

Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals responding to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*

This template is intended to support you (and your colleagues/organisation) in developing a written submission in response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Please e-mail your completed submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Individual submission details

Name	
Date	
E-mail	

Organisation submission details

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Position	Principal
Organisation	Holy Family School for the Deaf
Date	21 st December 2020
E-mail	

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

Yes

No

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

Holy Family School for the Deaf was established in 2016 when St. Mary's School for Deaf Girls & St. Joseph's School for Deaf Boys amalgamated. These schools have a long history associated with Deaf Education in Ireland and were lauded worldwide for their innovations in Deaf Education.

The school educates deaf children from the ages of 3 years old (Early Intervention), through 4-12 years old (Primary School) and on to 18 years old (Post Primary) and across many educational programmes.

Teachers and staff engage with each pupil using assistive technology and the students preferred communication methods including spoken language, Irish Sign Language and sign supported English to promote speech and learning. A wide range of activities are available to pupils including sports, arts and culture, IT and music.

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured to align with the six key messages related to the framework. Each message is summarised as a support for you in working on the submission.

Section 1

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

We broadly welcome this new draft Primary Curriculum Framework. Indeed the initial pages of the framework outline the rationale behind its development, firmly based on a rapidly changing Ireland and on research, networks, deliberations and consultation. We value the opportunity to add our insights to the pot.

The eight overarching principles are very closely aligned to our long-held deaf education beliefs, and the seven key competencies support them. The five broad curriculum areas will help to embed the principles and competencies, together with the legal right of school patrons to design their own programme in accordance with the ethos of the school.

However, we see one aspect of improvement for our pupils – the area of Language, specifically Irish Sign Language (a language with its own structures and grammar which is different to English or indeed Irish).

“All Deaf and hard of hearing children should be provided with opportunities, at an early age, to acquire fluent language skills while engaged in meaningful activity with capable users of the language, whether the language to be acquired is in signed, spoken or written form...”

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) should consider how the development and refinement of competence in ISL is best addressed within the school system.”

(p6, The Education of Deaf And Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland; 2011).

These lofty recommendations were made by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in 2011 based on an international review of best practice models and outcomes in the education of Deaf and hard of hearing children, commissioned by the NCSE and published in 2009 (Marschark and Spencer, 2009).

Recent research suggests that most deaf children’s difficulties in reading are mirrored by difficulties in understanding sign language. We need teachers and staff who are competent in ISL in our schools but we also need a well-structured, theory-based ISL curriculum which can be implemented in our special schools and our mainstream classrooms across the country.

One of the overarching principles of the curriculum framework is to do with assessment and progression, and refers to meaningful assessment being integral to teaching and learning. The Equal Status Act (2000) promotes equality and inhibits discrimination on many grounds of which disability is relevant here. In our context, the form of assessment we use to gather information should not in any way discriminate against them. We agree fully with this sentiment and we see the value of assessment in deaf education.

We use a variety of formative assessment techniques in the school, which as experienced teachers we have found to be useful but unfortunately not always giving us a full picture. Any formal standardised tests are not normed for deaf children in Ireland and so cannot be used in a valid way for reporting. Marschark & Spenser (2009) acknowledge that *“Reliable and valid assessment of learning disability in a deaf or hard-of-hearing child presents special difficulties and must employ varied methods and measures.”* (p.190). They include conducting two standardised tests to rule out overall cognitive delay.

We would like the ncca to recommend that standardised tests be developed for deaf children which can be used in our special schools and all mainstream schools in Ireland.

In conjunction with these observations, we also acknowledge the great resources developed to support the new Primary Language curriculum. These have been useful to our school in the main. However, some resources are sound based with no interpretation for deaf staff, parents or pupils. This makes them unusable for a large section of our school community.

We would recommend that any resources being developed to support the new Primary Curriculum Framework would be accessible to deaf people.

Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

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

- Be for every child.
- Recognise teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context.
- Give more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling to identify and respond to priorities and opportunities.
- Connect with different school contexts in the education system.
- Give greater opportunities for flexibility and choice for children's learning.

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

Each child in our school has her/his own needs and capabilities when it comes to communicating and language, and our teachers' professionalism recognises this.

We have identified a need for an ISL curriculum which would be available to all schools throughout the country.

Access to two languages for our children would provide greater opportunities for flexibility & choice for our pupils' learning.

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

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

- Provide a clear vision for children’s learning across the eight years of primary school.
- Link with learning experiences provided through the themes of the *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and connect with the subjects, key skills and statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.
- Support educational transitions by connecting with what and how children learn at home, in preschool and post-primary school.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

A child’s learning is founded on his/her ability to access the curriculum and this in turn is dependent on his/her development of language and a communication system. Good access to ISL and written/spoken English will influence all educational transitions of our pupils.

Emerging priorities for children’s learning

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

- Embed seven key competencies across children’s learning outcomes from junior infants to sixth class.
- Focus on developing children’s skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. The Learning Outcomes and the Key Competencies are broad in nature to describe this wider understanding of learning.
- Have increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning, and have new aspects such as Modern Foreign Languages, Technology, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, and a broader Arts Education.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to emerging priorities for children’s learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

With our history in Deaf Education we firmly believe that communicating and using language is a key foundation for each one of the seven key competencies. This is most true for the areas of wellbeing, digital learning, religion & beliefs, arts education and PE. Having access to a fully structured and recognised curriculum in ISL is vital to achieve these ideals with our pupils.

Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

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

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

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

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

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

We like the move towards a more integrated approach to the curriculum structure and acknowledge the need to see language as one of the main broad areas. It is imperative for our pupils that a curriculum in ISL would be included.

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

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

- Promote high quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Conceptualise assessment as an essential and critical part of teaching and learning.
- Highlight the importance of teachers’ professional judgement in supporting progression in children’s learning.
- Encourage teachers to make meaningful connections with children’s interests and experiences.
- Recognise the significance of quality relationships and their impact on children’s learning.
- Recognise the role and influence of parents and families in children’s education.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

Over the years our school has adopted a version of the experiential approach to teaching & learning where we relate our lessons to the child’s experiences and interests and acknowledge this as an effective strategy for our children.

It is our professional judgement that the provision of a curriculum in ISL would greatly enhance our children’s experiences of teaching & learning across the curriculum.

Building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to the challenges and changing needs and priorities.

The 1999 curriculum contributed to many successes including:

- Enhanced enjoyment of learning for children.
- Increased use of active methodologies for teaching and learning.
- Improved attainment levels in reading, mathematics and science as evidenced in national and international assessments.

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

- Address curriculum overload at primary level.
- Take stock of strategies, initiatives and programmes and clarify priorities for children’s learning.
- Link with *Aistear* and *the Framework for Junior Cycle*.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to challenges and changing needs and priorities. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

We welcome the new Primary Curriculum Framework, particularly the child-centred integrated approach to teaching & learning.

We have seen that access to language and a communication system is crucial for our pupils. The new Primary Language Curriculum could be enhanced for our children by the provision of an ISL curriculum which would address one of the priorities identified by our staff and teachers – a structured ISL curriculum (as opposed to a sign language curriculum mapped on to an English curriculum which would not address the need for an ISL structure).

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie