

Primary Developments:

Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam  
Teanga na Bunscoile

Report on the consultation on the draft  
curriculum for Stage 3 and 4/Céim 3 agus 4



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# 1. Introduction

Late 2015 saw the publication of the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for stages 1 and 2 (junior infants to second class). This was the first part of the 1999 primary curriculum to be reviewed and marked the beginning of the redevelopment of the curriculum as a whole. Since then, work has been focused on developing a language curriculum for stages 3 and 4 (third to sixth classes).

A Meitheal Forbartha<sup>1</sup> to work on the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for stages 3 and 4 was established in November 2016. The brief developed to inform the work of the Group outlined nine guiding principles summarised below.

1. Align with and reflect the rationale, aims and overview outlined in the *Primary Language Curriculum* (2015)
2. Provide curriculum continuity and coherence
3. Support progression
4. Be inclusive of all children
5. Promote a transfer of skills
6. Support Irish in different school contexts
7. Support children to engage with text in a digital age
8. Support teachers in interpreting and implementing the curriculum
9. Be mindful of external factors

The Group met on twelve occasions to develop the draft curriculum for third to sixth classes. This work was completed in January 2018 and culminated in the publication of the draft curriculum on [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)<sup>2</sup>. The Meitheal Forbartha will continue its work by considering feedback from the consultation as outlined in this report, and developing the curriculum further.

The consultation began on 19<sup>th</sup> February and continued until 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018. The NCCA engaged with a wide range of stakeholders including teachers, schools, parents, children, education partners, patrons and school networks. The consultation process was undertaken using a number of formats including online questionnaires, written submissions, work with schools, and engagement with experts in the

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for the list of Meitheal Forbartha membership.

<sup>2</sup> Full link: <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/draft-primary-language-curriculum>

field, and support services. The communication strategy employed involved the use of social media, webpages, NCCA events and through partner organisations. NCCA are grateful for the support from their education partners in promoting the consultation.

## Engagement

In all, 287 completed online questionnaire submissions were received and six written submissions; while 51 teachers attended consultative seminars. Significantly, the consultation also involved working with eleven primary schools from a broad range of contexts and over a sustained period of time. This engagement alongside the other formats provided a rich data set from a range of perspectives.

Several factors are likely to have impacted on engagement in the consultation. A number of deadlines for schools converged including requirements related to child protection, the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the ongoing consultation on the *Draft Primary Mathematics Curriculum for Stages 1 and 2*, and associated targets for the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022*. Another likely contributing factor is that the curriculum for stages 1 and 2 is beginning to be taught in schools, and so teachers may not have identified a need or urgency in contributing to a consultation which essentially extends this curriculum.

A major influencer on engagement was some critical discourse on social media. An anonymous post to a social media platform on 19<sup>th</sup> March resulted in a large number of additional contributions to the online questionnaire, multiplying responses in the days that followed. The post drew attention to the consultation and conveyed a great deal of dissatisfaction with the level of educational change in recent years. It called on teachers to voice their concerns through the online questionnaire. This experience provides important learnings for the NCCA in how consultations are designed and supported. In the context of this consultation, the social media commentary has impacted on the reliability of the data collected through the online questionnaire, which will be discussed later in the report.

## Some key messages in the draft curriculum

In response to the experience of schools with the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for stages 1 and 2, the draft curriculum for stages 3 and 4 fore-grounded some key messages for consultation. These are detailed in the table below.

*Pitch of learning outcomes and progression continua*

Clarifications on the expectations for children’s learning across school contexts are outlined on pages 7, 8 and 9 of the draft curriculum. This includes the extension of existing tables for stages 1 and 2, as well as the development of a new graphic indicating the general range of progression milestones across the three strands for stages 1, 2, 3 and 4.

*Linguistic diversity*

A new paragraph was included in the opening sections of the curriculum to recognise linguistic diversity in primary classrooms. It draws attention to the role a child’s home language has in the development of other languages, including English and/or Gaeilge.

*Clarifications on the use of progression continua*

A new statement on the use of progression continua was developed in consultation with the school network which indicates that children may move forwards/backwards along the continua depending on a range of circumstances and experiences. It includes the statement:

*It is not generally expected that classroom teachers would assess the progress of individual children using progression milestones. Rather they provide information to support periodic planning as well as holistic assessment of children’s and young people’s learning.*

The draft curriculum also extended outcomes from stages 1 and 2, to stages 3 and 4; with the addition of two new progression milestones. The draft also included a previous step, developed following the publication of the curriculum for stages 1 and 2, *early a*. This step was developed to provide further support to teachers in using the language curriculum to enable all children to make progress in their language learning. To date, the *early a* milestone has been in draft form and so not published within the curriculum for junior infants to second class. Its inclusion in the draft for stages 3 and 4 provided opportunity to consult on its usefulness and possible inclusion in the final curriculum document.

## Structure of the report

This consultation report is organised using the following sections:

- Methodology
- Findings
- Discussion and implications
- Next steps.

## 2. Methodology

The consultation process involved a range of formats with the aim of gathering feedback on the proposals for the development of the curriculum. The consultation formats included:

- online questionnaires
- written submissions
- work with schools
- consultative seminars
- collection of children's voices.

A brief description of each is provided below.

### Online questionnaire

As with previous consultations, the draft specifications—for English-medium schools, and for Irish-medium schools—were published online thereby providing access for all interested parties. An online questionnaire was developed in collaboration with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to gather responses relating to accessibility, usability and the development of support materials. As is the case in all open questionnaire formats, the respondents were self-selecting and therefore the sample collected is not representative. In other words, the responses to the questionnaires may be biased towards respondents who felt particularly strongly about curriculum developments.

### Written submissions

Written submissions were an important part of the consultation process. Six written submissions from organisations and individuals were received. These were read, coded, analysed and reported upon later in the report.

## Work with schools

The work with schools provided opportunity for teachers to spend time with, and to try out parts of the draft curriculum as they planned for, taught and assessed children’s language learning in their classrooms. The Primary Language Network (Appendix 2) was convened from October 2017 to April 2018 and comprised of eleven schools. Schools were identified following a public call for expressions of interest through the NCCA website, social media and INTOuch magazine. The schools represented both a geographical and contextual spread of school type, including urban DEIS, rural DEIS, scoil sa Ghaeltacht, Gaelscoil, special school, school with special classes, small rural and large urban.

An important aspect of this work was the establishment and maintenance of relationships with teachers. This involved a great deal of trust building, contact time and communication between NCCA and individual teachers. Two collective meetings were held, an introductory gathering in October 2017 and a final collective reflective session in April 2018. Between gatherings, NCCA team members visited schools to support their work with the draft specification, scaffold professional conversations and collect data.

## Consultative seminars

The purpose of the consultative seminars was to support focused discussion on the draft specification. Participants included teachers, principals, those working in initial teacher education and continuing professional development, and other education partners. The seminars took place in March 2018, in locations that provided a broad geographical representation. While the school network provided the opportunity to listen to school communities in their own environment, the seminars enabled teachers from different schools to come together, engage in rich discussion, listen to the views of others and provide their feedback. Interestingly, many teachers who attended the seminars indicated that they chose to attend as they were interested in 'upskilling' themselves in the new curriculum, before it was made available to schools. An overview of the locations of seminars is provided in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Locations and dates of consultative seminars**

Location	Date
<b>Midlands Hotel, Portlaoise</b>	March 12 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Silver Springs Hotel, Cork</b>	March 13 <sup>th</sup>
<b>The Harbour Hotel, Galway</b>	March 20 <sup>th</sup>

## Voices of children

By listening to children and giving them a voice on matters which affect them, they are enabled to contribute as active participants. This consultation sought to gather, analyse and present children’s voices on their experience with the draft curriculum for stages 3 and 4.

Children were invited to share their thoughts on their language experiences in English and in Irish as schools tried out aspects of the draft curriculum. Children in the senior classes were asked to write a short letter to the NCCA outlining what aspects of the language learning process they enjoyed, what parts they found challenging and what they would like more help with.

## Lines of inquiry

The lines of inquiry for consultation centred around three elements: accessibility, usability and support materials. These formed the framework within which questions were developed and views submitted. The table below provides greater detail as to lines of inquiry within each element.

**Table 2: Lines of inquiry**

<i>Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile, 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class</i>	
<b>Accessibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Language register across the specification</li> <li>▪ Content knowledge - understanding the learning within the learning outcomes</li> <li>▪ Connections and coherence across strands</li> <li>▪ Visual and physical presentation of learning outcomes and progression continua</li> <li>▪ Accessibility of T2 Gaeilge for English-medium schools</li> <li>▪ Definitions of ‘text’ and ‘genres’</li> </ul>
<b>Usability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ‘Pitch’ of the learning outcomes and progression continua – ‘recognising’ children’s learning in these</li> <li>▪ Unpacking the learning outcomes for a particular class</li> <li>▪ Planning teaching and learning using the learning outcomes and the progression continua</li> <li>▪ Using the specification to help with differentiation</li> <li>▪ Supporting progression in children’s learning and development</li> <li>▪ Connection and coherence between the learning outcomes in Stages 1 and 2 and those in Stages 3 and 4</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Using learning outcomes that span Stages 3 and 4</li> <li>▪ Progression from Milestone <i>h</i> to Milestone <i>i</i></li> <li>▪ Addition of only two 'further' Progression Milestones</li> <li>▪ Milestone <i>j</i> and exceptionally able children</li> </ul>
<b>Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pedagogies that need to be supported</li> </ul>
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Learning outcomes that might benefit from support material</li> </ul>

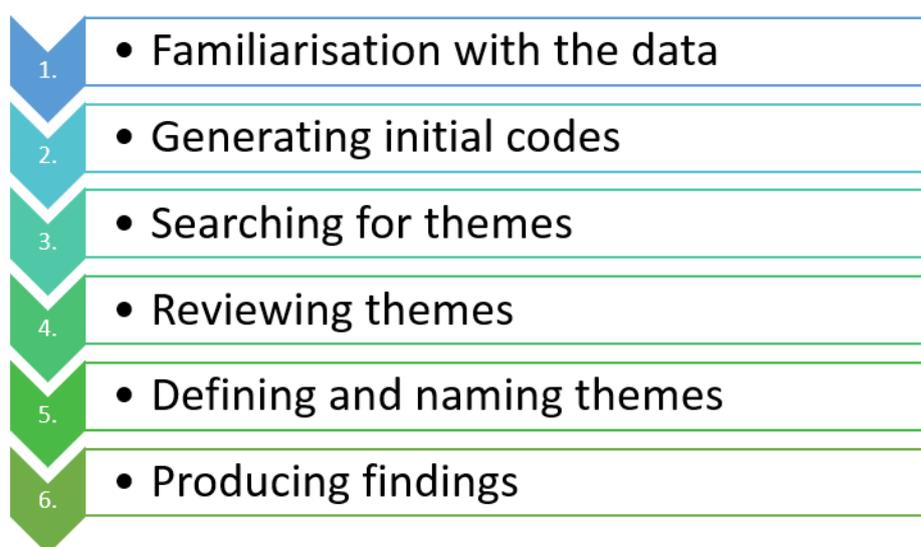
While this framework provided the broad basis for engagement, other areas also emerged as important points of feedback and these are also detailed in this report.

## Data analysis

### Consultative seminars and work with schools

The use of thematic analysis enables the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns in data. This approach was informed by the work of Braun and Clarke (2006), which outlines a process of familiarisation with the data, before generating initial codes, searching for thematic consistencies, reviewing initial themes and producing findings and propositional statements.

**Figure 1: Overview of analysis process from raw data to findings, adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 86)**



The development of a systematic approach to data gathering supported the accurate analysis of feedback from consultative seminars and work with schools. Templates developed to reflect the lines of inquiry provided a useful framework for feedback, while also providing space to respondents to elaborate as necessary on other considerations. The accurate keeping of field notes was also a strong feature of the data gathering exercise.

## Questionnaire

The analysis of the questionnaire data was undertaken by the Educational Research Centre (ERC). This involved analysis of responses in both a collective and individual context. For the purposes of reporting an overview summary of the findings of the questionnaire is provided in the main body of this report, with the full report and data set provided as Appendix 3.

## Written submissions

Each submission was read, analysed and coded accordingly. While consistent messages emerged from submissions, each provided a unique perspective. Rather than presenting the data in thematic form, the key messages from submissions are presented in short bullet point lists.

## Critical friend engagement

The consultation provided an opportunity to meet with a number of people with expertise in specific aspects of language learning. These discussions provided much additional feedback on the draft curriculum. Written records were kept of the conversations and discussions that took place during critical friend meetings. A number of critical friends submitted additional written feedback following meetings, and this was analysed in detail. Field notes documenting important and useful feedback and suggestions provided by those in attendance were analysed also. Follow up conversations were also a feature of this work in order to clarify and further explore suggestions in detail.

Quotations are used to present evidence from across the consultation formats. Where a quotation is provided in Irish, a translation is provided.

## 3. Findings

Findings from each consultation format are presented in this chapter. These findings result from the data collection and analysis described earlier and form the basis for the discussion in the following chapter.

### Primary Language Network

This section presents the findings of the data collected from schools, from the early stages of the consultation process to the end of the consultation phase. The findings indicate that schools were on their own journey in getting to know and understand the curriculum. It is organised under four headings: Accessibility, Usability, Support Materials and Other Considerations.

#### Accessibility

During the work with the Primary Language Network, feedback was sought on the accessibility of the document in both languages, English and Gaeilge, for English-medium and Irish-medium schools. In doing so, the language register across the specification was explored with teachers as well as their understanding and interpretation of the content presented. Teachers were asked to examine the draft specification and to provide feedback on coherence across strands and to interrogate the definitions of 'text and 'genres'. The accessibility of T2 Gaeilge for English-medium schools was also an important focus of the work with schools.

#### Language register

A key consideration for the schools in the Primary Language Network was to examine the accessibility of the language register for teachers. Some concerns were raised in relation to the complexity of language across the specification, with many participants stating that *less complicated language* [is] *needed in English and Gaeilge*. However, there was much evidence of teachers working successfully with their colleagues in schools in order to unpack and understand the content of the document. *D'oibrigh muid air le chéile agus uaireanta bhí orainn an teanga a bhriseadh síos agus déanamh amach go díreach céard a bhí i gceist/ag téastáí / We worked together and sometimes we had to break down*

*the language to try to understand what was being asked.* It was apparent that initial and continued familiarisation with the curriculum document and ongoing teacher collaboration was helpful in understanding and unpacking the language used in the curriculum.

It was expressed that the broad nature of learning outcomes could result in uncertainty about what needed to be taught and there was a call for clarity and indeed for greater prescription for teaching and learning. This view was not universal as many teachers found the learning outcomes to be clear and easy to understand. *Bhí na torthaí foghlama sóiléir agus beacht agus éasca le tuiscint cad a bhí le clúdú. Cuireann sé thú ag smaoineamh ar na páistí níos mó / The learning outcomes were clear and easy to understand what had to be covered. It makes you focus on the children more.* A small number of teachers in the network felt that the language of the learning outcomes and progression continua needed to be *less complicated and ambiguous in places.*

The additional milestones *i* and *j* in the progression continua were a source of much discussion and debate and were identified by some teachers as potentially challenging. Teachers remarked that these milestones seemed ‘longer’ and were more demanding than earlier steps in the continua. Many teachers welcomed the challenging nature of these progression steps and saw the scope they provided for meeting the needs of children of exceptional ability. *We feel that progression milestone j allows us to cater for children of exceptional ability.* There were a number of suggestions that these progression steps should be more concise and clearer for both languages in English-medium and Irish-medium contexts. For some teachers, an initial reaction was that the language was technical and daunting, particularly for Gaeilge T2, and in some cases for Gaeilge T1 in Irish-medium schools. However, engagement with the teachers in many cases led to an increased understanding and familiarisation with the language. *Familiarisation with the curriculum has reduced feelings of fear and complexity.* Teachers called for support to enable them to unpack the terminology in Gaeilge and there were numerous requests for a glossary or an equivalent tool to aid this. *An online explanation and hover over button online to describe terminology would be very useful.*

### **Layout and presentation**

A sub-theme emerged relating to the layout of the physical document and the presentation of content. A significant amount of feedback was gathered on the layout and presentation of the progression continua. For some, the document was too cumbersome to handle, therefore making it difficult to engage with. *The layout of the document is daunting and not user-friendly.*

Some teachers suggested that it would be preferable if all learning outcomes for individual strands could be presented on a single page. The fold-out nature of the continua was referenced by many as

problematic. *Tá an doiciméid ró-mhór agus deacair a léamh dá bharr / The document is too large and difficult to read as a result.* A number of alternative suggestions for the physical layout of the document were provided. These included providing the progression continua in poster format which could be helpful for teachers to refer to on an ongoing basis and at a glance. Another suggestion was that the progression continua should be restructured, with the relevant section of the progression continua for each strand being presented over three separate pages and organised according to the three elements of the language curriculum. An alternative recommendation was to present each learning outcome alongside the relevant section of the progression continua, so that learning outcomes and their related progression steps are visible as a combined unit. In addition to suggestions around the layout of the curriculum document, a significant number of teachers called for *the use of bullet points within the learning outcomes and progression steps* to help unpack aspects of learning as separate entities.

## Usability

The second key focus of the work with the Primary Language Network was the usability of the draft curriculum. Teachers were asked to examine the draft specification alongside the junior infants to second class curriculum specification in order to provide feedback on the connections and coherence between learning outcomes for stages 1 and 2 and those for stages 3 and 4. The appropriateness of the draft specification in catering for differentiation and supporting progression was also explored. Teachers' experiences of using learning outcomes and progression steps were examined. Insights into teachers' experiences are now presented according to a number of sub-themes which emerged in the data.

### Learning outcomes

An important area of focus for the Primary Language Network was on how teachers used learning outcomes to inform teaching and learning in their classroom. Through sustained engagement with the draft specification, many teachers identified the benefits of working with learning outcomes. *Learning outcomes were effective in zoning in on particular aspects of language learning in a way suitable to our particular school.* However, some teachers felt that using broad learning outcomes is a significant change. It was suggested that it would be useful for teachers if specific examples were provided of what learning outcomes 'in action' might look like in the classroom. *There is a need for support on the use of learning outcomes.* In this regard, it was felt that greater guidance and exemplification around

using learning outcomes would help teachers to engage more confidently with broad learning outcomes. *A menu of ideas and support materials for individual learning outcomes should be provided to help teachers come to terms with using learning outcomes.*

There was positive feedback for the additions to the inclusion of the learning outcome 'Motivation and Choice' in the Oral Language strand and 'Response and Author's Intent' in the Reading strand being described as being helpful in supporting and expanding the scope of children's learning. *The inclusion of a learning outcome related to motivation and choice is a positive addition. Without motivation, language learning can't happen.* Equally, the increased visibility of culture and identity as important aspects of children's language learning and development were welcomed in the draft.

A significant observation from working with the schools was evidence of teachers focusing primarily on the progression continua for the purpose of their planning, teaching and assessment. There was a tendency for many teachers to refer primarily to the progression continua in their planning rather than the learning outcomes. Teachers in general were strongly inclined towards the finer details in the progression steps, with some teachers stating that they focused more on the progression steps than on the learning outcomes. *At first, we were not going to the learning outcomes and were going directly to the progression continua.* While teachers became more aware of the importance of learning outcomes for planning and teaching they expressed the need for a clear explanation in the curriculum document that *learning outcomes need to be planned for, taught and addressed repeatedly.*

### **Progression continua**

Teachers' experiences of using the progression continua for teaching and learning were varied. Many teachers saw the progression continua as beneficial and useful in directing their teaching. *The progression continua help you to focus on what you want to teach.* While clarifications presented in the draft specification regarding the use of the progression continua were broadly welcomed, respondents continued to seek greater clarity around the relationship between learning outcomes and progression steps. *Further clarity on the progression continua and how to manage links between learning outcomes and progression steps is needed.*

It was commented on during the consultation that language learning does not always follow a linear trajectory as the presentation of the progression continua might imply. *Content cannot always be taught in a linear fashion as presented.* The development of comprehension was provided as an example. It was suggested by one teacher that *some of the progression steps lend themselves to going back and forth e.g. comprehension strategies are not necessarily taught in order; they are taught on a continuous basis, building upon each one and teaching them together.* It was also considered by some

teachers that using the progression steps as a supportive rather than as a prescriptive tool would be helpful. *The progression continua should be used as a tool box to consult with when needed.*

Many teachers spoke of the usefulness of the progression steps in helping to guide and direct their teaching. It was stated that the progression steps clearly link to the learning outcomes and help focus on the specific learning within those learning outcomes. However, others questioned whether it was necessary for them to use the progression steps for their planning. *Teachers feel compelled to use the progression continua but is this a must?* A number of teachers addressed the possible implications of the progression continua for assessment. One teacher expressed concern that it is *impossible to plot children on an overall progression milestone letter*. The need for further guidance on using progression steps was exemplified by many teachers. *Further work is needed on telling teachers how to use progression steps.*

## **Gaeilge L2**

A number of English-medium and Irish-medium schools in the network focused on the Gaeilge section of the draft specification. One school in particular saw their involvement in the network as *a positive opportunity to promote the teaching of Gaeilge throughout the school*. One principal noted that the curriculum would only be a success if schools fostered a positive disposition towards Gaeilge in general. Others also noted the need to emphasise the importance of ‘Gnáthchaint an Lae trí Ghaeilge’ and ‘Gaeilge Neamhfhoirmiúil’ as well as fostering a *willingness to focus on the use of Irish throughout the school*.

A significant area of feedback related to the challenge of teaching Gaeilge T2 in English-medium schools. A number of teachers in one school spoke of the *difficulties in getting children to speak Irish freely* and concluded that *it is so hard to teach Irish now*. For some, the learning outcomes were considered effective in supporting teachers to focus on specific aspects of Gaeilge. The progression steps were also highlighted as being helpful for teachers to identify the learning needs of children *and in spotting deficits and gaps in learning in Gaeilge*. However, some teachers expressed feelings that the progress of children’s learning of Gaeilge in the senior years of primary school is slower than in the junior years, and as a result felt that learning outcomes in stages 1 and 2 could be appropriate for many children in the senior classes. Some teachers expressed a sense of deflation in this regard stating that *children in the senior classes are so far back in the continuum*. Many teachers in English-medium schools suggested that the language development of children for Gaeilge in the senior classes is represented in the early milestones of the progression continua. *Children were at Ceim 1 and 2 in my 4<sup>th</sup> class.*

## Planning

The majority of teachers expressed concern around planning for the Primary Language Curriculum. Some suggested that it was difficult to plan using both the learning outcomes and progression steps, citing confusion as to the status of the progression continua in the curriculum. Other teachers described the time taken to identify the relationship between the learning outcomes and the progression steps. *It took a while to understand the links between the learning outcomes and progression steps and how to apply this to our teaching.* Some teachers called for the extension of the planning tool for the Primary Language Curriculum in order to simplify the planning process. However, in many cases teachers developed their own plans, reporting their successes with developing bespoke plans suited to their particular context and needs. Although flexibility in how teachers plan for the Primary Language Curriculum was welcomed, there was a desire for clear and consistent messages around the expectations for planning to be delineated in the curriculum document. Many teachers referred to the benefits of having the opportunity to be part of the Primary Language Network and to engage with and have conversations with other teachers in their schools and in other schools. *The whole school was involved in the conversation and not just senior classes. This was very positive for us.*

## Assessment

A question around the relationship between the progression continua and assessment also emerged during the work with network schools. It was suggested by some that the fashion in which the progression continua are presented would lead them to becoming assessment of learning tools. Other teachers suggested that the use of letters in the progression continua may encourage teachers to plot children along the continuum. There was a fear that this in turn may become a summative rather than a formative assessment activity. A number of teachers queried the implications of the Primary Language Curriculum for standardised testing, with some stating that *standardised testing needs to change to reflect the new curriculum.*

## Support materials

Engagement with schools and teachers in the Primary Language Network highlighted the need for supports to be developed and provided. A range of suggested support materials were identified, largely related to supporting appropriate approaches to language learning in the middle and senior classes of primary school. A number of schools referred to the usefulness of *a menu of ideas for teaching individual learning outcomes* or something similar. In addition to this, there were calls for

examples of good practice to be provided. *There is a need for practice guides that would show examples of what is being done in schools and to showcase useful examples of good practice.* There were particular requests for supports around the teaching of Gaeilge in English-medium schools. Guidelines for planning and assessment were also recognised as much needed supports in implementing the curriculum. All suggestions made by teachers were recorded in an online database.

Teachers stated that they generally found the second day of in-service for the Primary Language Curriculum with the PDST very helpful and informative. *The second training day showed how the curriculum can be taught in a less rigid way and this was beneficial.* Teachers stated strongly that more support and professional development opportunities would be beneficial in helping teachers to become familiar with and confident in implementing the curriculum. There was significant support for further professional development to be provided within the school setting.

A strong call for support in implementing Gaeilge in T1 and L2 settings was evident. This included a call for ample examples of children's learning in Gaeilge T1 and T2, supports for the specific teaching of Irish grammar and phonics and an online 'hover over' tool to aid teachers in unpacking and understanding challenging terminology within the curriculum for Gaeilge. *The terminology in Gaeilge is an issue and a glossary would be necessary.*

## Other considerations

During the work with schools a number of other sub-themes were considered. These included linguistic diversity in the curriculum, cross-curricular integration, transfer of skills across languages and the positioning and suitability of the *early a* milestone in the Primary Language Curriculum.

### **Linguistic diversity**

Many teachers welcomed the additional section on linguistic diversity in the opening sections of the curriculum and the clarifications on the importance of acknowledging and promoting linguistic diversity in primary school classrooms. However, a sense of confusion around the practicalities of doing so in the classroom was expressed. Teachers questioned the expectations that this would place on them and on implications for teaching, learning and assessment in the classroom. A number of teachers felt that *more clarity is needed around the term 'other languages'* as referenced in the draft specification. A number of teachers interpreted the inclusion of 'other languages' as proposing that teachers should be teaching other languages in addition to English and Gaeilge, and therefore viewed this as *a concern*. Engagement with the Primary Language Network did, however, result in a number

of teachers fostering more positive views of promoting linguistic diversity in schools and classrooms. *At first, I thought the words 'other languages' in learning outcomes meant we had to teach them. If it's more about allowing EAL children to use their languages and share them, that's a very different thing.* Despite initial reservations around reference to 'other languages' in the curriculum, one particular school in the network decided to purchase a range of dual language books in children's mother tongues and English for the school library as an initial move towards promoting linguistic diversity in the school.

### **Cross-curricular integration**

The cross-curricular nature of this curriculum was explored with schools. A number of teachers identified possibilities for cross-curricular integration but felt that opportunities needed to be highlighted very clearly and referenced in learning outcomes. *The cross-curricular nature of this curriculum needs to be highlighted clearly and even referenced to in the learning outcomes.* In addition, teachers called for more specific examples of cross-curricular links which could be provided in the form of support materials. *Examples of cross curricular links could be perhaps shared in support materials.* There was a general feeling that teachers need to be explicitly shown how to draw links between the primary language curriculum and other curriculum areas and that providing a list of general themes would be helpful in this regard. As an example of how schools explored cross-curricular links, one school felt that addressing the learning outcome 'creating texts' could be applied to all subjects. One teacher alluded to the fact that the broad definition of 'text' as presented in the curriculum also facilitates cross-curricular integration and allows learning to extend into other subjects.

### **Transfer of skills**

A number of schools chose to focus on both English and Gaeilge, exploring the benefits of working with both languages simultaneously. According to the teachers from one school, the experience of working with strands in both English and Gaeilge enabled them to gain a deeper understanding of the transfer of skills across languages. *Looking at writing in English and scríbhneoireacht in Gaeilge together helped in understanding [the] concept of transfer of skills.* The teachers in this particular school discussed the importance of *starting where the children are at.* During conversations with participants in the network, it became apparent that many of the teachers felt that they needed to become familiar with both the English and Gaeilge sections of the curriculum before engaging in planning for teaching for a transfer of skills across both languages.

