



# ***Leading Out Seminar Series***

## **Report On Seminar 9**

### **Partners for Change 2**

# *Leading Out:* Partners for Change 2 – A collective journey of learning in the enactment phase

The launch of five curriculum specifications on Monday 22nd September 2025 in Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál, Inchicore, Dublin by Helen McEntee TD, Minister for Education and Youth marked the most substantial change to primary education in over two decades. These specifications along with the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (PCF) now comprise the full redeveloped curriculum for all primary and special schools, representing the outcome of a comprehensive, development process led by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). This process involved extensive research, consultation, networking and deliberation, with teachers, school leaders, children, parents, researchers and stakeholders across the education sector contributing throughout. Further detail on this development process is provided in [The Redeveloped Primary School Curriculum in Ireland: Charting the Redevelopment Process](#) (Walsh, 2025)

The *Leading Out* Seminar Series is designed to facilitate collaboration and shared sense-making among stakeholders as the primary curriculum was redeveloped and now introduced to primary and special schools. To date, *Leading Out* seminars have focused on topics such as, 'Agency and flexibility', 'Policy alignment and coherence', 'System-wide leadership', 'System-wide learning' and 'Teacher agency and identity'. Stakeholder engagements – including research, consultations, Schools Forum input, BEACONS events, and collaboration with the NCCA Advisory Panel (Primary) – have helped organisations identify the conditions needed to support the introduction of the redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum*. The conditions identified to support curriculum change were documented in [Supporting System wide Primary Curriculum Change \(NCCA, 2023\)](#) which was published in tandem with the [Primary Curriculum Framework](#) in Spring 2023. Furthermore, the NCCA primary podcast series has facilitated the gathering of different voices and perspectives on matters relating to learning, teaching and assessment in schools in this time of curriculum change and are available [here](#).

As the enactment of the redeveloped primary curriculum is a collective journey of learning and change for everyone, a comprehensive programme of professional development has been established to support teachers and school leaders as they engage with curriculum change over the coming years. To build on the strength of partnerships developed so far, a new series of *Leading Out* seminars has been launched. These seminars aim to:

- Promote ongoing dialogue and collaboration
- Strengthen collective efficacy
- Support the gradual enactment of the redeveloped primary curriculum.

The ultimate goal is to realise the vision of the redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum* in practice and to ensure its long-term success.

The deliberations of the 9th seminar of the *Leading Out* series – *Partners for Change 2* took place on December 2nd 2025 and are recorded in this document. It provides an overview of the presentations and a summary of the discussions at the seminar as stakeholders worked together to consider next steps in the roadmap for change and key messages for curriculum enactment in the years ahead.

# Enactment of the redeveloped Primary Curriculum: growing and learning together

Dr Tracy Curran, Director – curriculum and assessment, opened the seminar and invited Arlene Forster CEO to address participants. In her introductory remarks, Arlene reflected on media headlines that followed the launch of the redeveloped curriculum specifications. Looking to the next stage of curriculum enactment, she considered previous seminar inputs from Dr Thomas Walsh, a member of the NCCA Advisory Panel (Primary). Dr Walsh had argued that enactment is not about striving for the same thing in every school – context matters, enactment takes time and it must be really well supported by all stakeholders. Arlene suggested that to make the redeveloped curriculum a reality for learners, teachers and school leaders must take time to grow and learn together.

Following the introductory address, participants had an opportunity to reflect on what they were hearing following the publication of the redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum* in facilitated, roundtable discussion groups.

## Discussion 1:

The key themes emerged from the participants' conversations with colleagues following the publication of the curriculum specifications. Themes such as time and space for teachers to enact the curriculum, confidence and reassurance, and alignment of messaging appeared repeatedly, and across all discussions.

Participants reported a positive response to the redeveloped curriculum and that the journey of change was already happening in schools. There was a sense of excitement around specific curriculum areas; the renewed focus on playful learning and the greater prominence of child voice were welcome. First-hand experiences of introducing new time allocations were shared and it was reported that the focus on integration of learning across the curriculum was being very well received.

