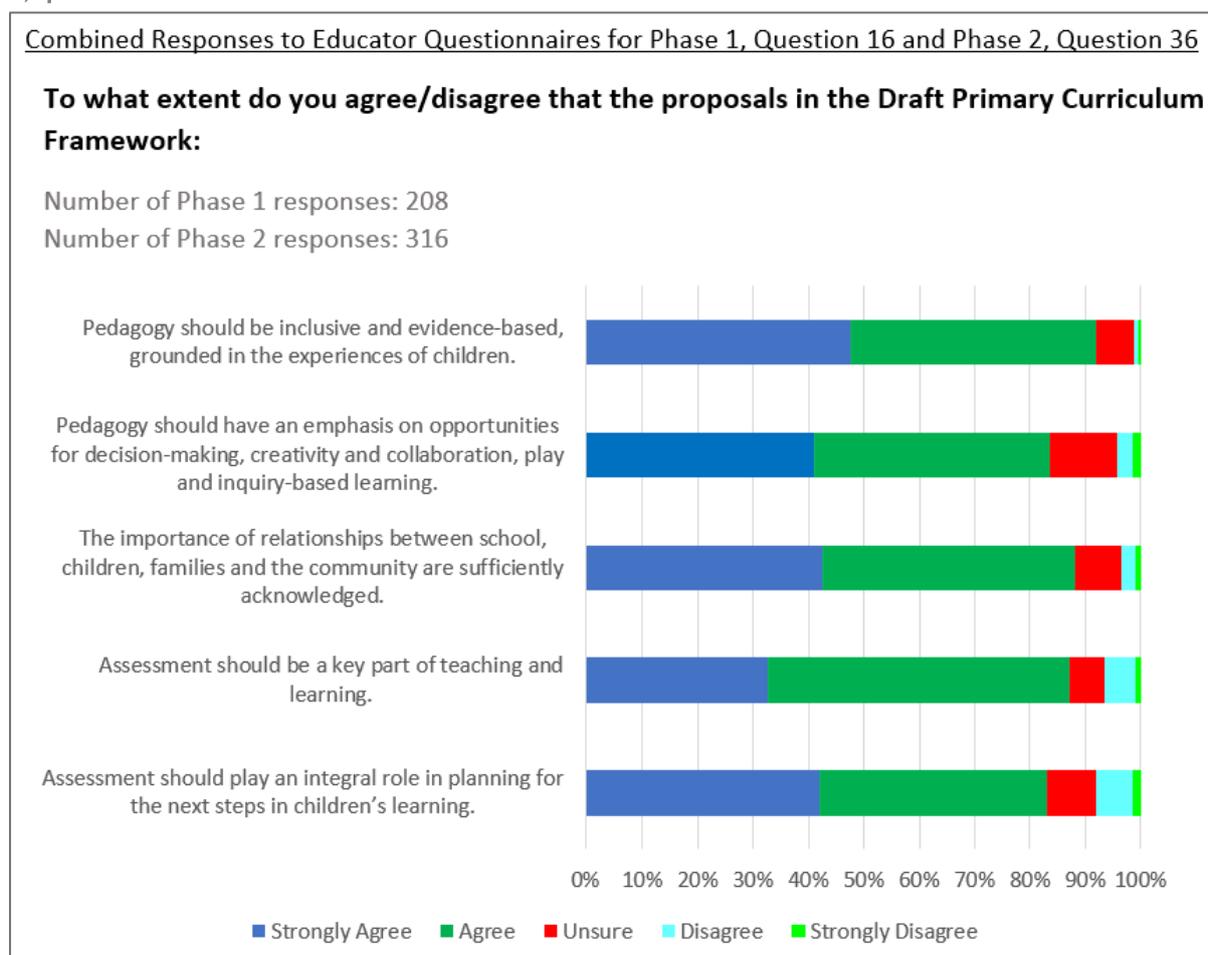
The responses also highlight that both parents and educators value the relationship between home and school. For example, 87% of parents/guardians across Phases 1 and 2 'agree/strongly agree' that the draft framework highlights the importance of parents and schools working together to support children's learning (Figure 17). This is echoed by educators, with less than 3% of participants who 'disagree/disagree strongly' that the importance of relationships between school, children, families and the community are sufficiently acknowledged in the proposals (Figure 18).

In relation to assessment, a majority (87%) of educators 'agreed/strongly agreed' that assessment should be a key part of teaching and learning, and 83% 'agreed/strongly agreed' that assessment should play an integral role in planning the next steps in children's learning.

3.3.9 Building on the strengths of the current Primary School Curriculum

Parents/guardians and educators were asked to reflect on the 1999 curriculum. Responses were in the form of comments. Using the initial stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, the comments were analysed, initial codes were generated, themes were identified and reviewed. These themes were then used to create word clouds to give an overview/snapshot of responses. The verbatim text responses on which the word clouds are based can be found in the full questionnaire reports, available in the Technical Report.

Educators in Phase 1 were asked if any aspects of the current curriculum should be reflected to a greater extent in a re-developed curriculum. 44% of educators responded to this question and the word cloud in Figure 19 was created to present an overview of their responses.

Figure 19: Phase 1, educator questionnaire, question 38

Phase 1, Educator Questionnaire, Question 38:

What other aspects of the 1999 Curriculum, if any, should be reflected to a greater extent in a redeveloped curriculum?

Number of responses: 93
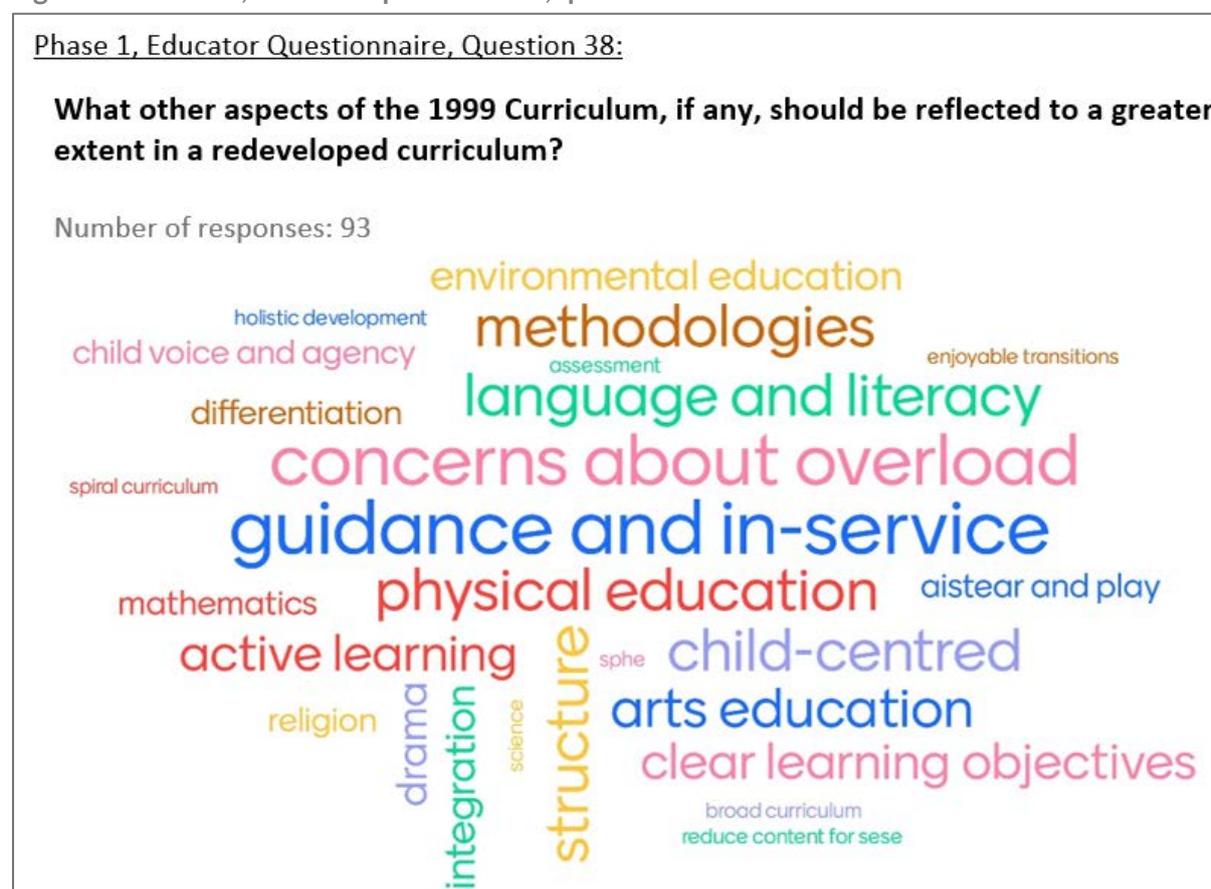
The most common theme identified was a need to focus on structured guidance and in-service to support educators in implementing a revised curriculum. This was referenced in 13 responses. For example, one educator, who welcomed increased agency and flexibility afforded to teachers, identified a need 'for structured guidance to be provided to ensure that children receive an optimum experience'. The 1999 Teacher Guidelines were praised with the 'toolkit for the redeveloped curriculum' identified as having 'real potential for the enactment of the curriculum in classrooms'.

A significant number of responses (11%) highlighted concern that the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* does not address curriculum overload, with one response expressing concern that, with the introduction of new areas of learning, there would be a 'possible increase in overload in the new curriculum'.

The following themes were identified in 6 responses: Methodologies, child-centred learning, PE, language and literacy, and structure. The child-centred, spiral approach in the 1999 curriculum was praised, as was structure, with the 'strands and strand units' highlighted in particular. PE and literacy were highlighted as strengths of the 1999 curriculum, with calls for an increased focus in a revised curriculum. For example, one participant wrote that 'Physical Education should be

expanded to include enough time for three solid lessons per week where physical literacy is taught'.

There was some concern expressed about time for Arts Education, and in particular Drama, with one educator commenting that 'the place of Drama as a subject and its level of importance is unclear'. Some aspects, such as technology, SPHE, assessment and Science, were referenced in one response each.

Parents/guardians in Phase 2 were asked to identify positive aspects of their child(ren)'s learning that should be maintained. The word cloud below (Figure 20) was created to present a snapshot of their responses. The verbatim text on which it is based can be viewed in the Technical Report.

Figure 20: Phase 2, parent questionnaire, question 12

Phase 2, Parent Questionnaire, Question 12:

What positive aspects of your child(ren)'s learning should be maintained?

Number of responses: 433

diversity and inclusion
irish language culture   no change needed
home school link   critical thinking   praise for framework
broad curriculum   physical education   mathematics
life skills   focus on core subjects   nothing
creativity   social emotional learning   technology
flexibility   playful approaches
learning to learn   unsure   child centred
less technology   stem   sphe   sese   active
academic achievement   positive environment   holistic   assessment
arts education   wellbeing   english
build independence   collaboration   religion and ethos
support children with sen   foreign language
outdoor learning
homework balance

The most commonly mentioned theme, identified in 17% of responses, was 'Playful approaches' to learning with *Aistear* highlighted in particular and some suggesting that playful approaches could be enhanced in older classes. 'Child-centred' approaches were identified in 11% of responses. For example, some parents/guardians referred to building on existing interests and prior knowledge, meeting individual needs and adopting a strengths-based approach.

The third most commonly identified theme was a 'Focus on core subjects' or literacy and numeracy, identified in 10% of responses, followed by 'Social and emotional learning' and a 'Positive learning environment,' each identified in 9% of responses.

In Phase 2, educators were asked if they agreed/disagreed with statements about how the draft framework builds on the strengths of the current curriculum (Figure 21). A majority (65%) 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the draft framework promotes children's enjoyment of learning. When asked if the use of Learning Outcomes will help promote integration, the most commonly chosen response was 'unsure' (32%). Just under 20% of respondents 'disagreed/disagreed strongly' that key competencies will help promote integration.