### **'Early a' progression milestone**

While the schools welcomed the inclusion of the *Early a* progression milestone in the draft specification, many gaps within its progression steps were identified by special schools, schools with special classes and schools with ASD classes. One school suggested that *Early a* does not go far enough in meeting the needs of all children. *Early a as it is still does not go far enough. There are gaps there.* A number of examples were given of progression steps where *Early a* appears to be at a more advanced level than progression milestone *a*. Some of the vocabulary used in the *Early a* steps was seen as challenging. The need for *Early a* to reflect the critical importance of language and communication for children with SEN was conveyed by many teachers of special classes, ASD classes and classes in the special school.

There was a broad welcome for the SEN Pathways Support Material which sets out to support teachers of children in SEN settings. Nonetheless, a call for the current General Learning Disabilities (GLD) guidelines to be modified to work alongside the Primary Language Curriculum was also evident.

### **Schools' experience with the network**

In general, principals and teachers valued the opportunity to be a part of the Primary Language Network as it facilitated whole school engagement. *We were enthused about being involved and this transferred to the pupils.* Engagement with the network was viewed as beneficial for two main reasons; firstly, as an opportunity for teachers to have additional time to become familiar with the curriculum before its formal introduction and secondly, as a means of having the opportunity to critically reflect on the draft specification. *Engaging with the draft has resulted in us reflecting on our current practices. This has impacted on teaching in a positive way.* Many teachers expressed the opinion that it will take a number of years of engagement with the curriculum, especially for Gaeilge, in order for marked improvements in children's language learning to become visible. In addition, it was noted that teachers felt a change in attitude towards the Irish language in general is needed in order for the curriculum to be a success. Positive aspects of the Primary Language Curriculum referred to include a 'greater emphasis on the learner' and the visibility of creative aspects of language learning. Many of the schools expressed an interest in future and ongoing involvement with the Primary Language Network due to their positive experiences of engagement in it. *It's positive that we had an influence, a say and ownership of content.*

# Voices of children

Reflections from children from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> classes in three schools which were part of the Primary Language Network were collected and presented as part of the consultation. The schools involved included a rural English-medium school, a large urban English-medium school and an Irish-medium school in the Gaeltacht. A number of prompts were provided to the children and these focused on the children's experiences of learning English and Irish; both positive experiences and aspects of the learning that they found most challenging throughout their experience with the draft curriculum. The responses of the children are presented according to each language.

## Gaeilge

Children were provided with the following prompts to help them reflect on their experiences of learning Gaeilge at school:

- What I enjoyed about learning Gaeilge.
- What I found difficult about learning Gaeilge.
- What I would like to do more of in Gaeilge.
- What I found helpful in learning Gaeilge.

With regard to children's positive experiences of learning Gaeilge and what they enjoyed most, the following table shows 10 categories of responses. These responses are ranked in order of frequency, beginning with the most frequent.

1.	Caint / Comhrá / speaking Irish / oral language games
2.	Drámaíocht / Drama / acting / mimes / doing plays
3.	Amhráin / listening to the songs
4.	Writing / clóscríobh / taighde ar <i>lpads</i>
5.	Léamh agus freagairt / listening to stories
6.	Gaeilge games / language games / cluichí ar an gclár bán
7.	Verbs / vocabulary / <i>I enjoyed learning verbs</i>
8.	Cluichí topaic / téamaí, e.g. <i>the restaurant / éadaí</i>
9.	Dancing / Irish culture
10.	Obair ghrúpa / taighde / Partner work

Figure 2: Example of child's response to learning Gaelige

<p><b>Gaeilge</b> – Cén rud is fearr leat nó is mó a thaitin leat san rang Gaeilge agus céard a chabhraigh leat?</p> <p>Thaitin:  scríobh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• caint agus comhrá</li> <li>• drámaíocht / taighde.</li> <li>• cluiche topaic / téama</li> <li>• Dánta • Tionscarnamh</li> </ul> <p>Cabhríonn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cluiche topaic / téama</li> <li>• Litriú</li> <li>• Léamh + freagairt</li> <li>• Gramadach</li> </ul>	<p><b>Béarla</b> – Cén rud is fearr leat nó is mó a thaitin leat sa Rang Béarla agus céard a chabhraigh leat?</p> <p>Thaitin:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• muinteoireacht foirne</li> <li>• cluiche ar an gclár bán</li> <li>• taighde ar na iPads</li> </ul> <p>Cabhríonn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• muinteoireacht foirne</li> <li>• taighde ar na iPads</li> <li>• cluichí ar na iPads</li> <li>• Cluiche ar an clár bán</li> <li>• Obair tuisceanna.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gaeilge</b> – Cén rud nach maith leat nó atá deacair duitse san rang Gaeilge?</p> <p>Ní maith liom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gramadach</li> <li>• Léamh agus freagairt ceisteanna</li> <li>• Comhrá ceoil</li> </ul> <p>Faighim iad seo deacair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gramadach</li> </ul>	<p><b>Béarla</b> – Cén rud nach maith leat nó atá deacair duitse san rang Béarla?</p> <p>Ní maith liom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obair tuisceanna</li> <li>• cloze</li> <li>• Foclóir</li> </ul> <p>Faighim iad seo deacair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• obair gramadach</li> <li>• cloze</li> </ul>

The comments and responses from children can be divided into two main categories; teaching and learning methodologies experienced in their classrooms, and aspects of learning the actual language.

Most striking across the responses is the children's enjoyment of oral language and their positive attitudes towards speaking the language. It is clear that the majority of children enjoy the opportunities afforded to them to speak Irish in the classroom and school. These opportunities are likely to be mediated and enhanced through the methodologies utilised by their teachers, as can be seen in the table above. Drama activities, oral language games, 'cluichí topaic' and partner work are viewed positively by the children, providing opportunities for *labhairt na Gaeilge*. Positive responses to using the Irish language include *I found the songs really fun; I like talking about your life, your hobbies and other stuff about yourself; Irish for the day was really good and fun.*

Responses such as those stating *[I enjoyed] gaining confidence in speaking Irish and thaitin an chaint liom* offer affirmation of teaching and learning activities that provide fun for children and don't impose correction on inaccurate expression.

Use of technology for Irish language learning is reflected in a number of references to iPads and the interactive whiteboard (clár bán), where their use is for research (taighde) or for language games.

Further validation of *gníomhaíochtaí* as a pedagogical approach is found in the ranking of language activities that the children ‘would like more of’. The following table lists activities that children would like more of and these are presented in order of frequency:

1.	Drámaíocht / Mimes / Acting
2.	Comhrá / conversation
3.	Games
4.	Reading Stories / writing stories
5.	More songs and poems / music / singing
6.	Drawing
7.	Reading / translating
8.	Writing / sentences
9.	Listening
10.	More verbs

It is clear from the children’s responses that active learning methodologies are preferred, reflecting the favoured activities listed earlier.

In terms of the strands preferred by the children responding to this survey, the oral language strand is predominantly favoured. However, writing and reading feature as some children’s preferences for learning Gaeilge. The use of story orally, in reading and in writing, is a strongly favoured aspect of language learning. *Amhráin*, poetry, music and dancing are other media through which many children enjoy access to the language. Responses include *I would like more Irish poems; I’d like more improvisations and plays; I would like to do more fun activities in Irish because I think it helps me to learn better and it sticks in my head*. A number of children indicated their enjoyment of learning verbs.

The children were also asked to indicate the aspects of learning Gaeilge which they found difficult. Their responses are summarised in the following table, beginning with the aspects most frequently mentioned.

<b>Cén rud nach maith leat nó atá deacair duitse san rang Gaeilge? What I found difficult in learning in Irish / in Gaeilge this year was .....</b>
1. Gramadach / Grammar / sentence structure
2. Litriú / Spelling and pronouncing
3. Léamh / Comprehension / ‘Focla éagsúla’
4. Speaking and writing / comhrá agus caint
5. Léamh agus freagairt ceisteanna / answering questions
6. Dánta
7. <i>Obair liom féin</i>
8. <i>I found a lot of things difficult</i>

Evidently, it is the technical elements of language learning that most commonly posed difficulty for the children. According to the children, the grammatical structures of the language are challenging, with verb forms and rules being one area of difficulty. Pronunciation and spelling rules are also prominent in children's concerns. The comprehension of reading material also figures as an area of challenge. Some individual responses include: *Remembering the meanings of the words in Irish; I found doing news or on-the-spot questions hard; Verbs at first - then I got the hang of it; I found writing the stories difficult.*

Some responses indicated satisfaction with their learning in Gaeilge, most notably pupils in a Gaeltacht school - *Ní fhaighim aon rud deacair sa Ghaeilge; Tá mé sásta go maith leis – níl sé deacair.*

## English

Children from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> classes were asked to write about their learning in English. A number of prompts were provided to the children to help them reflect on positive feelings towards learning English and aspects of learning that they found most challenging.

The prompts provided to the children were:

- What I enjoyed most about learning English this year.
- What I would like to do more of in English.
- Cén rud is fearr leat, nó is mó a thaitin leat sa rang Béarla? (scoil sa Ghaeltacht)
- What I found difficult about learning English this year.

The responses from the children were analysed and categories were formed. With regard to children's positive experiences of learning English and what they enjoyed most, the following table shows five categories of responses from them. These responses are ranked in order of frequency, beginning with the most frequent.

1.	Creative writing
2.	Recount writing
3.	Reading and the class novel
4.	Reading comprehension activities
5.	Poetry

Children considered writing to be the aspect of learning English they enjoy most. It is clear from children's responses that they enjoy writing in a variety of genres, with references being made to descriptive, narrative, expository and creative writing. Comprehension activities that generally require

written answers were also referred to as enjoyable by a number of children. Some individual comments included: *I liked seeing people’s reactions and thinking of the carecters (sic); When we wrote poems about different emotions; When we wrote the history-based story; I enjoyed writing stories - They let me express myself in different ways.*

The majority of children also referred to reading as an enjoyable aspect of their learning in English. Many of the children referred to specific titles of books and novels that they had enjoyed during the school year such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, *Adam’s Starling* and *Stone Fox*. Comments provided by the children on their enjoyment of reading included: *I enjoyed reading and doing the novel ‘The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas’ because it is a wonderfully written book with lots of cliffhangers; Thaitin léamh liom; The stories we read in class; I enjoyed group reading.* Listening to stories was noted as enjoyable and in one particular school, some responses referred to a storyteller who visited their school. Other children expressed their enjoyment of listening to the teacher reading stories in class.

A number of particular activities are highlighted below by the children as enjoyable. These included spelling games, project work, cloze activities and the use of iPads for learning. Other general comments from children about learning English included: *What I enjoyed about English learning was that the teacher always made it fun and if you didn’t understand something she would go over it; [What I enjoyed most about learning English this year] was everything because I love English.*

In response to being asked what they would like to do more of in English, the children’s responses are summarised in the following table, beginning with the aspects most frequently mentioned.

1.	Reading/class novel/DEAR time
2.	Creative and descriptive writing
3.	Project work and presenting projects
4.	Comprehension activities
5.	Listening to stories and read-aloud
6.	Spelling
7.	Dictionary work
8.	Debating
9.	Poetry

The children were also asked to write about the aspects of learning English which they found most difficult. Their responses are summarised in the following table, beginning with the aspects most frequently mentioned.

1.	Grammar
2.	Spelling and spelling tests
3.	Vocabulary and dictionary work
4.	Comprehension and answering questions on stories
5.	Writing stories
6.	Cloze activities

Grammar was the area of English language learning that the children referred to as being most difficult. Examples of difficulties associated with grammar included *understanding the differences between verbs and nouns* and *understanding homophones*. Understanding new vocabulary and locating words in the dictionary were other noted areas of difficulty. A number of children described the difficulties they have with comprehension exercises based upon material they had read. While reading class novels and writing stories present challenges for some children, these activities strongly appeal to other children.

Despite a number of difficulties faced by children in their learning of English and as recorded in their responses, a high number of children expressed little or no difficulty. In fact, many of the children referred to enjoyable and exciting learning activities in the classroom. A number of children from one particular school referred to the positive effect of team teaching/*múinteoireacht foirne* on their learning of English.

## Consultative seminars

Analysis of the feedback and data collected during the three consultative seminars identified a number of important themes: accessibility and language register, pitch of L1 and L2, linguistic diversity, the progression continua, and supports. The collated findings are discussed under the relevant headings related to these themes.

### **Accessibility and language register**

There were mixed responses with regard to accessibility of the draft specification and the language register of both English and Gaeilge. There were many examples of positive feedback received from participants with regard to the language register of the draft. *Language register is fine, accessibility good in relation to language*. However, a number of respondents made specific reference to the complexity of the language used in the draft specification, describing it as ‘wordy’ and ‘language heavy’. Some feedback suggested that the wording of the learning outcomes and progression steps

could be more concise in some instances. A ‘bullet points’ layout was favoured by a number of respondents for the purpose of identifying the different *parts of learning outcomes*. A number of respondents made reference to a lack of clarity with regard to the language of some phrases in the draft specification, such as ‘various languages’, ‘generally expected’ and ‘holistic assessment’.

*Unclear expectations where ‘various languages’ are referred to in a number of reading LOs.*

*The language and wording are good but there are some vague sentences which could be misconstrued in relation to assessment.*

There was some concern expressed around the language register used for Gaeilge in both specification documents for English-medium and Irish-medium schools:

*All teachers agreed that they find the Irish very daunting and had concerns about this.*

*A lot of terms in Irish that teachers will not be familiar with e.g. ‘glossary’. Coimeád simplí é.*

*Tá na téarmaí deacair le tuiscint, go hiondúil breathnaíonn muid ar na leaganacha Béarla le déanamh amach céard tá i gceist, m.sh. ‘hipitéisiú’; ‘ceapadh teoirice’. / The terms are hard to understand, usually we look at the English versions to figure out the meaning, e.g. hypothesising, theorising.*

*Míniú maith ar ‘comhréir’ agus ar ‘séimeantach’. Míniú ag teastáil ar ‘bailíocht’. / Good explanation of ‘syntax’ and ‘semantic’. Explanation necessary for the term ‘validity’.*

Feedback was received from teachers around the use of learning outcomes and the implications for professional development as the move to an outcomes-based curriculum is made. The breadth of learning outcomes was raised by a number of teachers who questioned the non-explicit nature of the language outcomes. In some cases, teachers called for more clarity around their content. Some general comments on the use of the learning outcomes included:

*Inclusion of motivation and choice a positive.*

*Further support for teachers around LOs – what does it mean to explore how culture and identity can influence how people communicate with others verbally and non-verbally?*

*Learning Outcomes language – ‘categorisation’ is not explicitly clear / familiar to teachers*

*If a teacher can’t understand what a LO means how can they plan for teaching and to assess students’ learning?*

*Provide examples of responding to aesthetic and creative aspects of language – a bit vague.*

Some participants felt that there was need for a greater focus to be placed on the learning outcomes in order to reinforce them as a starting point for teaching and learning. There were also calls for more support to be provided to teachers in using learning outcomes as conveyed in some of the comments below:

*If the core aspect of the P.L.C. [Primary Language Curriculum] are the L.O.s [Learning Outcomes] why is there so much emphasis on the P.C. [Progression Continua]?*

*Further support around L.O.s [Learning Outcomes]*

With regard to the progression steps, issues of specificity and definition arose from teacher comments and questions:

*Progression steps have been condensed but still quite a lot of text – I would respond better to clear bullet points*

*Lack of consistent standard across the continua. Steps are not graded.*

*Vague language with no reference to assessment – e.g ‘gains insight.....’ What is insight?*

One respondent felt that the current presentation of the progression continua is resulting in a distraction away from learning outcomes, and suggested that an alternative presentation of the progression continua is needed:

*The emphasis on the continua means we are losing sight of the LOs which should be the main focus of our planning. Perhaps progression continua should be presented differently.*

Teachers were asked to provide feedback on the definitions of ‘text’ and ‘genres’ as presented in the draft specification. With regard to the definition of ‘text’, the feedback was largely positive, and there was approval for the visible broadening of the definition as presented in the draft.

*Definition of text is comprehensive – oral, gesture and sign very important in our school but wouldn’t in the past have classified it as type of text*

*Text and genre definitions comprehensive.*

*Positive to see digital texts/ digital literacy included.*

The definition of ‘genres’ received mixed responses from teachers. While many teachers were pleased with the definition provided, there were also requests for additional supports to be provided, especially in the area of digital literacy.

*Genre is perfect – overlaps with first steps.*

*Genres need to be explained fully and addressed within progression steps.*

*The genre definition needs to be more succinct on page for learning outcomes/ progression milestones; and detail should be included in introduction*

*Teachers would welcome supports/resources/samples in using digital genres as it is a relatively new area and a minefield to filter through the internet.*

In addressing the overall accessibility of the draft document for teachers, some suggestions were made by teachers:

*Accessibility is fine in relation to language.*

*More easily accessible via online tool!*

*Physical size of document is not user-friendly when planning*

*This document is unwieldy*

*Oral Language – 14 outcomes is too many – show us if there's overlap. Link and bridge together more*

*Show more integration with oral language/reading/writing – the three seem very isolated – give teachers examples of how to make connections.*

## **Pitch of L1 and L2**

Teachers were asked to comment on the pitch of the learning outcomes and progression milestones presented for each stage, taking account of their particular school context. Responses suggested that the majority of teachers considered the pitch to be satisfactory.

*Happy with pitch for each level – aspirational but achievable - very structured as regards step-by-step continuing progression with links to previous step and next step.*

*Progression milestones for end of each stage are generally quite high for our school context, but the milestones are very useful for us as a school - for identifying where our pupils may be at the end of each stage.*

*Pitch of LOs for each stage – quite relevant, practical and useful.*

*The tables to indicate the approx. average for different classes on the progression continua are very useful as a starting point to guide teachers and schools.*

Respondents had mixed views on the addition of the *early a* progression milestone as presented in the draft specification:

*Early a – hugely important to ensure inclusion of all levels of ability/varying school contexts*

*Early a is very simplistic – would think it encompasses all children. Definitely for special schools etc. My school would come in b and c to Jun Infants*

Views were also mixed on whether the pitch was appropriate for all schools:

*j could be pushed further in some areas. The j asks less in some places than the e, e.g oral language LO 2, Motivation and Choice.*

*Most children would reach h; may be children who would reach i.*

*Need to be aware of pitching too low too! Have to have expectations for children.*

Teachers in Irish-medium schools appeared to be happy with the pitch as presented. In schools where Gaeilge was T2, it was apparent that teachers felt that the pitch was elevated and not realistic in English-medium settings:

*Oireann Tábla 2 Airde Caighdeán do mo scoilse./The pitch of Table 2 is appropriate for my school.*

*Irish – majority reach ‘e’ – not sure [about] further.*

*For L2, milestones not realistic for the majority of schools.*

### **Linguistic diversity**

The inclusion of the highlighted paragraph on linguistic diversity and the explanation of its meaning in the context of the Primary Language Curriculum was generally welcomed. Much feedback suggested that schools already celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity. Comments and feedback from teachers indicated a general support for children and their many home languages. There was evidence of teachers working in schools with a high proportion of children with a home language other than English or Irish; with one school having over 25 nationalities represented and another teacher having 17 nationalities represented among 35 children in a particular class setting:

*The linguistic diversity paragraph is a welcome and necessary addition in light of increasing diversity.*

*Tá sé le moladh go ndeirtear an méid seo go sonrath sa cháipéis curaclaim.... / It must be praised that this much has been specified in the curriculum document.*

However, there was a significant degree of doubt about the practical implementation of the suggested classroom teaching and learning approaches. It may well be that in the absence of more detailed suggestions in the draft document, teachers were expressing concerns about approaches that are as yet unclear.

*This activity of the child writing in their own language can be beneficial to explore the process – there needs to be more clarification in the curriculum on HOW? WHY? etc. this can be done. Also, how it can be assessed.*

*I don't see the merit in allowing EAL children to speak their own language on occasions. EAL children most often need the 5 hrs 40 mins of the school day to speak English.*

A number of respondents interpreted reference to 'other languages' in the curriculum as equating to the need to understand these languages, or indeed teach them in some cases. As a result of this interpretation, teachers had concerns around dealing with a range of languages they have no knowledge of and didn't see this as feasible or practicable.

*Maidir le 'teangacha eile' - An mbeidh teangacha iasachta á múineadh sna scoileanna, nó na hacmhainní curtha ar fáil chun a leithéid a dhéanamh? / Regarding other languages-will foreign languages now have to be taught in schools, or will resources be made available to do this?*

*Curriculum overload possible if more than half the class have variety of languages.*

*Good to see the addition of texts in their home languages. But make explicit the extent of use of their home language – e.g. use Polish in the yard? During Aistear? Group work?*

One respondent suggested the need for an information sheet on the Primary Language Curriculum to be made available for parents in a range of languages.

## **Progression Continua**

Teachers were asked to comment on and respond to a highlighted paragraph on the use of the progression continua. The paragraph concerned was largely welcomed by respondents who considered that it served to clarify a degree of uncertainty and even confusion about what the purposes and intentions of the continua were.

*The movement away from the thinking that the continua centre on assessment is very positive – it is an assessment FOR + WHILE learning tool, not OF learning.*

*Excellent addition and good clarification*

*Must be emphasised more and earlier, given more importance! Planning template that enables quick recording of differentiated progression milestones for children will encourage teachers to more fully engage*

*Tá na smaointe anseo go maith. Níl aon pháiste 'labelled' a-f. / The ideas here are good. No child is labelled a-f.*

It is clear from responses to the paragraph that a key concern of teachers was that the progression continua could, in the longer term, become the basis for assessment of children's progress. The paragraph text appears to have largely reassured those concerned that the continua are primarily a tool to support planning for teaching and learning, although doubt remains for some due to the inclusion of the word 'generally' in that paragraph.

*Range of progression milestones is excellent – important not to use these as a diagnostic tool (not labelling children). Learning outcome is the main factor, not programme continua.*

*I think this is a very good section particularly the last paragraph, except to remove the word 'generally'. [the same point is made by a number of respondents].*

*Very important that statement acknowledges that progression continua are used to inform/support planning and teaching.*

The paragraph's clarification of the idea that children can progress at different paces in a number of aspects of language development also served to reassure teachers, as did the statement that children could indeed move forwards and backwards along the progression continua at different points.

A few additional and general comments about the progression continua are worthy of attention:

*Need a clear defined purpose of Progression Continua circulated to all teachers, principals, inspectors.*

*I see the PC as being most useful for assessing children not falling into the average range, the child who mightn't be achieving or children whose language exceeds the expectations of your class group.*

*Progression steps haven't impacted our T&L [teaching and learning], it's just an exercise in regressive bureaucracy. I retrospectively fit the skills I know to be necessary around the vague progression language.*

## Supports needed

Teachers were asked to consider the supports that would need to be in place to support their implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum. Their responses are listed below under the headings of planning, teaching, CPD provision, online resources, assessment, SEN provision, and other considerations.

**Table 3: List of suggested supports for teachers**

Area of support	Types of supports	Comments, suggestions, questions
<b>Planning</b>	Planning seminars Long-term planning – templates for a whole-school plan	Teimpléid; pleannana samplacha Pleanáil inscoile Sample templates for a whole-class plan. User-friendly glance-cards for LOs and Progression Steps Plans must be working documents
<b>Teaching</b>	Examples of lessons Instructional videos Support initiatives such as station teaching towards LOs	
<b>Continuous Professional Development provision</b>	Continuous sustained support More in-school support; relevant to school's context	Class-level support from PDST for 5 years CPD – especially showing how to plan appropriately Mentoring established teachers – 'no-one is an expert in everything' More whole-staff CPD

		Whole-staff as opposed to taking away a teacher +1 other – messages not clear Summer courses Breis laethanta traenála
<b>Online resources</b>	Online planning tool	Online planning tool must be available if expectation is full implementation. Make online planning tool available asap. Áis phleanála ar-líne mar atá ar fáil anois./Online planning tool like we have now. Include dropdown boxes to facilitate planning, teaching and assessment Acmhainní ag teastáil go géar, go háirithe téacsanna digiteacha An online forum for support to answer Ts' questions
<b>Assessment</b>	Relationship between assessment and standardised tests. Potential for use of assessment checklists	How will standardised tests link in with new curriculum? How do we assess without becoming bogged down in the continua? May be useful to create checklists based on progression steps for Oral Language Sample checklists for assessing the milestones in OL, Reading and Writing Ensure assessment for learning remains important. Sample assessment guides, e.g. what areas a story can assess. That inspectors will have a standard view on assessment
<b>Language provision for children with SENs</b>	Work with NCSE on producing documents for ASD units/ special classes	
<b>Other considerations</b>		Link between SET and Class Teacher needs to be explicitly set out Inspectorate should have an agreed view on how planning should be done. Extension of implementation timeline desirable

### Additional comments, suggestions

Participants were asked to note any further comments, feedback or suggestions they may have for the further developments of the curriculum. Their responses are listed below.

Area	Comments / feedback / suggestions
<b>Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Success will depend on the supports provided especially around planning.</li> <li>▪ Emphasise new way of planning, <b>not</b> new curriculum. Teachers often fearful of 'new curriculum-at-speed' idea.</li> <li>▪ Language curriculum allows a very clear format for whole-school planning.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bring programme down to essentials for clarity – core is the learning outcomes and work from there.</li> <li>▪ Present programme is a way of helping to provide focus for our work in a more effective way as opposed to dramatically changing our practice.</li> <li>▪ It is positive for teachers to be able to refer to progression steps for guidelines but at the same time have the autonomy as professionals to adapt/use accordingly.</li> <li>▪ Whole-school planning needs specific guidelines; [needs] similar interpretations of principals.</li> <li>▪ Will day-to-day lessons change that much?</li> <li>▪ What would a daily/monthly plan look like? Does this run concurrently with <i>Aistear</i>/Jolly Phonics/reading schemes?</li> <li>▪ Uncertainty about expectations for use of Progression Continua – need more clarity re what teachers will be expected to do.</li> <li>▪ Learning Outcomes – would be useful to know which LO to start with, or is there an order in which to teach them?</li> </ul>
<b>Layout</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Need to connect 3 strands and 3 elements explicitly.</li> </ul>
<b>Links</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Links to <i>Aistear</i> need to be made – the mentioning of ‘playful learning experiences’ is too general.</li> </ul>
<b>Dissemination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clarity of message – NCCA and PDST giving different information on how the Progression Continua should be used.</li> <li>▪ There’s a serious lack of clarity from the NCCA – we’ve been receiving mixed messages about what correct practice should be.</li> <li>▪ There needs to be a coherent message from facilitators.</li> <li>▪ The document needs to be more accessible and user-friendly.</li> <li>▪ The NCCA need to be cognisant of the fact that teachers already have a huge amount of paperwork.</li> <li>▪ Communication with colleges of education – student teachers on placement should be familiar with new curriculum/ approaches</li> <li>▪ DEIS schools need a short publication linking all the current initiatives in DEIS to the new PLC please.</li> </ul>
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can the NCCA not help to create textbooks/material to suit the language curriculum? [Says commercial publications don’t address 1999 objectives].</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Further support materials to help students at <i>early a</i> / a milestone who may be in a special class/special school</li> <li>▪ Can SLT be made available to schools?</li> </ul>
<b>Diversity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Traveller culture and language – as schools we need to meet their language needs more than we have done</li> <li>▪ Now that ISL is a third official language, have NCCA considered the impact of this for the Primary Language Curriculum?</li> <li>▪ Need more support for differentiation and inclusion</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How is assessment going to work?</li> <li>▪ Need samples in both languages as guidelines for assessment</li> </ul>
<b>Role of progression continua</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How will the progression steps will be used in future? What expectations are there for their use? What will the attitude of inspectors be?</li> <li>▪ Will Progression Continua eventually be used as league-table type assessment?</li> </ul>

## Online questionnaire

This section describes the summarised outcomes of an online survey open to teachers, parents and the general public on their views on a draft of Stages 3 and 4 (third to sixth classes) of the Primary Language Curriculum. The full description of the data represented in this section is available in Appendix 3 of this report. The survey, which was hosted on the NCCA website, went live in spring 2018. Two-hundred and sixty-seven respondents completed a version of the survey focusing on English as L1 and Gaeilge as L2, while a further 20 completed a version focusing on Gaeilge as L1 and English as L2. Across the two versions, almost 90% of respondents identified themselves as primary teachers or principals. For the purposes of presentation, the data from both surveys is presented together below, unless otherwise stated.

