



**NCCA**

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



## [Draft Primary Curriculum Framework](#)

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This initial set of DRAFT questions and answers have been developed in response to questions from the education stakeholders during the on-going consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. The FAQs will be updated and reviewed regularly to respond to further questions from the education stakeholders.

#### **How has the consultation changed in response to COVID-19?**

The impact of COVID-19 on the education system has been fundamental and far reaching. This has meant changes to the original plans for the consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, including postponing consultation with schools and early childhood settings until the 2021 – 2022 school year. This was in consideration of the challenges being faced by teachers, school leaders, early childhood practitioners, parents and school communities. The overall approach to the consultation has been redesigned into two phases:

**Phase one** of the consultation involved online meetings with education stakeholders; over 150 submissions from organisations and individuals; and hundreds of questionnaires completed. Phase one continued until the end of January 2021.

**Phase two** of the consultation with schools and early childhood settings reopens in mid-October 2021 and will continue into early 2022.

Anyone wishing to contribute during phase two can do so through the online questionnaire, written submission form and consultation workshop materials for schools. We also hope to

provide opportunities for online and / or face to face consultation events, depending on public health advice early in 2022. All feedback gathered from phases one and two of the consultation will inform the finalisation of the framework.

### **Will the experiences of COVID-19 be reflected in the redeveloped curriculum?**

The global crisis brought about by the pandemic has significant consequences for education, severely impacting on education systems at every level. The diversity of experiences of teachers, school leaders, children and parents in Ireland in dealing with and adapting to new and more flexible approaches to teaching, learning and assessment will be particularly relevant along with findings from national and international research evidence and analysis into the impact of COVID-19 on children's continuity of learning, development and wellbeing. While the more long-term impact of COVID-19 on education is uncertain, NCCA will continue to carefully consider the response that the redeveloped curriculum can make in mediating a supportive and sustainable approach to teaching, learning and assessment in primary education in a post-COVID context.

### **Why is the curriculum changing?**

The *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) is twenty-two years old this year. When published, it was a cutting-edge curriculum informed by extensive research. The twenty years since have brought considerable research on children's learning and development and much societal change. There have been calls for curriculum change, such as increasing time for existing areas such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education (PE). New aspects of learning such as Coding and Computational Thinking, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, Modern Foreign Languages, as well as a greater emphasis on Wellbeing, have been suggested. The provision of two years of universal preschool education, the publication of *Aistear* (2009) and the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) have led to changes in what children experience before and after primary school. Advances in technology mean that today's children are living in a world where they have ready access to information. The education system and children themselves are also shaped by different experiences of family life, different cultures, different beliefs and viewpoints, different abilities and needs. Just consider that children born in 2021 and who begin primary school in September 2025/2026, will begin their working lives in the 2050s and retire in the late 2080s / early 2090s!

## **Will a redeveloped primary curriculum address curriculum overload?**

Yes, it will. While the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* provided a strong foundation for teaching and learning, one of its challenges was curriculum overload. The draft framework proposes moving from 11 subjects in stages 1 and 2 (junior infants to second class) to five broad curriculum areas, then moving to more defined subjects in stages 3 and 4 (third to sixth class). The redeveloped curriculum will comprise of the *Curriculum Framework*, five curriculum specifications and an online curriculum toolkit. The five curriculum specifications present an opportunity to eliminate unnecessary repetition across areas and subjects, and to move from very detailed content objectives to broad learning outcomes. The development of each curriculum specification will involve careful consideration of what is important and what is less important as we look towards a curriculum that will support children's learning for the next fifteen years. This will require decisions about what content is included and what content is not included. The suggested time allocations give schools and teachers greater flexibility in deciding how best to utilise time enabling teachers to make judgements on how best to enact the curriculum in their schools.

## **What is a curriculum framework?**

A curriculum framework sets out a clear vision and the principles for teaching and learning. It highlights what is important in primary education and why; and provides a description of what should be prioritised in children's learning. A primary curriculum framework will help schools to make local curriculum decisions as they work with broad learning outcomes that are tailored to, and appropriate for the children in their school community. [Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework \(2009\)](#) and [The Framework for Junior Cycle \(2015\)](#) are similar frameworks supporting children's learning before they begin primary school and when they move to post-primary school.