Figure 21: Phase 2, educator questionnaire, question 17

Phase 2, Educator Questionnaire, Question 17:

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following proposals:

Number of responses: 316
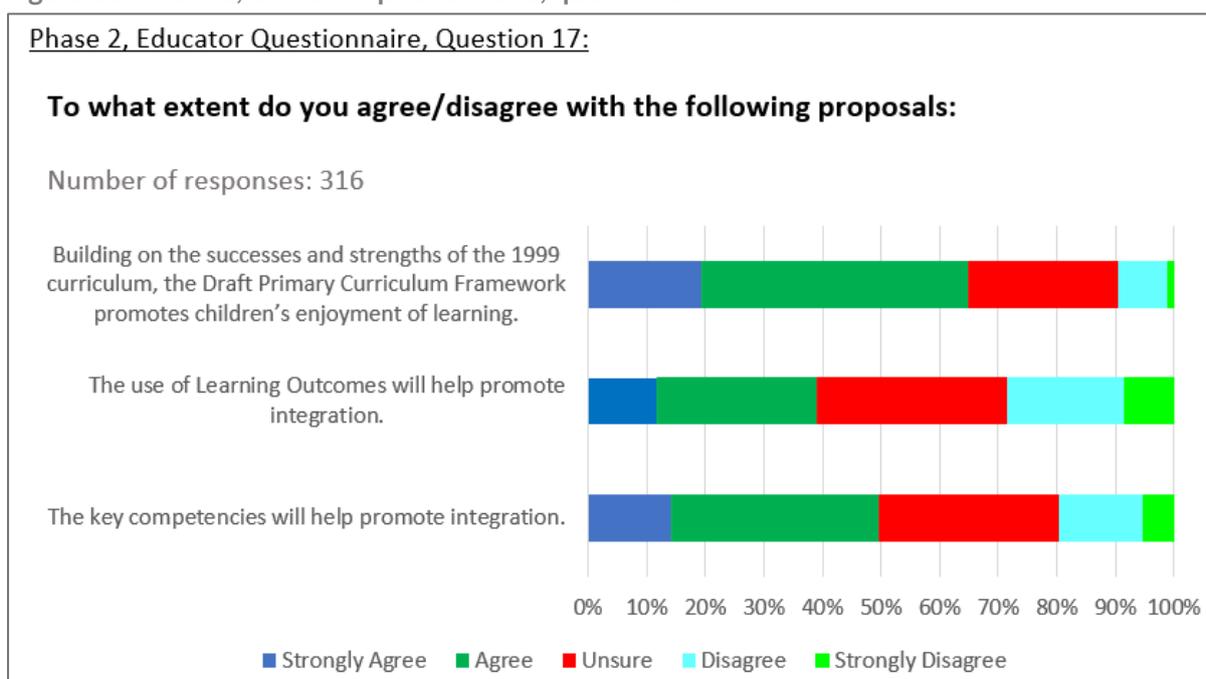
Educators in Phase 2 were also asked to consider how the draft framework will help to reduce curriculum overload (Figure 22). Almost 40% of educators selected 'unsure' when asked to consider if the use of curriculum areas in Stages 1 and 2 will address overload. A majority felt that reducing the number of documents and the inclusion of flexible time would help reduce curriculum overload. Regarding the use of learning outcomes, almost 25% were 'unsure' and 13% 'disagreed/disagreed strongly' that this would help reduce curriculum overload.

Figure 22: Phase 2, educator questionnaire, question 18

Phase 2, Educator Questionnaire, Question 18:

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following will help reduce curriculum overload:

Number of responses: 316
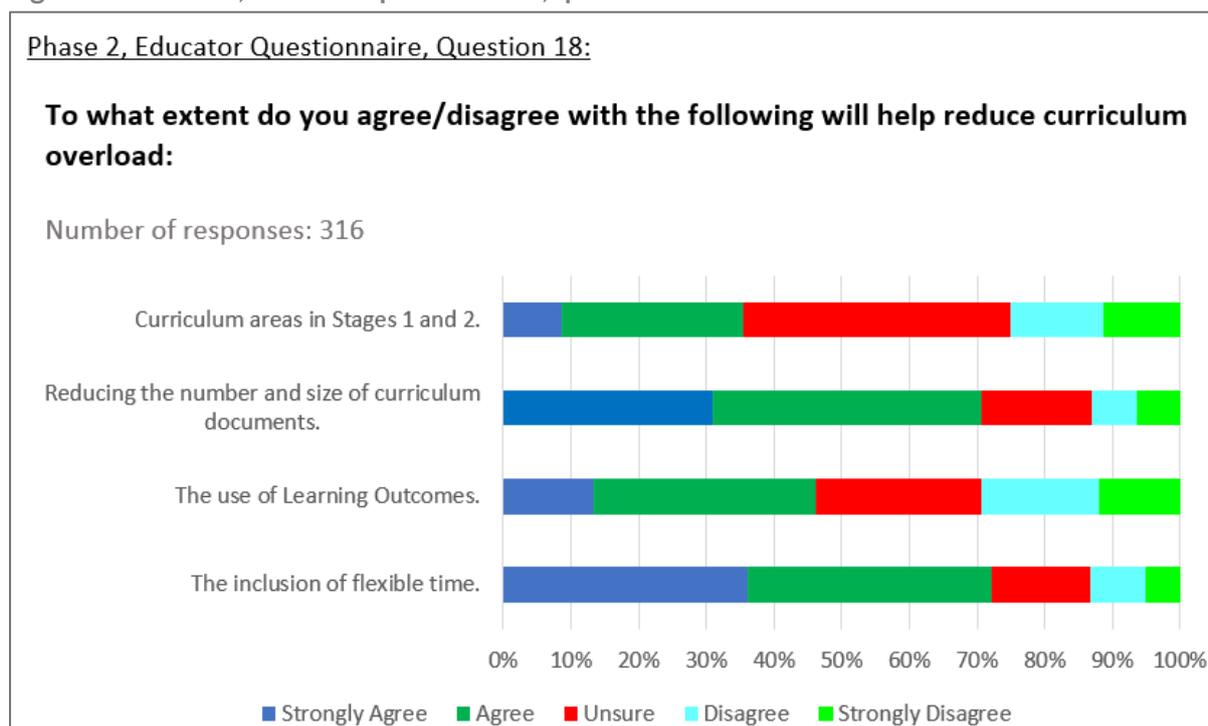
3.3.10 Other considerations

Both parents/guardians and educators had the opportunity to identify any area they think should be reviewed, and/or removed from the curriculum. These responses were in the form of comments. Using the initial stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, the text responses and comments were analysed, initial codes were generated, and themes were identified and reviewed. The most common themes from each question are presented in the following section in graph format to give an overview/snapshot of responses; the verbatim text responses on which they are based are available to view in the Technical Report.

Parents/guardians in Phase 1 were invited to identify anything else that they think should be looked at as part of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. The top six themes identified are included in the graph in Figure 23.

Figure 23: Phase 1, parent questionnaire, question 13

Phase 1, Parent Questionnaire, Question 13:

Is there anything else you think should be looked at as part of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework:

Number of responses: 81
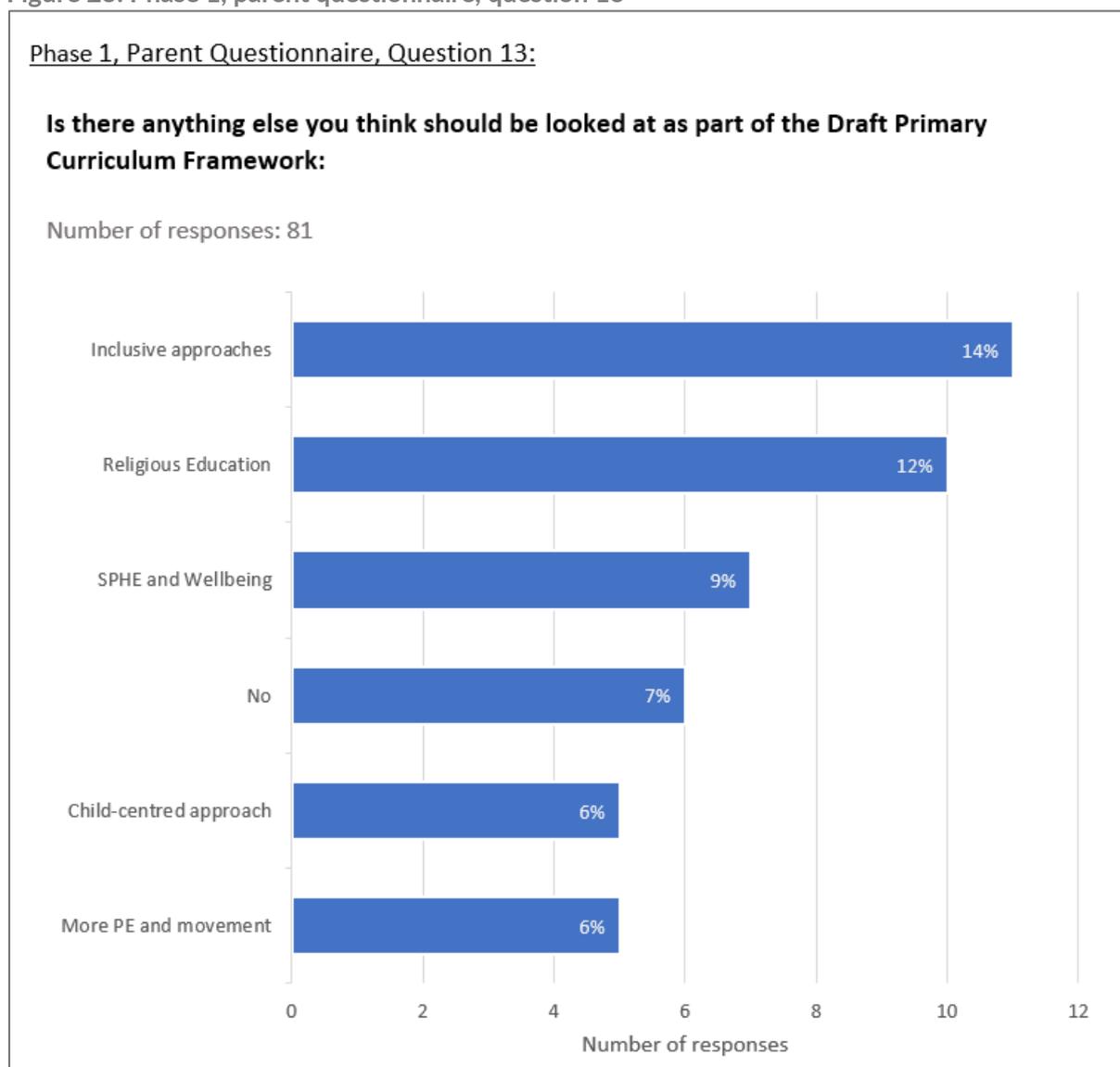
13% of parents/guardians responses in Phase 1 viewed 'Inclusive approaches' as important for a revised curriculum. For example, some wrote about necessary supports for including children with disabilities or special educational needs. Others identified inclusion of parents and children with no religion/different religions or ethnicities as an area that should be looked at. One participant wrote that the revised curriculum should 'focus on women and LGBTQ rights'.

The second most common theme identified was 'Religious Education.' Some participants called for Religious Education to be reduced or removed. For example, one parent wrote that reducing the time allocation for Religious Education and 'allowing this time to be dedicated to other areas would be beneficial'. Others viewed Religious Education as important, for example, one respondent wrote how it can 'equip them better for life and for secondary school' and another wrote that 'children should learn about all religions in Religious Education'.

'SPHE and Wellbeing' was identified as the third most common theme, in 9% of responses. Participants called for an emphasis on social wellbeing, building empathy and resilience, and exploring friendship and bullying.

7% of parents/guardians answered 'no' as their response. The themes 'Child-centred approach' and 'More PE and movement' were both identified in 6% of responses.

Parents/guardians in Phase 2 were asked to identify any part of the current or proposed curriculum that could/should be removed. The top 6 themes identified are included in the graph below (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Phase 2, parent questionnaire, question 13

Phase 2, Parent Questionnaire, Question 13:

Is there any part of the current or proposed curriculum that could/should be removed?