### Cross-cutting themes

Responding to a series of questions based on ‘cross-cutting themes’, 63% percent of respondents indicated agreement<sup>3</sup> with the view that ‘opportunities exist in the Primary Language Curriculum to draw on the linguistic abilities of all children. Just over half (52%) indicated agreement with the view that ‘children should be encouraged to communicate in their home language within school for a variety of purposes’. Sixty-one percent indicated agreement with the view that ‘reference to other languages in the curriculum is a positive feature of the document’. A large majority (74%) indicated disagreement with the view that ‘it is realistic to expect teachers to support children’s home language development’.

Respondents were referred to the definition of ‘text’ in the Primary Language Curriculum, which includes all products of language use – print, oral, gesture, sign, Braille, visual, tactile, electronic and digital. Whereas 46% felt that the definition was ‘just about right’, 47% felt that it was too broad. Just 2% felt it was too narrow. Respondents were also provided with a definition of genre as it is used in the Primary Language Curriculum<sup>4</sup>. Forty-nine percent felt that the definition was ‘about right’, while 48% felt that it was ‘too complex’.

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Indicated agreement’ should be interpreted as ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’, while ‘indicated disagreement’ should be interpreted as ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’.

<sup>4</sup> Types of multi-sentence oral or written text structures that have become conventionalised for particular purposes with expected organisational patterns, as well as language features related to register, e.g. narrative, informational, persuasive and multi-genre. Simply put, genre refers to a selection of oral and written forms in order to recount, explain, entertain, inform, give instructions, narrate, persuade and justify opinions. Oral forms include, but are not limited to, storytelling, drama, poetry, speeches, debates, film and digital media such as podcasts, videos, advertising, tv and radio broadcasts.

Forty-six percent indicated agreement with the statement that ‘the definitions of text and genre in the curriculum play a key role in embedding digital literacy in the Primary Language Curriculum’, while 51% indicated agreement with the view that ‘a focus on digital literacy in the classroom fosters children’s language skills’. Between 38% and 40% of respondents indicated disagreement with these statements. Responding to an open-ended question, several participants’ comments referred to a possible negative impact of digital learning on the communicative aspects of oral language development, while others endorsed the potential of digital technologies to support such development.

### **Learning Outcomes (English as L1, Gaeilge as L2)**

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt it is clear what learning is expected from the learning outcomes in the language curriculum for Stage 3 (third and fourth classes) and Stage 4 (fifth and sixth classes). Forty-eight percent of respondents indicated that it was not clear to ‘any great extent’ what learning was expected for Stage 3 and 46% for Stage 4. Similar percentages of respondents said that they were clear ‘to a great extent’ or ‘to some extent’ what learning was expected from the Learning Outcomes (46% for Stage 3, and 48% for Stage 4). Hence, overall, respondents were divided in their evaluation of the clarity of the learning outcomes.

The draft curriculum contains 33 learning outcomes for both English and Gaelige at Stages 3 and 4. Over seven in ten respondents (71%) felt that there were too many learning outcomes, while 17% felt that the number was just about right. Just 4% said there were too few.

Fifty-two percent of respondents indicated disagreement with the view that ‘the learning outcomes help teachers to plan for teaching and learning (L1)’, while 46% indicated agreement. Thirty-seven percent indicated disagreement and 61% indicated agreement with the view that ‘the learning outcomes show continuity and progression across the four stages of primary education (L1)’. Forty-eight percent disagreed with the view that ‘the outcomes are flexible enough to allow for the teacher’s own interpretation (L1)’, while 46% indicated agreement. Participants were also expressed mixed views on the L2 learning outcomes. Fifty-nine percent indicated disagreement with the view that ‘the learning outcomes help teachers to plan for teaching and learning (L2)’, while 38% indicated agreement. Forty-three percent indicated disagreement with the view that ‘the learning outcomes show continuity and progression across the four stages of primary education (L2)’, while 52% indicated agreement. Finally, 50% indicated disagreement with the view that that ‘the outcomes are flexible enough to allow for the teacher’s own interpretation (L2)’, while 39% indicated agreement.

Respondents' comments on the learning outcomes revealed concerns about the language and clarity of the outcomes, as well uncertainty as to what should be taught at different grade levels.

### **Progression Continua (English as L1, Gaeilge as L2)**

Thirty-four percent of respondents indicated that the progression continua presented in the draft curriculum document and their associated milestones 'not at all appropriately' reflected the learning outcomes in the curriculum. Twenty-nine percent indicated that some changes were needed, while 31% felt that the progression continua 'fairly appropriately' or 'very appropriately' reflected the learning outcomes in the curriculum. Seventy-three percent indicated disagreement with the view that the progression continua represented the learning outcomes for oral language. Corresponding percentages for reading and writing were 71% and 68% respectively. For each strand, one-third of respondents (33%) indicated agreement.

Sixty percent of respondents indicated disagreement with the view that the progression continua represented the learning outcomes for oral language (L1). Corresponding percentages for reading and writing (both L1) were 58% and 57% respectively. For each strand, one-third of respondents (33%) indicated agreement. Sixty-one percent indicated disagreement with the view that the progression continua for Teanga Ó Bhéal and Léitheoireacht reflected the learning outcomes in the curriculum. The corresponding percentage for Scróbhneoireacht was 62%. Twenty-seven percent indicated agreement with this statement for each of Léitheoireacht, Scróbhneoireacht and Teanga Ó Bhéal. These findings should be interpreted in the context of high levels of missing responses (about 40% of participants) on these questions.

Forty-nine percent indicated agreement with the view that the 'early a' milestone (included to support some children in their initial development of language) should be fully integrated into the progression continua. Thirty-seven percent indicated disagreement, while 14% 'did not know'. Almost one half (48%) indicated agreement with the view that 'the milestones i and j help extend the learning of children in the senior classes of primary school', while 42% indicated disagreement. Over six-in-ten respondents (63%) indicated disagreement with the view that 'the progression continua provide enough detail to plan and provide for learning experiences for all learners', while 28% indicated agreement.

Just over half of respondents (54%) indicated that there were too many milestones, while almost one-quarter (23%) felt that the number was just right and 6% felt that there were too few.

For L1 progression continua, between 23% of respondents (Reading) and 26% (Oral Language, Writing) indicated that they don't think they can apply the milestones in their classes (that is, they recognise few if any of their pupils in the progression continua). For L2, the corresponding figures were between 30% (Teanga ó Bhéal) and 35% (Scríbhneoireacht). In contrast, between 28% (Oral Language) and 32% (Writing) indicated that they can recognise most (but not all) of their children in the milestones for L1, while between 20% (Obair ó Bhéal) and 21% (Scríbhneoireacht, Léitheoireacht) indicated that they can recognise most (but not all) of their children in the milestones for L2 Léitheoireacht. Smaller proportions – between 15% (Writing) and 17% (Reading, Oral Language) for L1, and between 10% (Teanga Ó Bhéal, Scríbhneoireacht) and 11% (Léitheoireacht) for L2 – recognised all or almost all of the children in their classes in the milestones.

### **Reflections on the junior infants to second class curriculum**

Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with seven statements about the language curriculum for children at the early class levels/stages. Sixty percent of participants responded. Of these, sixty-six percent indicated agreement with a statement that they were familiar with the Junior Infants to Second class Curriculum. Seventy-one percent indicated agreement that their school had begun using the language curriculum for junior classes. Fifty percent indicated agreement with the view that 'the curriculum is inclusive of all children', while 40% indicated disagreement. Just over one-quarter (27%) indicated agreement with the view that the curriculum 'enhances children's engagement with learning', while 56% indicated disagreement. Fifty-nine percent indicated agreement with the view that 'expectations for children's language learning and development are not realistic', while just 25% indicated disagreement. Ninety-three percent indicated agreement that planning for the curriculum is challenging. A strong majority of respondents (81%) indicated agreement with the statement that they had attended inservice on the Junior Infants to Second class Curriculum in the current school year (2017/2018). Among those who responded to this set of questions, a majority tended to be more negative than positive about the curriculum for Stages 1 and 2.

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with six statements about the resources and supports available to teachers for the language curriculum for Stages 1-2. A strong majority (84%) indicated agreement with the view that the curriculum book (hard copy) is difficult to navigate. Just 14% indicated disagreement. Similarly, 79% indicated agreement with the view that 'the language and terminology used are too complex'. Forty-five percent of teachers indicated agreement with the view that 'the video examples of children's language are a useful reference point'. Marginally more (46%) indicated disagreement. Large proportions of respondents also indicated disagreement with the view

that 'the interactive online curriculum is easy to navigate' (86%) and that 'I feel I have all the support material I need to teach the curriculum' (86%).

### **Demographic Data on Respondents**

Fifty-eight percent of participants provided demographic information. Eighty-nine percent of these were class teachers, deputy principals or principals at primary level, while 4% were student teachers. No respondents identified themselves as parents. Marginally more teachers taught at third to sixth class levels than at junior infants to second. Twenty-nine respondents were support/resource teachers. Ninety-six percent of respondents identified themselves as teaching in or linked to English-medium schools, while the remainder identified themselves as teaching in or linked to Gaelscoileanna (2.9%) and Gaeltacht schools (1.5%). Respondents who were teachers represented a range of school sizes, with one-quarter each representing schools with 201-300 and 301-500 pupils. One-sixth represented schools with more than 500 children. Hence, more respondents were from larger schools than smaller ones. The vast majority of respondents had fewer than 20 years of teaching experience. Two percent of respondents reported that they taught in special schools, while 28% said they worked in schools in DEIS.

### **Participants' views on types of supports needed for successful curriculum implementation**

One-hundred and twenty-one participants provided 191 responses to an open-ended question. While the vast majority of responses were coded as 'Supports', almost one-in-five were categorised as 'Presentation', 'Structure' or 'Other'. The types of support requested by participants included planning tools (14% of all responses), in-service training (10%), and sample lessons/video clips (8%). A number of participants specified the types of inservice they wanted (e.g., face-to-face, whole school, in-school), while other responses related to this topic were more general (e.g., inservice, more training, realistic training). A few mentioned specific groups who could provide support (e.g., cuiditheoirí, PDST). Responses categorised as structure (5.8%) included calls for more specific learning outcomes and a more inclusive curriculum, while those relating to presentation (5.2%) included calls for a hard copy of the curriculum document to be made available to all teachers, simplified language/glossary of key terms, and greater clarity on teaching methodologies.

### **Participants' final comments on the curriculum as a whole**

At the end of the survey, participants were given an opportunity to provide final comments on the curriculum as a whole. Ninety-seven participants offered 174 comments. In general, comments tended to be negative (about three-quarters) or positive/constructive (one-quarter). Comments were

assigned to the following categories: implementation (24.1%), structure (13.8%), support (14.4%), international context (5.2%), consultation process (6.3%), NCCA (4.0%), research (4%), Gaeilge (3.4%), presentation (2.9%) and other (21.8%).

Comments on implementation focused on lack of time for planning and implementation, large volumes of paperwork, lack of confidence in addressing implementation, and requests to separate implementation of L1 and L2. Comments related to time addressed lack of time for planning, and a need to pace implementation of new curricula over a longer timeframe.

Comments related to structure ranged from endorsements of progression continua to proposals to restructure the curriculum (a knowledge-based curriculum, objectives to be specified for each class level, greater specificity of learning outcomes for junior classes etc.). Comments also called for a better balance between basic and more complex skills with the former viewed as being under-represented compared with the latter.

Participants also referred to the international context in which the new language curriculum is emerging, with several noting that the proposed approach (progression continua) had produced less than optimal results in the UK and elsewhere. Under a related theme, research, participants asked that relevant research on the efficacy of the progression continua and other aspects of the curriculum be shared, or argued that the curriculum developers were unfamiliar with the relevant research.

Under the 'consultation process' theme, some participants expressed a view that there was a general lack of awareness among teachers that a process was in place. Others claimed that there had been no consultation with teachers prior to developing the draft curriculum and that such a consultation should have taken place. In a related theme, reference to the NCCA ranged from praise and encouragement to criticism.

Under Gaeilge, participants expressed the view that the proposed curriculum is pitched at a high level relative to pupils' current skills in an L2 context. A few comments expressed the view that Gaeilge could be overlooked if schools decide to emphasise the implementation of English first. Under 'presentation', participants expressed concern about the layout of the curriculum, while a small number requested that the Gaeilge elements be translated into English.

### **Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge agus Scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht (T1 Gaeilge, T2 English)**

In all, 20 participants identified themselves as teaching in or linked to Irish-medium schools. This subgroup responded to a set of questions in Irish, where T1 was identified as Gaeilge, and T2 as

English. The following is a summary of the responses of these participants, with most questions answered by 10 (of 20) participants.

- 40% indicated that the progression continua fairly appropriately reflected the learning outcomes in the draft curriculum, 30% indicated that some changes were needed, and 30% indicating that they were not appropriate at all.
- Forty percent of respondents indicated agreement with the view that the progression continua support planning for learning activities for all pupils, while the remainder indicated disagreement. For T1 léitheoireacht and scríobhneoireacht, respondents were evenly split between those who indicated agreement and those who indicated disagreement. Respondents were also equally divided with respect to T2 (English) oral language, reading and writing.
- 50% of respondents indicated agreement with the view that the progression continua provide sufficient detail to plan and implement learning experiences for all learners, while 50% indicated disagreement or 'did not know'.
- About one half of respondents indicated agreement with the view that the progression continua reflect the progression in learning for most of the children in their class for the different strands in T1 and T2. Between one-fifth and one-third indicated that they could not apply the milestones to their class(es) at all.
- When presented with a graphic designed to support teachers in understanding the expected learning of children at different stages of primary schooling, similar proportions (44%) indicated agreement and disagreement with the view that 'the graphic reflects the general language attainment of children in my school in T1 (Gaeilge)'. In contrast, 70% indicated disagreement with the view that 'the graphic broadly reflects the general language attainment of children in my school in T2 (English)', while just 10% indicated agreement.
- Forty percent found a statement clarifying the purpose and use of the progression continua to be 'quite useful', while the others (60%) found it to be 'not very useful'.
- Participants were informed that there are 11 milestones (early a-j) across the 8 years of primary education. Eighteen percent felt that there were too few milestones, and the same percentage felt that there were too many. Thirty-six percent felt that the number was just right, while over one-quarter 'did not know'.

Overall, participants who responded to questions about curriculum content related to T1 Gaeilge/T2 English tended to be more positive than or responded similarly to the much larger group of respondents answering with respect to T1 English/T2 Gaeilge.

## Concluding comments

In general, participants in the survey tended to be divided in terms of their views on the value and usefulness of different curriculum components (Learning Outcomes, Progression Continua, Milestones etc.). Response patterns may have been influenced by participants' experience with the Primary Language Curriculum for Stages 1 and 2 (junior infants to second class), as many had attended in-service or were aware of issues arising from implementation of the curriculum in classrooms. Hence, the possibility that their responses were influenced by these prior experiences rather than or as well as the actual structure and content of the draft language curriculum for Stages 3 and 4 should be considered. It is also noteworthy that a large minority of respondents to the survey taught junior infants to second classes, rather than the class levels at which the draft curriculum for Stages 3 and 4 is targeted.

It is clear that planning is a key concern of respondents. In particular, it would seem important to ensure that there is early and ongoing access to planning tools and other relevant supports from the beginning of implementation of the language curriculum for Stages 3 and 4. Notwithstanding the clarifying statements in the questionnaire, it would also seem important to communicate the relative standing of learning outcomes and the progression continua/milestones, how these should be linked to one another, and how teachers are expected to use them in practice.

In the future, there may value in supplementing surveys open to the general public (such as the current survey) with a planned survey of a nationally-representative sample of primary teachers. The latter would allow one to draw conclusions about teachers' views of the curriculum nationally. It is difficult to tell if the outcomes of the current survey are representative of the views of teachers nationally, or whether the sample is biased in some ways. A systematic survey of up to 20 teachers in each of 200 schools of varying size/gender composition/management structure/language focus would allow for stronger inferences about views on the primary language curriculum nationally. It might also ensure a stronger representation from teachers in Irish-medium schools.

## Written submissions

This section provides a brief overview of the considerations raised in written submissions and is organised under four sub-headings: big questions, accessibility, usability and supports. For the purposes of this consultation report they are presented in bullet point form.

### Big questions

- *'the cart before the horse'*- a number of written submissions drew attention to the fact that the Language Curriculum precedes the redevelopment of the entire primary curriculum. This is seen as unhelpful and has invited the question as to whether the *Primary School Curriculum-Introduction* (DES, 1999) is still applicable to this curriculum.
- *positioning of the continua*- attention was drawn to the role and position of the continua in the curriculum. The position of the continua within the 'curriculum' space rather than within the 'toolkit' space is seen as inconsistent with their intended use. This positioning also affords the continua equal status with the learning outcomes which is seen as problematic.
- *research base for stages 3 and 4*- While language and literacy develop gradually and holistically throughout children's years in primary school, building on their experience from stages 1 and 2, it was remarked that research on adolescent literacy could be helpful in informing appropriate approaches for older children in primary schools. The research reports focused on children's language learning for aged 3-8 years are viewed as particularly helpful in third level institutions.
- *approaches to language learning for Stages 3 and 4*- related to the matter of research above is that of the approaches that may be fore-grounded and highlighted in the curriculum document. Three were outlined as being significant for children in senior classes, including cross-curricular and disciplinary literacy, digital literacy, and critical literacy.
- *assessment and reporting*- the move from content objectives to learning outcomes is a significant development in terms of the perceived expectations around assessment in schools. Focus on what children should be able to do rather than the teaching input has put a new emphasis on the development of all children. It was remarked that teachers need support in this regard and that the prevalence of high stakes standardised tests is unhelpful within this new understanding of assessment.

- *constrained skills*<sup>5</sup>- the question of whether all learning outcomes from Stages 1 and 2 of the curriculum should be presented for Stages 3 and 4 was raised. Outcomes concerning constrained skills were identified as having a lesser role, or may have no role at all, in senior classes.

## Accessibility

- *inclusion*- the incorporation of the *Early a* milestone in the draft curriculum was widely welcomed. Furthermore, it is proposed that *Early a* should become *a* in the progression continua.
- *outcomes and progression continua in Stages 1 and 2*- the need to revisit learning outcomes and progression continua for Stages 1 and 2 was highlighted by a number of submissions. Specific examples have been identified as needing further development in light of the development for Stages 3 and 4.
- *language register (Gaeilge)*- the language register in Gaeilge for both draft specifications was remarked upon in submissions. Particular concern was expressed for schools with Gaeilge as L2 of the school.
- *glossary and online possibilities*- the provision of a comprehensive glossary of terms is suggested in several submissions. The online space may provide opportunity to develop a 'hover over' facility for challenging terminology in both English and Gaeilge.
- *professional development*- many submissions highlighted the need for continuous professional support to ensure the successful enactment of the curriculum. Support in using and interpreting learning outcomes was identified as being particularly important.
- *'text' and 'genre'*- the significant role played by both definitions is highlighted in written submissions. The fore-grounding of these in the curriculum is recommended.
- *feedback across all outcomes/progression continua*- significant attention was given to providing specific feedback on the content of learning outcomes and progression continua.

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<sup>5</sup> Constrained skills – skills such as early print concepts, letter name knowledge, phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency are constrained to small sets of knowledge that are mastered in relatively brief periods of development (NCCA 2012 p.274).

## Usability

- *planning*- a strong feature of written submissions was the need to provide clear guidance to teachers and schools in relation to classroom and whole-school planning. It has been remarked that the current specification for Stages 1 and 2 does not sufficiently address this, and the process outlined is unhelpful and not conducive in supporting teachers.
- *the curriculum book*- the presentation of the hard copy version of the curriculum received some consideration in submissions. A call was made for a redesign of the book, with particular consideration given to the placement and presentation format of the continua.
- *progression continua (formatting)*- related to the point above, the formatting of the continua in a grid-like fashion may unintentionally present learning as a linear process. Consideration to the re-design of the continua should be given in the further development of the curriculum.
- *clarifications on progression continua*- these were welcomed by many submissions. However, further work on unpacking some of the clarifications may be needed. It was suggested the statement that continua *provide information to support periodic planning as well as holistic assessment of children's and young people's learning* needs further elaboration within the document.

## Supports

- *development of supports*- there has been a call for further development of support materials and resources for teachers. Suggestions focus on the practical, 'how-to', of the curriculum and are outlined in the discussion section.

## 4. Discussion and implications

This section provides an overview of emerging messages which need to inform the redrafting and further development of the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for Stages 1 to 4. These key considerations relate to the curriculum specification and the supports needed to facilitate implementation of the curriculum.

### Learning outcomes and progression continua

Consistent with the consultation on the Primary Mathematics Curriculum, the role, positioning and content of learning outcomes and progression continua were the focus of much deliberation and debate throughout the consultation. The engagement with the Primary Language Network provided particularly detailed feedback on the interpretation of learning outcomes, as well as on the content of the progression continua. The following section describes some key considerations for the role and positioning of both curriculum components.

Respondents across the different strands of the consultation identified learning outcomes as a significant change in how curriculum is presented. Many described this change as a challenge as it impacts upon how teachers view their role in the learning process. Teachers reported that decisions regarding lesson content and appropriate pedagogical approaches require greater time for planning. Respondents called for guidance as to how they might negotiate and interpret Learning Outcomes for planning, teaching and assessment purposes. A number of successes when using learning outcomes were also recorded, including greater levels of autonomy, flexibility and creative freedom in teaching elements of language learning. Seeing the value of having an outcome-based curriculum, many teachers called for the outcomes to be foregrounded in the curriculum to ensure they are the focus of planning, teaching and assessment.

Debates centred on the progression continua were prevalent across all consultation formats. It is evident that there is a lack of consistency as they are being understood, interpreted and used in many different ways in schools. Consistent with the consultation on the Primary Mathematics Curriculum, respondents reported frustration with, and concern about a perceived need to track children, as well as the fear of 'extra paperwork'. What emerges from the consultation is the amount of attention the progression continua attract in comparison to the learning outcomes. Their status, positioning and

physical size appear to be contributing factors in this regard. Furthermore, teachers have described the linear layout of the continua as counter-productive and conceptually flawed as learning does not take place in this way. Concern was also expressed that teachers may treat these as a tick-the-box method of teaching, presenting a narrower curriculum than described in the outcomes. Overall the presence of the progression continua has had the unintended consequence of attracting attention away from the learning outcomes which were developed to describe the expansive nature of language learning in primary schools. The positioning of the progression continua within the specification requires significant consideration.

## Opening sections and rationale of the curriculum

There is strong support for the possibility of revising the opening sections of the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for Stages 1 and 2. A typical contribution to the consultation in this regard includes:

*While the continuity demonstrated in the rationale for the curriculum is to be welcomed, this section falls short on providing clear priorities and foci for learning at the upper end of the primary school. (ITE written submission 1)*

Several features from the opening sections were raised as needing consideration which are presented below.

There is broad welcome for the addition of approaches to linguistic diversity in the Primary Language Curriculum. Teachers welcomed the opportunity to recognise and respect the heritage language of children in their class, and also called for clear guidance on the expectations associated with the approach. Teachers speculated that *encouraging children to use their home languages and to share their knowledge of languages* may place an onus on teachers to be knowledgeable about the languages in their classrooms. In light of this response, a clear articulation of the approach in action is warranted to support this practice.

Planning at both classroom and whole-school levels was a strong feature of the discourse surrounding the consultation. Teachers described receiving mixed messages as to the expectations around planning, and the perception that any curriculum change equates to increased paper work was prevalent. The consultation also collected various views on the support required for planning, with some teachers calling for a single 'approved' template, and others calling for a set of agreed guiding principles to inform effective planning. The publication of a suite of samples from a range of schools, with their planning process also described received considerable support. The publication of the

*Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for stages 1 to 4 provides an opportunity to develop such supports and to make clear statements around the process of planning.

Related to planning are the expectations for children's learning across school contexts, as set out on page 8 of the consultation document. Overall respondents found the guidance useful in informing whole-school planning for children's language development. Respondents wondered if by connecting the progress of children to the Progression Continua, they would in time become a summative tool for classroom teachers to benchmark children against. Thus, positioning and framing of this guidance becomes an important consideration. Whether it is a feature of a curriculum document or within the supporting documentation for school planning requires further exploration.

The terms 'text' and 'genres' were given considerable attention during the consultation process. Overall the definitions, with minor tweaking, are fit for purpose. Teachers explained that the definitions did shift their perspectives on what is understood by both terms, and in particular the variety of media 'text' represents. It is notable that both definitions play a significant role in the articulation of learning across strands and other subjects which may need additional support in the further development of the curriculum. Teachers recommended foregrounded the definitions to ensure they are not lost in the footnotes of the curriculum.

Notably, several respondents drew attention to the opportunity to foreground language learning in the middle and senior classes of primary school with the development of the curriculum for stages 3 and 4. Teachers suggested the inclusion of high-level approaches to language learning including disciplinary and cross-curricular literacy, critical literacy and digital literacy, among others. The support provided by the current language curriculum for stages 1 and 2 in the form of high-level approaches to language learning was referenced as a strength of the document. With the further development of the curriculum, an opportunity to describe what language learning looks like in stages 3 and 4 is seen as a positive.

An important consideration was raised by teachers and agencies working with children with complex needs. The ratification of the *Irish Sign Language (ISL) Act* in December 2017, formally recognised ISL as a language of Ireland. In terms of curriculum provision, the implications of the Act are as yet unclear and will require consideration in the ongoing work of the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*.

## Accessibility

Considerable data was gathered on the accessibility of the draft curriculum and the ease with which it can be read, understood and used. In responses, participants drew on their experiences of the curriculum for Stages 1 and 2 and its accessibility.

A key issue that emerged from the consultation was a desire for clarity of language. In certain cases, participants felt unsure as to what the expectations for teaching and learning were, as presented in the learning outcomes and progression milestones. Sustained engagement with the Primary Language Network did, however, indicate the extent to which teachers did come to terms with the draft specification through exploration and discussion. Feedback relating to the clarity of language in the specification was gathered across consultation formats and this will inform the next phase of redrafting, which will provide opportunities to further refine language where possible and necessary. Particular considerations with regard to issues of accessibility centre around the extent to which teachers need more time, support and opportunities to engage with the language in the document. Throughout the work with the Primary Language Network, it became evident that the opportunity to engage with, and talk through the curriculum on a sustained basis helped teachers to come to a better understanding of the document in many instances. Questions also arose around the consistency of language used for both the English and Irish sections of the document. Finalisation of the curriculum will afford the opportunity to audit the document for consistency of terminology in both languages.

Teachers suggested that there were challenges with the accessibility of the language used for Gaeilge T2 in English-medium schools. This was also the case to some extent for Gaeilge T1 in Irish-medium schools. In many instances this was due to the use of technical vocabulary used in the document. These questions will require continued attention as the curriculum is redrafted. It will also be important to support teachers who may not have a high level of proficiency in Irish in their engagement with the curriculum. The presentation of the learning outcomes and the progression continua was also a factor affecting accessibility. It is apparent from these findings that a significant tension and challenge for the draft specification lies in ensuring ease of accessibility to the document, while also retaining the integrity of the curriculum.

