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

Name	Tanya Flanagan
Position	Chairperson
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Date	January 29th 2021
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 ☐ Y   No ☐

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

The One Voice for Languages Group aims to be a unified voice for various language networks and associations in Ireland. The group is inclusive and will cooperate with various members from across Irish society as well as with experts in linguistics, thereby highlighting all aspects of language learning and teaching in a multilingual and multicultural context.

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

Section 1

Please outline your overall response to the _Draft Primary Curriculum Framework._

The executive committee of the One Voice for Languages group is very grateful for the opportunity to respond to the NCCA's Draft Primary Curriculum Framework.

Irish society and education have changed considerably since the last iteration of the curriculum framework for Irish primary school children in 1999. In the first instance, we are pleased that importance and prominence have been accorded to children's home languages and to the importance of heritage, diversity and inclusion.

As advocates for the important role that language learning can play in nurturing and promoting many curricular and societal goals, such as respect, intercultural understanding and appreciation, as well as linguistic competencies, we believe it is also a positive that the _demand for MFL_ is noted in the document's introduction (p. 2).

Almost nine years have passed since the end of the DES's programme, the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI), which supported the teaching and learning of MFL in over 500 schools. In the interim, the _demand_ for MFL to be introduced on a formal basis to the Irish Primary Curriculum has been a consistent request from educationalists, the business community, parent groups, social commentators and politicians. Indeed the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, called for the introduction of modern languages to primary schools at an event in Dublin recently, and it was one of the main points of his wide-ranging speech that was subsequently quoted by media outlets.[1]

It is heartening, therefore, to read Dr. Katrina Keogh's paper in the bibliography that details the work and legacy of the MLPSI and the lessons that can be learned from the programme as the issue is being reconsidered.

According to Keogh-Bryan (2019), the new 'Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile' combined with the recent publication of the 'Languages Connect Strategy' provides 'a timely and fitting juncture to examine whether and to what extent _foreign_ languages could be incorporated into language learning at primary level' (p.11, our emphasis).

We note that under the key skill of "Communicating and Using Language", the new Draft Primary

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[1] https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/taoiseach-wants-european-languages-to-be-taught-across-all-primary-schools-1.4462422

Keogh-Bryan, K. (2019). _Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment Background paper: Integrating modern foreign languages in a redeveloped primary curriculum_ (Issue September). https://ncca.ie/media/4446/background-paper-integrating-modern-foreign-languages-in-a-redeveloped-primary-curriculum.pdf

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Curriculum Framework includes the teaching of *English, Irish and other languages* in Stages 3 and 4, from 3rd to 6th class. We are also pleased to note that this proposal is for a language competency model, whereby *It supports the introduction of MFL in Stages 3 and 4, incrementally building on children's existing knowledge and awareness of language and progressing to a competency model in Stage 4".*

We very much look forward to the NCCA's next stage of the drafting process which hopefully will bring more clarity to the changes this will entail in terms of teacher education, both initial and continuing, and also the guidance and support that schools will need in terms of the choices involved to ensure both language diversification and continuity of provision at a local level.

In addition to the above MFL related points, we would also like to make the following comments which are related to the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework in its totality.

The rationale (draft PSC: 1) rightly identifies challenges of curriculum overload, etc. Using a teacher-centred approach to education, rather than a child-centred approach, can lead to these very challenges.

We are told that the child is *curious*; *brings existing knowledge and experience* to the learning process. The draft PSC recognises that … *children are active and demonstrate agency to act independently and to make choices…* (p. 6).

From birth, the child uses this agency to have his/her needs met. As the child develops, her agency expands too.

The word *individual* and teachers' responses to individual's needs are also highlighted throughout the draft PSC document where the underlying thinking is clearly child-centred, learner-centred. We are very fortunate in Ireland to have a child-centred PSC (1999). We need to ensure that this vital element of child-centred teaching and learning remains. It is important to actually use these phrases, child-centred and learner-centred, to make clear that this new PSC will be focussed on learners, their needs, development, etc.