Number of responses: 496

| Theme	%
Religion	31%
Patron's Programme	14%
No/Unsure	11%
Reduced focus on Irish	10%
Homework	6%
Modern Foreign Language	5%

Number of responses
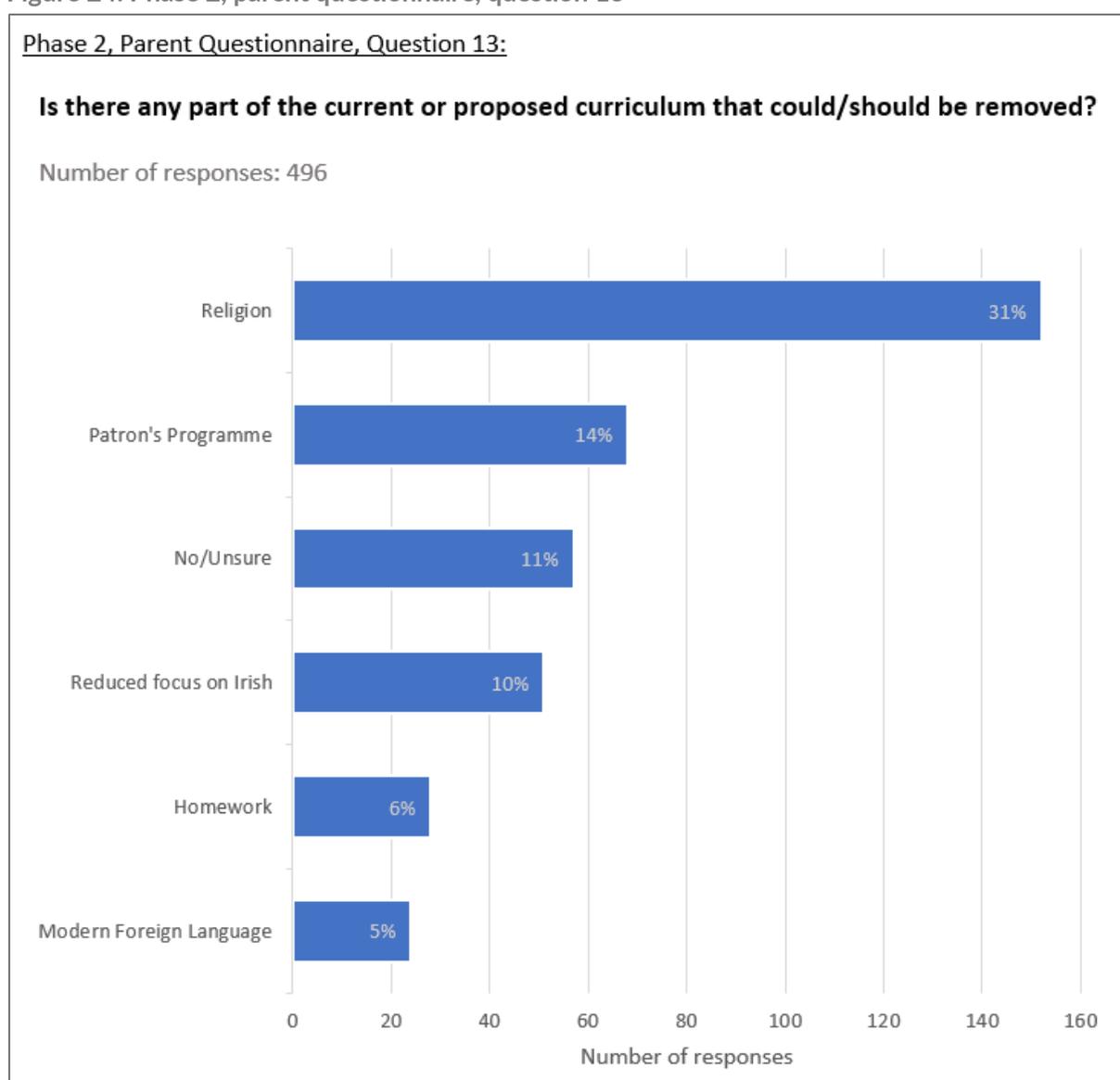
The most common theme was Religion, identified in 31% of responses. Many parents/guardians expressed the view that there should be less emphasis on Religion and others believed that Religion should be removed and take place outside school hours. A further 4% of responses argued that children should learn about world religions and religious beliefs. One participant wrote that 'the religious framework should be updated to reflect modern educational practices and modern Ireland to include all beliefs'.

Patron's Programme was the second most common theme, identified in 14% of responses. Some argued that time allocated to the Patron's Programme should be reduced while others argued that time spent on 'faith formation' should take place outside of school. One parent/guardian highlighted how in some rural areas, there is a lack of choice regarding school patronage.

11% of respondents answered 'no' or indicated that they were unsure. 10% of comments related to Irish with many indicating a preference for a reduced emphasis on Irish, and some believing that Irish should not be compulsory. 6% of responses identified 'homework' as something that should be reduced or removed and 5% of responses related to the introduction of MFL, with some expressing concern that learning a third language would take away from time spent on other curriculum areas.

Educators in Phase 1 and Phase 2 were invited to identify any part of the current or proposed curriculum that could/should be removed. There were 298 text responses across Phase 1 and Phase 2 which were combined and analysed using the initial stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. The graph below (Figure 25) shows the 7 most commonly identified themes which gives a snapshot/overview of their combined responses. The verbatim text responses are available in the Technical Report.

Figure 25: Combined responses to educator questionnaires for Phase 1, question 30 and Phase 2, question 13

Combined responses to Educator Questionnaires for Phase 1, Question 30 and Phase 2, Question 13:

Is there any part of the current or proposed curriculum that could/should be removed?

Number of Phase 1 responses: 83
Number of Phase 2 responses: 194
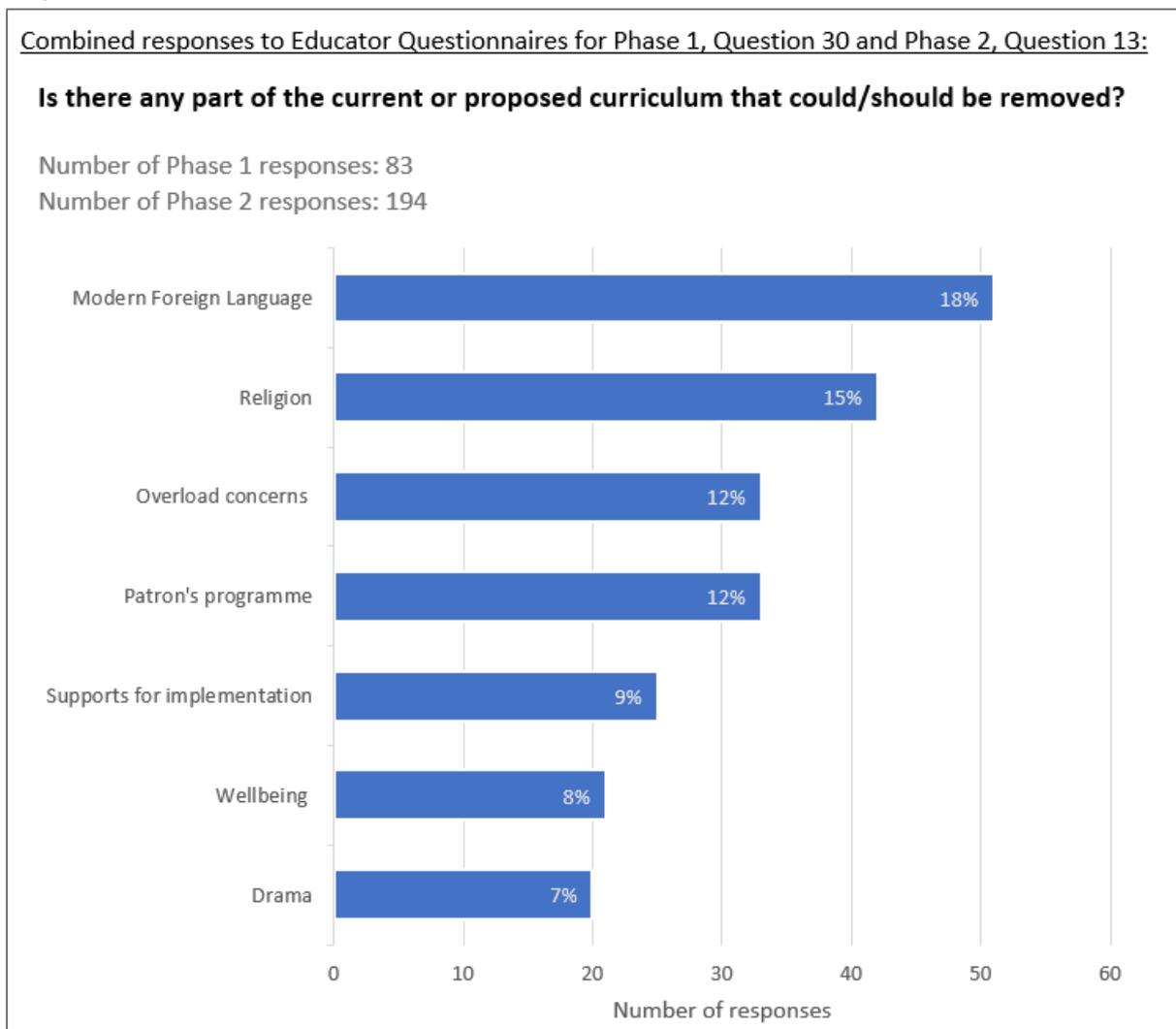
The most common theme identified related to the introduction of MFL from 3rd – 6th classes, identified in 18% of responses. Some believe this should not be part of the revised curriculum as 'the curriculum is already overloaded'. Others expressing concern that time spent learning a modern foreign language would have a negative impact on learning in other areas. Some participants welcomed the introduction of MFL but expressed concern about the implementation, highlighting, for example, training and teacher 'competency in speaking that language' as a potential barrier to implementation.

The second most common theme related to Religion where 15% of educators surveyed expressed views that time spent on Religious Education should be reduced or take place outside school hours. A further 12% of responses related to the Patron's Programme where some argued for a reduction in time and other expressing the view that faith formation and preparation for religious sacraments should take place outside school hours. For example, one educator wrote 'in today's diverse classrooms, religious instruction and sacramental preparation should not be part of school hours'.

Concerns regarding curriculum overload was identified in 12% of educator responses and 9% of responses related to implementation of the revised curriculum. Some participants expressed concern that the current curriculum is already overloaded and that the proposed introduction of new areas in the revised curriculum would compound this. For example, one participant wrote that 'there needs to be a clear document outlining what is going to be removed. Please do not add anything to the curriculum without removing something else. The curriculum is completely overloaded'. Other participants identified supports needed for implementation of the revised curriculum, including a need for training and resources. One response highlighted the need for consistent messaging, 'the message we receive as teachers from the NCCA matches what we are told inspectors are looking for'.

8% of responses each related to Wellbeing and 7% to Drama. Some participants expressed the view that there is too much time allocated to Wellbeing. Other participants believed that Drama should be a methodology rather than a discrete subject.

3.3.11 Reflections on learning in light of experiences since March 2020

Phase 2 questionnaires included a question where participants could reflect on their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on education. They were invited to select their top three priorities for a redeveloped curriculum. Parent/guardian and educator responses are presented in the chart below (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Phase 2, questionnaire responses for parent question 14 and educator question 19

Phase 2, Questionnaire Responses for Parent Question 14 and Educator Question 19:

From your experience of the Covid-19 pandemic to date, please select your top three priorities for the finalisation of the draft framework.

Number of parent responses: 927
Number of educator responses: 316
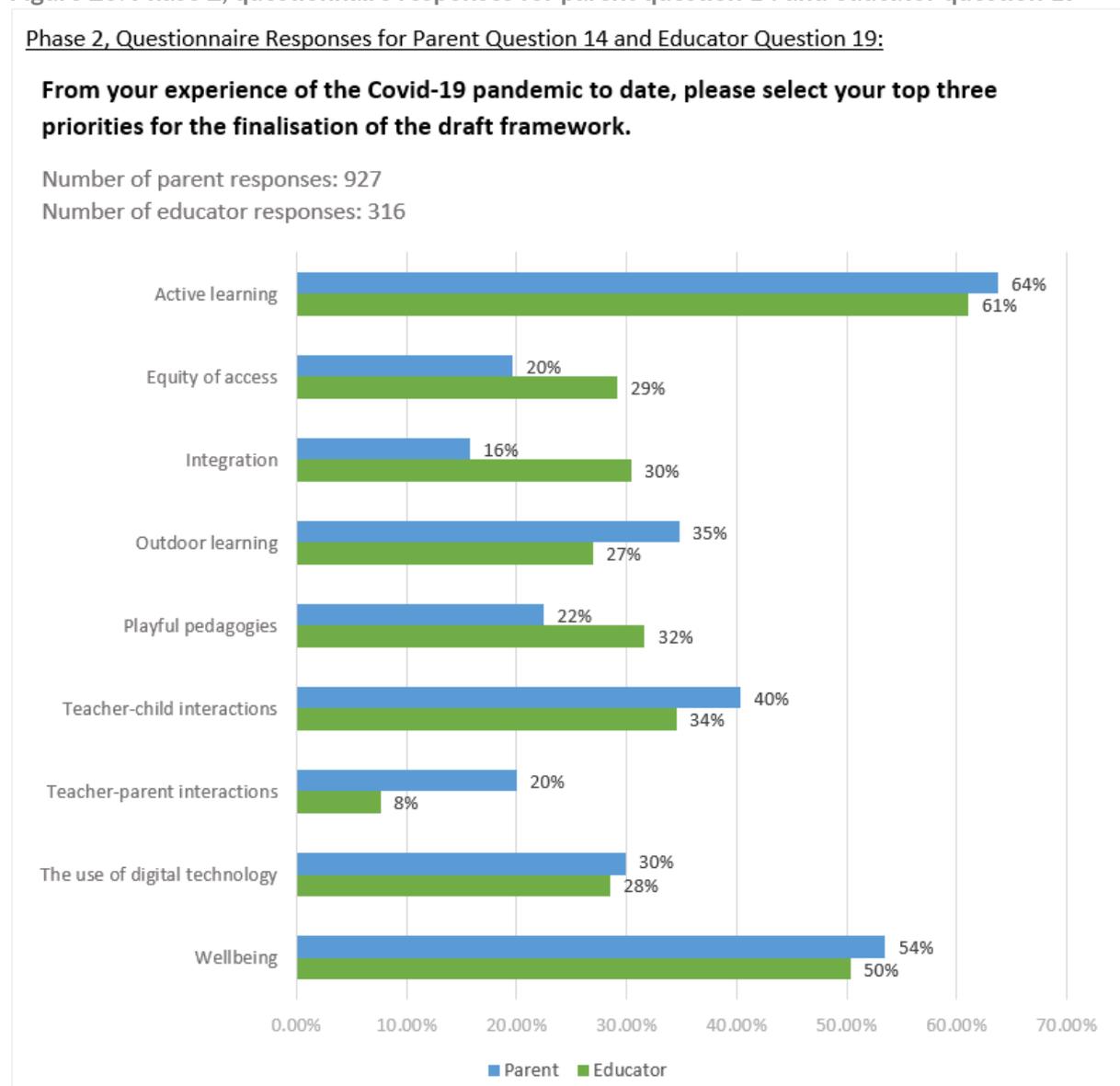
Comparing responses from both parents/guardians and educators, it is interesting to note that both groups identified 'Active learning', 'Wellbeing' and 'Teacher-child interactions' as their top three priorities for the finalisation of the draft framework. Following this, parents/guardians identified 'Outdoor learning' and 'The use of digital technology' as their fourth and fifth priorities, while educators identified 'Playful pedagogies' and 'Integration' as their fourth and fifth choices. For educators, 'Teacher-parent interactions' was the least commonly selected, while for parents/guardians, 'Integration' was chosen the least.