Refining the learning outcomes and progression continua in both languages will ensure that where possible and appropriate, language will be amended to improve clarity. Another part of this work will be to explore the extent to which the physical representation of the progression continua is a challenge for accessibility, and whether these can be presented in a more user-friendly and appropriate way. Equally, supporting teachers with new or unfamiliar terminology through the extension of the online interactive glossary for all stages will be a key part of the next steps. Central

to making the document more accessible will be making judgements as to where it is necessary and appropriate to refine language, and where it is best to provide further supports.

## Usability

Another key focus of the consultation was around the usability of the draft specification and sustained engagement with the Primary Language Network in particular, provided rich feedback on this. A wide volume of responses across the consultation formats relate to implications of the curriculum for teacher planning and assessment. Work with the Primary Language Network highlighted the need to foreground learning outcomes in the specification in order to emphasise their pivotal role in planning for teaching and learning. As previously mentioned, the consultation process provided diverse and often contradictory understandings of the progression continua and their role. This indicates the need to provide a clear description of the progression continua, their purpose and clear guidance around their usage.

Across consultation formats, there were clear calls for an online planning tool and information for teachers around the expectations for planning and assessment. Of major importance to the implementation of the curriculum will be the availability of clear guidance and relevant supports on classroom- and whole-school planning. Concerted efforts will need to be made to ensure that teachers are cognisant of the importance of reflective and contextualised planning which is developed to suit the particular and local needs of individual classrooms and schools.

In light of the experiences of teachers engaging with the draft document and additional feedback received during the consultation, specific work will be undertaken in the refinement of the curriculum specification to support its usability. Further investigation, refinement and development of learning outcomes will ensure that a limited number of learning outcomes will span over two stages. This will result in greater clarity being provided on the expectations for children's language learning across stages. Teachers in the Primary Language Network expressed some concern at a lack of connection between a number of learning outcomes across stages. Further development of the specification will aim to ensure that there is greater connection, coherence and progression between the learning outcomes in stages 1 and 2, and those in stages 3 and 4. This will involve revisiting and examining the learning outcomes across stages for consistency of terminology and wording and for clear guidance around expectations for children's language learning and development.

## Supports

Across consultation formats, there was a volume of requests for adequate supports to successfully implement the Primary Language Curriculum for third to sixth classes. The need for such supports received considerable attention during the work with the Primary Language Network. Suggestions include practical support materials for teachers and the need for ongoing and sustained continuous professional development, with a strong call evident for greater opportunities for context-specific support at local level over a sustained period of time. In particular, calls for support around the teaching of Gaeilge in English-medium schools were made. One such example is a call for support materials around the use of the *tréithe breise* for Gaeilge: *ábhar tacaíochta leis na tréithe breise a léiriú agus samplaí a chur leis chun tacaíocht a thabhairt do na múinteoirí; Support material to illustrate the 'tréithe breise' and samples to help support the teachers.* The provision of a well-developed support toolkit was described as an essential accompaniment to the curriculum and its implementation. The further development of support materials for teachers that already exist for junior infants to second class was also a feature of the feedback received across consultation formats. Arising from the consultation findings, a list of possible supports has been generated for consideration and these will be examined, considered and prioritised in the coming months. They range from supports around pedagogy, planning and the big ideas embedded in the curriculum. The sample list of the overarching supports required is provided below, to address:

- Gaeilge L2
- Planning with the Primary Language Curriculum
- Linguistic diversity in the classroom
- Disciplinary literacy in the classroom
- Reading instruction
- Comprehension.

There were also calls for supports around teacher planning and assessment, with particular emphasis on the provision of an online planning toolkit, similar to the one in existence for the 1999 curriculum.

## 5. Next steps

The consultation successfully collected the views of stakeholders on the draft *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for stages 3 and 4. As presented above a number of considerations for the further development of the curriculum can be identified, including:

- the foregrounding of learning outcomes in the curriculum
- the positioning of the progression continua
- further refinement of both learning outcomes and progression milestones/steps
- clarifications on the expectations around recognising linguistic diversity
- guidance on planning and exploration of the online planning space
- Irish Sign Language and the potential implications
- accessibility of language in both English and Irish
- the inclusion of descriptions of language learning approaches appropriate for stages 3 and 4.

Drawing on the consultation findings, work will continue on the development of the curriculum with a focus on all four stages of the specification. The curriculum will be finalised and presented to Council for approval towards the end of 2018.

The NCCA would like to extend a special thank you to everyone who contributed to the consultation process. To the principals and teachers in the school network, to everyone who completed the online questionnaire, to those who attended the public consultative seminars and to all the stakeholder groups who contributed or helped facilitate events, thank you all for your time and considered feedback.

# Appendix 1: Meitheal Forbartha

## Meitheal Forbartha for the Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teaga na Buscoile stges 3 and 4

Title	First Name
Chair	Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoidh
Catholic Primary Schools Management Association	Geralyn Costello
An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta	Maire Nic an Rí
Co-opted	Patrick Burke
Co-opted	Aisling Ní Dhíorbháin
Department of Education and Skills	Clare Griffin
Foras na Gaeilge	Clodagh Ní Mhaoilchiaráin
Irish Federation of University Teachers	Niamh Fortune
Irish National Teachers' Organisation	Karen Devine
Irish National Teachers' Organisation	Anne English
Irish National Teachers' Organisation	Fiona Enright
Irish National Teachers' Organisation	Paul Moroney
National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education	Chris Stewart

# Appendix 2: List of schools in the Primary Language Network

<b>School</b>	<b>County</b>
<b>Gaelscoil Eiscir Riada</b>	Dublin
<b>Scoil Chaitlín Maude</b>	Dublin
<b>Scoil Mhuire Senior School Blakestown</b>	Dublin
<b>Our Lady of Good Counsel</b>	Dublin
<b>Glasnevin NS</b>	Dublin
<b>Scoil Náisiúnta Muire Gan Smal (Scoil Chamuis)</b>	Galway
<b>St Felim's NS</b>	Cavan
<b>St. Brigid's Special School</b>	Westmeath
<b>Cornafulla NS</b>	Westmeath
<b>Tubberclare NS</b>	Westmeath
<b>Scoil Niocláis</b>	Cork

# Appendix 3: Full data set from online questionnaire

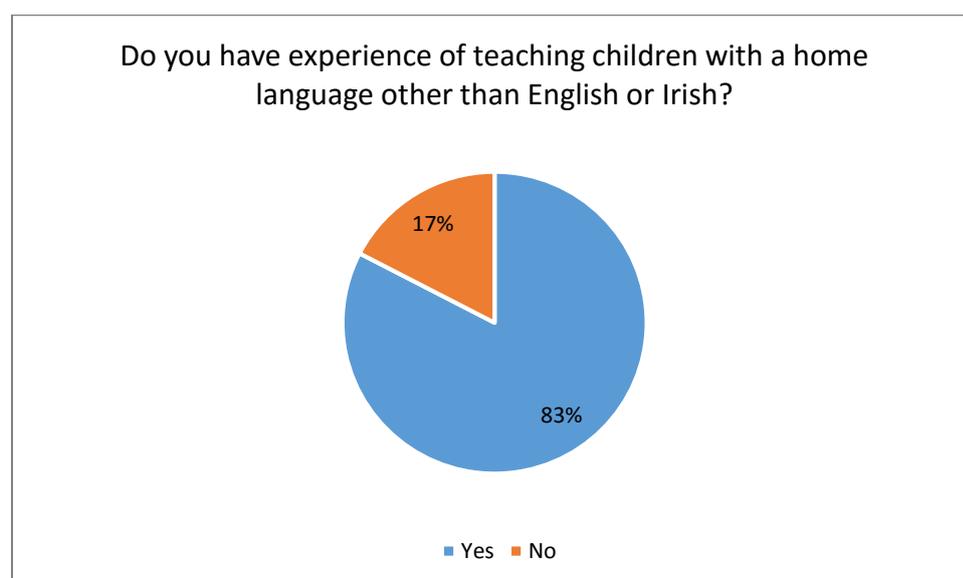
## Overview

This report summarises the outcomes of an online survey on Stages 3 and 4 of the Primary Language Curriculum. The survey, which was hosted on the NCCA website, was implemented in spring 2018. The questionnaire included separate routes for those interested in English as L1 and Gaeilge as L2, and for those interested in Gaeilge as L1 and English as L2. While 267 participants including a handful from Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools followed the English as L1/Gaeilge as L2 route, 20 followed the Gaeilge as L1/English as L2 option. Both groups also answered some common questions.

## Cross-cutting Themes in the Curriculum (All respondents)

Eighty-three percent of respondents reported that they had experience of teaching children with a home language other than English or Irish (Figure 1).

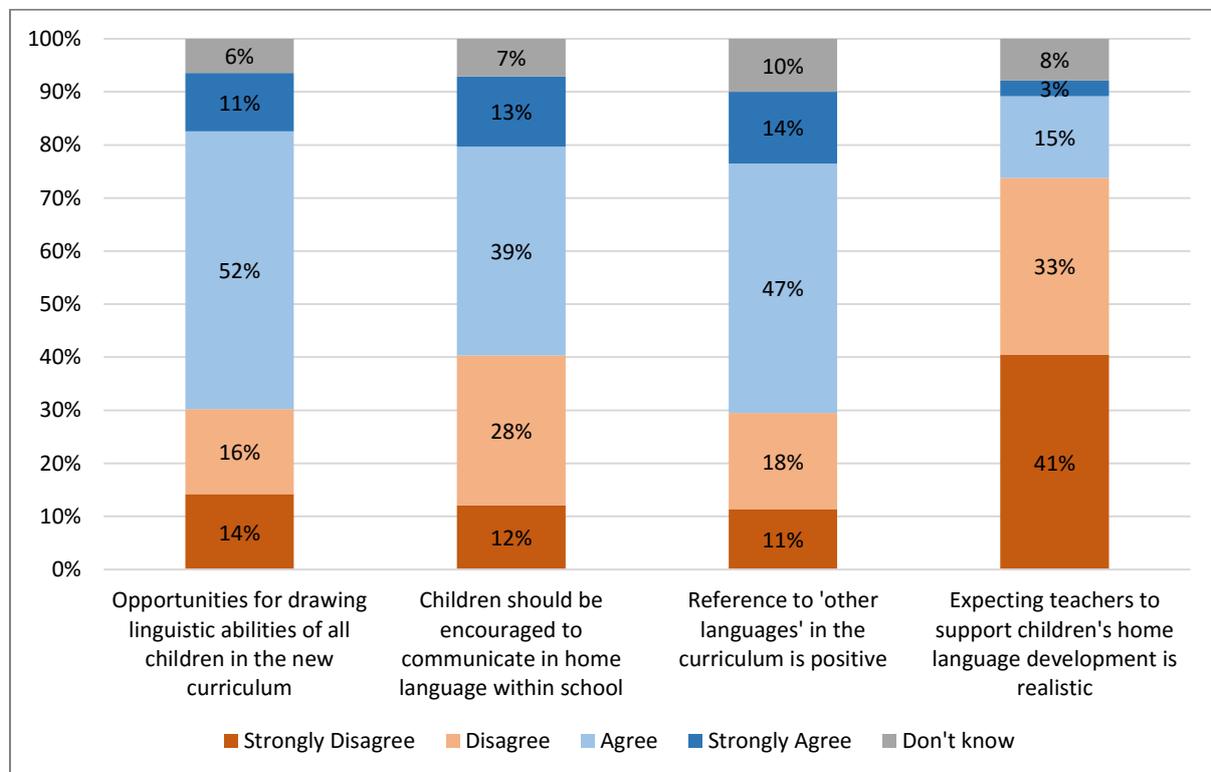
**Figure 1: Percentages of respondents with (without) experience of teaching children with a home language other than English or Irish**



Valid N = 282; Missing = 5 (1.7%)

Respondents were asked to indicate their levels of agreement with four statements about linguistic abilities and language development. Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated agreement<sup>6</sup> with the view that ‘opportunities exist in the Primary Language Curriculum to draw on the linguistic abilities of all children’ (Figure 2). Under one-third (30%) indicated disagreement. Just over half (52%) indicated agreement with the view that ‘children should be encouraged to communicate in their home language within school for a variety of purposes’. Sixty-one percent indicated agreement with the view that ‘reference to other languages in the curriculum is a positive feature of the document’. Almost three-in-four participants (74%) indicated disagreement with the view that ‘it is realistic to expect teachers to support children’s home language development’.

**Figure 2: Percentages of respondents indicating various levels of agreement with statements about linguistic ability and language development**



Valid N = 281; Missing = 6 (2.1%)

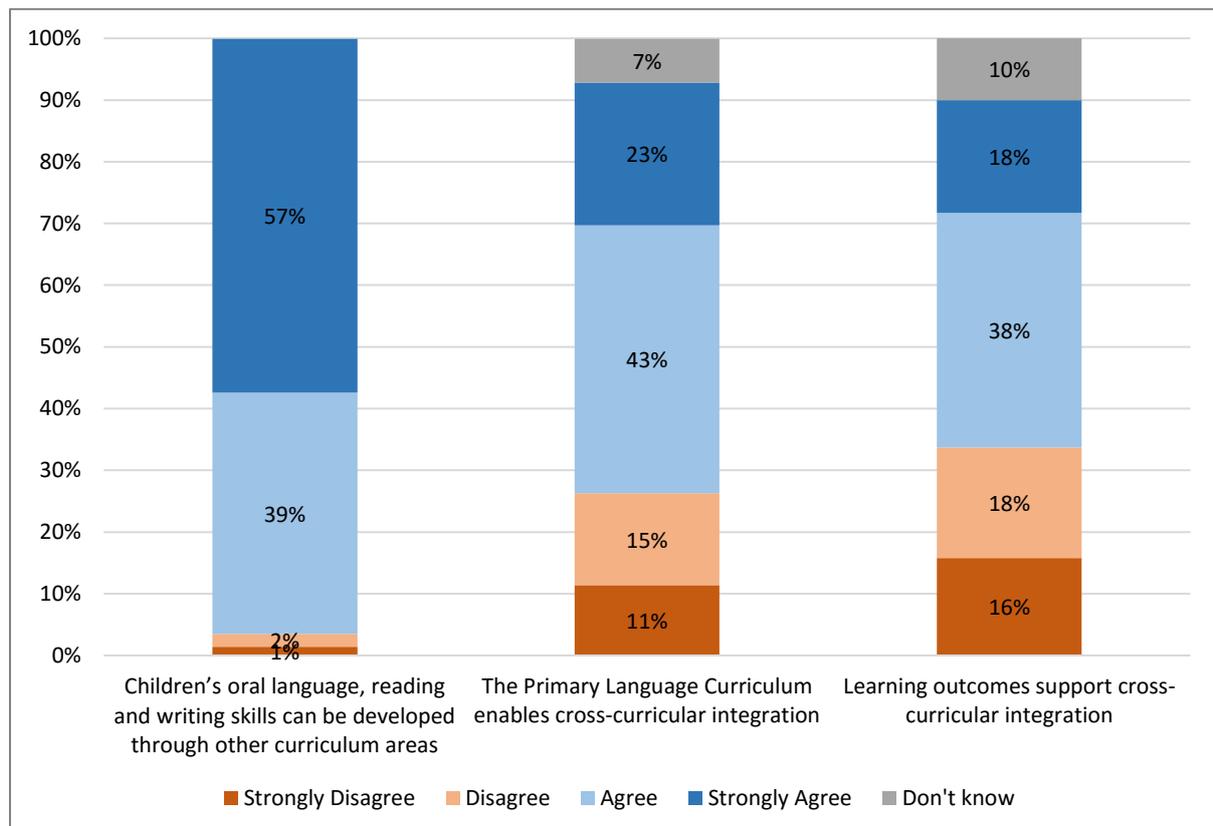
Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with three statements about integration of English and Gaelic in the curriculum and the teaching of language through other curriculum areas. Ninety-six percent indicated agreement with the view that ‘children’s oral language, reading and writing skills can be developed through other curriculum areas’ (Figure 3). Sixty-six percent indicated agreement with the view that ‘the Primary Language Curriculum’ enables cross-curricular integration’,

<sup>6</sup> ‘Indicated agreement’ should be interpreted as ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’, while ‘indicated disagreement’ should be interpreted as ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’.

while 48% indicated agreement with the statement that ‘learning outcomes support cross-curricular integration’. One in three (34%) disagreed with this view.

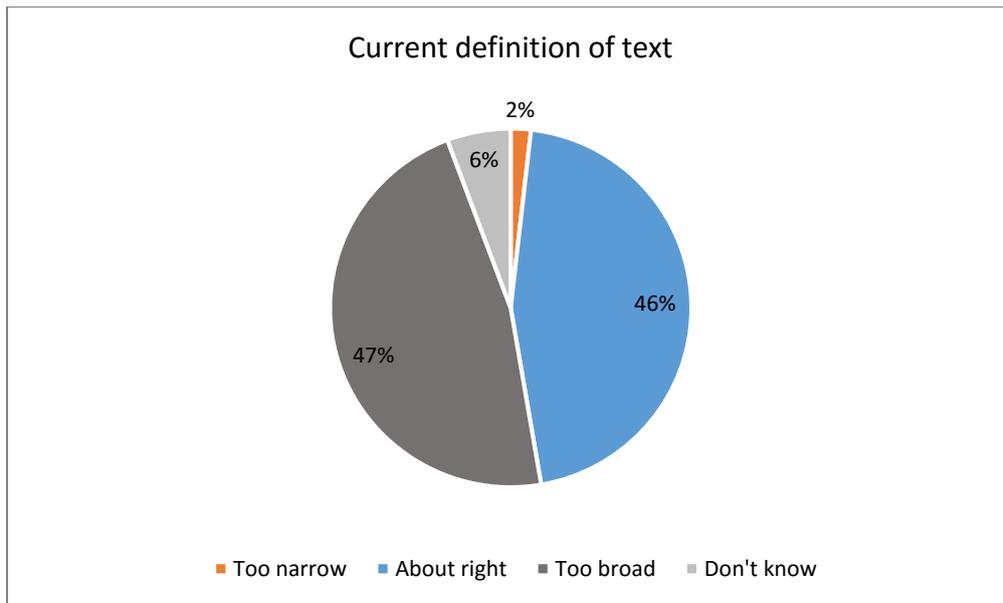
Respondents were reminded that the current definition of ‘text’ in the Primary Language Curriculum includes all products of language use, including print, oral, gesture, sign, Braille, visual, tactile , electronic and digital. Whereas 46% felt that the definition was ‘just about right’, 47% felt that it was too broad (Figure 4). Just 2% felt it was too narrow.

**Figure 3: Percentages of respondents indicating various levels of agreement with statements about integration of English and Gaelige in the curriculum**



Valid N = 281; Missing = 6 (2.1%)

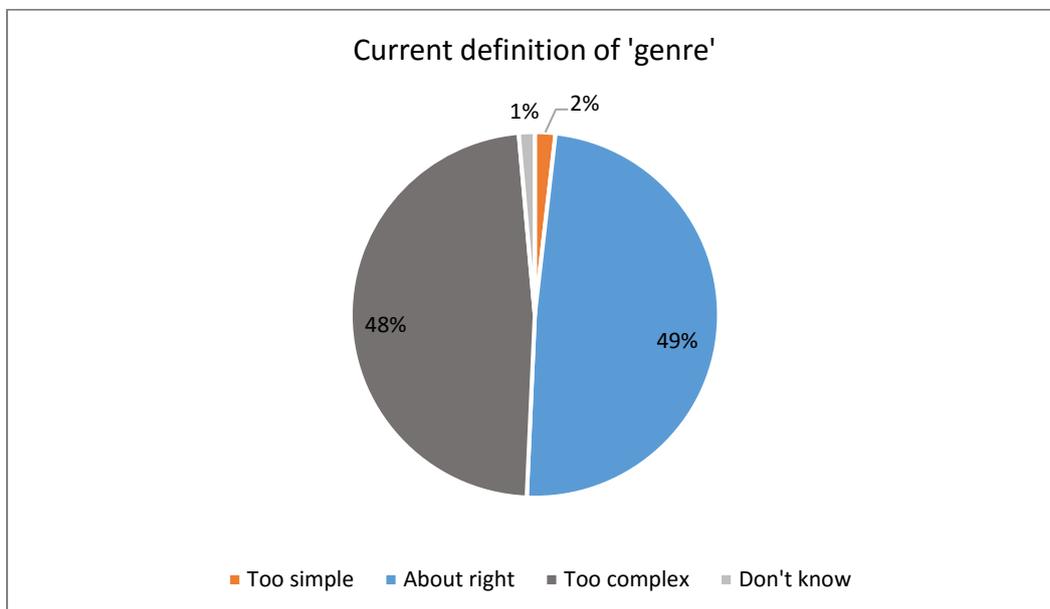
**Figure 4: Percentages of respondents indicating varying views on the definition of ‘text’ in the Primary Language Curriculum**



Valid N = 279; Missing = 8 (2.8%)

Respondents were provided with a definition of genre, as it is used in the Primary Language Curriculum<sup>7</sup>. Forty-nine percent felt that the definition was 'about right', while 48% felt that it was 'too complex' (Figure 5). Just 2% felt it was 'too simple'.

**Figure 5: Percentages of respondents indicating varying views on the definition of 'genre' in the Primary Language Curriculum**



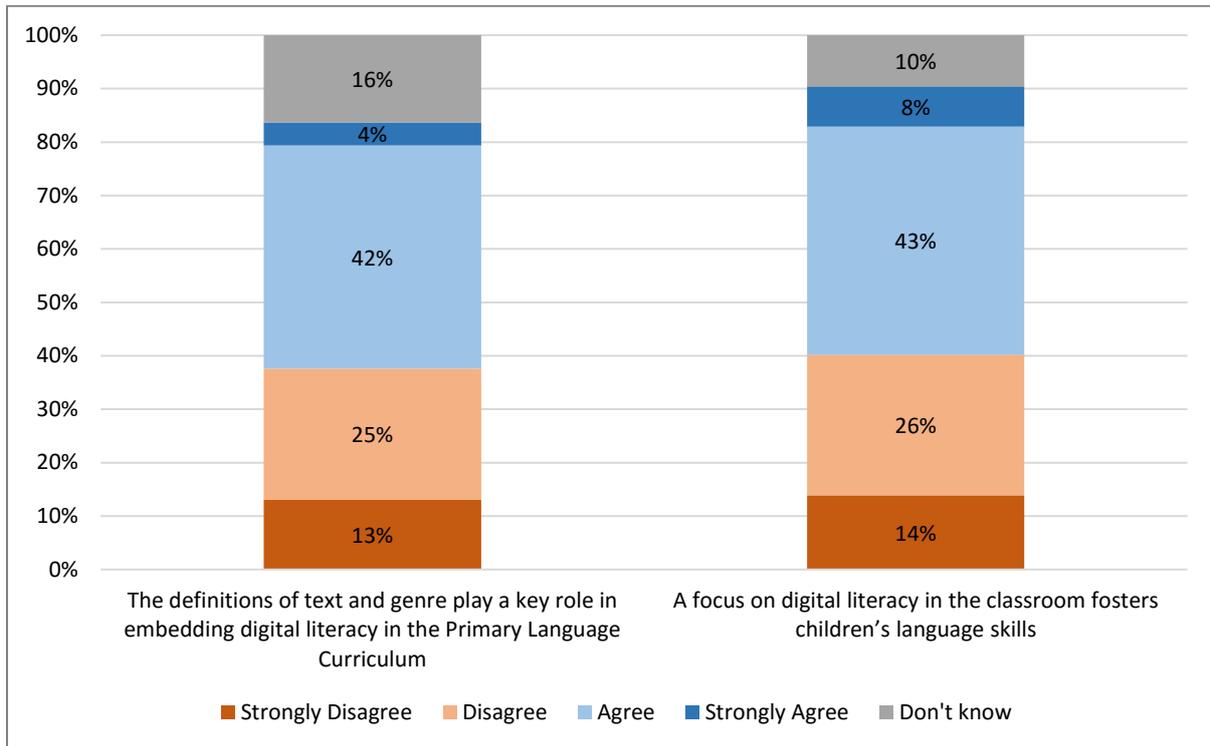
<sup>7</sup> Types of multi-sentence oral or written text structures that have become conventionalised for particular purposes with expected organisational patterns, as well as language features related to register, e.g. narrative, informational, persuasive and multi-genre. Simply put, genre refers to a selection of oral and written forms in order to recount, explain, entertain, inform, give instructions, narrate, persuade and justify opinions. Oral forms include, but are not limited to, storytelling, drama, poetry, speeches, debates, film and digital media such as podcasts, videos, advertising, tv and radio broadcasts.

Valid N = 282; Missing = 5 (1.7%)

Participants were asked to respond to two statements about digital literacies. Forty-six percent indicated agreement with the statement that ‘the definitions of text and genre in the curriculum play a key role in embedding digital literacy in the Primary Language Curriculum’, while 51% indicated agreement with the view that ‘a focus on digital literacy in the classroom fosters children’s language skills’ (Figure 6). Between 38-40% of respondents indicated disagreement with these statements.

Participants were also invited to comment on a number of statements under ‘cross-cutting themes’. One-hundred and seven respondents provided comments, with five of these providing two comments. The data in Table 1 refer to percentages of comments (out of 112). Thirty-one percent of participants commented on aspects of digital literacy. Several of these comments referred to a possible negative impact of digital learning the communicative aspects of language development. Others were more positive and endorsed digital technologies as tools to stimulate language. Eleven percent of comments related to the language of the PCL draft document, with most of these calling for greater clarity, especially around the definitions of text and genre. Sixteen percent of comments related to other curriculum issues, including curriculum breadth (respondents said it was too broad), curriculum overload, and a need for support with curriculum implementation. Eleven percent of comments referred to English language learners, with most of these comments arguing that class teachers cannot be expected to contribute to children’s home language development (see last column in Figure 2 above). Under resources (13% of comments), several teachers argued that resources for digital learning (including broadband) were lacking in their schools. Comments in the ‘other’ category (13% of comments) tended to be critical of the curriculum in a general sense.

