

Preparation for Teaching and Learning

Frequently Asked Questions & Glossary

1. How and why has this guidance come about?

In recent consultations and work with schools, teachers have told us about the time they spend planning and the volume of paperwork they produce. For many this was a primary concern for any new curriculum being introduced to our schools and for others it was a barrier to engaging with the underpinning rationale of the curriculum. Teachers are currently preparing to teach using two different styles of curriculum, the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and the Primary Language Curriculum (2019). As a result, many questions have arisen from teachers in all school contexts. In response to curriculum change, the NCCA, PDST, NCSE and the Department of Education Inspectorate have collaborated in developing this guidance. This document is intended to provide guidance to all teachers and school leaders in all school contexts. The guidance describes a renewed understanding of ‘preparation for teaching and learning’ which is intended to take the emphasis from paperwork to the broader activities teachers undertake during their preparation.

2. What is meant by ‘teacher agency’?

Agency is about choice and flexibility. Agentic teachers are empowered to make informed and reflective professional decisions about teaching and learning, in response to the abilities and needs of all children in a variety of contexts. As agentic professionals, teachers are best placed to use their knowledge of the children, the curriculum and pedagogy to make decisions about what children learn, the sequence, the pace and the activities and experiences through which they learn. In flexibly and capably responding to emerging opportunities and the developing needs of the children, teachers exercise their agency and efficacy.

3. What is meant by ‘preparation for teaching and learning’?

Preparation for teaching and learning is now the term used to recognise the array of activities that take place before, during and after teaching. It replaces the term ‘planning’ which has become synonymous with paperwork. Preparation for teaching and learning is best understood as an ongoing process which evolves. It involves invisible, visible, and recorded preparation as three equally valued components.

4. What is meant by ‘invisible preparation’?

Invisible preparation is continuous and unrecorded. It entails ongoing decision making and reflection about children’s learning and development often occurring through collaboration with the children, their parents and other professionals. Invisible preparation involves teachers purposefully using the curriculum and its supports in a flexible, responsive way.

5. Do I need to record my invisible preparation?

No, it is not necessary to record invisible preparation.

6. What is meant by 'visible preparation'?

Visible preparation is teaching and learning in action. Teachers provide appropriate playful and engaging learning experiences, informed by the curriculum, where meaningful interactions are facilitated using suitable resources to support the children's learning. The approach to teaching and learning should be fluid and flexible where teachers can embrace unexpected and emerging learning opportunities as they arise.

7. What is meant by 'recorded preparation'?

Recorded preparation is the documentation you use to support your teaching. It should be personal and bespoke. Teachers use working documents which evolve in response to emerging learning opportunities. As a work in progress, recorded preparation should be practical and purposeful, and should reflect the children's ongoing learning. This may involve teachers' short term/long term documentation, cuntais mhíosúla, annotations, and amendments to support further teaching and learning.

8. What do I need to include in my short term recorded preparation?

Recorded preparation is first and foremost for the teacher. It may be presented or recorded in a way which is most practical and useful for you.

Recorded preparation refers directly to the curriculum in use in your context and is led by your reflections on the children's abilities, needs and next steps in their learning. Recorded preparation should identify:

- A clear focus of new learning for children, with reference to the curriculum, for example using learning outcome(s) or content objective(s);
- The learning experiences chosen to support all children in progressing their learning;
- How the new learning will be demonstrated by all children and how it will be assessed and monitored.

9. What do I need to include in my long term recorded preparation?

Be flexible with your long term preparation. It may need to be amended as you learn more about the children in your context or as unexpected learning opportunities arise. You may consider including:

- the expected learning in broad terms;
- the range of learning experiences;
- the range of assessment practices;
- the integration of the learning with other curricular areas, whole-school practices/events;
- how the classroom routines, classroom culture and longer term interventions and practices support the intended learning.