3.4 Schools Forum Workshop Materials

3.4.1 A more integrated approach to teaching and learning in the junior classes

Broad curriculum areas in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* were considered by most as a positive move, with favourable comments on the curriculum area of Wellbeing. The increased autonomy and flexibility afforded to schools and teachers was welcomed, as was the focus on cross-curricular links and meaningful child-led learning. The proposals were seen by some as helpful in reducing overload with one school commenting that the proposals for a more integrated approach were 'very exciting'.

Comments suggested that an integrated approach was already well developed and that the proposals were reflective of current practice in many junior classes with *Aistear* providing a framework for practice. Teachers inexperienced with junior classes should be provided with support in realising an integrated approach. Class size, a dearth of classroom assistants and a lack of resources to support play-based and enquiry-based learning were identified as negatively impacting on the realisation of a more integrated approach to teaching and learning.

Planning was an overriding issue, and teachers were concerned to identify it as central in realising the ambition of the redeveloped curriculum. At school level, resources in terms of time and professional development were seen as central. Some thought templates would be useful, others focused on the need to ensure that learning was incremental and progressive from year to year, and that unnecessary repetition was avoided. Meaningful integration was seen as predicated on careful planning at teacher level. Several responses reflected concerns that 'nothing important' would be left out. Time allocations were seen to provide a structure for safeguarding areas such as Literacy and Numeracy, but also for addressing planning across the curriculum areas. Monthly allocations and flexible time would allow for more cross curricular links.

While play and enquiry-based learning were seen as fundamental to learning in junior classes, there was a need to further promote these learning strategies in first and second class, and several advocates suggested extending them to all classes.

3.4.2 Assessment

Comments on assessment were overwhelmingly positive. Teachers welcomed the clarity of the presentation, including the continuum and strategies outlined. One comment suggested that as a result, there should be 'less anxiety around assessment'. There was support for the concept of valuing, working with and sharing information with all stakeholders. While parents were seen as key in the assessment process, clarity was requested on the forms that collaboration with parents might take. Several schools shared a concern that STEN scores were not clearly understood by parents and the source of much anxiety within families. One comment stated that 'the area of standardised testing needs to be revisited in the revised curriculum', while another asked whether 'the over focus on reporting of standardised testing in recent years ...has had a negative impact on the concept of assessment in education?'

The way in which assessment is presented in the draft framework means that there is now more choice and options of the types of assessment to use. The emphasis on the child at the centre of the assessment process was recognised as an important feature as 'it provides the child with the

opportunity to have voice'. Several comments welcomed the fact that the child will have a much more active role in the assessment process than previously.

In terms of realising assessment practice as outlined in the draft framework, concerns were expressed about how collaboration with stakeholders could be accommodated within current provision. Time within the school day was seen as a major issue, as was the understanding/preparedness of the partners in education that work with teachers.

Overall, teachers reported that the draft framework offered opportunities to develop an autonomous, agentic practice around assessment to support children and promote learning. One school stated that 'this could be a very positive development for teachers and children, so long as it is allowed, encouraged and supported to be implemented as intended'.

3.4.3 Key competencies

Many liked the competencies and their presentation. They were seen as 'modern concepts and vitally important'. Their value in foregrounding a holistic view of children's learning and development was highlighted, as was the fact that they linked in well with *Aistear*. Special education respondents felt that the introductory text resonated well with them. Others found the competencies 'too adult' and 'very disconnected from the school setting'.

Some wondered how the competencies/attributes could be assessed, since they were 'not very measurable', while others felt that the attributes were a useful guide in understanding how a particular competency might be displayed. It was suggested that, where appropriate, learning outcomes could be predicated on attributes, and attributes could provide a focus for planning and/or assessment.

Forty-two per cent strongly agreed with the importance of the seven competencies, 47% agreed and the remainder were unsure. Use of the label 'Being mathematical' was felt to be too subject specific and 'boxed in'. There was a suggestion that scientific attributes should be included in its list of attributes. The labels 'Being mathematical' and 'Being a digital learner' caused confusion and was interpreted by some as subject areas. This confusion may also account for the observations that History and Geography aspects are missing from the list of competencies, along with PE, reading and being a reader. It was observed that 'Being mathematical' and 'Communicating and using language' should be easier to develop given the recent emphases on these areas.

Many identified 'Fostering wellbeing' or 'Being a digital learner', or less often, 'Communicating and using language' as most important, though others saw all as equally important. The first two were also identified by many as challenging to teach and assess, along with 'Being an active citizen'. Most responses emphasised that professional development is required in order to offer appropriate support to children in developing the competencies, but particularly 'Being a digital learner'.

3.4.4 New time allocations

Weekly allocations for Language and Mathematics were welcomed. The time allocation for Wellbeing while welcomed by most, gave rise to questions which together convey teacher uncertainty about this area. This uncertainty emerges through questions such as: What content is

envisaged? Is this amount of time necessary? What training and programmes would be suggested for use? Does a time allocation still recognise and support the informal ways that Wellbeing is promoted in classrooms? Would the weekly allocation lead to 'over accountability' and a more 'formal' approach to this area?

Monthly allocations for Science and Technology Education, Arts Education, and Social and Environmental Education were considered by almost all as a positive change. Increased flexibility and agency for teachers, and deeper learning by children were seen as key consequences of working in longer blocks of time. Children's engagement in more project/theme-based learning, field trips, local initiatives, increased active/outdoor learning were identified as potential outcomes of monthly timetabling. Also, they provided important opportunities for the development of skills and competencies.

Flexible time for schools to use as they choose was identified as important in realising teacher agency. Both opportunities and threats arising were clearly recognised, including the possibility that it might result in the promotion of particular subjects to the detriment of others. Option 1 was seen as promoting teacher agency and offering teachers most flexibility but reservations were expressed that Wellbeing was getting too much time here. Option 2 was popular with those who wanted tighter time specifications for Language 1 and Language 2. The increased detail offered in Option 3 was welcomed by some. Overall responses clearly indicated most support for Option 1 as being the most flexible and offering most choice to schools, especially in the area of Language provision.

Key challenges associated with working with the time allocations include optimising the potential of flexible time in schools through whole-school planning, with opportunities to plan, collaborate and talk to colleagues; carefully designed timetabling with tracking of time; and integration.

3.4.5 Principles of teaching and learning

The comments on the principles were overwhelmingly positive. The 'holistic feel' to the principles and their potential to provide a good foundation for the work of schools was identified. They were seen as 'child focused and child centred', as well as 'sensible and realistic' and as 'comprehensive and clear' while 'providing a practical and relevant purpose for teaching and classroom practice'.

The centrality of Partnerships was considered particularly important, as was the focus on Transitions and Continuity. The Engagement principle with its reference to children's agency in making choices would require a shift in teachers' approaches to developing the curriculum, and some were unsure how this could be implemented.

While the principles were acknowledged as aspirational, they were not considered overly ambitious provided schools are supported in working with them. The principle of 'Inclusive Education and Diversity' was identified as one area requiring increased support to be anything other than aspirational. It was suggested that the principles related to Partnerships and Relationships are quite similar and might be better contained under one heading. The inclusion of the word 'caring' in the vision was welcomed, but it was noted that the Relationships principle didn't fully reflect the importance of children becoming caring individuals as mentioned in the vision.

Good connectivity was identified between the vision and the principles. There was recognition of 'a great deal of crossover' between them. It was also stated that 'the principles complement the vision and give the teacher a better understanding of their role'. A perceived disconnect between the vision and principles was observed by others who argued that 'the principles refer to partnerships between home and community with school and the vision only refers to the child and the teacher'. Some comments suggested that a digital element with reference to the technological/modern world should be acknowledged in the principles.

3.4.6 Transitions, continuity and progression in children's learning

Teachers described their school's strategies for supporting transitions. It was observed by some that in general, most transition practices tend to be characterised by fragmentation and a lack of communication, with a regrettable lack of shared language and purpose.

Several comments suggested that the principles presented in the draft framework connect well with the principles of *Aistear* and those of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. It was stated that 'there is clear evidence of principles from both ... in the principles of the draft curriculum'. The connections between the key competencies, the themes of *Aistear* and the key skills of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* were very clearly identifiable by respondents. The connections with these other frameworks were seen as important for continuity of learning and for supporting key principles across the continuum. For some, links between the three frameworks are evident, but better alignment in terms of wording is desirable, and 'would cause significantly less confusion when students transition to post-primary school'.

Some argued that differences in content and presentation between the frameworks are not of significance, provided that there are some shared principles. For example, the inclusion in the draft framework of Partnerships, Pedagogy, Learning Environments, as well as Transitions and Continuity was a divergence from the other two frameworks, but this was regarded as a positive in respect of the work of primary schools.

In planning for learning, raising primary teachers' awareness of *Aistear* and the *Framework for Junior Cycle*, and supporting increased communication around transitions were seen as potentially beneficial. Joint professional development to share ideas and practice which could contribute to promoting connections and continuity was also mooted.

3.4.7 Curriculum vision

Teachers identified a range of key purposes of a primary curriculum. It should help children realise their full potential by engaging them in learning which meets their needs in everyday life, as well as equipping them with the necessary skills to continue their formal learning beyond the primary school. For teachers, it should provide a framework that promotes a continuum of learning, and guides teachers in providing a broad and quality education.

There was a great deal of support for the vision. Comments suggest that teachers strongly support its holistic approach, describing it as 'extremely strong', 'inclusive', and 'non-prescriptive'. Its portrayal of the roles of children and teachers in realising the potential of primary education was commended by many.

Responses suggest appreciation of the image of children as capable with some teachers pointing out that, as children develop their capabilities and learn to act independently, resilience can be acquired. A dearth of supports for teachers in areas such as SEN was identified as a major obstacle preventing some children reaching their full potential. The image of teachers as agentic was welcomed, but concerns were expressed about how it could be received and understood by teachers, and how its interpretation by teachers as well as the partners in education might impact on the ways that teachers engage with the *Primary Curriculum Framework*.

Most were satisfied that general aims were not necessary and that the vision statement together with the principles and key competencies provided sufficient direction for schools and teachers. Some commented that planning with *Aistear* was difficult due to the lack of general aims, while others liked the continuity with *Aistear* and the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.

Most felt that the vision statement with its emphasis on inclusion, diversity, uniqueness and a holistic approach to education was reflected throughout the draft framework.

Section 4: Submissions

4.1 Background

This section provides a profile of the submissions on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. In total, 174 written submissions were received and all 147 submissions for which consent to publish was received have been published on the NCCA website to accompany this report. This section provides a brief profile of the submissions and key topics addressed within them.

4.2 Phased approach

As noted previously, in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the consultation design was amended and proceeded on a phased basis. Phase 1 took place from February 2020 to January 2021 and Phase 2 from October 2021 to February 2022.
The majority of the 174 submissions were received in Phase 1. In acknowledgement of the time between the phases of the consultation and the challenges associated with COVID-19, as part of Phase 2 NCCA contacted all those who had made submissions in Phase 1 to offer the opportunity to update their submissions. A section was added to the original submission template to invite reflections on the impact of the pandemic on responses to the draft framework. 18 requests to update submissions were received, and 14 submissions were actually updated before the consultation closed at the end of February 2022. 11 new submissions were also received, giving a total of 25 submissions that include feedback on the impact of COVID-19.