**Figure 6: Percentages of respondents indicating varying views on statements about digital literacies and the Primary Language Curriculum/children’s learning**



Valid N = 282; Missing = 5 (2.7%)

**Table 1 – Distribution and examples of comments made by teachers at end of section on cross-cutting themes**

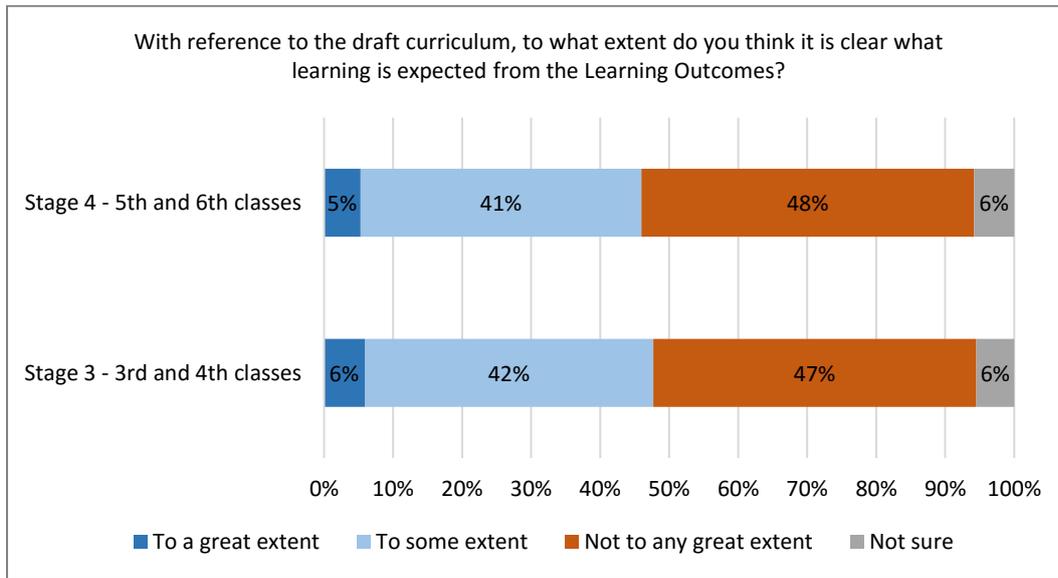
Theme	Percent of comments made	Examples
Digital Literacy/Digital Learning	31.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No time for digital literacy. There’s too much to cover in language learning without adding in digital.</li> <li>Technology can stem the flow of language in many circumstances.</li> <li>There is potential for digital literacy to foster language skills; this depends on how it is used and also resources available</li> <li>Specific digital literacy skills are essential</li> </ul>
Curriculum – other issues	16.1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The new language curriculum is way too broad, it is also very hard to work with, and if it's going to be implemented a lot more time needs to be given to training teachers and to allow for whole school planning also!</li> </ul>

Curriculum – language of curriculum document	10.7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The term genre is way too complex and does not transfer to planning on the ground</li> <li>• Genre should be limited to classification instead of trying to change the meaning and context of a word which is already clearly defined</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
English language learners	10.7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The question regarding supporting a child's home language mentions teachers. I would argue that a support teacher would be more effective in this regard</li> </ul>
Resources	12.5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital literacy is dependent on adequate support such as internet connection reliability and speeds that promote large scale digital use in lessons</li> </ul>
Other	12.5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The new curriculum has NOT been thought through. It seems to be based on out-of-date research.</li> </ul>
Questionnaire-related issues	6.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tá na ceisteanna ró-shainiúil chun deis a thabhairt do mhúinteoirí eolas cuí a thabhairt. (<i>Questions are too specific to allow teachers to impart relevant information</i>).</li> </ul>

### Learning Outcomes (L1 English, L2 Gaeilge Schools)

Participants linked to schools with English as L1 and Gaeilge as L2 (all but 20 survey respondents) were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt it is clear what learning is expected from the learning outcomes in the PLC for Stage 3 (Third and Fourth classes) and Stage 4 (Fifth and Sixth classes). Responses were similar for the two stages, with 48% indicating that it was not clear to ‘any great extent’ for Stage 3 and 47% for Stage 4 (Figure 7). Similar percentages of respondents said that they were clear ‘to a great extent’ or ‘to some extent’ as to what learning was expected from the Learning Outcomes (46% for Stage 3, and 48% for Stage 4).

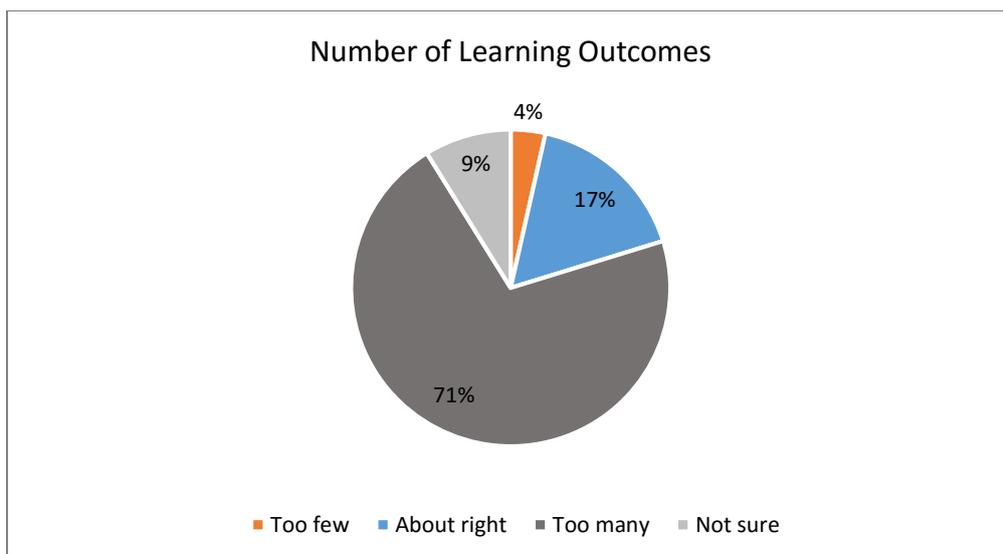
**Figure 7: Percentages of respondents indicating varying views on the clarity of the learning expected from the learning outcomes**



Valid N = 220; Missing = 47 (17.69%); Not asked: 20

Participants were informed that there are 33 learning outcomes for both English and Gaelige at Stages 3 and 4 and were asked for their views on the number of learning outcomes. Over seven in ten respondents (71%) felt that there were too many learning outcomes, while 17% felt that the number was just about right (Figure 8). Just 4% said there were too few.

**Figure 8: Percentages of respondents indicating varying views the number of learning outcomes in English/Gaeilge in the PLC**

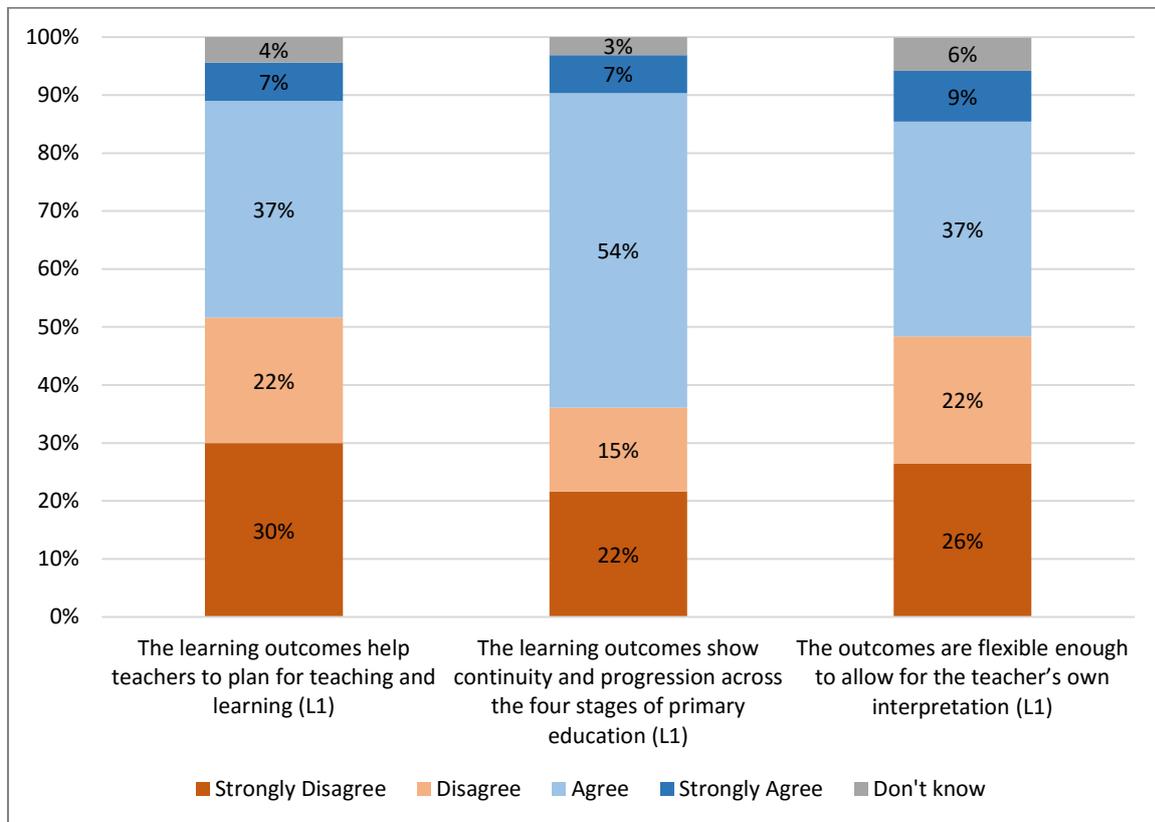


Valid N = 227. Missing = 40 (20.9%); Not administered: 20

Participants were then asked to respond to three statements about learning outcomes in L1 for their school. Fifty-two percent indicated disagreement with the view that 'the learning outcomes help teachers to plan for teaching and learning (L1)', while 44% indicated agreement (Figure 9). Thirty-seven percent indicated disagreement and 61% indicated agreement with the view that 'the learning outcomes show continuity and progression across the four stages of primary education (L1)'. Forty-eight percent disagreed with the view that 'the outcomes are flexible enough to allow for the teacher's own interpretation (L1)', while 46% indicated agreement.

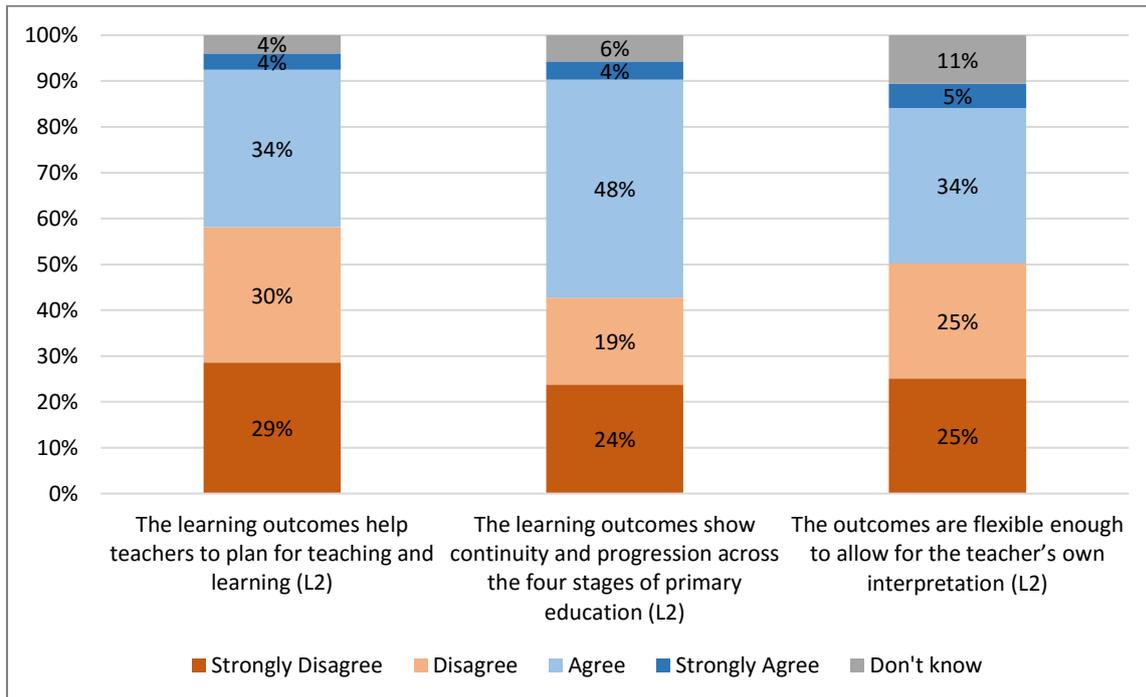
Participants were asked to respond to the same three statements with regard to learning outcomes for L2 in their school. Just over one half (52%) indicated disagreement with the view that 'the learning outcomes help teachers to plan for teaching and learning (L2)', while 38% indicated agreement (Figure 10). Forty-three percent indicated disagreement with the view that 'the learning outcomes show continuity and progression across the four stages of primary education (L2)'. Fifty-two percent indicated agreement. Finally, 50% indicated disagreement with the view that that 'the outcomes are flexible enough to allow for the teacher's own interpretation (L2)', while 39% indicated agreement. The remaining 11% 'did not know'.

**Figure 9: Percentages of respondents indicating varying levels of agreement with statements on learning outcomes for L1 in their school**



Valid N = 227. Missing = 40 (17.6%). Not asked = 20.

**Figure 10: Percentages of respondents indicating varying levels of agreement with statements on learning outcomes for L2 in their school**



Valid N = 227. Missing = 40 (17.6%). Not asked = 20.

Participants were invited to comment on the learning outcomes in the PLC for Stages 3 and 4. Ninety-five of 287 participants did so (33%), with a total of 126 valid comments received. A key theme in each comment was identified. These are summarised in Table 2. In general, comments were negative or critical, though a small number of positive ones, endorsing aspects of the learning outcomes, were included. The most frequent theme (in 37% of comments) related to the structure/format of the learning outcomes. Specific concerns related to number (too many), breadth (too broad), complexity (too complex) and level of detail (too much). A further 13% of comments referred to the language of the learning outcomes, which was viewed as being too wordy or unclear. Several comments on structure and language also raised a possible lack of a common understanding of outcomes across teachers. Twenty-one percent of comments referred to planning for teaching and learning, and these included concerns about what to teach at different levels and the amount of time that planning would require. Comments under Gaeilge referred to the relative difficulty of the L2 outcomes for children in English-medium schools. Comments related to support with curriculum implementation (5%) called for extra supports (mainly CPD, but also learning resources) in order to implement the new language curriculum. 'Other' comments (18%) included concerns about the research base for the language curriculum.

**Table 2 – Distribution and examples of comments made by teachers about learning outcomes in the PLC at Stages 3 and 4**

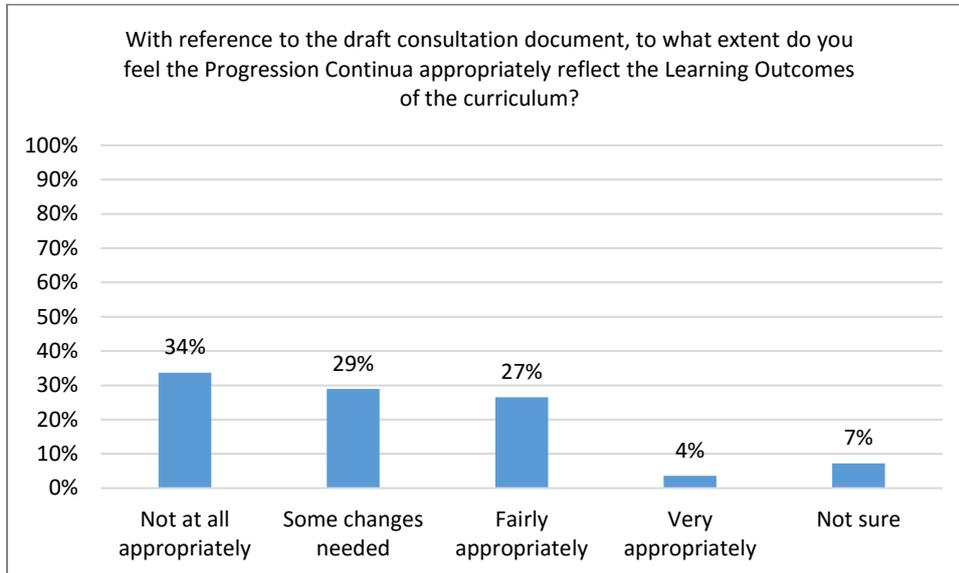
Theme	Percent of comments	Examples
Structure /Format	36.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some learning outcomes are very broad and encompass an entire year's worth of learning</li> <li>• Learning outcomes are quite general, teachers want to know the nitty-gritty</li> </ul>
Language	13.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All documents are too wordy. They are not user friendly.</li> <li>• The language is overly complicated and unnecessarily so</li> </ul>
Planning	20.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No need to change from the current objectives. Teachers have enough to do instead of planning for individual children</li> </ul>
Gaeilge	6.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The level presented for Gaeilge needs to be clearer. It is unrealistic to expect students to get near the same level of learning in a second language particularly</li> <li>• The Irish technical vocab is too hard to translate</li> </ul>
Support with implementation	4.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't feel ready to implement any new language curriculum. I need more support and advice. It is all happening too soon.</li> </ul>
Other	18.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progression is at times achieved in the complexity of the text chosen and not in the expected outcomes and this needs to be referenced in the document.</li> <li>• Based on out-of-date research.</li> <li>• I like the fluidity and clear progression of the learning outcomes.</li> </ul>

### **Progression Continua (English Medium Schools)**

First, with reference to the draft consultation document, participants were asked to what extent the progression continua (and associated progression milestones) appropriately reflected the learning outcomes in the curriculum. Thirty-four percent selected 'not at all appropriately', perhaps indicating dissatisfaction with the progression continua, the learning outcomes, or both (Figure 11). Twenty-nine

percent indicated that some changes were needed, while 31% felt that the progression continua 'fairly appropriately' or 'very appropriately' reflected the learning outcomes in the curriculum.

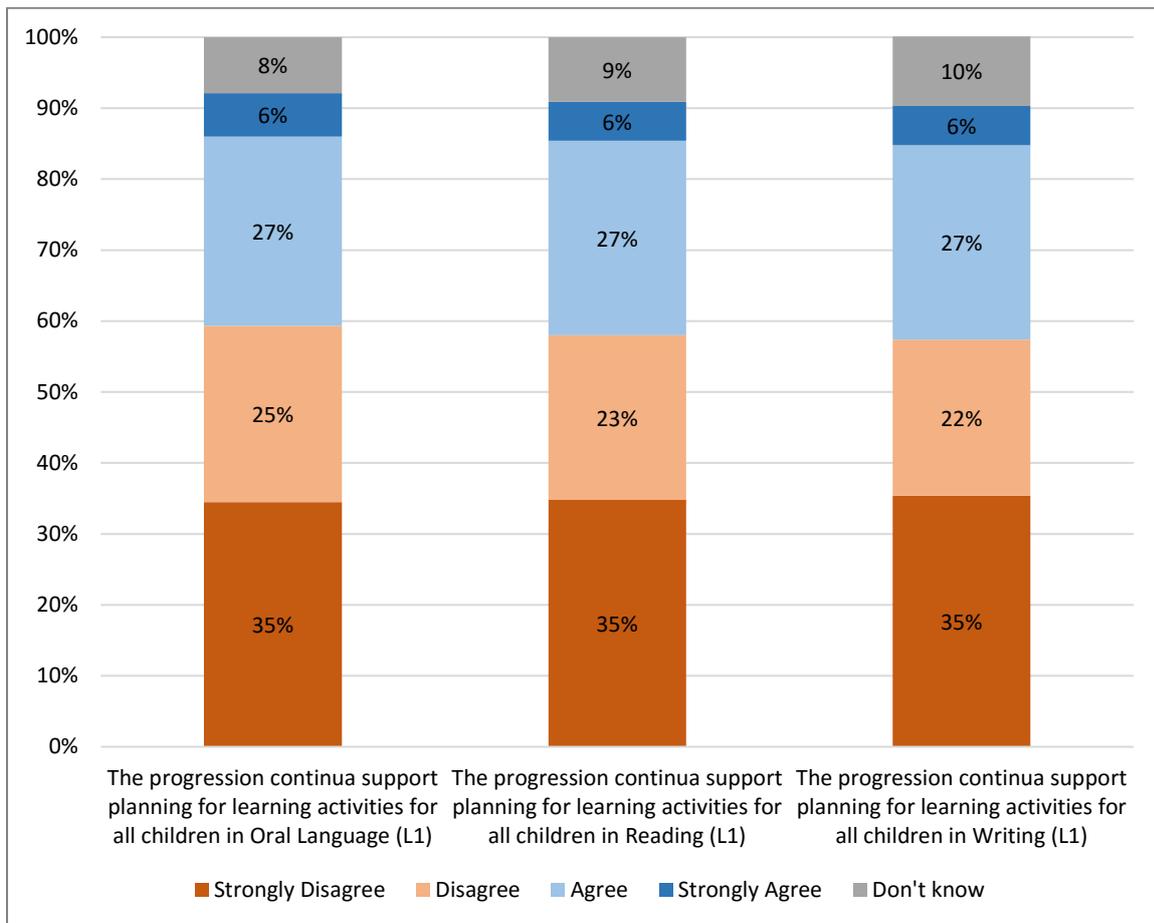
**Figure 11: Respondents' evaluations of the extent to which the progression continua in the draft consultation document reflect the learning outcomes of the curriculum**



Valid N = 166; Missing = 101 (37.8%). Not administered: 20.

Participants were asked to indicate for oral language, reading and writing for both L1 and L2 if the progression continua support planning activities for all children. Figure 12 summarises responses for L1. Sixty percent indicated disagreement with the view that the progression continua supported planning for oral language. Corresponding percentages for reading and writing were 58% and 57% respectively. For each strand, one-third of respondents (33%) indicated agreement.

**Figure 12: Respondents' levels of agreement with statement that the progression continua support planning for learning activities for all children in L1 (English) oral language, reading and writing**

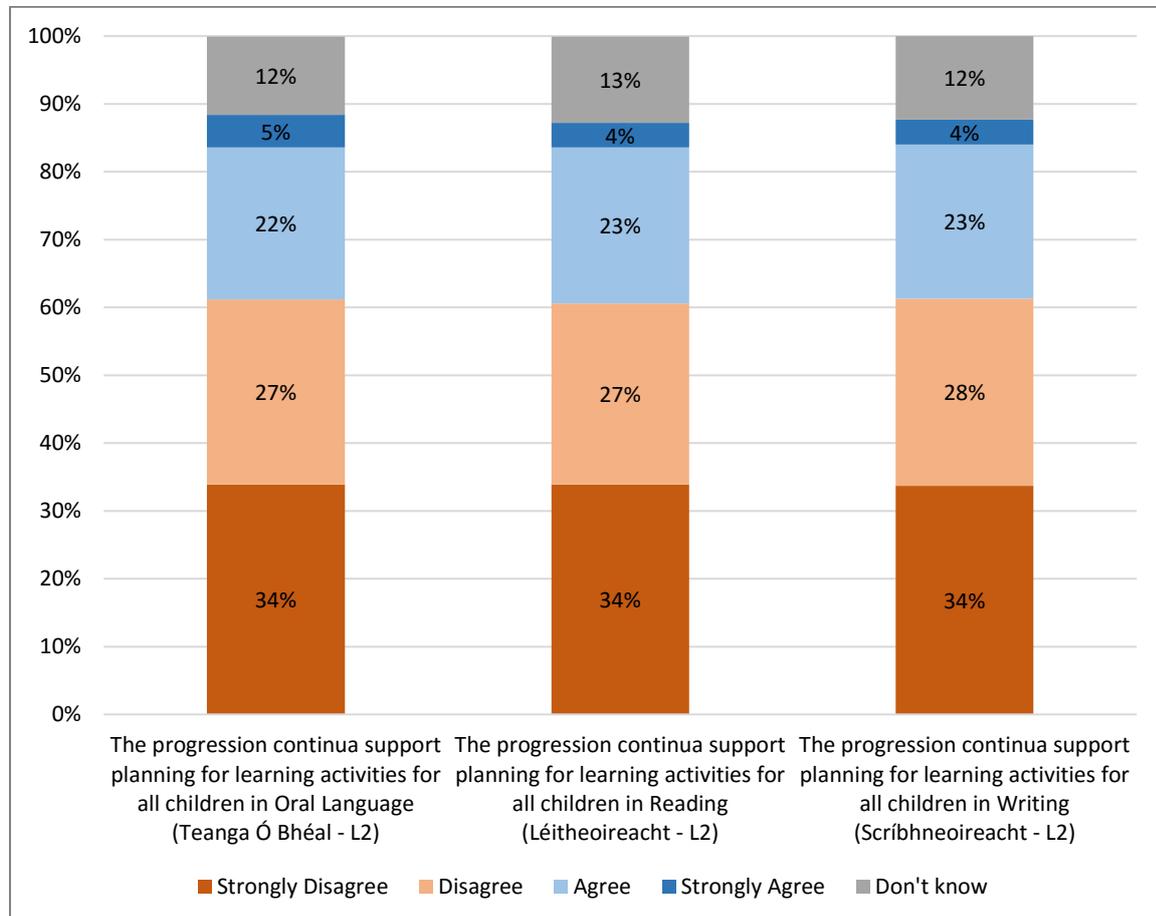


Valid N = 164; Missing = 103 (38.6%). Not administered: 20.

Participants were asked to respond to a similar statement with respect to L2 (that is, Gaeilge) in English-medium school. Figure 13 summarises their responses. Sixty-one percent indicated disagreement with the view that the progression continua for Teanga Ó Bhéal and Léitheoireacht reflected the learning outcomes in the curriculum. The corresponding percentage for Scróbhneoireacht was 62%. Twenty-seven percent indicated agreement with the statement for each of Léitheoireacht, Scróbhneoireacht and Teanga Ó Bhéal. The responses in Figures 12 and 13 should be interpreted in the context of high levels of missingness/non-response (almost 40% of those responding to the

questionnaire did not answer the questions covered in Figures 12 and 13).

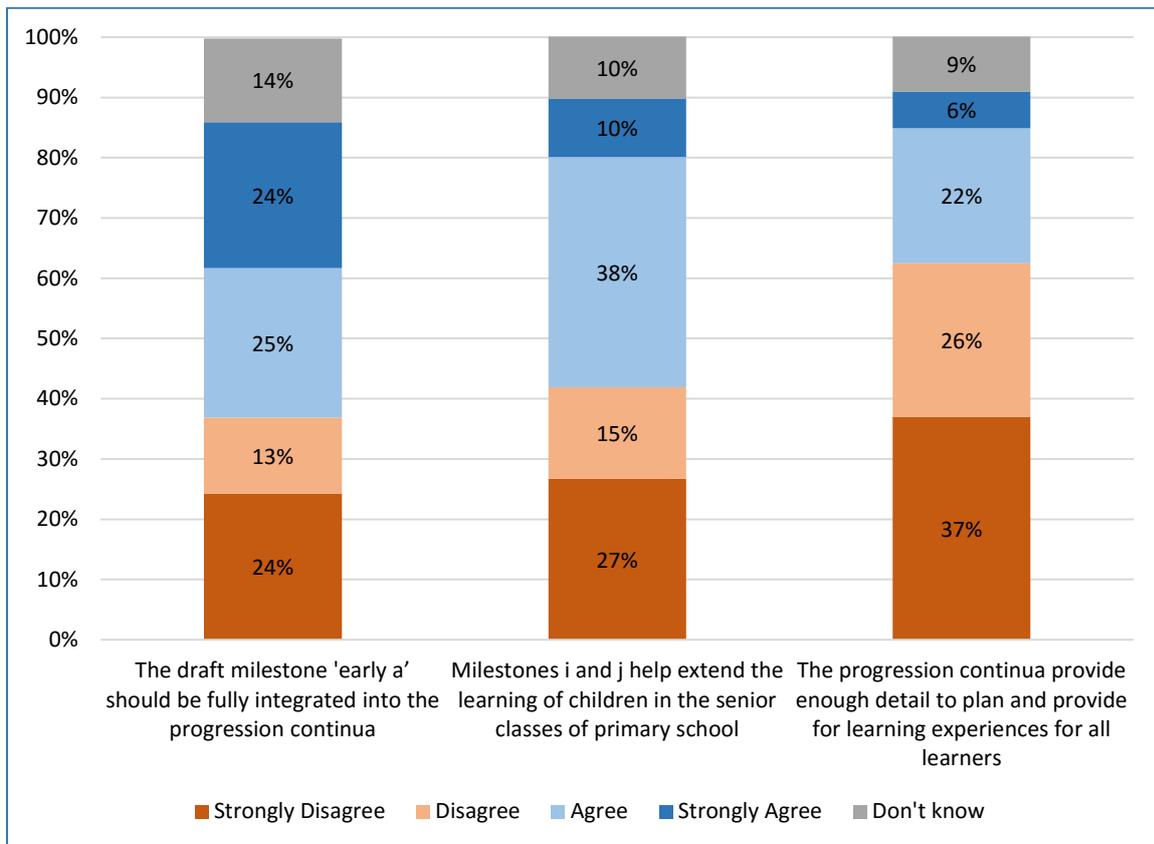
**Figure 13: Respondents' levels of agreement with statement that the progression continua support planning for learning activities for all children in L2 (Irish) oral language, reading and writing**



Valid N = 163; Missing = 104 (39.0%). Not administered: 20.

