



**NCCA**

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



# 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](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

### *Individual submission details*

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	

### *Organisation submission details*

<b>Name</b>	Regina Dunne
<b>Position</b>	President
<b>Organisation</b>	Literacy Association of Ireland
<b>Date</b>	28.02.22
<b>email</b>	

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](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

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

The Literacy Association of Ireland (LAI) aims to support and inform all those concerned with the development of literacy (including teachers, lecturers, researchers, trainers and parents, encourage them in reflection and dialogue, challenge them in their practice and give public voice to their concerns. Further information here: <https://www.literacyireland.com/>

This submission has been compiled by the executive committee, which consists of educational professionals who devote significant time and energy to the dissemination of high quality, evidence-based literacy research and practice.

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.

Please email your submission to [PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

# Section 1

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

## Literacy Association of Ireland

### Submission on NCCA Draft Primary Curriculum Framework

The Literacy Association of Ireland (LAI) welcomes the opportunity to submit views on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. The following submission is based on the considered views of LAI's executive committee, which consists of educational professionals who devote significant time and energy to the dissemination of high quality, evidence-based literacy research and practice.

#### The Literacy Association of Ireland welcomes:

- the inclusion of 'Communicating and using language' as a key competency that spans all areas of learning in the draft framework
- the emphasis on partnership to extend children's learning
- the promotion of inclusivity and diversity to ensure equity of opportunity and participation for all learners
- the grouping of subjects in the early years; this is attractive given pressures on instructional time and perceived curriculum overload.
- the focus on agency and flexibility to allow schools to respond to individual circumstances and to play to their strengths; teachers and schools need to feel empowered to do this.
- the alignment between the Draft Framework and that of the Junior Cycle; there is a clear and welcome continuum evident in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and the Junior Cycle Framework.
- the addition of Learning to be a Learner as key competency in the context of assessment; understanding that quality feedback is the bedrock of formative assessment is crucial
- the focus on agency and choice for children, and the recognition of children as active participants in their own learning experiences
- the clear focus on the importance of wellbeing in the Draft Framework

#### The Literacy Association of Ireland is concerned by:

##### 1. Proposed reduction in instructional time allocated to the teaching of literacy

Overall, LAI is very concerned with the apparent reduction in the instructional time given to the teaching of literacy (L1 and L2) in all three options provided in the draft framework. LAI is particularly concerned about the reduction of time for literacy outlined in Option 3. This proposal runs counter to the thrust of national policy over the last decade, the most recent focus on curricular reform at primary level (English/Gaeilge) and the available research evidence. Specifically:

- The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) stated that more instructional time should be afforded to the teaching of literacy and mathematics nationally. This has been linked by the Department with improvements in
- Literacy standards, as measured by international assessments (See Hislop, 2017). The Strategy highlighted that "the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions developed in these early years impact significantly upon their later learning experiences. During the primary school years, critical early skills need to be developed within a broad, balanced and enjoyable curricular experience. These literacy and numeracy skills have to be carefully consolidated and developed throughout the junior and senior cycles in post-

primary schools and in centres for education. We have to acknowledge that understanding and using literacy and numeracy are such core skills that time for their development must be safeguarded.” This statement cannot be reconciled with the time allocations for literacy presented in the Draft Framework.

- Reducing the time allocation for literacy may have significant implications for children who are at risk of literacy difficulties. The National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics (2014) found improvements in reading assessment scores since 2009, but significant differences remained between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Overall improvements in reading were linked with many factors, but increases in instructional time were likely to be a significant contributor. The authors of the NAMER context report recommended that: “Schools in general should continue to allocate approximately one hour per day to the teaching of English, with additional time allocated in schools in which there are large numbers of struggling readers” (p. xx). Reducing the time allocation for literacy runs the risk that these gains will be lost.
- In his recent LAI keynote (October, 2020), Timothy Shanahan highlighted that the most significant and important alterable determinants of learning included three key factors: time, quality of instruction and content/curriculum
- In their research study, Simmons et al. (2007) investigated the role of instructional time in kindergarten classes. Their results demonstrated that children who received more time in reading instruction made significantly more growth on measures of letter identification, phonemic decoding and word reading
- Citing Neuman and Dickinson (2006), Kennedy et al. (2012; NCCA Research Report 15) outline a wide range of factors that are crucial for children’s success in literacy, including an explicit focus on vocabulary, syntax, world knowledge, phonology, alphabet knowledge and word decoding. This is a truncated list. Many of these fundamental literacy learning outcomes are detailed in the Primary Language Curriculum (i.e. conventions of print, sentence structure and grammar, phonological awareness, word recognition, word study, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, spelling, writing process, handwriting). It is unlikely that it will be possible for teachers to implement the PLC given the instructional time suggested in the draft framework, which amounts to 33 min per day in the infant classes. It is difficult to reconcile this time allocation with the concerted effort that has been made since 2011 to improve literacy standards nationally.
- Furthermore, a review of studies of effective literacy teachers and schools cited in NCCA Research Report 15 highlights that effective teachers of literacy provide large blocks of time (a minimum of 90 minutes but up to 2.5-3 hrs) for literacy instruction (p. 182). This cannot be reconciled with the options for time allocation outlined in the Draft Framework.