4.3 Submission formats

Submissions were received from both organisations and individuals in a variety of formats. While most submissions used the standard submission template based on the six key messages, other submissions were in the form of letters and various other types of written documents such as essays and leaflets. The breakdown of formats is as follows:
- 155 written submissions were received on NCCA's own submission template
- 7 were received in the form of letters
- 12 presented their information through other formats such as leaflets, presentation slides or essays (see Figure 27).

Figure 27: Overview of submission formats
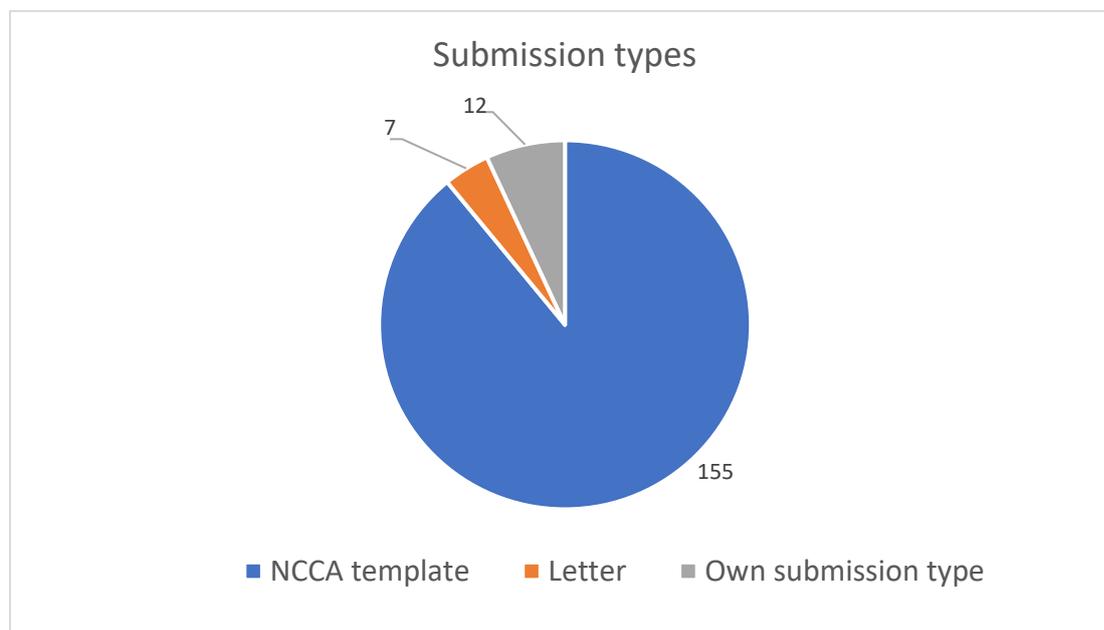
4.3.1 Submission template

The submission template was designed to enable alignment of the findings from the consultation across all data gathering methods, and a copy is included in Appendix 1 of this report. Section 1 of the submission template invited an overall response to the proposals in the draft framework, while Section 2 (2.1 – 2.6) invited feedback on each of the key messages[2]. Of the 155 submissions that were received on the NCCA submission template, 18 chose only to complete section 1, 'Overall response', but did not provide any feedback in Section 2 on the six key messages. See Table 2 below for a breakdown of completion of the various sections. It should be noted that, while the template requests a contact email for the author(s), in accordance with GDPR, this information is not published.

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[2] For the text of the six key messages, please see the <u>Frequently Asked Questions</u> document.

4.3.2 Permission to publish

The submission template included a section in which the author(s) indicated their permission for the submission to be published online at the end of the consultation process. In a number of instances, there is no indication of the author's preference in relation to publication. In some instances, the relevant section had not been completed while, in some cases where the submission template was not used, there was no indication as to the author's preference. These, and other circumstances, required clarification from authors on their permission or otherwise to publish the submissions included in this document. Follow up emails were sent to authors requesting an indication of whether or not they wanted their submission published, and while most responded, others did not. Out of a total of 174 submissions received, 147 have the requisite permission to publish and 27 do not.

Table 2: Completion rates for submission template sections

| Section of submission	N = 155	%
1 - Overall response	150	97%
2.1 - Agency and flexibility in schools	126	81%
2.2 - Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools	120	77%
2.3 - Emerging priorities for children's learning	124	80%
2.4 - Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented	124	81%
2.5 - Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning	120	77%
2.6 - Building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to the challenges and changing needs and priorities	122	79%
Phase 2: Additional section	N=25	
2.7 - Implications of schools' experience of the pandemic for the finalisation of the Primary Curriculum Framework	25	100%

4.4 Categories

There is considerable diversity of focus across the very large number of submissions received. All submissions were reviewed and categorised according to the main focus of the submission. This is not to suggest that individual submissions only address a single main point, but rather to identify groupings of submissions that will facilitate ease of navigation through the published submissions,

given the very large number of individual submissions. The main categories which emerged across the 174 submissions are:

- Inclusion
- Diversity
- Language
- Ethos
- Subject-specific
- Civic society
- General (mainly implementation/system issues) (see Figure 28 below).

Figure 28: Submission groupings and numbers of submissions per grouping
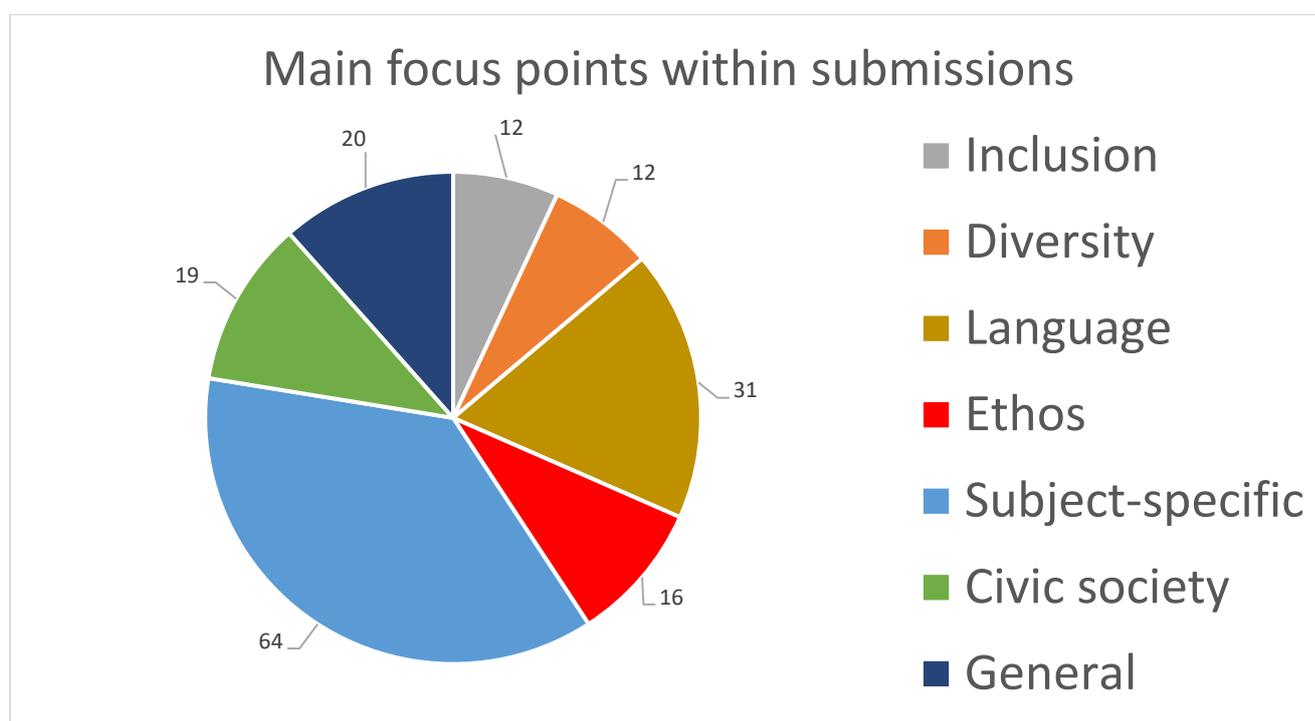
The following sections provide some insight into the range of topics focused on within each of the seven categories across the written submissions received.

4.4.1 Inclusion

Eleven submissions were categorised as having 'inclusion' as the central focus of the submission. These were made on behalf of individuals, special schools, advocacy groups and national organisations. The analysis of these submissions presents a range of topics and issues which were highlighted as requiring consideration as the curriculum is redeveloped, some of which include:

- attention to teaching 'practical skills' for children with additional needs
- greater supports for children with dyslexia
- an expanded 'core curriculum' for children with a visual impairment
- access to assistive technology and resources for all children with learning needs
- a focus on supporting independent living as children grow and develop
- greater use of the Arts in supporting inclusive education.

Considerable attention was paid to provision for Irish Sign Language (ISL) in a redeveloped Primary School Curriculum. Across these submissions reference was made to the rights of the ISL community under the Irish Sign Language Act (2017), that recognises the right of the community to use ISL as their native language and to develop and preserve the language. As well as seeking curricular provision for ISL, these submissions drew attention to the need for suitable conditions within which the cultural and linguistic needs of children using ISL can be met.

4.4.2 Diversity

During the categorisation process, diversity was understood in broad terms to encompass topics related to ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, age, and political and religious beliefs (although not ethos). Twelve submissions were categorised as broadly having a focus on these matters. The analysis of these submissions presents a range of topics which were highlighted as requiring consideration as the curriculum is redeveloped, some of which include:

- respect for people who identify as LGBTI+
- reflect seldom heard and/or marginalised voices in curriculum developments
- respect the place of religious education as integrated within the curriculum
- focus on global citizenship education and developmental education
- align messages of inclusion and diversity in *Aistear* and the redeveloped primary curriculum
- address the fragmented and misunderstood approach to religious education in the proposals to redevelop the primary curriculum
- support transgender issues in education
- reflect the role of women and children within the curriculum
- respect the right of parents to withdraw their child from teaching contrary to their conscience.

4.4.3 Language

Thirty-one submissions have been categorised as 'language'. While most of these submissions related to the teaching of the Irish language and to the introduction of a modern foreign language, some submissions also address other topics. While a mixture of views is presented, there was considerable focus on the supports that will be needed around implementation. Some of the topics within these areas that were addressed include:

The Irish Language

- importance of the Irish language from a cultural point of view in our country
- reflect the challenges of teaching Irish
- support the amount of time spent teaching Irish in L1 and L2 schools
- provide a clear vision for bi-lingualism and Irish
- consider a key competency of 'being bi-lingual'
- consider that Irish could be used to strengthen the key competencies
- recognise immersion education
- include reference to current policy regarding Irish exemptions
- reference the policy on Gaeltacht education and the policy on Irish-medium education
- develop a policy on Irish in the education system from preschool to 3rd level
- consider how to reverse the decline in Irish achievement in primary school
- build on the skills transfer which is central to the *Primary Language Curriculum*

- ensure that the Irish language will be included in any proposed development of computer systems and information technology
- support greater CPD across all areas but especially in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools.

Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)

- welcome for the teaching of a modern foreign language as there are benefits for learners and society
- consider requirements in terms of expertise of teachers in schools
- introduce a language awareness course rather than a third language
- support a language competency model whereby the introduction of MFL comes in stages 3 and 4
- provide flexibility and choice to schools around which language they wish to introduce
- consider the impact of MFL on teaching time for Irish
- consider the issue of curriculum overload with the introduction of MFL.

Other topics

- emphasise the importance of foundation skills in handwriting
- consider the inclusion of Irish Sign Language in the redeveloped curriculum
- reflect how CLIL methodologies support both language development and curriculum overload
- make links between the Primary Language Curriculum and new curriculum developments
- recognise language as central in the curriculum and the importance of literacy skills across the curriculum.

4.4.4 Ethos

Sixteen submissions were categorised under 'ethos' in the analysis. While some of these spoke broadly to a school's ethos or characteristic spirit, many were solely focused on the role of patrons, management bodies, boards of management and the patron's programme. The analysis of these submissions presents the following considerations for the redevelopment of the primary school curriculum:

- support schools as nurturing spaces for children to grow and reach their full potential
- recognise the role of patrons, management bodies and boards of management as stated under the Education Act (1998)
- provide an anthropological understanding of the person to include spiritual, moral and religious dimensions of the child
- support education in human values and wellbeing
- support the characteristic spirit of denominational schools
- provide 30-minutes of daily teaching time for the patron's programme
- reduce the patron's programme further than the 2-hours per week proposed
- recognise parents' right to withdraw their child from teaching that is contrary to their conscience
- support wellbeing as a part of school ethos.