Participants were then asked to respond to three further statements on the progression continua and associated milestones. Forty-nine percent indicated agreement with the view that the 'early a' milestone (included to support some children in their initial development of language) should be fully integrated into the progression continua (Figure 13). It may be the case that some participants who taught senior primary classes may not have been fully familiar with the 'early a' milestone, and hence were not in a position to respond. Forty-two percent indicated disagreement with the view that 'the milestones i and j help extend the learning of children in the senior classes of primary school', while almost one-half (48%) indicated agreement. It is unclear if negative responses here indicate concern with milestones i and j, or if they represent a more general opposition to the use of milestones. Over six-in-ten respondents (63%) indicated disagreement with the view that 'the progression continua provide enough detail to plan and provide for learning experiences for all learners', while 28% indicated agreement.

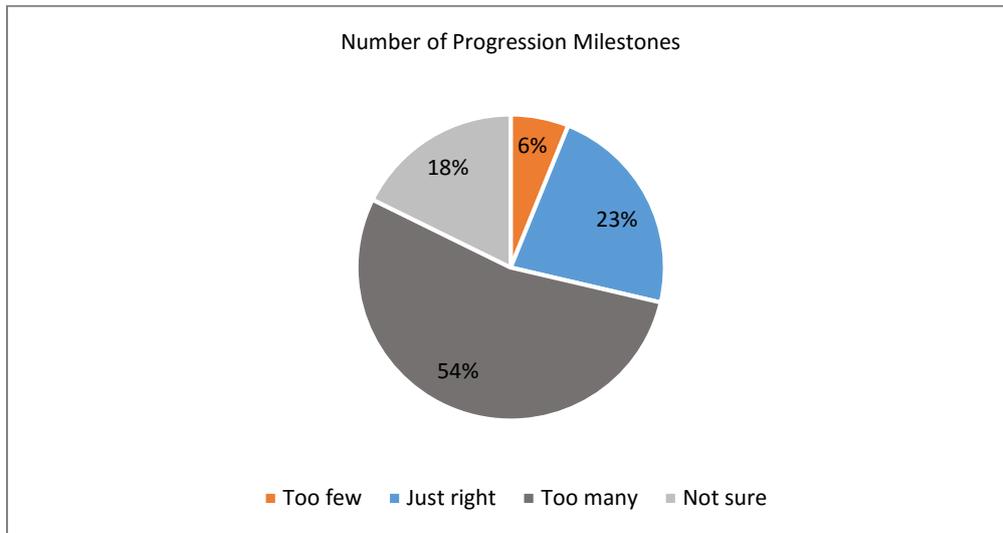
**Figure 13: Respondents' levels of agreement with statements about progression continua and associated milestones**



Valid N = 165. Missing = 102 (38.2%). Not administered: 20.

Participants were informed that there are 11 milestones (early a-j) across the 8 years of primary education. They were asked to indicate how appropriate they felt this number was. Just over half of respondents (54%) indicated that there were too many milestones, while almost one-quarter (23%) felt that the number was just right and 6% felt that there were too few (Figure 14).

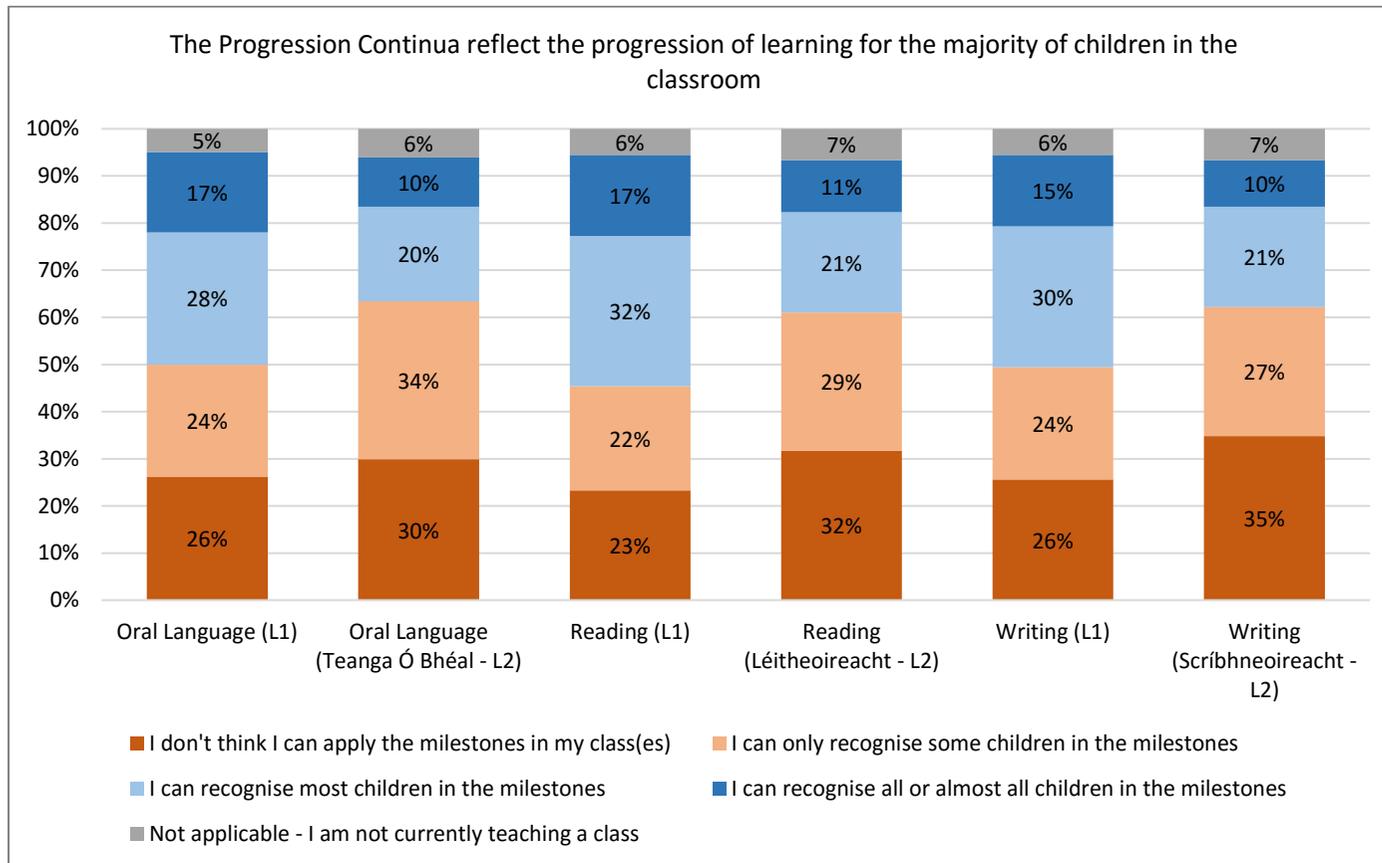
**Figure 14: Percentages of respondents indicating varying views the number of milestones across the eight year of primary education**



Valid N = 164; Missing = 103 (38.6%). Not administered: 20.

The next question asked participants to reflect on their current class, and to indicate the extent to which they felt the progression continua reflected the progression of children in their classes for each curriculum strand in L1 (English) and L2 (Gaeilge). For L1 progression continua, between 23% of respondents (Reading) and 26% (Oral Language, Writing) indicated that they don't think they can apply the milestones in their classes (Figure 15). For L2, the corresponding figures were between 30% (Teanga ó Bhéal) and 35% (Scríbhneoireacht). Between 22% of respondents (Reading) and 24% (Oral Language, Writing) indicated that they can recognise some of their children in the L1 milestones, while between 27% (Scríbhneoireacht) and 34% (Teanga ó Bhéal) indicated that they can recognise some of their children in the L2 milestones. Between 28% (Oral Language) and 32% (Writing) indicated that they can recognise most (but not all) of their children in the milestones for L1, while between 20% (Teanga ó Bhéal) and 21% (Scríbhneoireacht, Léitheoireacht) indicated that they can recognise most (but not all) of their children in the milestones for L2. Smaller proportions - between 15% (Writing) and 17% (Reading, Oral Language) for L1, and between 10% (Teanga Ó Bhéal, Scríbhneoireacht) about 11% (Léitheoireacht) for L2 – recognised all or almost all of the children in their classes in the milestones.

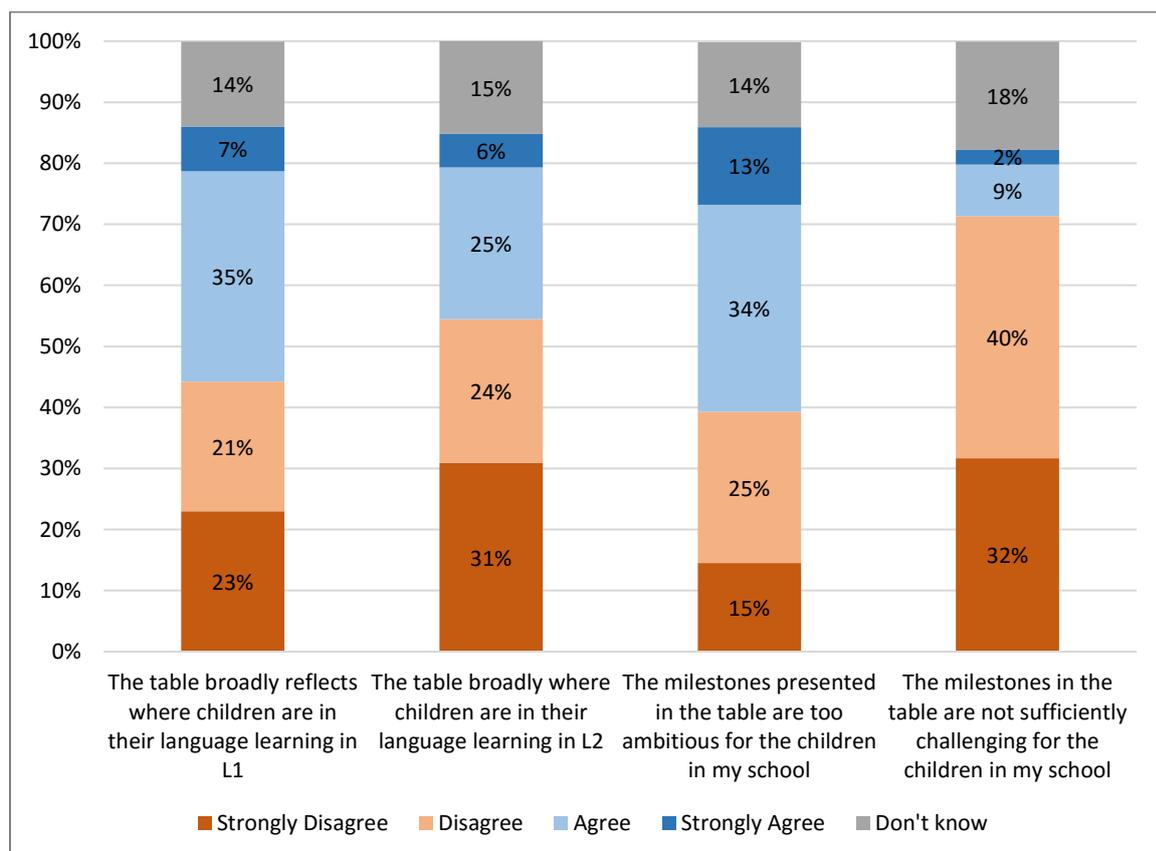
**Figure 15: Respondents' views on the extent to which the progression continua reflect the progression of learning for the majority of children in their classrooms across different strands (L1 and L2)**



Valid N = 164; Missing = 103 (38.6%). Not administered: 20.

Participants were then provided with a table that indicated the expected learning of children (in terms of milestones reached) at different stages of primary schooling. Participants were asked to respond to four statements about the table. Forty-four percent of respondents indicated disagreement with the view that ‘the table broadly reflects where children are at in their language learning in L1’ (Figure 16). Forty-two percent indicated agreement, while 14% ‘did not know’. Fifty-five percent indicated disagreement with the view that the ‘the table broadly indicates where children are at in their language learning in L2’ while just over three in ten (31%) indicated agreement, and 15% ‘did not know’. Fewer than half (47%) indicated agreement with the view that ‘the milestones presented in the table are too ambitious for children in my school’, while four in ten (40%) disagreed. Finally, over seven in ten (72%) indicated disagreement with the statement that ‘the milestones in the table are not sufficiently challenging for children in my school’. This could be taken to imply that 72% indicated agreement that the milestones were sufficiently challenging.

**Figure 16: Respondents’ levels of agreement with statements about table designed to support teachers in understanding the expected learning of children at different stages of primary schooling**

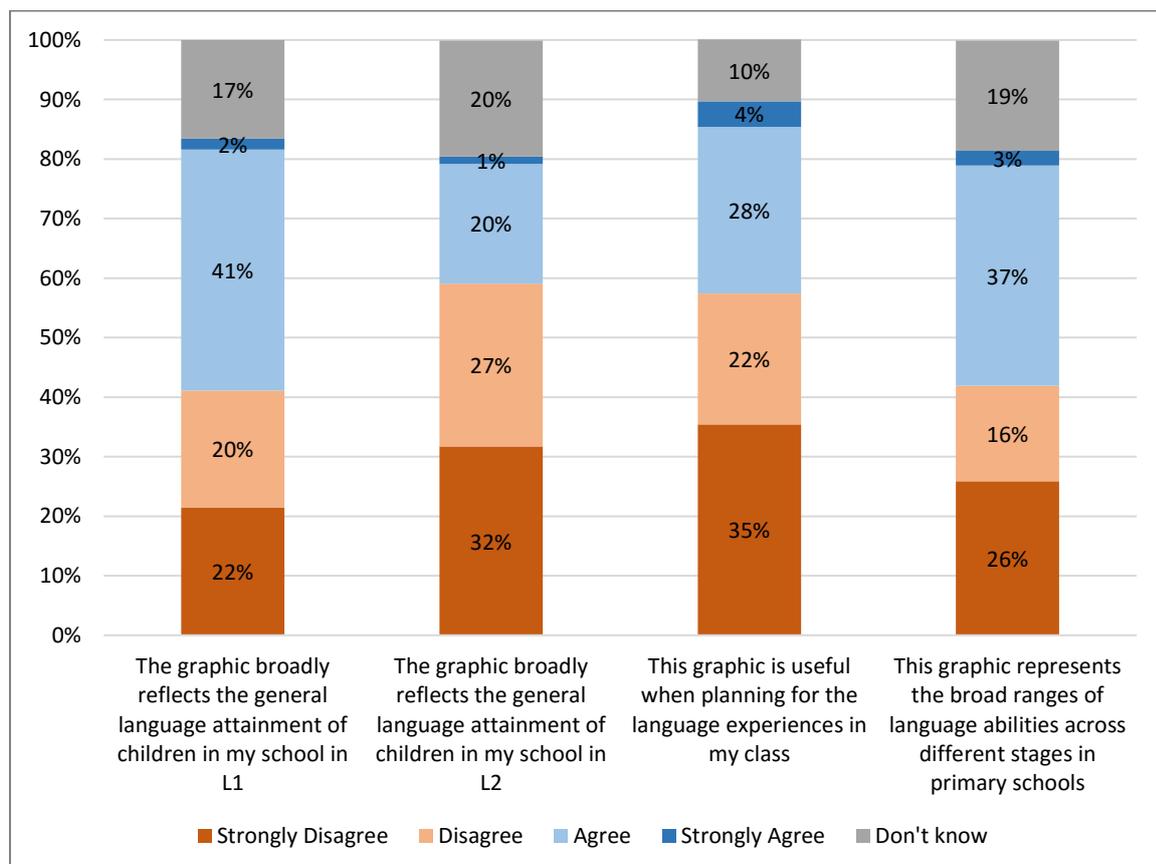


Valid N = 165; Missing = 102 (38.2%). Not administered: 20.

Next, participants were presented with a graphic designed to support teachers in understanding the expected learning of children at different stages of primary schooling. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with four statements about the graphic. Figure 17 summarises the outcomes. It should be noted that between 10% (third statement) and 20% (second statement) selected the 'do not know' response option.

Forty-three percent of respondents indicated agreement with the view that 'the graphic broadly represents the general language attainment of children in my school in L1', while just 21% indicated agreement with the same statement in respect of the attainment of children in L2. Fifty-seven percent indicated disagreement with the view that 'the graphic is useful when planning for the language experiences in my class', and 42% indicated disagreement with the statement that 'the graphic represents the broad range of language abilities across different stages in primary schools'. Hence, among respondents, there is greater support for the graphic as it relates to the range of language abilities of pupils in L1, compared with L2.

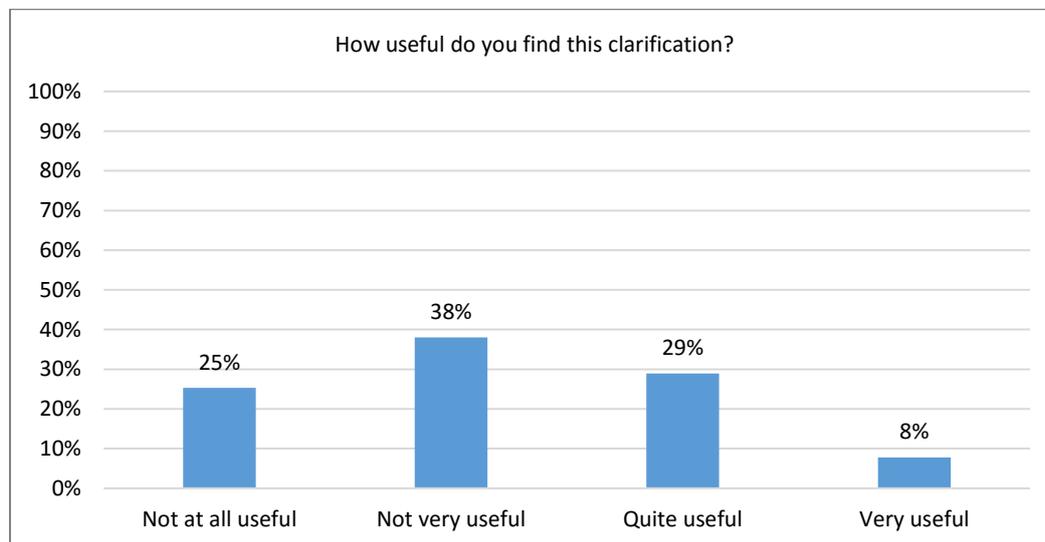
**Figure 17: Respondents' levels of agreement with statements about graphic designed to support teachers in understanding the expected learning of children at different stages of primary schooling**



Valid N = 162; Missing = 105 (39.3%). Not administered: 20.

Respondents were then presented with a statement clarifying the purpose and use of the progression continua and milestones and asked how useful they found the clarification. Of these, 63% found the clarification to be either ‘not at all useful’ or ‘not very useful’. Just 8% found it ‘very useful’.

**Figure 18: Extent to which respondents found clarification statement about progression continua useful**



Valid N = 166; Missing = 121 (42.2%)

At the end of the section on progression continua and milestones, respondents were invited to provide comments on these aspects of the draft curriculum. Eighty-six participants provided responses, with 35 making two comments, and 6 making three, giving a total of 129. Each comment was allocated a theme (see Table 3 below). About 10% of all comments were positive, supporting the use of progression continua in planning for teaching and learning, or in differentiating students. Forty-three percent of comments related to implementation of the progression continua, and many of these expressed concerns about the time it would take to assess all pupils in a class on continua. Some comments under this theme also called for the provision of resources, including digital resources, glossaries, easier-to-access formats etc. A key issue raised under ‘Structure’ (34% of comments) related to whether language is acquired in a linear manner (as the continua were interpreted as suggesting) or in some other way. Several participants also raised the status of the ‘early A’ milestones, which they felt should be incorporated into the continua to promote inclusion. The wide gap between some milestones was also raised by participants, as was the suitability of the Gaeilge continua for pupils learning Gaeilge as L2 (expectations were deemed to be too high). Ten percent of participants commented on the language of the Progression Continua. A majority of these pointed to language as being ‘too wordy’ or ‘not teacher-friendly’. Thirteen percent provided ‘other’ comments. These were

generally critical of the progression continua, the NCCA, and the consultation process, and questioned the research base underlying the progression continua.

**Table 3 – Distribution and examples of comments made by teachers about Progression Continua in the Primary Language Curriculum**

Theme	Percent of comments	Examples
Implementation	42.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are too many. We already can plan adequately for our pupils' needs. Our time would be better spent finding resources</li> <li>• The clarification provided is really welcome; however, I'm not sure it goes far enough. Should it state that the progression steps are expected to be used in a flexible manner and teachers can add and subtract sections as appropriate to the teaching and learning at a given time?.</li> </ul>
Structure	34.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very confusing. Teachers are not meant to assess individual pupils so how can this help their holistic education?</li> <li>• Progression continua should be a resource for teachers when planning and not a core part of the curriculum.</li> <li>• Progression continua do not work for language learning as language development is not linear.</li> </ul>
Language	10.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think the progression continua are useful. I feel the continua for Gaeilge as a second language are too wordy and should be simplified</li> </ul>
Other	13.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am very disappointed to see that some parts of the progression continua have been taken directly from the Junior Cycle Level 1 programme</li> </ul>

### **Reflections on the Junior Infants to Second Class Curriculum**

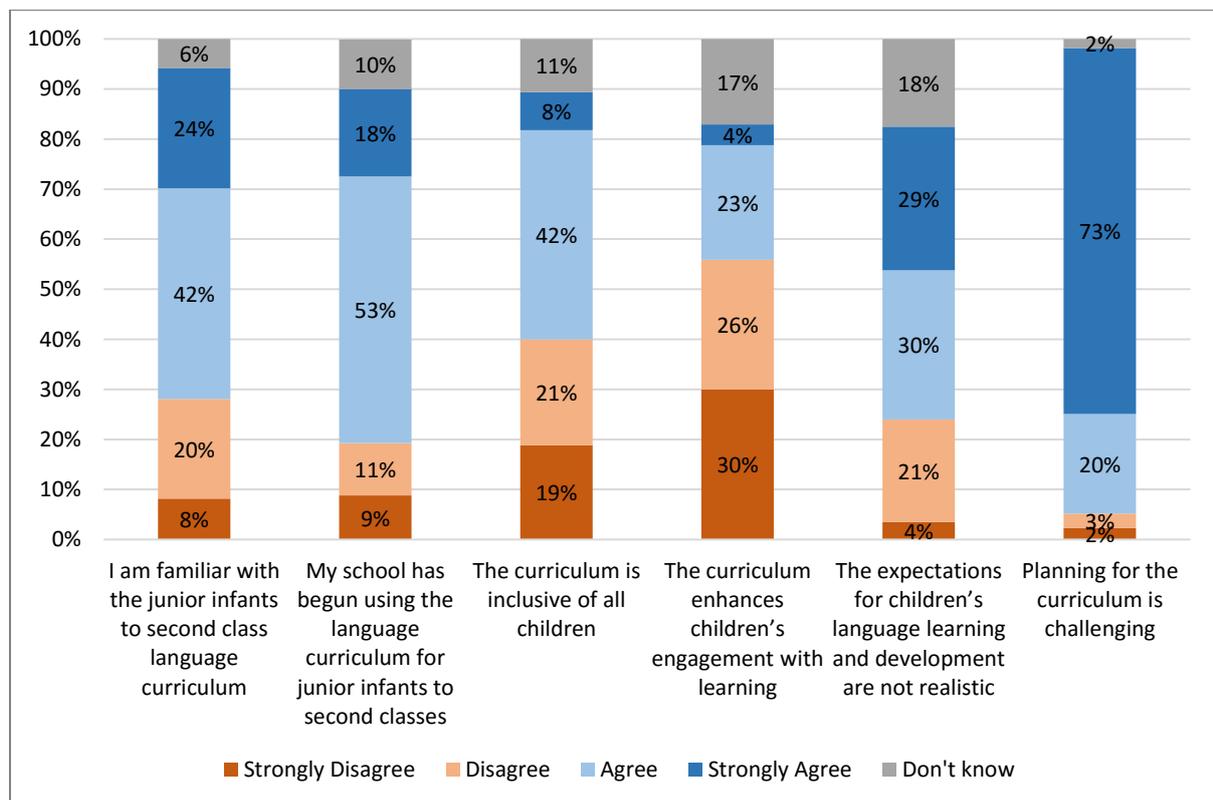
Participants were invited to reflect on PLC for the Junior primary classes (Junior Infants to Second, Stages 1-2). First, they were asked to indicate their agreement with 7 statements about the language curriculum for children at these class levels/stages (Figure 19). Sixty-six percent of respondents indicated agreement with the statement that they were familiar with the Junior Infants to Second class curriculum. Seventy-one percent indicated agreement with the statement that their school has

begun using the language curriculum for Junior classes. Fifty percent indicated agreement with the view that ‘the curriculum is inclusive of all children’, while 40% indicated disagreement.

Just over one-quarter (27%) indicated agreement with the view that the curriculum ‘enhances children’s engagement with learning’, while 56% indicated disagreement. Fifty-nine percent indicated agreement with the view that ‘expectations for children’s language learning and development are not realistic’, while just 25% indicated disagreement. Ninety-three percent indicated agreement that planning for the curriculum is challenging.

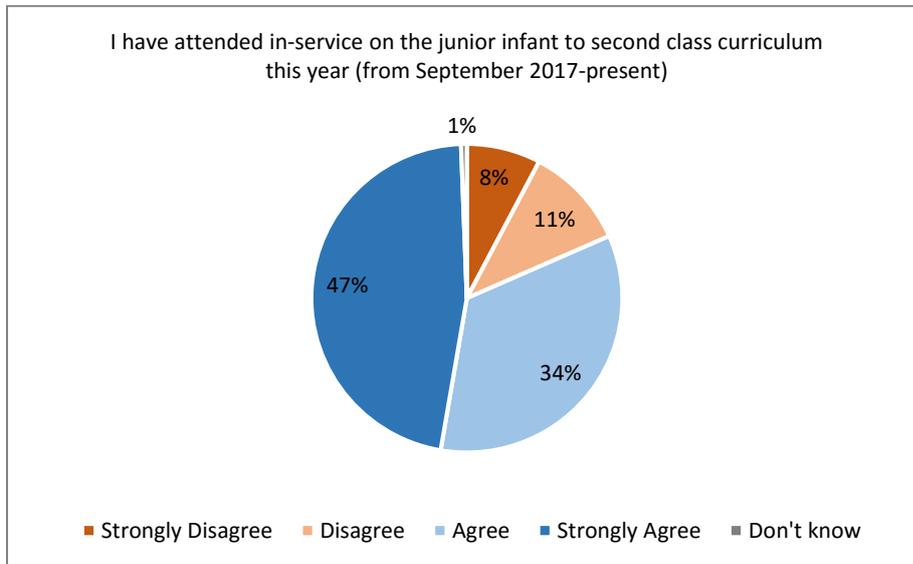
A strong majority of respondents (81%) indicated agreement with the statement that they had attended inservice on the Junior Infants to Second class curriculum in the current school year (2017-18) (Figure 20).