Collaboration between teaching colleagues and the collective effort of all were identified as key tenets of effective engagement with the redeveloped curriculum. The need for adequate time and space for teachers and school leaders to enact the redeveloped curriculum was seen as paramount. While teachers have some level of apprehension as to what all the changes might look like, school leaders reported a general feeling of nervousness regarding overseeing the enactment journey. The importance of affording schools the flexibility to adapt and learn from their experiences was emphasised. Ongoing support in building teacher confidence to exercise agency and to support pupil agency is required. The confidence needed to stand over decisions taken within a specific school context was discussed and the question raised – *What if our vision doesn't align with that of others?* Other participants reflected on the need for balance regarding agency, to avoid it becoming an excuse not to enact the curriculum.

Schools are generally appreciative about the flexibility offered around the order of specification enactment. It was acknowledged that it will be important to build on the positive momentum around the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum*. Participants welcomed the 2025/2026 introductory year focussing on familiarity with the PCF, giving teachers the opportunity to reflect first, take things from where they are and move forward. It was suggested that a day for schools to check where they are at before professional learning commenced would be beneficial. A reassuring message for teachers is that enactment is a process and that it doesn't all have to be done this year.

Given the complexity of special schools, it was reported that some teachers are nervous about a few of the newer parts of the curriculum. An example given was Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and how this might work at Stage 3 in a class with highly varied levels of abilities. Concern about how to choose the MFL was voiced. It was reported that CPD providers are heavily influencing the need for professional learning in MFL and causing some panic amongst teachers. Representatives from schools for the Deaf and hard of hearing wondered if further language supports will be provided to support their pupils in accessing learning from all curriculum specifications.

Alignment of stakeholder messaging and the need to bring all teachers' attention to Department of Education and Youth (DEY) communications that outline enactment expectations were seen to be critical. Getting messaging deeper into the system to dispel myths that have emerged, e.g. that teachers need to be fluent in a third language to teach MFL, is essential. It was noted that it may be necessary to pre-empt what other support materials could be useful to deal with misinformation with regard to the Wellbeing curriculum, in particular.

# Key messages to support curriculum enactment

Dr Patrick Sullivan, Deputy CEO, spoke of the need to move from an implementation mind-set to an enactment mind-set to support the vision of the redeveloped curriculum. He suggested that professional learning, including opportunities for sustained collaboration at school level, will be necessary. Patrick acknowledged that the current professional learning programme provides a strong foundation for this work. The *Leading Out* seminar series will continue to provide a forum for shared enactment experiences. Patrick ended his input by revisiting four key messages for all stakeholders around early curriculum enactment:

- We are building on our strengths to support every child to reach their potential
- We are all learning and growing as we enact the curriculum
- We will all work together to ensure positive learning experiences for every child
- We have agency to make the curriculum engaging and meaningful for every child.

Following Patrick's input, participants had the opportunity to engage in facilitated group discussions to consider what is currently being done at system and school level that aligns with each of the key messages and what possibilities exist for further development.

## Discussion 2

This discussion focussed on the very many strengths of the Irish primary school system in relation to each key message; how these provide a solid foundation for enactment of the redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum* and the opportunities that exist for further development. The following is a summary of the key themes that emerged in relation to the latter.

### **We are building on our strengths to support every child to reach their potential**

It was argued strongly that space within the school calendar to support leadership in creating conditions for professional dialogue that leads to reflection on curriculum enactment and transformative classroom practice is a priority. Teachers require opportunities to talk and work together and to share practice in a safe and supportive environment. Implementing lesson study at school level and creating networks for teachers to share practice will help foster collaboration and build confidence to sustain them on their enactment journeys. Offering different modes of support, including online options, allows greater accessibility. Partnership at all levels, including parents and students, is imperative. Helping parents to understand the redeveloped curriculum and pointing them to reliable sources of information regarding curriculum content will be important to dispel fear and anxiety.