4.4.5 Subject-specific

Sixty-five submissions have been categorised as 'subject-specific'. Many of these submissions address detailed issues that become pertinent as specifications are developed for each curriculum area and as such become an important reference point as developments progress in the coming years. It is notable that the vast majority of submissions broadly welcomed the proposals while

also highlighting topics and issues for consideration as the curriculum is redeveloped, some of which include:

Language

- provide a clear rationale for the introduction of MFLs and how they will be implemented at school level
- address teacher confidence and competence in language teaching, particularly MFL
- support the Irish language as new languages are introduced into the primary classroom
- support effective approaches to creative writing.

Mathematics, Science and Technology

- support problem-based mathematical teaching and learning
- provide a clear rationale for the composition of the curriculum area Mathematics, Science and Technology
- enhance food education in Science
- articulate the relationship between Science and Technology
- provide greater time for Science Education
- consider greater visibility of money management within Mathematics
- consider coding and computational thinking
- focus on the nature of scientific inquiry within Science
- consider the inclusion of scientific thinking within the key competency of 'Being Mathematical'
- support the connection between Mathematics and Physics.

Arts Education

- provide greater time for Arts Education
- provide for a broad range of learning experiences within Arts with expression and performance central
- support the prominence of dance, with discrete time, within the Arts.

Social and Environmental Education (SEE)

- support play-based and outdoor learning in SEE
- support practical and applied approaches to Geography through 21st century competencies
- recognise children as informed, caring and responsible citizens
- reflect the learning from the Global Citizenship Schools initiative
- reflect to a greater degree the principles of Education for Sustainable Development
- focus on the natural environment
- articulate the positioning of Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) within SEE
- recognise parents' right to withdraw their child from teaching that is contrary to their conscience
- consider the inclusion of children's everyday geographies or 'ethnogeographies' within a redeveloped Geography curriculum
- consider the inclusion of marine studies within SEE.

Wellbeing

- address alcoholism and addiction through Wellbeing
- support inclusion and diversity
- support the value of PE within Wellbeing
- consider the inclusion of 'health' within what is traditionally known as PE
- consider the inclusion of 'values' within what is traditionally known as Social, Personal and Health Education
- consider visibility of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) within Wellbeing
- support the development of fundamental movement skills as part of the curriculum
- support a whole-school approach as well as curricular provision for Wellbeing
- address cyber-bullying
- focus on a holistic view of wellbeing, beyond physical wellbeing
- support mindfulness practices within Wellbeing
- recognise parents as the primary educator of their child and their right to withdraw their child from teaching that is contrary to their conscience
- recognise spirituality within Wellbeing.

Other

- support teachers' understanding and use of learning outcome curricula
- clearly articulate the nature of play in the early years of primary and how this evolves as children move to the older classes
- mitigate against the influence of subject-specific textbooks on how curriculum is enacted in classrooms
- support both disciplinary learning and integrated learning in Stages 1 and 2
- focus on outdoor learning in the natural environment
- focus on creativity across the curriculum
- articulate how integration is to be understood and realised in a redeveloped curriculum
- embed Education for Sustainable Development, climate change and sustainable energy across the curriculum.

4.4.6 Civic society

Nineteen submissions were categorised under 'civic society' and were made by individuals and groups, including schools, educational organisations, advocacy groups and independent statutory bodies. These submissions highlighted a number of topics requiring consideration as the curriculum is redeveloped, for example:

- include financial education and financial literacy in relevant curriculum areas
- embed Global Citizenship Education or Development Education across the curriculum
- consider the inclusion of Global Citizenship Education as an additional overarching key competency
- emphasise 'global' and 'wider community' in the framework to develop awareness of interconnectedness and collective responsibility to each other and the world.
- include reference to Europe and the European Union in the framework and provide opportunities to explore Ireland's membership of the EU

- emphasise the important role of natural and outdoor learning environments and experiences, including woodland and marine environments
- increase the focus on Education for Sustainable Development and make explicit reference to Environmental Education in stages 3 and 4
- recognise child agency within the Vision and strengthen awareness of children's rights in and through education
- articulate how the Key Competencies can support children to develop core human rights values
- strengthen the use of digital technologies as a cross-sectoral tool for accessing the curriculum and empowering children to be active citizens.

A number of submissions spoke to the potential of the Key Competencies to support holistic development and the importance of embedding them throughout the curriculum. For example, 'Being an active citizen' was highlighted as having the potential to explore equality, global citizenship, human rights, and support children to live responsibly, justly and sustainably with regard for rights of others. 'Learning to be a learner' was described as underpinning a sense of learner identity and viewed by some as the cornerstone of all key competencies.

4.4.7 General

Twenty submissions were categorised as 'general' from the written submissions received. A range of topics are presented through these submissions, with a predominant focus point being on CPD and support for the redeveloped curriculum for teachers and school leaders. A number of topics requiring consideration as the curriculum is redeveloped are highlighted, including:

- provide greater clarity on how curriculum overload will be reduced particularly as new areas of learning are introduced
- articulate more clearly the importance of transitions from preschool to primary and on to post-primary education
- provide a schematic overview of the redeveloped curriculum
- enhance the visibility of playful approaches to teaching and learning
- enhance the visibility of child voice within the framework
- recognise leadership to a greater extent and include as a principle of the framework
- articulate more clearly how cross-curricular integration can support learning
- provide learning on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and online safety for children
- recognise the prevalence of multi-grade classrooms in primary schools and provide guidance in relation to curriculum enactment in this context
- balance the introduction of learning in digital technology/literacy with traditional literacy skills
- include spatial understanding and awareness in the curriculum
- clarify the relationship between *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum*
- balance teacher agency with national priorities and protocols to mitigate against inequity and the potential risk of lowering educational standards
- acknowledge the systemwide change necessary to support teacher agency in a system which has traditionally focused on output regulation
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
    - provide adequate time and space for teachers and school leaders to engage with change of this scale

- o   frontload CPD for this curriculum change before the curriculum is introduced – a focus on the vision, principles and pedagogical approaches of the curriculum
- o   provide system structures that enable collaboration, professional conversations, planning, reflection and ongoing professional learning
- o   provide context specific support to teachers and school leaders on a sustained basis
- o   provide support materials and guidance on key aspects of the curriculum
- o   set realistic expectations for curriculum familiarisation, exploration/experimentation, embedding and reviewing
- o   provide significant subject-based CPD to support teachers' pedagogical content knowledge
- o   provide CPD that reflects the principles of agency and ownership of teachers.

4.5 Conclusion

Submissions were received from a large number of organisations and individuals and these submissions addressed a broad and diverse range of issues. This profile has given a sense of that diversity and explained how the submissions have been managed in preparation for publication. As many of the submissions addressed issues directly related to specification development and/or enactment of the curriculum, they will continue to be a source of information for Council's work in the years ahead. The majority of these submissions are now published on the website to accompany this consultation report.

Section 5: Consultation with Children: Executive Summary

5.1 Introduction

In March 2020 Marino Institute of Education successfully tendered for a research project, commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), to consult with children on their views of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. This reflects an educational policy focus on the voice of the child as observed by *The Chief Inspector's Report* 2016-2020. It noted "the active inclusion of student voice in policy-making has been a notable change in educational policy development." (Dept of Education, 2022, p. 49).

The context for the consultation is primary curriculum review and redevelopment leading to the development of a new primary school curriculum. *The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* was published in February 2020. Six key messages were identified as underpinning the new draft framework and those six key messages informed the questions put to children. They include as follows:
1. Supporting agency and flexibility in schools
2. Building connections between pre-school, primary and post-primary schools
3. Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented
4. Emerging priorities for children's learning
5. Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning
6. Building on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum and responding to challenges arising from it.

Children from preschool settings, primary school and the first year of post-primary school were consulted on what they liked, disliked, and would change about learning in school. Amongst other questions, children were asked about how they like to learn, whether they felt they had autonomy or were given choices in school and about their priorities for learning in the 21st century. Teachers in the schools collected the data and returned audio recordings, drawings and worksheets to the research team. Online questionnaires were returned online by each individual research participant. Teachers were provided with online training and ongoing support to engage with the research project.

5.2 Methodology

The sample comprised twelve educational settings, which included two preschools, eight primary schools and two post-primary schools. The sample generated a considerable amount of data. It should be noted, however, that the sample size is relatively small and although many school types are represented (e.g. urban, rural, vertical schools, English-medium, Irish-medium, Gaeltacht school, DEIS), there may be only one example of a particular school type. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalising the findings.

The methodological approach was informed by Participative Learning Theories (PLTs) putting the child at the centre of the research process. Clark and Moss' (2011) mosaic research approach, which emphasises the importance of listening to children's voices using appropriately child-friendly research, was also used.

The research team probed the six messages in depth and then devised a series of questions to ask children based on each key message. In preschools and the junior section of primary schools (Junior Infants to Second Class), children responded to questions orally in audio-recorded interviews and through drawings and worksheets. Questionnaires were used in the senior section of primary schools (Third to Sixth Class) and in the first year of post-primary school. The children's teachers were the data gatherers and they sent the data to the research team, through pre-arranged channels, for analysis.

5.3 Key Findings

5.3.1 Supporting agency and flexibility in schools.

Play, physical movement, the Arts and technology are areas of the curriculum where, children tend to experience agency and a flexible or exploratory approach to learning. These are also the areas of learning that are reported as liked by children, therefore agency and flexibility may be a contributory factor to children's enjoyment of learning. In some respects, it appears that the primary school children's understanding of choice was quite narrow; they spoke about having choices in choosing what book to read or what picture to draw but they did not consider choice on a more macro level. Children in preschool indicated they had choice in deciding what to play with on the day they participated in the study. Children in senior primary school classes and in the first year of post-primary school felt a lack of agency in relation to their schooling. 92% of senior primary school students believed the teacher to be the primary decision maker. Post-primary school children reflecting on their experience of primary school, emphasised the 'fun' they had and the great friendships but noted that primary school was strict and their preference was for the freedom they experience at second level.

5.3.2 Building connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

Many young children agreed that they did similar activities in preschool and primary school such as play and art. Preschool was perceived as providing more of the comforts of home such as naps and access to food. Most children recalled discussing 'big school' when they were in preschool and talked about matters such as homework, play, friends and new teachers. They also felt that work might be harder. Children's drawings indicated that children may be more seat-bound in primary school than in preschool. Children in post-primary schools, reflecting back on their experience of primary school, consistently talked about friendships, playing, break time and football with friends. Some children also mentioned the easier workload in primary school but others complained that there was too much homework in primary school and the workload made it difficult to fit in extra-curricular activities.

5.3.3 Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

When asked about the structure of their school day, children talked about including longer break times, more play time, more field trips and they asked that subjects such as PE and Drama would take place more regularly. Senior primary school children asked for more activities, much like their junior counterparts. Post-primary school children seemed to like the variety of subjects available to them and having different teachers for different subjects. The overall feeling from post-primary school children, reflecting on the structure of the primary school curriculum, was that they would like to have experienced more autonomy in primary school. When asked how they learned in primary school, for example, the most common responses were through listening (323 responses),

asking questions (304 responses), and watching (295 responses). Learning by doing was the next most popular option expressed, at 257 responses.

5.3.4 Emerging priorities for children's learning

Children's priorities for learning mirror societal concerns, namely learning about different aspects of diversity and inclusion, as well as family and peer relationships, health, wellbeing, and climate change. The data revealed some divergence between what children liked learning and what they deemed to be important to learn. For example, the data shows that play is almost universally liked by young children; yet nearly a quarter of young children considered play as not important. Children in senior primary school rated Mathematics as the most important subject to learn in primary school, followed by English, History and then health and Wellbeing. Post-primary school children consider Mathematics to be by far the most important subject taught in primary school (109 responses). The next most important subject was considered to be English (43 responses), followed by sports (36 responses) and Irish (26 responses). Positive attitudes to the Irish language are linked to children's exposure to Irish. The Irish language was universally liked by children in Gaelscoileanna, but disliked by many children in English-medium schools.

5.3.5 Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning

Children indicated a strong preference for learning through activity-based and social approaches. Young children like playing, working in pairs or groups, and working alongside their teacher. Junior Infants particularly liked play (89%), asking teacher for help (81%) and watching a film to learn (78%). Senior Infants seemed to be moving away from dependence on the teacher with only 57% of children saying they liked asking teacher for help. 81% of Senior Infants said they liked learning by using technology. A noteworthy finding is young children's dislike of peer evaluation and self-evaluation, an area that needs further exploration. Children from the senior end of primary school and the first year of post-primary school also indicated their preference for hands-on activity-based learning but when asked how they learn/learned in primary school the highest number of responses were in relation to listening, asking questions and talk/discussion.