This focus may be realised by making clear that learning is built on the *existing knowledge and experience* of the child and encouraging use of, activating, making explicit, the child's existing agency to begin to develop their own learning. Where children's agency is being tapped into, learners quickly develop their existing autonomous skills, honing and developing them as they learn and begin to make decisions to undertake learning tasks that they devise for themselves. They do this because they are interested, motivated, engaged in their learning, and simply because they can. This description of learners' autonomous learning skills is not aspirational. Experienced teachers can testify to seeing their pupils, even very young pupils, autonomously engaged in pursuing tasks/ areas of learning that they themselves have identified and they do this with vigour and enthusiasm. The teacher has not proposed the topic, the approach, but by pedagogic skills that allow learners the space and use of their agency to pursue their chosen topics, learners often learn more than they do from externally imposed tasks. Teacher-directed tasks happen too, but are greatly enhanced when children bring their agency to bear on carrying them out. Teachers cannot be in control of everything that children learn. Pupils engage in their own learning out of school with great application and enthusiasm. Why not harness these skills and make them applicable to what happens in school?

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Dialogic learning:
Pedagogical research stresses the importance of involving learners in dialogue, exploratory talk, thinking together, collaborative interaction. Such dialogue involves reciprocal communication where all involved have initiating rights. This is how links are made between existing and new knowledge and information. An open and flexible classroom environment that encourages pupils to contribute to interactive classroom discussion proves beneficial to the learning of all pupils. Dialogic classroom communication allows pupils and teachers to support each other in the development of knowledge and information and is associated with good pedagogical practice in Irish primary schools (PSC 1999; Barnes 1976, 2008; Mercer 2000; Mercer and Littleton 2007)[2]. Such discourse initiatives require learners to exercise agency; exercising their agency contributes to the development of learner autonomy.

In this way pupils can truly become *active agents* in their own learning. The word *active* needs clarification as it can be narrowly interpreted to mean 'physically active; engaged in doing'. However, it needs expansion to include 'cognitively active' as children already are when they enrol in primary school. It is this cognitive activity that needs to be built on for development of learning, of questioning, of higher order thinking skills, ability to analyse, observe, hypothesise, etc.
… challenges such as climate change, sustainability, human migration… illustrate the importance of dispositions and skills such as resilience, creativity, innovation… (ibid.: 3)
Education not only reflects society but is an influence in shaping its development (PSC 1999: 6).

We have actually experienced how our society has had to adapt and change during the course of the last year due to the effects of COVID. This pandemic was not foreseen. There may be other pandemics. We are warned of the damaging effects of climate change. Home schooling and distance learning may be issues that will force us to examine whether or not we have provided our pupils with:

- Skills of self-management
- The tools to undertake this
- the capacity to monitor and assess their own progress.

If we have not provided these skills, tools and capacities, our current crisis shows us that we cannot wait any longer to do this. If ever there was a time to begin to develop the skill of autonomous learning it is now. If we have learned nothing else from the COVID pandemic through which we are still living, it is that the skills necessary for autonomous learning, currently untapped in many of our pupils, need to be activated.

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[2] Barnes, D. (1976). *From communication to curriculum*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

  Barnes, D. (2008). Exploratory talk for learning. In N. Mercer & S. Hodgkinson (Eds.), *Exploring talk in school* (pp. 1–15). London: Sage.

  Government of Ireland (1999). *Primary School Curriculum, Introduction*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
  Mercer, N. (2000). *Words and minds: How we use language to think together*. London & New York: Routledge.

  Mercer, N. & Littleton, K. (2007). *Dialogue and the development of children's thinking: A sociocultural approach*. Abingdon: Routledge.

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Meaningful assessment is collaborative and integral to high quality teaching and learning (Draft PSC: 6, 23, 24).

In this section of the draft PSC children are the subject of, but not the agents of, their assessment (P. 6 tells us children demonstrate agency). While self-assessment is alluded to (p. 23) it is not explicitly identified. The presentation is heavily teacher-centered rather than learner-centered (see diagrams p.23). Even very young learners have the ability to describe what they can, cannot do, and what they would like to be able to do but require the development of skills they do not yet have. This demonstrates their ability, an ability that is currently left untapped. Young children can, and do, have the ability to self-evaluate. Very often this is an implicit skill that simply needs to be activated. Skills of self-evaluation is an area that needs to be addressed urgently.