## 2. **Teachers and principals as ‘curriculum makers’**

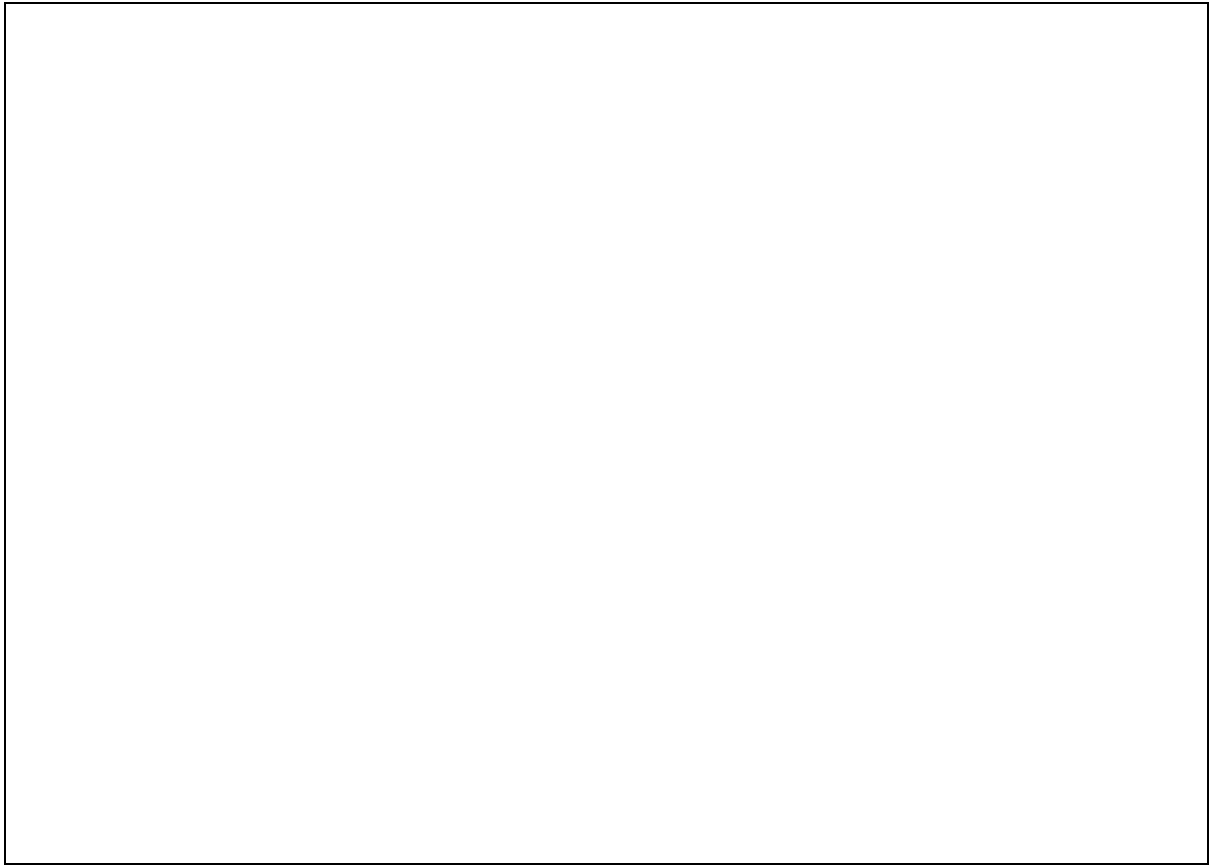
The draft framework sets out the principle of teachers and school leaders as ‘curriculum makers’. This is highly commendable; however, there needs to be some consideration of what is important for teachers to know before shaping the curriculum for their unique situation. In relation to the teaching of literacy, the LAI is concerned that there is an assumption that teachers have the required content knowledge to hand to become ‘curriculum makers’. However, international research would demonstrate that content knowledge, particularly in relation to early literacy skills, is not well understood by many classroom teachers (Bos et al., 2001; Brady & Moats, 1997, Dickinson & Brady, 2005; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Phillips et al., 2007). Furthermore, without the serious consideration of providing teachers/school communities with time to become ‘curriculum makers’, this commendable idea will remain an aspirational one.

3. **Modern foreign languages (MFL)**

- The draft framework refers to Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026 (DES, 2017) and welcomes the commissioned background paper on the possible integration of modern foreign languages in the redeveloped primary curriculum (Keogh-Bryan, 2019). Though LAI welcomes the inclusion of a modern foreign language, as mentioned in previous sections, this should not come at the expense of the instructional time afforded to language and literacy in English/Gaeilge.
- LAI is concerned with the practical and logistical considerations required to include a modern foreign language in the Primary School Curriculum. While we agree with the principle of teaching an additional language in senior primary school, we have concerns about the level of support that would be provided to teachers and whether it will be carried out by a generalist or specialist teacher.

4. **Integration**

- LAI agrees with the principle of integration outlined in the 1999 curriculum and further endorsed in the Draft Framework. However, we know from the research on meaningful literacy integration that balancing both disciplinary learning and literacy development requires deep subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge on the behalf of generalist primary teachers (e.g. Lemley et al., 2019). Further, the prevailing research on literacy integration emphasises disciplinary literacy as the most appropriate way of conceiving of literacy integration (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This has been signalled in the NCCA's own research report (Shanahan, 2019) and the Primary Language Curriculum documentation (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). However, there is a very poor connection between this vision for literacy integration and the content of the Draft Framework.
- There is significant scope for developing language competence through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012), as clearly signalled in the Primary Language Curriculum, but which is not signalled in the Draft Framework.



Please email your submission to [PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

# 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.**

## **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.**



## **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.**

## 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.**

## **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.**

**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.**

## **Covid-19**

Since the publication of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, Covid-19 has presented a big challenge for schools. Please give your views on the implications of schools' experience of the pandemic for the finalisation of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*.

## **Data Protection**

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit [www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement](http://www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement) or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at [dpo@ncca.ie](mailto:dpo@ncca.ie).

**Thank you for your submission.**

Please email your submission to [PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)