**Figure 19: Respondents’ levels of agreement with statements about the PLC for stages 1 and 2 (Junior Infants to Second class)**



Valid N = 171; Missing = 116 (40.4%)

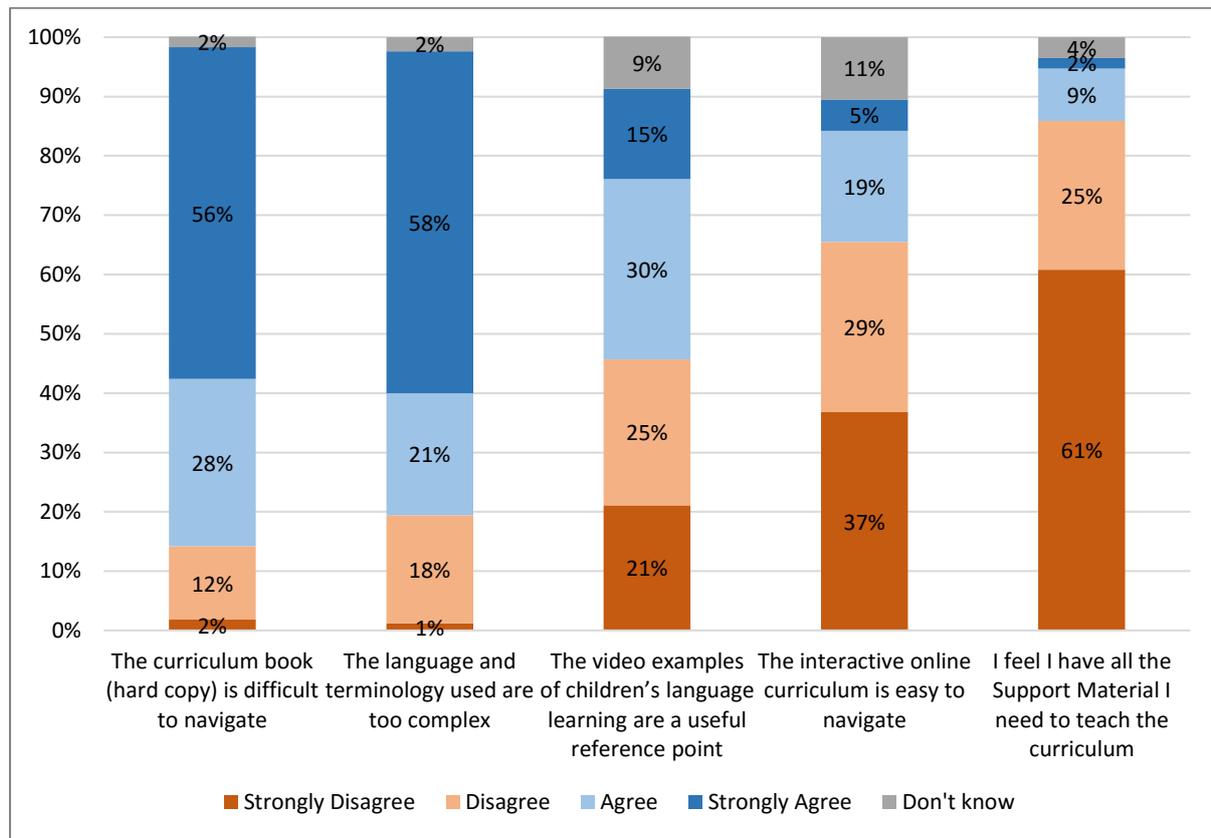
**Figure 20: Respondents' levels of agreement with the statement that they had attended inservice on the Junior Infants to Second class curriculum in the current (2017-18) school year.**



Valid N = 169; Missing = 118 (41.1%)

Following this, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with six statements about the resources and supports available to teachers for the PLC for Stages 1-2. A strong majority (84%) indicated agreement with the view that the curriculum book (hard copy) is difficult to navigate. Just 14% indicated disagreement. Similarly, 79% indicated agreement with the view that 'the language and terminology used are too complex'. Forty-five percent of teachers indicated agreement with the view that 'the video examples of children's language are a useful reference point'. Marginally more (46%) indicated disagreement. Large proportions of respondents also indicated disagreement with the view that 'the interactive online curriculum is easy to navigate' (86%) and that 'I feel I have all the support material I need to teach the curriculum' (86%).

**Figure 21: Respondents' levels of agreement with statements about the resources and supports available to teachers for the PLC at Stages 1-2**



Valid N = 171; Missing = 118 (41.1%)

At the end of this section, teachers were asked for further comments on the curriculum for Junior Infants to Second class. Ninety-eight respondents provided a total of 179 comments, and these are summarised in Table 4. Again, about 10% of comments were positive or neutral, while the remainder were predominately negative. Five broad themes are identified: Implementation (30% of all comments), Support (28%), Structure (23%), Language/presentation (7%), and Other (12%). Comments on implementation typically referred to planning (about which respondents were concerned and felt that not enough support had been provided), lack of time/heavy workload and large volumes of paperwork. Under structure, some participants indicated that they were unable to navigate curriculum documents or found them to be complex, while a few argued for the integration of early a into Progression Continua proper. Under the theme of language/presentation, comments referred to the complexity of the language in the curriculum document. Other comments tended to be largely negative, with, for example, some asking why there is a need of change the English curriculum, given that standards in literacy are high in Ireland, compared with other European countries.

**Table 4 – Percentages and examples of comments made by participants on the PLC for Stages 1-2**

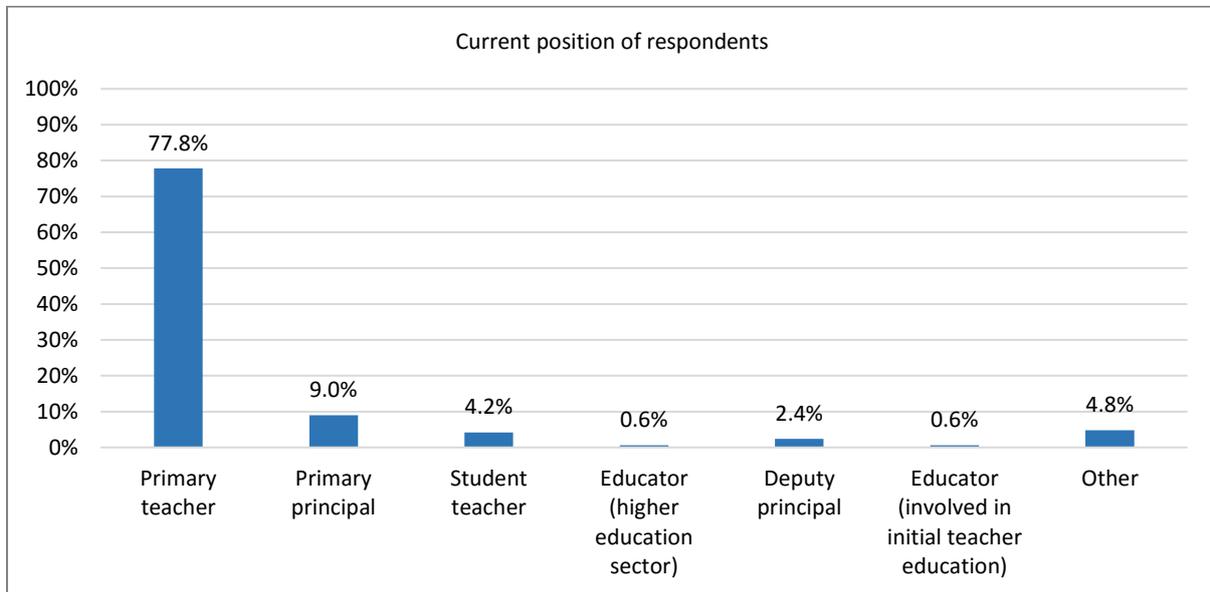
Support	27.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The templates provided are difficult to use.</li> <li>• In-service advice differs across tutors and from one in-service session to the next.</li> <li>• Gaeilge Supports need to be developed.</li> <li>• The amount of support material available should be growing, it isn't.....</li> </ul>
Structure	23.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think the amendments made to Table 1 in the 3rd to 6th class curriculum are excellent and reflect more realistic expectations for children at each stage.</li> <li>• . . . far too complex to navigate, particularly linking the progression continua with learning outcomes/objectives.</li> <li>• If one wished for the curriculum to be taught logically by class then it should be organised by class, i.e. A Junior Infant child will be enabled to.</li> </ul>
Language/presentation	6.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why has it been deemed necessary to use such difficult and pretentious terminology in the new curriculum?</li> <li>• An option to view the statements or continua in more user-friendly language would also be useful</li> </ul>
Other	11.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I still find teaching my class – a speech and language class – I’m completely left out of the curriculum.</li> <li>• I wonder if we are placing enough emphasis of the very important strand of listening?</li> </ul>
Total	100	

### **Demographic Data on Respondents**

One hundred and sixty-seven respondents (58% of all respondents) answered questions about their backgrounds and those of their schools. These questions appeared towards the end of the questionnaire. Eighty-eight percent of respondents taught or managed at primary level, while 4% were student teachers (Figure 22). No respondents identified themselves as parents.

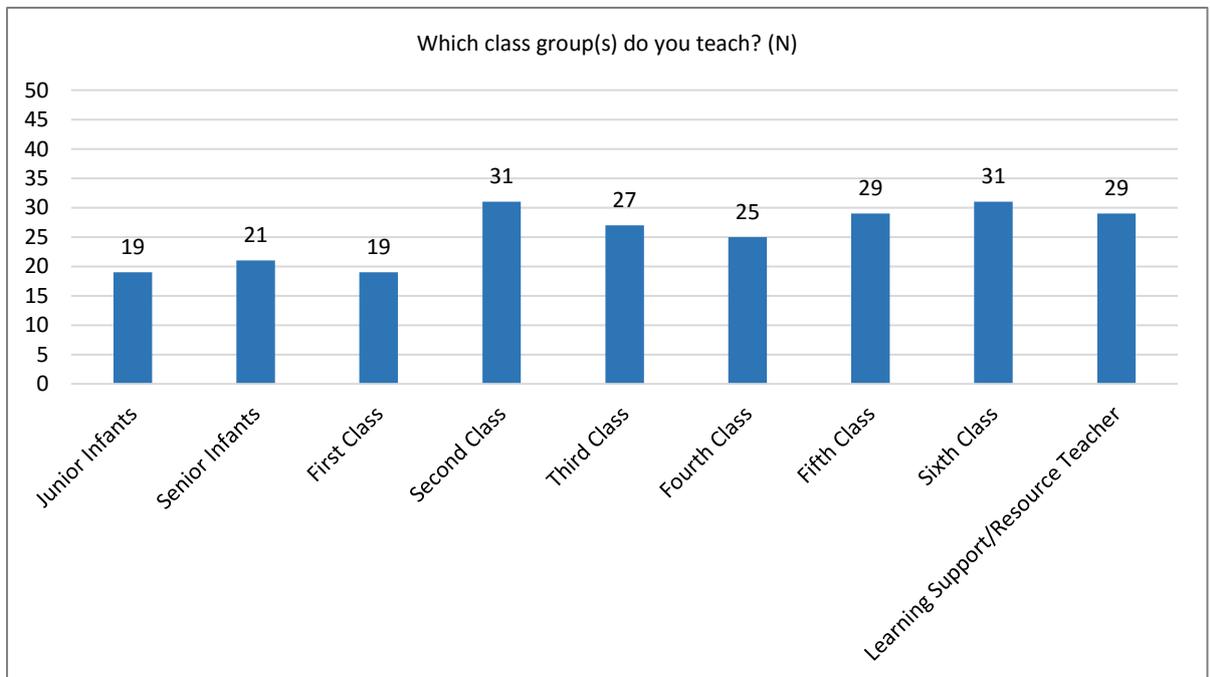
The largest numbers of teachers reported teaching in Second and Sixth classes (both 31), while 29 reported working as resource/support teachers (Figure 23). More teachers of Stage 3 and 4 classes than Stage 1 and 2 classes responded to the survey.

**Figure 22: Current positions of respondents (percentages)**



Valid N = 167; Missing = 120 (41.8)

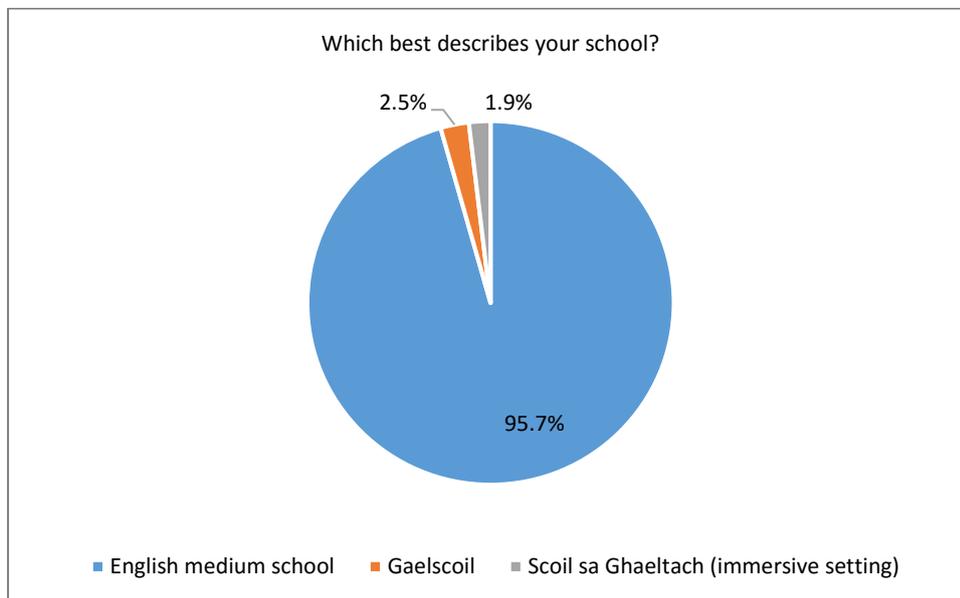
**Figure 23: Number of respondents teaching in various grade levels (primary)**



Valid N = 167; Missing = 120 (41.8). Note: Respondents could select multiple grade levels/roles.

Ninety-six percent of respondents identified themselves as teaching in English-medium schools, while the remainder identified themselves as teaching in Gaelscoileanna (2.9%) and Gaeltacht schools (1.5%) (Figure 24).<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 24: Percentages of Respondents in Ordinary, Gaelscoil and Gaeltacht Schools**



Valid N = 162; Missing = 125 (43.6)

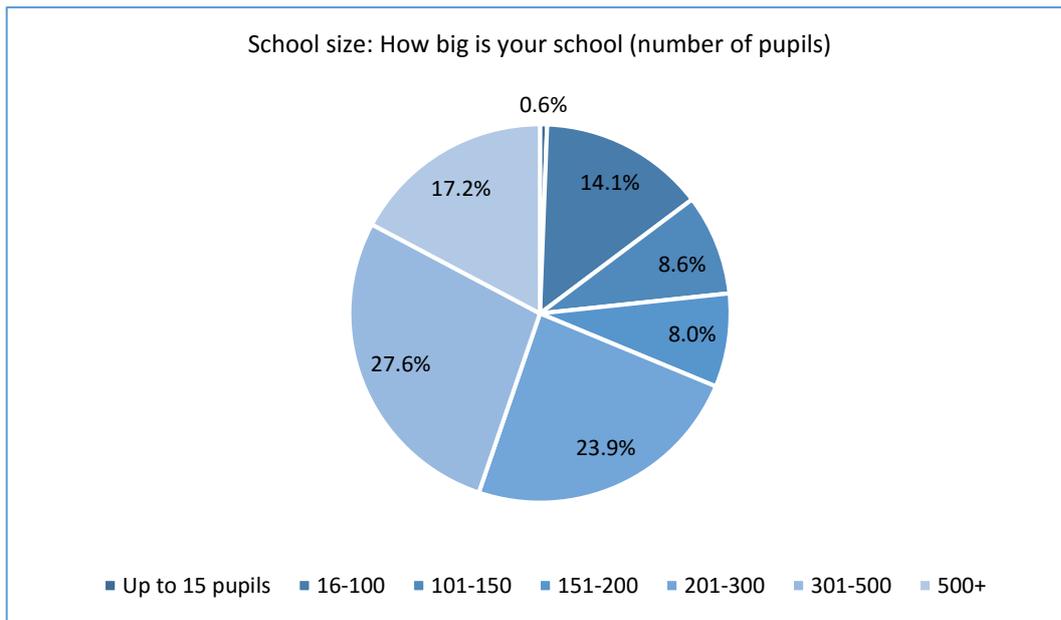
Respondents represented a range of school sizes, with one-quarter of respondents each representing schools with 201-300 and 301-500 pupils. Just one-sixth represented schools with more than 500 students (Figure 25).

Two percent of respondents reported that they taught in a special school, while 28% said they worked in DEIS schools.

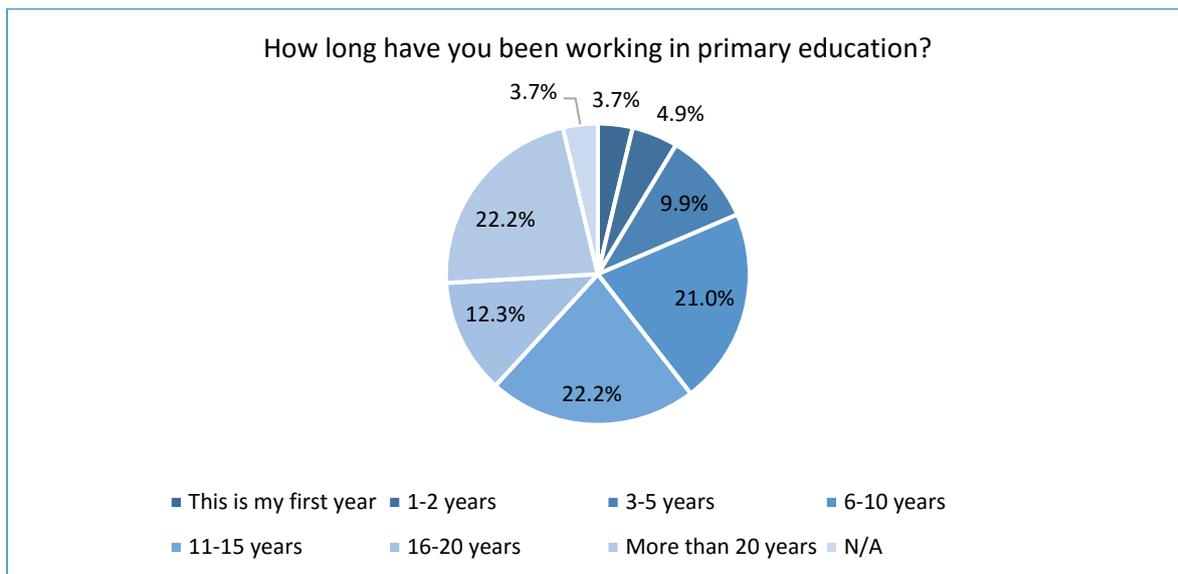
Fifteen percent of respondents reported that they had been working in primary education for up to two years at the time they completed the survey (Figure 26). One quarter had been working in primary education for 6-10 years, with a further 23% working in the sector for 11-15 years. Twenty-seven percent had been working for 11-20 years, while just 4% had been working for over 20 years. Hence, the vast majority these respondents had worked in primary education for 20 years or fewer.

<sup>8</sup> On a related question, 20 respondents indicated (7%) indicated that they taught in or their child attended an Irish medium school.

**Figure 25: Percentages of respondents working in primary schools of varying sizes**



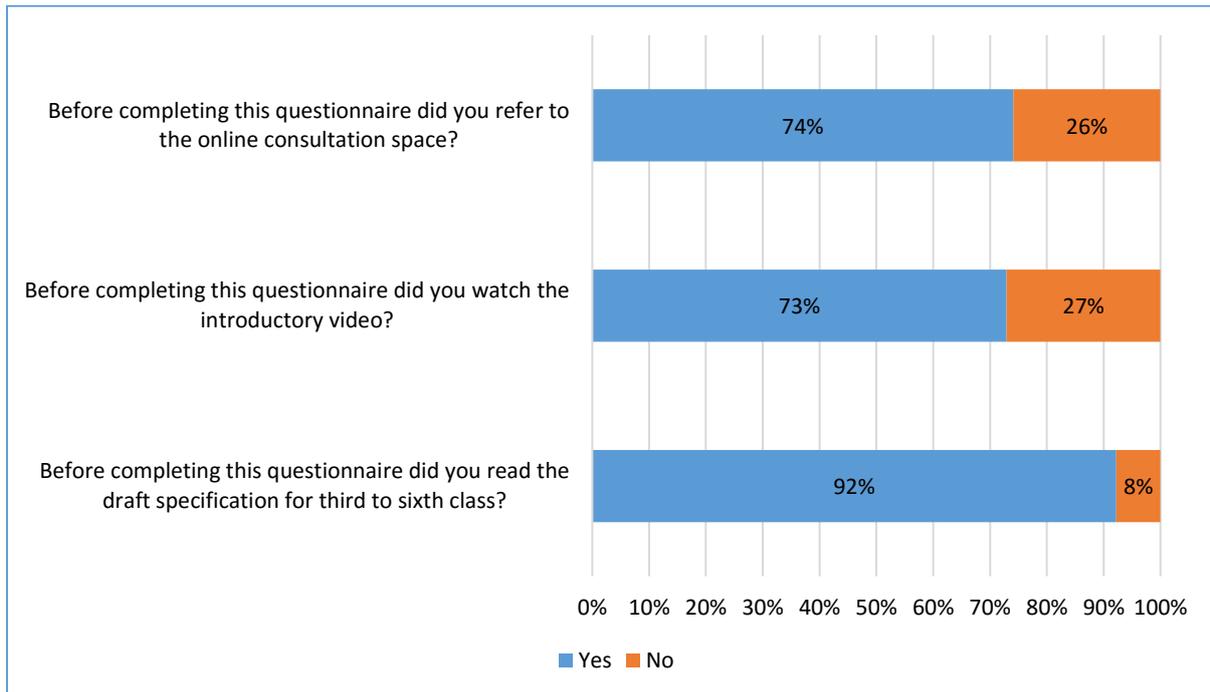
**Figure 26: Percentages of respondents with varying levels of teaching experience**



Valid N = 162; Missing = 125 (43.6)

Respondents reported engaging in a number of preparatory activities prior to completing the current survey. Seventy-seven percent said they had referred to the online consultation space. Seventy-three percent said they had watched the introductory video, and 92% said they had read the draft specification for Third to Sixth classes (Figure 27).

**Figure 27: Percentages of respondents engaging in various preparatory activities prior to completing the survey**



Valid N = 166; Missing = 121 (42.2)

### Views on Types of Supports Needed for Successful Curriculum Implementation

Participants were invited to respond to an open-ended question asking what form of support for the proposed curriculum they would prefer. Responses are summarised in Table 5. One-hundred and twenty-one participants provided 191 responses. While the vast majority of responses were coded as ‘Supports’, almost one-in-five were categorised as Presentation, Structure or Other. These categories were required as some participants interpreted support in a broad sense to include revisions to the curriculum document such as simplification of language, provision of objectives for each class level, or abandonment of the progression continua. The types of support requested by participants included planning tools (14% of all topics), in-service training (10%), and sample lessons/video clips (8%). A number of participants specified the types of inservice they wanted (e.g., face-to-face, whole school, in-school), while other responses related to this topic were more general (e.g., inservice, more training, realistic training). A few mentioned specific groups (cuiditheoirí, PDST). Responses categorised under structure (5.8%) included calls for more specific learning outcomes and a more inclusive curriculum, while those relating to presentation (5.2%) included calls for a hard copy of the curriculum document, simplified language/glossary of key terms, and greater clarity on teaching methodologies.

**Table 5: – Percentages and examples of topics cited by participants on their preference for support in implementing the curriculum**

Theme	Percent of topics	Examples
Support	80.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning tools/templates (including online planning tools) (14%)</li> <li>• Inservice training (10%)</li> <li>• Sample lessons/Schemes/video clips (8%)</li> <li>• Significant support for Gaeilge</li> <li>• Practical activities</li> <li>• Specific topics (e.g., public speaking)</li> <li>• Summer courses</li> <li>• Teaching methodologies</li> <li>• Adequate In-service for each class group through L1 and L2</li> <li>• Input on content/underlying theory</li> <li>• Support from cuiditheoirí</li> </ul>
Structure	5.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More specific learning outcomes</li> <li>• A more inclusive curriculum</li> <li>• A return to stands and strand units</li> <li>• A simpler curriculum</li> </ul>
Presentation	5.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard copy of curriculum</li> <li>• Simplified language and glossary of terms</li> <li>• More clarity with methods</li> </ul>
Other	8.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More consultation</li> <li>• Set aside progression continua</li> <li>• Greater attention to teacher feedback.</li> </ul>

### **Participants' Final Comments on the Curriculum as a Whole**

At the end of the survey, participants were given an opportunity to provide final comments on the curriculum as a whole. Ninety-seven participants offered 174 comments. These are summarised in Table 6. Comments were mainly negative (about three-quarters) or positive/constructive (one-quarter). Comments were assigned to the following categories: Implementation (24.1%), Structure (13.8%), Support (14.4%), International Context (5.2%), Consultation Process (6.3%), NCCA (4.0%), Gaeilge (3.4%), Presentation (2.9%) and Other (21.8%) (see Table 5).

Comments on Implementation focused on lack of time for planning and implementation, large volumes of paperwork, lack of confidence in addressing implementation, and requests to separate implementation of L1 and L2. Comments related to time addressed lack of time for planning, and a need to pace implementation of new curricula over a longer time frame. Comments under Implementation also referred to unnecessary assessment.

Comments related to structure ranged from endorsements of progression criteria to proposals to restructure the curriculum (a knowledge-based curriculum, objectives to be specified for each class level, greater specificity of learning outcomes for Junior classes etc.). Comments also called for a better balance between basic and more complex skills (with the former viewed being under-represented compared with the latter). Participants also referred to the intentional context in which the PLC is emerging, with several noting that the proposed approach (progression continua) had produced less than optimal results in the UK and elsewhere. Under a related theme, research, participants asked that relevant research on the efficacy of the progression continua and other aspects of the curriculum be shared or argued that the curriculum developers were unfamiliar with the relevant research.

Under the 'consultation process' theme, some participants expressed a view that there was a general lack of awareness among teachers that a process was in place. Others claimed that there had been no consultation with teachers prior to developing the draft curriculum and that such a consultation should have taken place. In a related theme, reference to the NCCA ranged from praise and encouragement to criticism (see Table 6 for examples).

Under Gaeilge, participants expressed the view that the proposed curriculum is pitched at a high level relative to pupils' current skills in an L2 context. A few comments expressed the view that Gaeilge could be overlooked if schools decide to emphasise the implementation of English first. Under presentation, participants again expressed concern about the layout of the curriculum, while a small number requested that the Gaeilge elements be translated.

Finally, under ‘Other’, participants raised a number of issues including requests to start the curriculum development process again or halt it altogether and revert to the 1999 curriculum.