## **When will the redeveloped curriculum be available to schools?**

COVID-19 has significantly impacted on the timeline for the redeveloped curriculum. The NCCA will use the findings from the ongoing consultation to finalise the curriculum framework. Once published in early 2023, this framework will guide the development of the specifications for each of the curriculum areas. While detailed planning on resources, structures and processes is yet to take place, the NCCA envisages the completion of the development of all

curriculum area specifications by summer 2026 after which they will be sent to the Minister for Education for approval. A timeline for schools' work in implementing the redeveloped curriculum will be set out by the Department of Education [DE].

2020 – 2022: Publication of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* and consultation

Early 2023: Publication of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*

2023 – 2026: Development of curriculum specifications supported by ongoing consultation and work with school leaders, teachers, children and parents

2026: Completion of the curriculum specifications by the NCCA

### **Why did work proceed on a new Primary Language Curriculum and Primary Mathematics Curriculum ahead of the primary curriculum as a whole?**

The *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011 – 2020* (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2011) set out a curriculum reform agenda. This required the NCCA to begin the redevelopment of the primary curriculum in the area of language (English and Irish) followed by mathematics. Shaped by this timeline in the strategy, this work proceeded ahead of the review of the primary curriculum as a whole.

### **What is the relationship between the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga Bunscoile* and the redeveloped primary curriculum?**

Even though already published, the new [Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile](#) links directly with the vision, principles, structure and content proposed for the redeveloped curriculum. For example, the language curriculum uses learning outcomes to describe children's expected learning and development at the end of a period of time. Learning outcomes will be used similarly in all other curriculum areas and subjects. It is hoped that teachers' experiences of working with the language curriculum will inform and enrich the feedback gathered during the consultation on the draft framework.

The draft framework proposes the introduction of Modern Foreign Languages in stages 3 and 4 (third class – sixth class). This [background paper](#) explores the feasibility of integrating Modern Foreign Languages in a redeveloped primary curriculum. The possible inclusion of Modern Foreign Languages in the redeveloped curriculum may, in time, necessitate some tweaking of

the language curriculum. Additional information on Language can be found on page 13 in the draft framework.

### **What is the relationship between the *Draft Primary Mathematics Curriculum* and the redeveloped curriculum?**

In addition to the language area, the NCCA has also been working on the new draft Mathematics Curriculum. Many teachers and principals took part in the consultation in 2017/2018 on the draft curriculum for junior infants to second class. Following consultation on the draft framework, the NCCA plans to publish the draft curriculum for mathematics (junior infants to sixth class) for consultation. The findings from this consultation together with the consultation on the draft framework will help to clarify the relationship and connections between the draft maths curriculum and the full redeveloped curriculum. Additional information on mathematics can be found on page 13 in the draft framework.

### **What are the key messages shaping the proposals in the draft framework?**

The consultation is framed around a set of six key messages which, taken together, represent the main features and significant changes proposed for the redeveloped primary curriculum. Each of these is outlined below.

The draft framework:

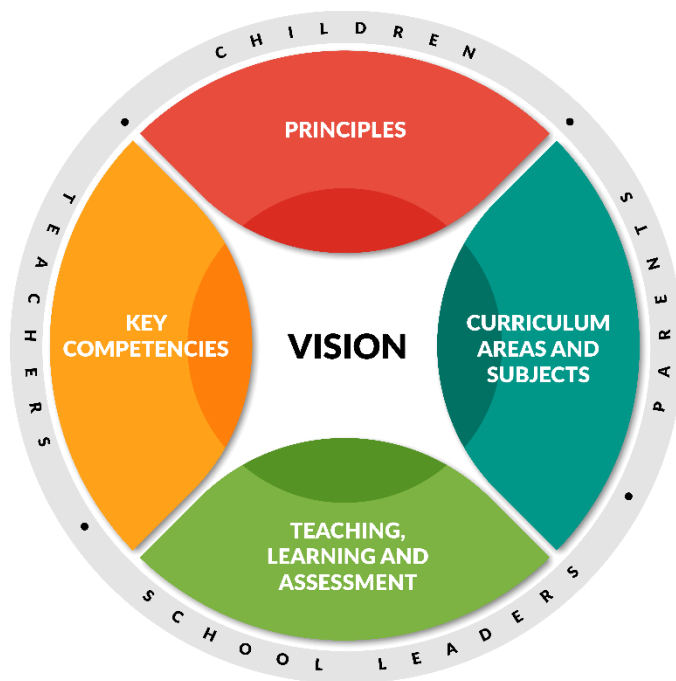
1. Builds on the ***successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum*** such as children's enjoyment of learning and teachers' increased use of active learning methodologies. At the same time, the framework ***responds to key challenges*** which schools have identified such as curriculum overload and using assessment in a meaningful way to inform teaching and learning.
2. Places an importance on ***agency and flexibility for schools***, recognising the variety of school contexts that exist in our system, and providing for learning environments that support the learning of every child. It also aims to increase flexibility for schools in terms of planning and timetabling.
3. Supports ***transitions between home, preschool and post-primary*** by providing a vision for children's learning across the eight years of primary school which links with learning experiences provided through *Aistear* and connects learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.

4. Makes proposals that are ***responsive to emerging priorities for children's learning*** and embeds seven key competencies from junior infants to sixth class. The draft framework also proposes giving more time and prominence to wellbeing, introducing modern foreign languages from third class, broadening the arts education area and increasing the focus on technology.
5. Proposes ***changing how the curriculum is structured*** by moving from subjects in the first four years of primary school to broad curriculum areas which support an integrated approach to teaching and learning. These areas would become more differentiated into subjects from third class onwards to reflect children's growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising their learning.
6. ***Supports a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning.*** The draft framework emphasises the importance of curriculum integration, inclusive practice, inquiry based-learning and playful pedagogy. Assessment is presented as a central part of teacher's daily practice.

## What are the components of the draft framework?

The draft framework describes the purpose, structure and content for a redeveloped primary curriculum through inter-connected components (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Curriculum Components**



## What is meant by the term 'agentic' teacher in the curriculum's vision?

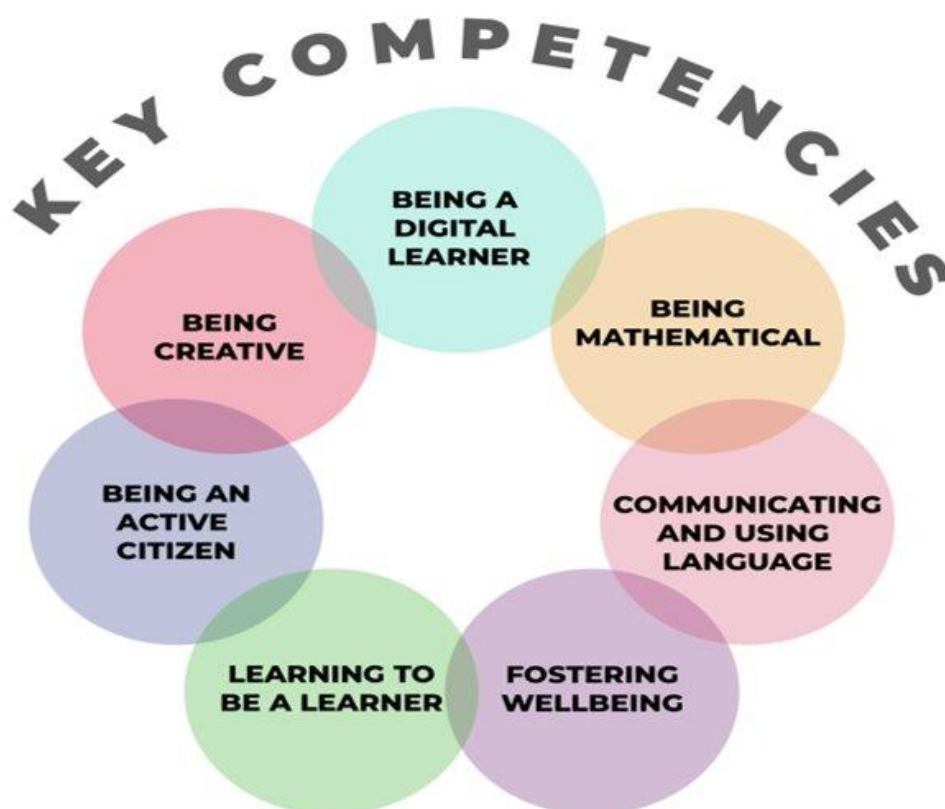
Two core images sit at the very heart of the vision for the redeveloped curriculum - one of teachers and the other of children. Our work with schools in recent years has highlighted the need to foreground the professional role of the teacher more clearly. The image of the teacher presented in the draft framework is that of a committed, skilful and agentic professional. This recognises the central role that teachers play in providing rich learning experiences for children as they draw on a range of skills, competencies and knowledge to make informed judgements and decisions about children's learning and development in a variety of contexts. Supporting this vision, the draft framework provides opportunities for teachers to make choices and to be flexible in how they work with the curriculum framework, for example, in their use of time, the