### **We are all learning and growing as we enact the curriculum**

The importance of emphasising a mind-set that sees the redeveloped curriculum as an opportunity for teacher learning and development as opposed to a compliance exercise was seen to be critical. Professional learning that scaffolds teachers and reminds them that they are already on a journey of learning that builds on their current practice is required. Schools need to be practical in their approach and consider everything they are doing in terms of extra-curricular activities with a view to establishing if there is anything they need to drop to create space for appropriate engagement with the redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum*. Overall, a strategic, step-by-step approach to curriculum enactment will be important to avoid teachers becoming overwhelmed by perceived excessive demands.

## **We will all work together to ensure positive learning experiences for every child**

The importance of professional learning that helps teachers to better understand child agency and the vision of the child as an active agent in their learning at all stages was noted. Practical examples of child agency and how teachers can best harness the voice of the child in the classroom are needed. Some participants argued for the need to talk to children about curriculum changes with others suggesting that child voice could be used to determine the order of curricular areas. Participants spoke of the need for increased support for inclusion and, in particular, support for teachers in ASD classes from those with expertise in ASD and, for more engagement with multi-disciplinary teams. Some joint professional learning events for teachers in mainstream and special schools would facilitate sharing of expertise. The unique challenge of working with up to three curriculum frameworks in special schools was noted. ITE representatives spoke of the need for greater inter-department collaboration in the design of courses to support an integrated approach to learning. Ensuring that all staff, including school placement tutors, are aligned and on message regarding the redeveloped PC is a priority. With regard to plurilingualism, it was suggested that tensions around Irish exemptions, in light of the introduction of MFL, merit further consideration.

## **We have agency to make the curriculum engaging and meaningful for every child**

It was emphasised that a wider understanding of what teacher agency involves needs to be developed. Teachers need to see risk taking being modelled and they require scaffolding as they try out new approaches to learning. There were calls for more context-specific pedagogy and adequate resources to help make the curriculum meaningful for all children. Teachers require greater support in undertaking meaningful integration and in understanding how to support language awareness. Curriculum toolkits will continue to be important with newer elements of the specifications and in supporting teachers to translate the broad learning outcomes into well-focused, responsive learning activities. Encouraging teachers to see learning outcomes as an evolving process and to link positive learning outcomes with progression was deemed important. Textbooks need to be seen as a resource, a compass to direct teachers in terms of ideas, and not be over relied on or replace the curriculum.

Taken together, these contributions suggest a strong appetite for teacher agency and learning, alongside a very clear need for reassurance, modelling and time for teachers as they build confidence in enacting the specifications. At school level, teachers need to feel empowered to try out new approaches to teaching and learning, make decisions and move forward as a team.

# Spotlight on child and student voice in curriculum development

Dr Liam Clohessy, NCCA Education Officer, provided an input on child and student voice in curriculum development in Ireland. He shared a video to demonstrate how the NCCA gave those voices a prominent role in shaping curriculums in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC.<sup>1</sup> 4,000 children were involved in the *Children's School Lives* study underpinning the review of the *Primary School Curriculum*. Learners reported that they were happy to have had a say in the curriculum development process and what they had to say mattered to the NCCA. In conclusion, Liam reminded participants that it will be important to continue to listen and respond to children's voices in the enactment phase.

## Keynote address 'Pivoting towards future engagement and partnership for change'

### Professor Louise Hayward, University of Glasgow and NCCA Primary Advisory Panel

Professor Hayward opened her address by congratulating NCCA on the launch of the curriculum specifications. She reflected on the joy expressed by the young people on being part of the curriculum change process. Professor Hayward advised that teachers must have the opportunity to think and talk about what the redeveloped curriculum means in their classrooms. She advised against just telling teachers what to do as this will not support them in being creative. Professor Hayward advised that leadership is important to support curriculum enactment. She reassured participants that the redeveloped curriculum will come to life in the hands of skilful, agentic professionals and that the voice of the learners and their families will continue to be important as the curriculum is enacted.