**Table 6: – Percentages and examples of participants’ comments on the curriculum as a whole**

Theme	Percent of themes	Examples
Implementation	24.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It would be great if there could be specific integration opportunities mentioned in the curriculum to link with other subjects, as I think this would help teachers in their planning at the start of terms</li> <li>• Teachers do need the time to engage with the content, trial it, reflect and adjust before making changes and recommendations to whole school planning groups.</li> <li>• It’s more paper work for teachers</li> </ul>
Structure	13.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like the broad scope of the progression criteria and learning outcomes.</li> <li>• Respect for language diversity is good</li> <li>• I feel it’s also too broad and unstructured for clear planning year to year in the school.</li> <li>• It assumes children are capable of high-level work such as examining and reflecting on their own intentions as authors. On the other hand, it does not specify basic knowledge about language use that pupils should master by the end of primary. For example, how to lay out their work in paragraphs and use a title.</li> </ul>
Support	14.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure clarity with respect to planning and expectations</li> <li>• Please examine and point out what should be covered in each class.</li> <li>• Despite a day of in service with an excellent cuiditheoir we are struggling to see the point of it.</li> <li>• Training needs to be provided by dissecting every single Element and every step on the Progression Continuum. We can plan and teach</li> </ul>

		much more effectively when we have an in-depth understanding of our material.
International context	5.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As usual there seems to be a tendency to employ initiatives that other educational jurisdictions have used and later abandoned</li> <li>• The Finnish system is so far from this, and appears to be one of the best if not the best educational systems. So I cannot understand why we are going in the complete opposite direction</li> </ul>
Consultation process	6.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers generally unaware of consultation process</li> <li>• Consult with schools on inservice needs</li> <li>• The curriculum for infants to 2nd is not as successful as it could. If there had been more meaningful consultation at the development stage, it may have been a better resource for teacher</li> </ul>
NCCA	4.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Education Officers and the advisory committee are to be commended on the level of detail, thought and insight they have provided in this document. Many thanks.</li> <li>• Don't give up on the learning outcomes and progression continua. Take ownership of them and stand over them. Council need to be strong on that. Some teachers seem to think outcomes and continua are going to be pulled. If this happens the NCCA will lose all credibility and may as well fold the tents.</li> </ul>
Research	4.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What research underpins the PLC progression continua? I have read the background papers on your website but could find no specific reference to progression continua.</li> <li>• Look at international research, not trendy nonsense.</li> </ul>
Gaeilge	3.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the majority of schools, Gaeilge language development dramatically lags behind English language development. The new curriculum needs to be more realistic about this</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We think the L2 is too difficult and will not motivate teachers or pupils.</li> </ul>
Presentation	2.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The layout for the new curriculum is overly complex, the headings &amp; categories too long and cumbersome, the physical book is unusable as a planning resource.</li> <li>Translate the Irish. It's just going to put teachers off from using it properly</li> </ul>
Other	21.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am familiar with the oracy practises of School 21, an innovative school in London that work closely with Cambridge University.</li> <li>Having recently completed the NCCA consultation on Junior Cycle English I filled out a section on links between the Junior Cycle and primary. I am astonished not to see a comparable section here; there isn't a single question that addresses primary teachers' familiarity with the secondary curriculum or asks their judgement about how the proposed changes will have an impact on children's readiness to access the next step in their learning journey.</li> <li>At the moment, I am very worried about the future of the progression steps and worry that they will be used as a grading scheme and used to compare children and compare schools.</li> </ul>

### ***Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge agus Scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht***

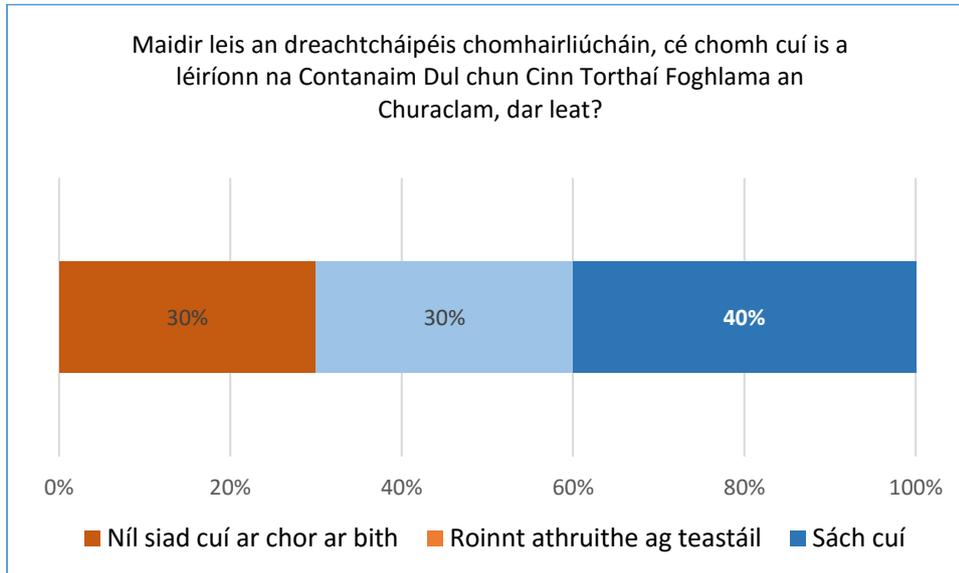
Twenty respondents (7% of all respondents) indicated that they taught in or (in the case of parents) their child attended, an Irish-medium school. These respondents were routed to a series of questions that asked about milestones and progression continua in the context of L1 (Gaeilge) and L2 (Béarla).<sup>9</sup> Outcomes for the questions on the milestones and progression continua are summarised here.

When asked how well the progression continua reflected the learning outcomes, 10 respondents answered, with 40% indicating that the continua fairly appropriately reflected the learning outcomes,

<sup>9</sup> The questionnaire also asked about Learning Outcomes in the context of L1 (Gaeilge) and L2 (Béarla) schools. However, none of the respondents from Irish-medium schools answered these questions (9a to 12c). It may be that they did not get an opportunity to answer them due to a technical issue.

30% indicating that some changes were needed, and 30% indicating that they were not appropriate at all (Figure 28).

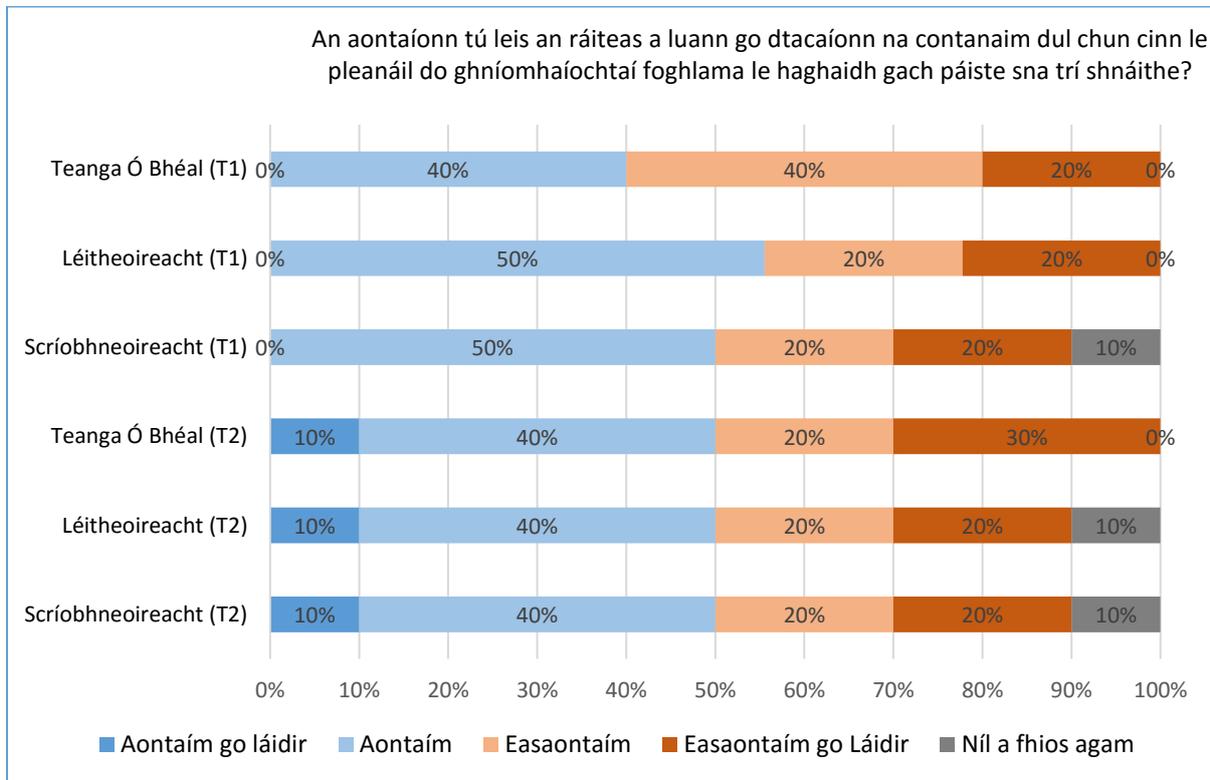
**Figure 28: Respondents' evaluations of the extent to which the progression continua in the draft consultation document reflect the learning outcomes of the curriculum – Irish-medium schools**



Valid N = 10; Missing = 10 (50%). Not administered = 267.

Participants were also asked if they agreed with the view that the progression continua support planning for learning activities for all pupils. For T1 (Gaeilge) oral language (Teanga Ó Bhéal), 40% of respondents (4 of 10) indicated agreement, while the remainder indicated disagreement (Figure 29). For T1 reading (léitheoireacht) and writing (scríbhneoireacht), respondents were evenly split between those who indicated agreement and those who indicated disagreement. Respondents were also equally divided on their agreement for T2 (English) oral language, reading and writing.

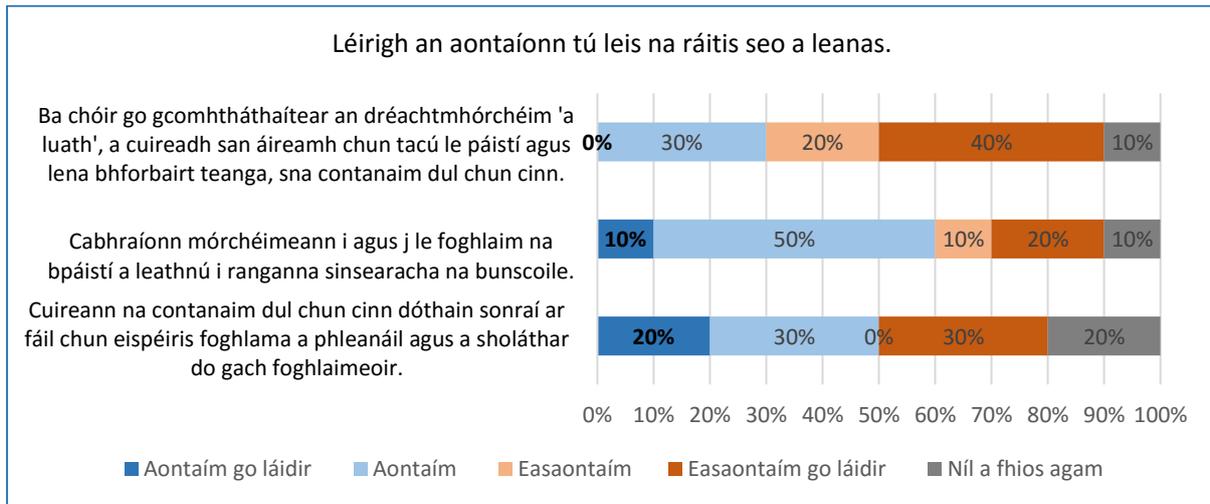
**Figure 29: Percentage of teachers indicating varying levels of agreement with the view that the progression continua support planning for learning activities for all pupils across three strands (T1 Gaeilge, T2 Béarla)**



Valid N = 10. Missing= 10 (50%). Not administered = 267.

Respondents were also divided in their levels of agreement with three statements about the progression continua and associated milestones (Figure 30). For example, 50% of respondents indicated agreement with the view that the progression continua provide sufficient detail to plan and implement learning experiences for all learners, while 50% indicated disagreement or ‘did not know’. As noted earlier, respondents referencing L1 (English) and L2 (Gaeilge) provided broadly similar response patterns (see Figure 13).

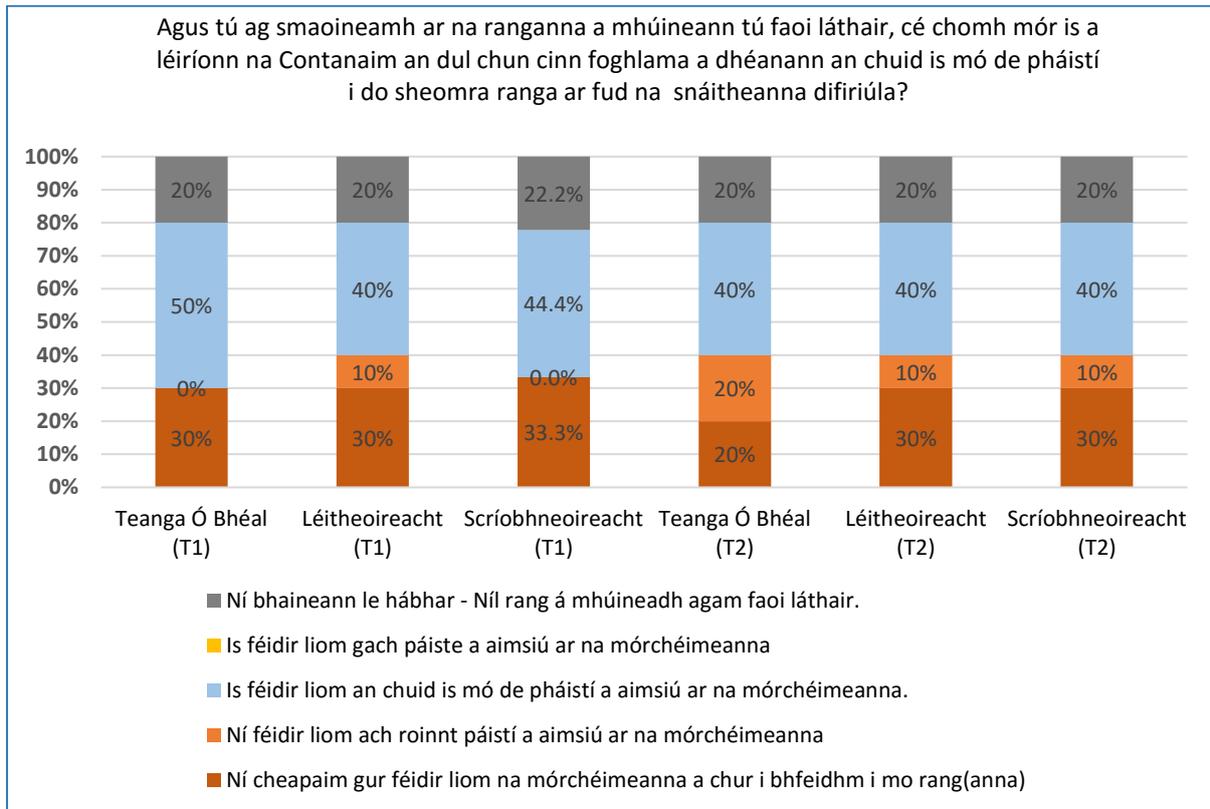
**Figure 30: Respondents' levels of agreement with statements about progression continua and associated milestones**



Valid N = 10. Missing= 10 (50%). Not administered = 267.

About one half of respondents indicated agreement with the view that the progression continua reflect the progression in learning for most of the children in their class (though none of these indicated that the continua reflected all children in their class) for the different strands in T1 and T2. Between one-fifth and one-third indicated that they could not apply the milestones to their class(es) at all. Again, this is consistent with the responses of teachers answering with respect to L1 (English) and L2 (Gaeilge) (see Figure 15).

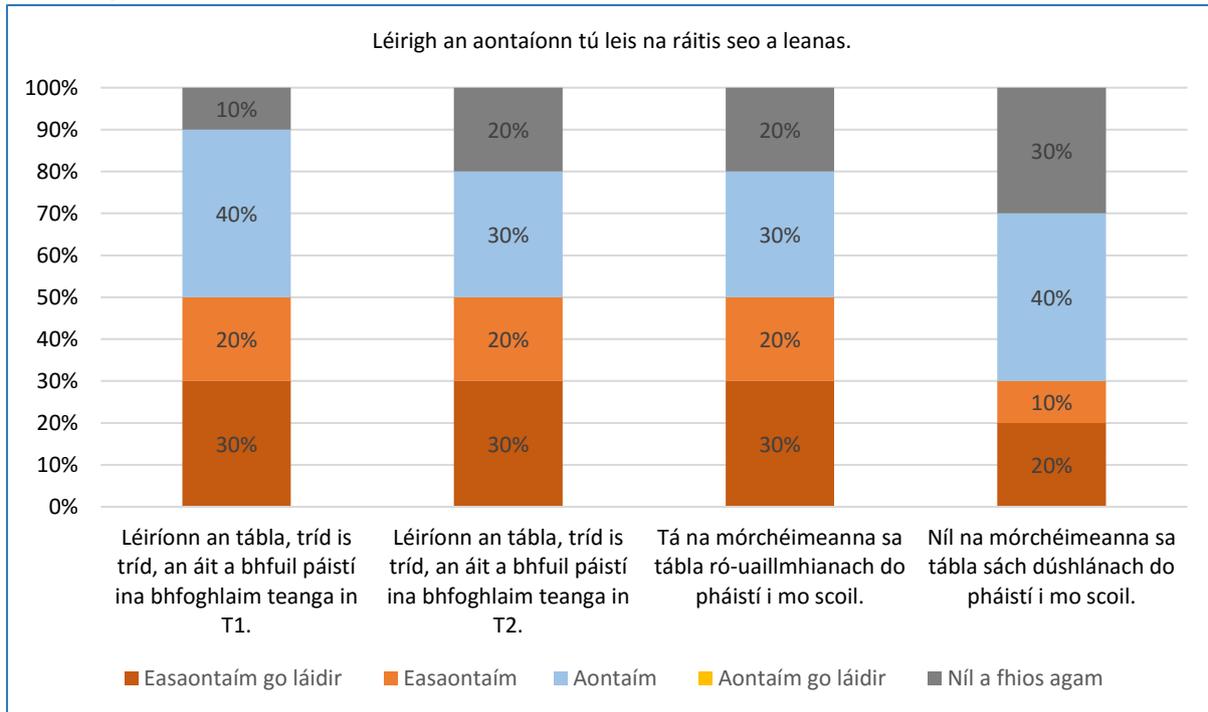
**Figure 31: Respondents' views on the extent to which the progression continua reflect the progression of learning for children in their classrooms across different strands (L1 and L2)**



Valid N = 10. Missing= 10 (50%) except Scríobhneoireacht (T1) where Valid N = 9. Not administered = 267.

Participants were then provided with a table that indicated the expected learning of children (in terms of milestones reached) at different stages of primary schooling. Participants were asked to respond to four statements about the table. Forty percent agreed with the view that the table broadly reflects where children are at in their language learning in T1 (Gaeilge), while 50% indicated disagreement (Figure 32). Corresponding percentages for T2 (English) were 40% and 40% respectively. Half of respondents disagreed with the view that the milestones in the table are too ambitious for children in their school, while 30% indicated agreement. Finally, 40% indicated agreement with view that the milestones were not sufficiently challenging for children in their school, while 30% indicated disagreement.

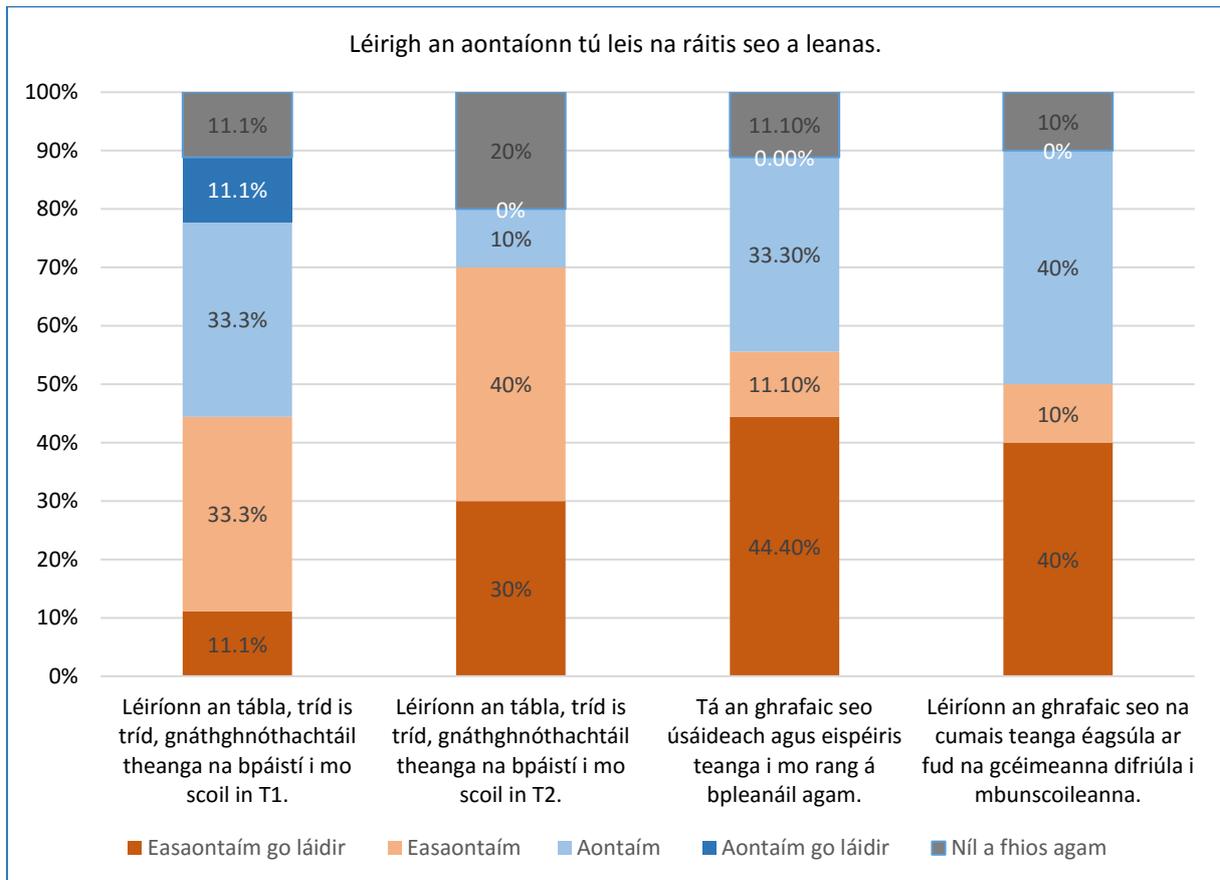
**Figure 32: Respondents' levels of agreement with statements about table designed to support teachers in understanding the expected learning of children at different stages of primary schooling**



Valid N = 10. Missing= 10 (50%). Not administered: 267.

Next, participants were presented with a graphic designed to support teachers in understanding the expected learning of children at different stages of primary schooling. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with four statements about the graphic. Similar proportions (44%) indicated agreement and disagreement with the view that ‘the graphic reflects the general language attainment of children in my school in T1 (Gaeilge)’. In contrast, 70% indicated disagreement with the view that ‘the graphic broadly reflects the general language attainment of children in my school in T2 (English)’, while just 10% indicated agreement. These contrast with the outcomes reported in Figure 17 for participants in L1 English contexts. There, similar proportions of respondents indicated agreement that the graphic broadly reflects attainment in L1 and L2 in their schools. Returning to participants answering in respect of L1 (Gaeilge)/L2(English), 33.3% indicated agreement with the view that the graphic was useful when planning for language experiences in their class, while 55.5% indicated disagreement. Broadly similar proportions of respondents also indicated agreement /disagreement with the view that ‘the graphic represents the broad range of abilities across different stages in primary schools’.

**Figure 33: Respondents' levels of agreement with statements about graphic designed to support teachers in understanding the expected learning of children at different stages of primary schooling**

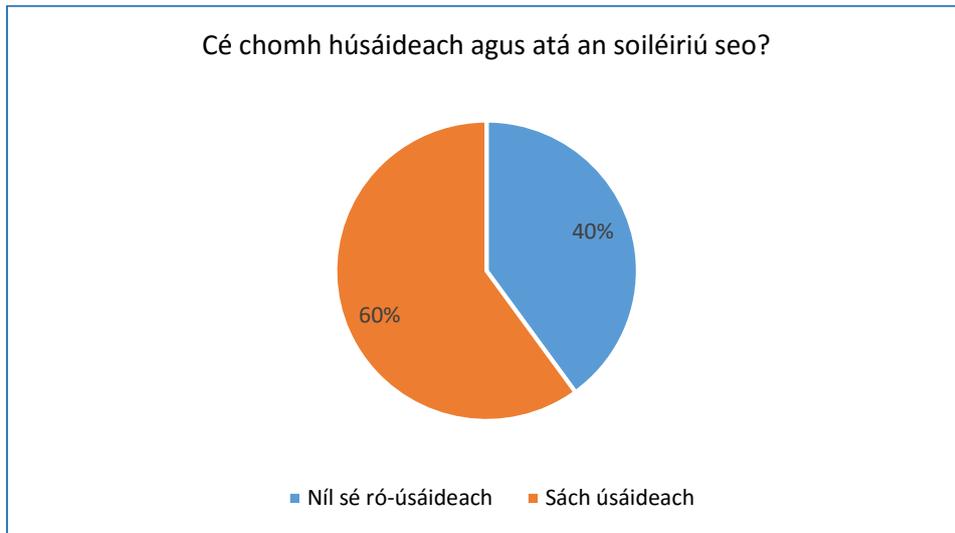


Valid N = 10. Missing= 10 (50%) except first and third statements, where Valid N = 9. Not administered: 267.

Respondents were presented with a statement clarifying the purpose and use of the progression continua and milestones and asked how useful they found the clarification. Forty percent found the clarification to be 'quite useful', while the others (60%) found it to be 'not very useful' (Figure 34). No respondent selected the 'not at all useful' or 'very useful' options.

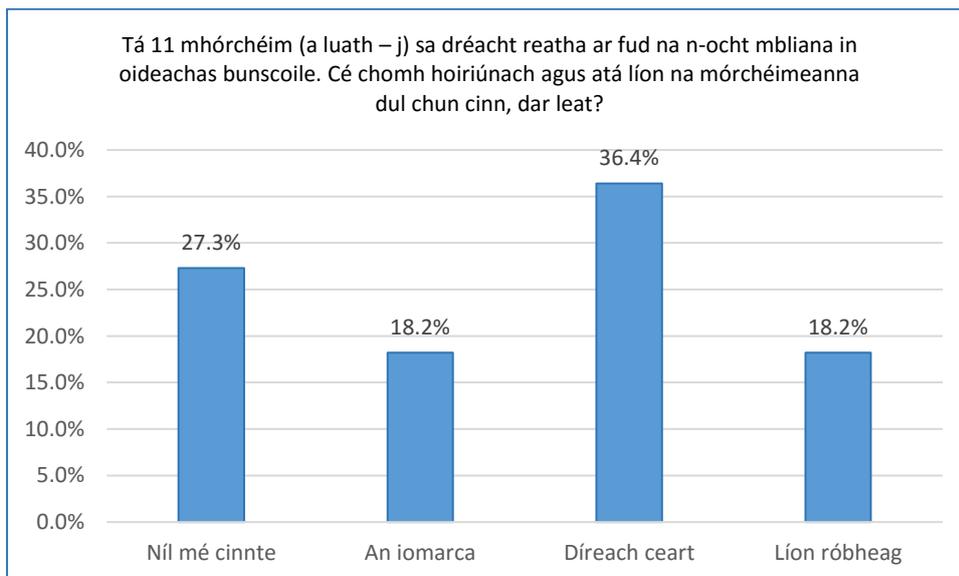
Participants were informed that there are 11 milestones (early a-j) across the 8 years of primary education for each of Gaelge and English. They were asked to indicate how appropriate they felt this number was. Eighteen percent felt that there were too few milestones, and the same percentage felt that there were too many (Figure 35). Thirty-six percent felt that the number was just right, while over one-quarter were not sure.

**Figure 34: Extent to which respondents found clarification statement about progression continua useful**



Valid N = 10. Missing= 10 (50%)

**Figure 35: Percentages of respondents indicating varying views the number of milestones across the eight year of primary education**



Valid N = 11; Missing = 9 (45%). Not administered: 267.