pace and sequence of teaching and learning, and in how they support all children to make progress in their learning across the curriculum. The vision is on page 5 in the draft framework.

### What are key competencies and why are they being proposed for the redeveloped primary curriculum?

The key competencies proposed for the redeveloped curriculum will support children to develop essential knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values for life and learning. To support continuity in children’s learning as they move from preschool to primary school and from primary to post-primary school, the competencies are intentionally linked to the themes of *Aistear* and the key skills in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. They will be embedded across all curriculum areas and subjects through the learning outcomes for junior infants to sixth class. A variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies will support children’s progress towards the competencies. This [research paper](#) provides information on key competencies and additional information can be found on pages 7 – 10 in the draft framework.

Figure 2: Key competencies





### **Why is 'Being a digital learner' included as a key competency?**

'Being a digital learner' aims to foster children's ability to become curious, creative, confident and critical users of digital technology in their lives in a digital society. This necessitates the embedding of this competency across all curriculum areas as a reflection of the prevalence of digital competence across all areas of life.

### **Why is 'Fostering wellbeing' included as a key competency?**

'Fostering wellbeing' aims to help children to appreciate and demonstrate wellbeing on their ability to be as physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually healthy as they can be. To foster self-awareness and promote the importance of children seeing themselves as capable and resourceful, the competency needs to be embedded across all curriculum areas as reflection of the importance of wellbeing across all areas of life.

### **What about assessment in the redeveloped primary curriculum?**

Drawing on the key ideas within [Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools \(NCCA, 2007\)](#), assessment in the redeveloped curriculum will be a collaborative process involving children and teachers, and at times, parents and other stakeholders. Important key messages about assessment include:

- Assessment is integral to high-quality teaching and learning across the curriculum
- Assessment exists along a continuum ranging from 'intuitive' to 'planned interactions' to 'assessment events'
- Assessment provides information for various stakeholders, of whom children are central

Assessment in the draft framework reflects an understanding that learning is an inherently social activity in which teachers and children work together to use information to inform learning and teaching in the classroom. This [research paper](#) provides information on assessment and additional information can be found on pages 23 – 25 in the draft framework.