## Discussion 3

Professor Hayward facilitated a discussion which sought to find out how do we continue to grow and move into the enactment phase. Participants had a very clear vision of what needed to be brought forward from the development phase as well as a keen insight into the supports required to scaffold less confident stakeholders. The strong appetite for structures that facilitate teacher collaboration, and the conditions where agency can thrive on the journey of curriculum enactment, was particularly striking.

### “ What was good about the process of redeveloping the curriculum and that is important to bring forward into the next phase (of enactment)?

A strong theme that emerged was the need for continued stakeholder collaboration. As enactment was seen to be a shared responsibility, stakeholder collaboration was deemed imperative in the enactment and review phases also. It was argued that the Schools Forum should continue to be used to develop practical supports for teachers and to pre-empt any future challenges. Consultation with learners should also continue, including their consistent representation at stakeholder events, and responses provided to voices to being heard. It was suggested that it may be useful to revisit the same voices where possible, for continuity. There was widespread agreement on the need to continue to build on the foundations of what is good in schools and to celebrate this, to reassure teachers.

<sup>1</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

**“ How can stakeholders in Ireland (teachers, school leaders, education partners) who are less confident or apprehensive about enacting curriculum change, be best supported?**

Participants emphasised the importance of consistent communication about what phased enactment actually means in dispelling any unnecessary fear among teachers. The publication of a timeline for MFL enactment along with a commitment to DEY supports, will be important. Strategic messaging around integration and connections between curriculum areas will help ameliorate the perception of curriculum overload. It was suggested that the administrative burden on school leaders be reduced to support them in overseeing enactment. Participants advised that school leaders should foster a culture of teacher learning by modelling that they are also learning. They should take time to explore teacher apprehension and promote teacher collaboration and experimentation. Practical suggestions were made such as the development of criteria to support reflection and holding post-professional learning sense-making sessions; providing time for teacher reflection to support sharing and embedding of practice (individual and collective reflection; discussion in-school and across schools – online communities etc.).

**“ How can Ireland continue to enable and amplify the voices of teachers, children and others through the process of curriculum enactment?**

There was a strong call for a co-ordinated, robust review process after a period of enactment to help share the benefits of curriculum change, including the perspectives of learners. Surveys, that capture wider stakeholder views on the enactment process at periodic intervals, could be issued. Acknowledging the feedback and, crucially, how any concerns are being addressed would be important. Early teacher feedback could be gathered as part of *Oide* support days and used to inform the system (at meso and macro levels) in an attempt to identify and address common concerns promptly. Participants advocated for the expansion of *Droichead* as a supportive mechanism for all teachers to facilitate the sharing of expertise and good practice. Context-specific TPL will give schools permission to engage with enactment from where they are at. Schools should be encouraged to reach out for timely support from *Oide* / *National Council for Special Education* when gaps in expertise are recognised.

There was widespread agreement on the importance of links with parents and the wider community to spread the message about curriculum change. There was a strong call for ongoing commitment to the types of shared discussions supported by *Leading Out* Seminars.

# Walking discussion to support shared sense-making

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Participants then engaged in a short discussion facilitated by Dr Tracy Curran, NCCA Director. They considered the following three statements:

1. Having agreed key messages for enactment is **the most important component** for ensuring coherence, continuity and alignment
2. Curriculum cannot be enacted successfully without **ALL stakeholders** getting on board
3. **All voices matter equally** in sharing experiences and learning about curriculum enactment

Participants expressed a wide range of opinions, highlighting the importance of multiple perspectives, school context, the challenge of misinformation and the need for shared understandings of the curriculum vision.

## Towards a future model of shared learning and collective responsiveness

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This session commenced with a facilitated group activity that sought to identify the enablers of effective teacher learning and the enactment experiences that might be useful to share to help build confidence. Participants again expressed the strongly held view that time and space in schools will be necessary for teacher collaboration to help them move forward with the enactment process.