10. How can a whole-school approach to recorded preparation be developed, while allowing for individual teacher agency?

A whole school approach can agree on common features to be included in the recorded preparation. The detail contained in documentation may vary from teacher to teacher, depending on your individual preference, your professional judgement, and the context in which you are teaching. It should be a practical and useful guide for you as a teacher and should meaningfully support your preparation for teaching and learning. The 'Supporting Preparation for Teaching and Learning' section (pp.13-19) of the guidance document may be useful and helpful for you to consider.

11. With regards to preparation for teaching and learning, what will my principal and inspector expect?

The concept of preparation for teaching and learning requires a new way to consider how all teachers demonstrate their preparation for teaching and learning during the school year and at moments of inspection. Preparation for teaching and learning may be demonstrated through four sources of evidence; the child(ren), the teacher, the learning environment, as well as recorded preparation and reflection. These are explored in more detail on pages 10 to 12 of the guidance document. Looking at our Schools – A Quality Framework for Primary Schools (2016) is also a valuable resource to explore this further.

12. How do I prepare for teaching and learning to include the interests, needs and abilities of all children in my context?

Consider the interests, needs, and abilities of all children in your context when selecting the most appropriate focus for teaching and learning. Using your knowledge of the children, their priority learning needs, and their prior learning, identify the focus of learning which will best support them. Inclusive learning experiences should be created and adapted to support all children in their learning journey. Teachers will be further supported to prepare for inclusive teaching and learning in all contexts during the sustained support process.

13 (a) How will this guidance inform our school plan / plean scoile going forward?

This guidance describes a renewed understanding of short-term and long-term ‘preparation for teaching and learning’ for both the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), in addition to future primary curriculum developments.

An outcome based curriculum however, requires a change in how we approach whole school planning / plean scoile. Whole school planning/plean scoile has been identified as an emerging need and guidance will be issued in due course.

13 (b) In the interim, what can we do as a school to prepare for the continuity and progression of all children?

Professional conversations with colleagues facilitate thinking around continuity and progression. These conversations may centre on how children develop concepts, skills and dispositions over time. Decisions are underpinned by intuitive and planned high quality assessment practices, ranging from child led to teacher led, which are used to inform progression in teaching and learning.

14. When should our preparation for teaching and learning reflect this guidance?

The guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning launched on the 27th April 2021. In term three 2020/21, teachers can begin to incorporate aspects of the guidance into their preparation for teaching and learning. The inspectorate and support services will be available to support teachers and school leaders during this time and as the guidance is enacted. Looking towards September 2021, inspectors will begin engaging with / supporting school leaders and teachers as they develop a renewed understanding of preparation for teaching and learning.

15. What are our next steps?

Take time as a teacher, and as a school, to engage with and reflect on the interagency video, the guidance document, and the key pillars of preparation for teaching and learning.

Collaborative whole staff discussions will build understanding and confidence on how the invisible, visible, and recorded components of preparation for teaching and learning will be reflected in the specific school context in a practical and purposeful way.

The reflective questions in the guidance document (p.12) may prove useful as a starting point in guiding staff discussions around preparation for teaching and learning. It may also be helpful to consider engaging with some of the wide range of additional supports that are available to schools.

16. What supports are available to us as we move forward with this guidance?

A wide range of supports will be available to teachers and school leaders in all school contexts, as we move forward with developing a new way of approaching preparation for teaching and learning. These supports include:

- PDST advisors and NCSE Primary Curriculum advisors will provide tailored and bespoke school-based support to help you and your school in navigating the guidance and applying it to your specific school context.
- PDST advisors and NCSE Primary Curriculum team will continue to offer sustained school support that offers a deeper form of professional learning that supports schools in embedding new practices over time.
- The PDST leadership team will also be available to provide school support for individual school leaders and leadership teams in developing practices and approaches to preparation, with their staff. In addition, the professional learning communities within the Misneach, Tánaiste and Forbairt programmes will also provide opportunities to share and develop practice.
- Web spaces where you will find the guidance document, in addition to the webinar and support videos include the following:
 - www.ncca.ie/primary/preparation
 - www.pdst.ie
 - www.ncse.ie
 - www.education.ie