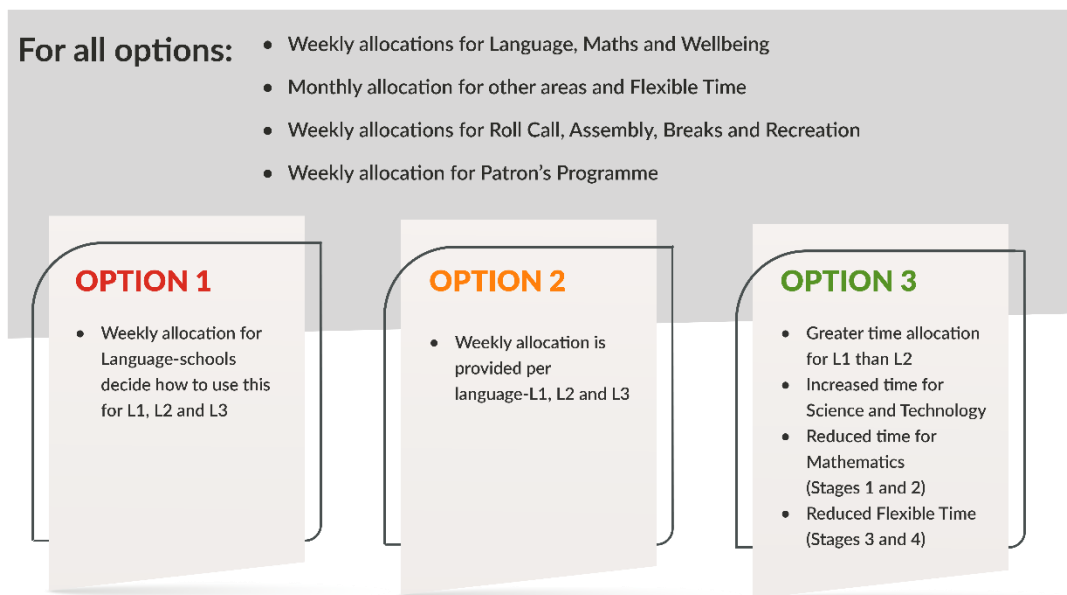
### **What are the key messages behind the time allocations proposals?**

Suggested time allocations are intended to assist teachers and schools in managing their work with the redeveloped curriculum. These allocations are made up of two categories of time for teaching, learning and assessment. The first category, *Minimum Curriculum Time*, provides a weekly time allocation for Language; Mathematics; and Wellbeing, and a monthly time allocation for Science and Technology Education; Social and Environmental Education; and Arts Education. The second category of time, *Flexible Time*, is responsive to schools' own present and future educational priorities. It is intended that this flexibility will allow for greater integration and provide opportunities for teachers to use more substantial blocks of time in their curriculum planning to enable project work and involvement in local initiatives. Practical guidelines and examples of how the time allocation categories can be used by teachers and schools will be developed.

## What are the similarities / differences between the three-time allocation options?

To inform discussion and deliberation in the consultation, three options for time allocations are presented on pages 15 – 18 in the draft framework. In formulating each of the options, time was taken from all aspects of the current curriculum, with the exception of Wellbeing (PE and SPHE) and breaks and recreation.

**Table1: Time Allocation Options**



## What preparations are currently taking place to support schools in getting ready to work with the redeveloped primary curriculum?

The NCCA is working with a number of schools from across the country in what is referred to as the [Schools Forum](#). The Forum has played a key role in shaping the ideas and proposals in the draft framework. In addition, the schools have been spotlighting the types of supports that will be needed in the coming years. Informed by all of this, the NCCA is working closely with schools and wider education partners including those at policy level, to plan for and pave the way for positive, pragmatic and worthwhile curriculum change. This represents an exciting opportunity for all education stakeholders to learn, grow and develop together as a community, so that we can provide for the best possible learning experiences and outcomes for children.

As with any change, questions naturally arise as to the road ahead and how teachers and school leaders will be supported in enacting this change. In recent months, the NCCA has been working collaboratively with stakeholders through the *Leading Out* seminar series, in planning ahead for the introduction of the redeveloped curriculum. Topics such as supporting teacher agency, professional development, resourcing, the timing and pacing of change, and others, are all the subject of this work.

**Will the way in which teachers plan for teaching and learning need to change?**

Yes, it will. The redeveloped curriculum will bring opportunities and changes in how teachers currently prepare for teaching and learning. Preparatory work has already begun with education stakeholders, including teachers and school leaders, scoping out what future meaningful preparation for teaching and learning might look like. Key considerations underpinning this work are the importance of children's learning experiences, managing teacher workload, supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies, meaningful integration, and the central role of assessment. It is intended that support materials and guidance will enable teachers to prepare for teaching and learning as they enact the redeveloped curriculum in their schools.