In considering the enablers of effective teacher learning, participants emphasised the importance of exemplars of authentic classroom practice, either in-person modelling or video. Teachers learn best when the practice observed is delivered by colleagues who are knowledgeable and passionate about teaching and learning, and when the pupils are motivated and engaged in learning activities with a clear focus. Participants emphasised the importance of sustained connection with colleagues. Learning from the relatable, lived experiences of teachers that work in similar contexts was also acknowledged. Clustering of schools for high level professional learning and the establishment of professional communities of practice will facilitate this.

Feedback on knowledge or insights about enactment that will be useful to share underscored the importance of the curriculum vision and the need for this to be regularly repeated, unpacked and debated. Insights from school-based experiences of early enactment through multiple lenses, (teachers, pupils, parents) including success stories and the challenges and how these were overcome, should be shared at various stages. The importance of teachers having time to become familiar with the specifications; becoming increasingly confident in working with learning outcomes and understanding the pedagogy underpinning the curriculum was highlighted. Time for reflection on the enactment process, as one area is finished and before another is commenced, should be encouraged. Participants emphasised the importance of sharing the expectations of the Inspectorate and the role of inspectors as they engage with schools in the enactment phase.

Positive team relationships, built on a culture of trust and respect, along with supportive school leadership creates comfortable, safe conditions for teachers to share their learning. Having a secure space to be vulnerable while reflecting on teaching and learning, in terms of what works and doesn't work, was deemed to be important for psychological safety. Leadership that fosters a 'have a go' attitude empowers teachers in growing and learning. Providing different ways of managing feedback at staff level creates a safe climate for sharing learning. Having regular opportunities to consult with support services' professional learning leaders (PLLs) builds teacher confidence in sharing learning and classroom experiences. Dedicated professional learning communities for school leaders will provide a safe forum for sharing learning in overseeing curriculum enactment. In considering potential risks or concerns, it was highlighted that some teachers may feel isolated, less confident and overwhelmed by the redeveloped curriculum. Promoting the sense that teachers, together as a whole staff, are in the process of curriculum change will help reduce any levels of resistance and ensure that everyone is working to a common purpose. It will be imperative to dispel the narrative '**We are doing it already**'.

Participants suggested the following as the top ingredients for effective shared learning:

- A shared common purpose and understanding based on the curriculum vision
- High level, relevant professional learning and responsive supports to motivate teachers, especially in new areas like MFL
- Time and safe spaces at school level for teacher learning; a climate of trust, honesty and openness that empowers teachers to share and reflect on practice, both individually and collectively
- Ensure that school leaders and teachers are informed about the research behind the curriculum.

In considering the simple early actions that could be taken to help teachers learn from each other, the following were suggested:

- Be flexible and use the opportunities that are already in the system to create spaces for staff collaboration, professional conversations and for reflection
- Recognise and use teachers' expertise and create buddy system supports to help build teacher confidence
- Build on the *Droichead* model and create an open door policy with opportunities for all teachers to share professional practice and to see various methodologies in action
- NCCA to hold periodic shared learning days when teachers can share their experiences of curriculum enactment
- Create shared online spaces for teacher voice to promote professional conversations about early curriculum enactment experiences
- Create a shared online space for attendees at *Leading Out* Seminars and other stakeholders for sustained interactions beyond the scheduled events.

## Closing fireside chat

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Professor Louise Hayward and Dr Tracy Curran NCCA reflected on key learning from the day and how we might proceed into the early enactment phase.

A number of points were raised including the need to learn from the junior cycle experience when NCCA was very successful in getting the message of curriculum reform into wider society. Similar messaging will be important to bring all stakeholders along on the journey of primary curriculum reform. The vital importance of clear, consistent messaging across agencies was reemphasised. The need to scaffold teachers and build space and a culture of trust that supports shared learning were highlighted as essential.

## Next steps

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Dr Patrick Sullivan closed the seminar and thanked participants for their contributions. He talked about the importance of a positive school culture and the need for teachers to feel psychologically safe as they learn and grow in their professional practice. Patrick noted that the next step is to share the valuable learning from this seminar across the system.