5.3.6 Building on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum and responding to challenges arising from it

Children seemed to have a strong sense that the world of the 21st century has different priorities to the generations of learners that went before them. They mentioned the need to know more about other cultures, technology, languages, Science and the environment. Interestingly, older children did not ask for more exposure to technology, stating they have quite an amount of exposure to technology outside of school. It is clear that all social aspects of learning in the curriculum need to be preserved and opportunities for the development of relationships should continue to be fostered. For children, young and old, the main preoccupations for them are friendships and playtime.

5.4 Implications of the findings

The voices of children in the report are loud and clear. They draw a number of issues to our attention and ask us to consider the following –

- More agency for children in the classroom
- Increase in the use of active learning strategies and inquiry-based approaches
- More time for Arts Education, and PE/sport activities
- A focus on issues relating to diversity, other cultures, other languages, the environment and wellbeing
- Consideration of the role of homework
- Consideration of how to use the outdoor environment more for learning and provision of outdoor play resources
- More school field trips
- Focus on how Irish is taught in English-medium schools
- Review approaches to the teaching of handwriting
- Greater attention to how creative technologies are used in the classroom for learning purposes
- More time for children to eat lunch and to play in school.

Section 6: Conclusion

Every effort was made to ensure the consultation on the proposals of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2020) provided anyone who wished to contribute to the consultation an opportunity to do so. The key findings, reported above, clearly indicate the level of interest as well as the diversity of views society holds in relation to primary education. The broad welcome for curriculum developments, over 20 years since the introduction of the 1999 curriculum, acknowledges the changes in Irish society and a recognition that it is timely to update, enhance and redevelop the *Primary School Curriculum.*

All consultation and research approaches have limitations, particularly when consulting broadly with multiple and diverse cohorts of people. In this context, the findings outlined in this consultation report need to be taken in the context of NCCA's other development processes and structures which relate to:

- Engagement with research
- Networks
- Deliberation.

Across the formats of consultation, we can identify an emerging consensus for the 'direction' of developments at primary. The general acceptance of the proposed vision, principles, key competences, statements on pedagogy and assessment, and inclusive nature of the proposals are all evident in feedback from respondents. There are also a number of considerations that emerge and which require attention as the redevelopment of the *Primary School Curriculum* progresses. Some of these echo educational debates that resurface at times of major curriculum redevelopment, while others are more directly concerned with the proposals put forward for consultation. An overview of findings across the key messages for a redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum* are captured below.

6.1 Key message 1

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* is designed to build on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum such as children's enjoyment of learning and teachers' increased use of active learning methodologies. At the same time, the draft framework responds to key challenges which schools have identified such as curriculum overload and using assessment in a meaningful way to inform teaching and learning.

Summary findings

Findings indicate agreement that features of the draft framework have the potential to reduce curriculum overload, but concern also emerged about the risk of increasing it. Learning Outcomes, curriculum areas and flexible time allocations are seen as positive in this regard, but concern exists about how the new structures will be operationalised. For example, there was considerable attention given to the introduction of MFL, which was welcomed as a reflection of our diverse society and a support for children's transitions, but much of it dealing with the implications of how it would be enacted on curriculum overload. There was agreement that the draft framework

has children at its centre, and there was very broadly based agreement on the framework's proposals on pedagogy, with considerable focus on the importance of play for all children, rather than limiting it to the infant classes. The draft framework's proposals on assessment were widely welcomed.

6.2 Key message 2

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* proposes changing how the curriculum is structured by moving from subjects in the first four years of primary school to broad curriculum areas which support an integrated approach to teaching and learning. These areas would become more differentiated into subjects from third class onwards to reflect children's growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising their learning.

Summary findings

While there was considerable commentary on the configuration of subjects within curriculum areas, there was consistent and widespread support for integrated curriculum areas for Stages 1 and 2, evolving into subjects for Stages 3 and 4. In the context of supporting children's transitions and promoting continuity, it was widely recommended that the transition between Stages 2 and 3 be given considerable attention in specification development to avoid creating a fracture in the continuity of children's learning experiences. The topic of integration was a significant feature of the feedback on this key message, with the balance of integrative approaches and disciplinary knowledge a key point of debate. Again, these considerations will impact on specification development and on the structures and mechanisms through which integration within and across curriculum areas is progressed.

6.3 Key message 3

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* makes proposals in relation to a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning. The draft framework emphasises the importance of curriculum integration, inclusive practice, inquiry based-learning and playful pedagogy. Assessment is presented as a central part of teachers' daily practice.

Summary findings

This is one area of the findings where agreement could be very clearly identified, and that was in relation to the appropriateness of play and playful pedagogies for junior classes. A distinct strand in the data is the widely held view that such pedagogies should be continued into Stages 3 and 4. There was agreement on the importance of integration as a feature of pedagogy, with ramifications for reduction in curriculum overload and an acknowledgement that the way integration is built into specifications will be the main measure of success. Again, there was extensive welcome for the draft framework's proposal on assessment, contextualised by concerns about CPD and the dominance of standardised testing.

6.4 Key message 4

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to curriculum connections and transitions between home, preschool and post-primary by providing a vision for children's learning across the eight years of primary school which links with learning experiences provided through *Aistear* and connects with learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle.*

Summary findings

The findings indicate widespread awareness of the significance of educational transitions for children as they progress from early childhood education through primary and on into post-primary school. Curriculum alignment and cohesion is seen as a vital contributor to positive transitions, and the draft framework was considered to enhance that alignment. However, the findings suggest that statements around the connectivity between *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* need to be much more explicit. The focus for feedback on the primary to post-primary transition tended to be on the need for greater communication between the sectors rather than any changes needed to the draft framework.

6.5 Key message 5

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to emerging priorities for children's learning, such as the key competencies, with a focus on children's skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. The draft framework also proposes an increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning and new aspects such as MFL, Technology, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, and a broader Arts Education.

Summary findings

In sum, the seven key competencies were very well received. There were suggestions about the titles of some key competencies, queries about how they would connect with learning outcomes across curriculum areas and subjects, debate as to whether they would resolve or add to curriculum overload but in the round, they generated predominantly positive responses. There was intense feedback focused on the place of religious education (RE), values, ERB and Ethics, the patron's programme and ethos in curriculum. A significant strand in the data around the proposals in the draft framework focused on the time allocation for the patron's programme, with suggestions that it should be rebalanced to give more time for curriculum areas. This was very closely associated with concerns about supports for children and families who do not engage with RE and/or the Patron's programme. As referenced in a previous section, the proposal to introduce MFL was welcomed, but there was considerable debate as to how it would be operationalised. Queries emerged as to why MFL is not being introduced until Stage 3 given that many children in the junior classes are already multi-lingual when they enter school, given the level of language diversity in the school population.

6.6 Key message 6

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to agency and flexibility in schools in terms of, for example, teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context and giving more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling. The draft framework is intended to be for every child, and the proposals on agency and flexibility are also about giving children greater opportunities for flexibility and choice in their learning.

Summary findings

The data on agency and flexibility is complex. One clear finding is that greater clarity is needed on the concept and enactment of child agency in relation to, for example, the balance of child agency and the role of teachers in pedagogical approaches such as inquiry-based learning and child-led play. There was absolute agreement on the concept of a curriculum for every child, but that was contextualised by a concern for the inclusion of children with additional and special educational needs. There were many references to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in this context.

The concept of the agentic teacher was widely welcomed by the profession and the findings indicate that teachers and school leaders believed that the draft framework acknowledges and builds on their professionalism. It must be said, however, that findings also indicate a lack of trust in the education system to create the conditions in which teachers and school leaders have the space to exercise agency.

While there was very pronounced welcome for the proposals to give more flexibility to teachers, school leaders and schools, it is fair to say there was a distinct strand of disquiet at the potential risk of local decision-making having a negative impact on 'standards' and children's experience of a broad and balanced curriculum. This was particularly focused on the potential for Gaeilge to 'lose out' and that debate was centred on the proposals on time allocations, which included flexible time. No consensus emerged on a preferred option of the three time-allocation proposals in the draft framework.

Overall, the findings on agency and flexibility could be summed up as a welcome for the opportunities envisaged, with some scepticism as to how the system will facilitate their realisation.

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Appendix 1: Submission templates

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	
Position	
Organisation	
Date	
E-mail	

The NCCA will publish written submissions received during the consultation. The submissions will include the author's/contributor's name/organisation. Do you consent to this submission being posted online?

Yes   [ ]   No   [ ]

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

The 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.

Section 1

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

Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

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

- Be for every child.

- Recognise teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context.

- Give more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling to identify and respond to priorities and opportunities.

- Connect with different school contexts in the education system.

- Give greater opportunities for flexibility and choice for children's learning.

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

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.

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.

Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

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

- Be broad and balanced in purpose and content.
- Be structured in five broad curriculum areas;
    - Language
    - Mathematics, Science and Technology Education
    - Wellbeing
    - Social and Environmental Education
    - Arts Education.

(In addition to the five areas above, the Patron's Programme is developed by a school's patron with the aim of contributing to the child's holistic development particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective and in the process, underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school. These areas connect to the themes of *Aistear* and to the subject-based work in Junior Cycle.)

- Provide for an integrated learning experience, with curriculum areas in Stages 1 and 2 (junior Infants – second Class) and more subject-based learning in Stages 3 and 4 (third class – sixth class).
- Use broad learning outcomes to describe the expected learning and development for children.
- Incorporate the new *Primary Language Curriculum / Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile.*

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to changing how the curriculum is structured and presented. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

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.

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.

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*.

Data Protection

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at dpo@ncca.ie.

Thank you for your submission.

Athbhreithniú agus Athfhorbairt ar Churaclam na Bunscoile

Teimpléad aighneachta scríofa d'eagraíochtaí, do ghrúpaí agus do dhaoine aonair ar mian leo freagra a thabhairt ar an *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile*

Cuirtear an teimpléad seo ar fáil mar chabhair duit (agus dod' chomhghleacaithe/eagraíocht) chun aighneacht scríofa a chur le chéile mar fhreagairt ar an *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile*. Le do thoil, seol do fhreagairt chomhlíonta chuig PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Sonraí aonair

Ainm	
Dáta	
Ríomhphost	

Sonraí na heagraíochta

Ainm	
Post	
Eagraíocht	
Dáta	
Ríomhphost	

Foilseoidh an CNCM na haighneachtaí scríofa a chuirtear chucu le linn an chomhairliúcháin.

Beidh ainm an duine / an údair / na heagraíochta luaite san aighneacht. An dtoileann tú an aighneacht seo a bheith foilsithe ar líne?

Toilím ☐   **Ní thoilím** ☐

Tabhair roinnt eolas cúlra faoi d'eagraíocht (más cuí)

Cuimsíonn an chuid eile den teimpléad dhá roinn. Iarrtar ort i Roinn 1 do thuairimí ginearálta agus do mheas a thabhairt ar an *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile.* Is é struchtúr Roinn 2 ná na sé príomhtheachtaireachtaí a bhaineann leis an dréachtchreat. Déantar achoimre ar gach teachtaireacht mar thaca leis an obair ar an bhfreagairt.

Roinn 1

Tabhair cuntas ginearálta, le do thoil, ar do fhreagairt ar an *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile.*

Roinn 1

Roinn 2

Gníomhaíocht agus solúbthacht i scoileanna

Maidir leis an gcuraclam athfhorbartha, molann an Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile:

- Gur le gach páiste é.

- Go n-aithneoidh sé gairmiúlacht agus gníomhú mhúinteoirí agus phríomhoidí agus iad ag cur an curaclam i bhfeidhm i gcomhthéacs a scoile féin.

- Go gcuirfidh sé breis solúbthachta ar fáil do scoileanna maidir le pleanáil agus socruithe amchláir chun deiseanna agus tosaíochtaí a aithint agus freagairt dóibhsan.

- Go ndéanfaidh sé naisc idir chomhthéacsanna éagsúla sa chóras oideachais.

- Go gcuirfidh sé breis deiseanna ar fáil le haghaidh solúbthacht agus rogha i bhfoghlaim páistí.

Tugann an *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile* rianú ar theachtaireachtaí tábhachtacha i leith gníomhaíocht agus solúbthacht i scoileanna. Tabhair, le do thoil, do aiseooas ginearálta maidir leis an bpríomhtheachtaireacht seo.

Naisc idir réamhscoileanna, bunscoileanna agus iarbhunscoileanna

Maidir leis an gcuraclam athfhorbartha, molann an Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile:

- Go leagfaidh sé amach fís soiléir d'fhoghlaim páistí thar ocht mbliana den bhunscoil.