**What supports will be made available to teachers to support them to work with the redeveloped curriculum?**

A range of resources including examples of children's learning and support materials for teachers will guide teachers and school leaders as they work with the redeveloped curriculum. The ongoing consultation on the draft framework is an opportunity for teachers, school leaders and parents to identify the types of supports that they might need to assist them in working with the full redeveloped curriculum in the coming years.

**How do the proposals in the draft framework support schools in responding to diversity and enabling all children to feel respected, valued and engaged in learning?**

Through its vision and principles, the draft framework encourages an appreciation of children's unique capabilities, interests, culture, language, beliefs and background. The draft framework promotes equity of opportunity and participation, in which each child is supported to have

meaningful engagement and challenge in learning and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community. The use of broad learning outcomes and proposed new areas of learning, such as Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, as well as the recognition of the important place of home languages in the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* are some examples of how the draft framework responds to diversity. Through its promotion of varied learning experiences and responsive pedagogies, the redeveloped curriculum will enable children to make connections with diverse languages, cultures, identities and worldviews.

**The 2007 Guidelines for Students with General Learning Disabilities (GLD) provided an appropriate curriculum for children with GLD. Can these still be used for children with additional needs in the redeveloped curriculum?**

The development of new specifications for the different curriculum areas and subjects will, in time, mean that the 2007 Guidelines will no longer complement the primary curriculum. However, there are aspects of the 2007 Guidelines, such as the Introduction, Awareness of learning and teaching approaches for students with GLD, and Planning, that are relevant for any curriculum. Guidance on supporting children with GLD to access and learn through the redeveloped curriculum will form part of the support materials that will be provided in the online curriculum toolkit. This same approach is used with the new *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* and the *Draft Primary Mathematics Curriculum*.

## **How is integration promoted in the redeveloped primary curriculum?**

As proposed in the draft framework, presenting the curriculum in curriculum areas for stages 1 and 2 (junior infants to second class) will make integration across and within subject areas more visible. In stages 3 and 4 (third to sixth class), it is proposed that these curriculum areas will become more differentiated into subjects to reflect children's growing awareness of the world. Subject specifications will continue to provide important opportunities for teaching and learning in integrated and engaging ways, such as through themes, interdisciplinary skills, big ideas and real-world problems that are starting points for integrated teaching and learning. The redeveloped primary curriculum promotes curriculum integration in different ways:

1. The key competencies are embedded in learning outcomes across the curriculum from junior infants to sixth class providing continuity and connectivity in children's learning as they move through primary school.
2. Learning outcomes support integration by providing opportunities for teachers and children to draw on interdisciplinary concepts, skills and knowledge as they pursue learning.

The online curriculum toolkit will include examples of how schools use themes, interdisciplinary skills, big ideas and real-world problems to integrate teaching and learning across the redeveloped curriculum. Additional information on integration can be found on page 22 in the draft framework.

## **What is the relationship between the Report on the Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and the redeveloped curriculum?**

The [Report on the Review of RSE in Primary and Post-Primary School \(2019\)](#) sets out advice on the future direction for RSE. This advice promotes a more holistic approach to RSE provision where the relational and emotional aspects are connected and balanced with the sexuality aspects. In the case of the redeveloped primary curriculum, provision for RSE is made in the proposed curriculum areas of Wellbeing and Social, Personal and Values Education. Decisions on what and when aspects of RSE will be taught in the redeveloped curriculum will be agreed through consultation with stakeholders. Additional information on curriculum areas and subjects can be found on pages 11 – 14 in the draft framework.

**What are the connections between the redeveloped curriculum, *Aistear* and *the Framework for Junior Cycle*?**

The draft framework makes meaningful connections with *Aistear* and the *Framework for Junior Cycle* to promote continuity and progression in children's learning. The principles of teaching and learning build on the principles in *Aistear* and connect with the principles of the Junior Cycle Framework. The key competencies and broad curriculum areas in stages 1 and 2 (junior infants to second class) extend and build on children's prior learning shaped through *Aistear*'s themes. Similarly, the key competencies provide continuity of learning with the key skills of Junior Cycle and the more subject-based focus in stages 3 and 4 (third to sixth class) supports children's transition into post-primary school. Additional information on transitions, continuity and progression in children's learning can be found on page 19 in the draft framework.