- Go ndéanfaidh sé naisc le heispéiris foghlama a sholáthraítear trí théamaí *Aistear: Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige* agus go ndéanfaidh sé ceangal leis na hábhair, príomhscileanna agus ráitis foghlama sa *Chreat don tSraith Shóisearach*

- Go dtacóidh sé le haistrithe oideachasúla trí naisc a dhéanamh lena bhfoghlaimíonn páistí

  agus a modhanna foghlama sa bhaile, sa réamhscoil agus san iarbhunscoil

Tugann an *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile* rianú ar theachtaireachtaí tábhachtacha i leith naisc idir réamhscoileanna, bunscoileanna agus iarbhunscoileanna. Tabhair, le do thoil, do aiseolas ginearálta maidir leis an bpríomhtheachtaireacht.

Tosaíochtaí foghlama do pháistí ag teacht chun cinn

Maidir leis an gcuraclam athfhorbartha, molann an Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile:

- Go neadóidh sé seacht bpríomhinniúlachtaí trasna torthaí foghlama páistí ó Naíonáin Shóisearacha go Rang a Sé.

- Go ndíreoidh sé ar scileanna agus eolas páistí a fhorbairt mar aon le méin, luachanna agus dearcthaí. Is leathan iad na Torthaí Foghlama agus na Príomhinniúlachtaí chun cur síos ar an tuiscint níos leithne seo ar an bhfoghlaim.

- Go dtreiseoidh sé an bhéim ar réimsí atá ann cheana amhail Corpoideachas agus OSPS (Folláine) agus foghlaim dhigiteach, agus molann réimsí nua amhail Teangacha Iasachta Nua-aimseartha, Teicneolaíocht, Oideachas faoi Reiligiúin agus Chreidimh (ORC) agus Eitic, mar aon le hOideachas Ealaíon níos leithne.

Tugann an *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile* rianú ar theachtaireachtaí tábhachtacha i leith tosaíochtaí foghlama do pháistí ag teacht chun cinn. Tabhair, le do thoil, do aiseolas ginearálta maidir leis an bpríomhtheachtaireacht.

Struchtúr agus cur i láthair an churaclaim á athrú

Maidir leis an gcuraclam athfhorbartha, molann an Dréachtchreat Curaclaim Bunscoile:

- Go mbeidh sé leathan agus cothrom ina aidhmeanna agus ábhar.
- Go mbeidh sé leagtha amach i gcúig réimse leathan curaclaim:
    - Teanga
    - Oideachas Matamaitice, Eolaíochta agus Teicneolaíochta
    - Folláine
    - Oideachas Sóisialta is Imshaoil
    - Oideachas Ealaíon

(Ag teacht leis na cúig réimse thuas, déanann pátrún scoile Clár Pátrúin a fhorbairt chun cur le forbairt iomlán an pháiste, agus dearcadh reiligiúnach agus/nó eiticiúil ar leith á cur san áireamh. Mar thoradh ar an bpróiseas seo, bíonn an clár mar bhonn agus taca do shainspiorad na scoile. Tá na réimsí seo nasctha le téamaí Aistear agus le saothar in ábhair sa tSraith Shóisearach.)

- Go soláthróidh sé eispéireas foghlama comhtháite, bunaithe ar réimsí curaclaim i gCéimeanna 1 agus 2 (Naíonáin Shóisearacha – Rang 2) agus bunaithe ar ábhair i gCéimeanna 3 agus 4 (Rang 3 – Rang 6).
- Go n-úsáidfidh sé torthaí foghlama leathana chun cur síos ar an bhfoghlaim agus ar an bhforbairt a mbeifí ag súil leis i bpáistí.
- Go gcuimseoidh sé an Curaclam Teanga Bunscoile nua.
- Go mbeidh ábhair tacaíochta agus eiseamláirí d'fhoghlaim páistí ar fáil leis.

> **Tugann an *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile* rianú ar theachtaireachtaí tábhachtacha i leith struchtúr agus cur i láthair an churaclaim á athrú. Tabhair, le do thoil, do aiseolas ginearálta maidir leis an bpríomhtheachtaireacht.**

Ag tacú le raon modhanna agus straitéisí teagaisc le measúnú atá lárnach san teagasc agus foghlaim

Maidir leis an gcuraclam athfhorbartha, molann an Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile:

- Go gcuirfidh sé teagasc, foghlaim agus measúnú den chéad scoth chun cinn.
- Go mbeidh an tuiscint ann ar mheasúnú mar ghné riachtanach, ríthábhachtach den teagasc agus den bhfoghlaim.
- Go n-aibhseoidh sé tábhacht bhreithiúnas ghairmiúil mhúinteoirí agus iad ag tacú le dul chun cinn i bhfoghlaim páistí.
- Go spreagfaidh sé múinteoirí chun naisc shuntasacha a dhéanamh le hábhair suime páistí mar aon lena n-eispéiris.
- Go n-aithneoidh sé an tábhacht a bhaineann le gaolta d'ardchaighdeán agus an tionchar a bhíonn acu ar fhoghlaim páistí.

Tugann an *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile* rianú ar theachtaireachtaí tábhachtacha i leith tacú le raon modhanna agus straitéisí teagaisc le measúnú atá lárnach san teagasc agus foghlaim. Tabhair, le do thoil, do aiseolas ginearálta maidir leis an bpríomhtheachtaireacht.

Ag cur le buanna agus láidreachtaí churaclam 1999

Chuir curaclam 1999 le roinnt mhaith buanna, iad seo a leanas san áireamh:
- Mhéadaigh sé ar úsáid mhodheolaíochtaí gníomhacha san teagasc agus san fhoghlaim.

- Rinné sé foghlaim páistí níos taitneamhaí.

- Tháinig feabhas ar leibhéil ghnóthachtála sa léitheoireacht, sa mhatamaitic agus san eolaíocht, de réir mheasúnú náisiúnta agus idirnáisiúnta.

Díreoidh an curaclam athfhorbartha ar na cuspóirí seo:
- Réiteach a fháil ar ró-ualach curaclaim sa bhunscoil.

- Athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar straitéisí, ar thionscnaimh agus ar chláracha, agus tosaíochtaí foghlama do pháistí a shoiléiriú.

- Nasc a dhéanamh le *Aistear: an Creatchuraclam Luath-Óige* agus *Creat don tSraith Shóisearach.*

Tugann an *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile* rianú ar theachtaireachtaí tábhachtacha i leith na buanna agus láidreachtaí churaclam 1999, agus lena chois, ag aithint agus ag freagairt do dushláin, riachtanais agus tosaíochtaí. Tabhair, le do thoil, do aiseolas ginearálta maidir leis an bpríomhtheachtaireacht.

Covid-19

Ó foilsíodh *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile,* tá Covid-19 tar éis dúshlán mór a chruthú do scoileanna. Tabhair do thuairimí maidir le himpleachtaí taithí scoileanna ar an bpaindéim, ar thabhairt chun críche *Chreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile*

Ráiteas Príobháideachais

Tá lánmheas ag an CNCM ar do cheart chun príobháideachta. Aon fháisnéis phearsanta a chuireann tú ar fáil don CNCM, cosnófar é le sárchaighdeáin slándála agus rúndachta, go beacht de réir na nAchtanna um Chosaint Sonraí. Má tá tuilleadh eolas uait maidir le cosaint sonraí, cliceáil anseo https://www.ncca.ie/ga/ráiteas-príobháideachais , nó is féidir teagmháil a dhéanamh le hOifigeach Chosaint Sonraí na CNCM ag dpo@ncca.ie

Go raibh maith agat.

Appendix 2: Contributors to the consultation (submissions)

1.	AIPLF (Irish Association of French-Language Teachers) President
2.	Alcohol Action Ireland (AAI)
3.	Amalee Meehan, PhD
4.	An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
5.	An Foras Pátrúnachta
6.	Angela Langan
7.	Ann Moran
8.	Association for Drama Education in Ireland (ADEI)
9.	Atheist Ireland
10.	BeLonG To Youth Services
11.	Burrenbeo Trust
12.	Catherine Kenny
13.	Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA)
14.	Catríona Cunningham
15.	Centre for European Studies_UL
16.	Centre for School Leadership (CSL)
17.	Chloe McLoughlin Purcell and Emer Kenny
18.	Chris Addington
19.	Claire Redmond
20.	Colette O'Connor
21.	Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann
22.	Comhar chumann Forbartha Ghaoth Dobhair
23.	Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC)
24.	Conradh na Gaeilge
25.	Cork French Teachers' Association Chairperson
26.	Council of Irish Sign Language Teacher _Committees
27.	Dáithí Mac Cárthaigh
28.	Dance in Education Working Group
29.	Data Protection Commission
30.	Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul
31.	Department of Foreign Affairs _Irish Aid
32.	Dorothy Morrissey
33.	Dr Anne Dolan and Dr Jennifer Liston
34.	Dr. John O'Reilly, Dr. Emmanuel O'Grady
35.	Dr. Kevin Gormley
36.	Dr. Liz Dunphy
37.	Dr. Michael Flannery
38.	Dr. Suzanne Parkinson
39.	Dr. Thomas Finegan (and colleagues)
40.	Dublin Archdiocese Education Secretariat
41.	Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC)
42.	Dúlra Éireann
43.	Dyslexia Association of Ireland
44.	Educate Together
45.	Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
46.	Educational Research Centre
47.	Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce
48.	Erin Mollison, Deirbhile Curran
49.	Evelyn Moriarty
50.	Faculty of Education, Mary Immaculate College

51.	Féach
52.	Fighting Words
53.	Food in school
54.	Foras na Gaeilge
55.	Frances Shearer
56.	Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education
57.	Gael Linn
58.	Gaeloideachas
59.	Gearóid Ó Mórdha
60.	GIY - Schools Programme
61.	Global Action Plan Ireland
62.	Global Citizenship Education (GCE) - Primary
63.	Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education
64.	Goal Global Citizenship Department
65.	Grace Mulligan, Rachael Connelly, Ciara Walsh
66.	Health Service Executive
67.	Holy Family School for the Deaf
68.	Holy Family Special School
69.	Institute of Education, DCU_Jones Irwin
70.	INTO LGBT+ Teachers' Group
71.	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
72.	Irish Association for Applied Linguistics
73.	Irish Association for Primary Science Education
74.	Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference
75.	Irish Development Education Association (IDEA)
76.	Irish Doctors for the Environment
77.	Irish Forest School Association
78.	Irish Heart Foundation
79.	Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA)
80.	Irish Ocean Literacy Network
81.	Irish Primary PE Association
82.	Irish Schools Sustainability Network ISSN
83.	Irish Traveller Movement
84.	ITE_SPHE and Wellbeing Lecturers
85.	James Lowry
86.	John Patrick Doherty
87.	Joint Managerial Board
88.	Laura Furlong
89.	Leave no Trace Ireland
90.	Literacy Association of Ireland
91.	Love Geography
92.	Marino Institute of Education
93.	Martina Butler
94.	Marymount National School, Drogheda
95.	Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education
96.	Maureen Matthews
97.	MIC_Dept. of Learning, Society and Religious Education
98.	MIC_Lecturers in Religious Education
99.	MIC_PE Team
100.	Mícheál_Ó_Raghaillaigh
101.	Mindfulness Teachers Association of Ireland
102.	Miriam Keegan
103.	Muireann Ní Chonnaláin

104.	National Parent's Council
105.	Ombudsman for Children's Office
106.	One Voice for Languages
107.	Opt Out Rights
108.	PACT team
109.	Pádraig Mac Fhearghusa
110.	Patrick Burke
111.	PDST Digital Technologies Team
112.	PDST Foireann na Gaeilge
113.	PDST Health and Wellbeing Team
114.	PDST Leadership Team
115.	PDST Literacy Team
116.	PDST PLC Team
117.	PDST STEM Team
118.	Physical Education Team, School of Arts Education and Movement DCU
119.	Post-Primary Languages Ireland
120.	PRESERVE
121.	Primary Geography Education Team, DCU
122.	Primary School Diocesan Advisors Archdiocese of Tuam
123.	Researching Early Childhood Education Collaborative
124.	Richard Casey
125.	Sarah O'Rourke, Molly Curtin
126.	Seamus O'Neill
127.	Seán G. Gleasure
128.	Seán Ó Cionfhaola
129.	Seán Ó Súilleabháin
130.	Seán Ó Súilleabháin
131.	Shane Ó Gruagáin
132.	Sixmilebridge National School
133.	SPHE Network
134.	Sr. Edel Murphy
135.	St. Brigid's GNS
136.	St. Mary's Primary School
137.	St. Mary's Primary School Strokestown
138.	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)
139.	Teacher Educators Primary Physical Education Network
140.	Teaching staff of Clonbullogue NS
141.	The Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon
142.	The Camden Education Trust
143.	The Countess
144.	The Creative Ireland Programme
145.	Transgender Equality Network
146.	Trocaire
147.	Viboxo Sound Senses