It is vitally important that the revised PSC describes how teachers may capitalize on the *curiosity, knowledge, experience and agency of their pupils* in order to foster the development of learner autonomy that will allow their pupils to *act independently and to make choices.* Teachers are professional educators. They are also learners and have agency. They need the freedom to exercise their autonomous learning skills to allow them create classrooms where openness and flexibility allow for the co-creation of new knowledge and approaches with their pupils that will benefit all learners in the room. Many teachers know this and implement such learning environments. However, it is important that as professional educators they are empowered to make decisions that will benefit the learning of all pupils in their care. This includes the freedom to decide where to use an integrated approach to learning. This is not a decision that should be left to either the age of the learner or the curriculum. Teachers bring their own experience, knowledge, agency and autonomous learning skills to their professional lives. Where teachers see possibilities for integrated learning, at whatever age or stage of development their pupils are at, they need the freedom to make these decisions in the best interests of their pupils. Pathways and procedures are necessary for learning. However, the leap of creativity that teachers want to see happening in their pupils' learning must often depart from the known, the secure, if new ways and paths are to be developed.

Language (p.13):

As well as *exposure to a wide variety of texts* it is important that pupils are encouraged to produce their own texts in the language of schooling; dual language texts in curricular languages/ home languages and the language of schooling.

Written expression encourages children to make decisions regarding their own learning. It supports their explorations in relation to how language learning occurs. It also makes them more discerning in relation to their own attributes and develops the capacity for self-assessment. In so doing, it satisfies a specific aim of the primary school curriculum which seeks to enable learners to develop skills that allow them to learn independently (PSC 1999: 34).

Writing and Speaking are expressive/ productive skills of language learning. Support of the written word, aids spoken language learning and vice versa. Neither skill should be neglected in the pursuit of proficient language learning whether that language is the language of schooling, curricular language, or home language. Writing plays an essential role in the development of language proficiency. Writing can be used for the purposes of dialogue and it is also needed for clarification of thought. This, in turn, provides a focus for additional reflection which enables the conscious planning, monitoring and evaluating involved in communicative tasks.

"When an experienced primary school teacher was asked about the relation between speaking and writing she said:
A number of years ago if you had asked me about this I would have had a different answer because I would have said … written work, no, the oral is the most important …. [But now] I think that if they form their thoughts with pen and paper first, it gives them the confidence then to go and speak. So at home they would put together their three or their thirty-three or whatever number of sentences, and the next day they don't open the copybook, I just ask the question or say tell me the story, tell me about …, and because they've already gone through that process of putting it together they then have that bank of ideas rather than just standing up and going … I can't think. So the thinking is done with pen and paper and then the speaking is done without any reference to any written word and I do think that really helps to gain confidence going forward." (Little & Kirwan 2019: 124).[3]

Writing (pp. 8, 10) … *engaging purposefully in the creation of different text types… Reflection and collaboration* (p. 22) are supported by writing. Writing allows time for reflection and the consideration of possibilities.

There can be an assumption that we have thoughts which we then put in writing. This can happen but Clark (1997) has proposed that there are certain kinds of thinking that cannot happen except through writing. He uses the following to illustrate what he means:

If a tree is seen growing on an island, which do you suppose came first? It is natural (and usually correct) to assume that the island provided the fertile soil in which a lucky seed came to rest. Mangrove forests, however, constitute a revealing exception to this general rule. The Mangrove grows from a floating seed which establishes itself in the water, rooting in shallow mud flats. The seedling sends complex vertical roots through the surface of the water, culminating in what looks to all intents and purposes like a small tree posing on stilts. The complex system of aerial roots, however, soon traps floating soil, weed and debris. After a time, the accumulation of trapped matter forms a small island. As more time passes, the island grows larger and larger. A growing mass of such islands can eventually merge, effectively extending the shoreline out to the trees! Throughout this process, and despite our prior intuitions, it is the land which is progressively built by the trees (Clark, A. 1997: 207).[4]

In her book *Children's Minds*, Donaldson makes the point that the 'features of the written word which encourage awareness of language may also encourage awareness of one's own thinking and be relevant to the development of intellectual self-control, with incalculable consequences for the development of the kinds of thinking which are characteristic of logic, mathematics and the sciences' (Donaldson, 1978: 93-95).[5]

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[3] Little, D. and Kirwan, D. (2019) *Engaging with Linguistic Diversity: A Study of Inclusion in an Irish Primary School.* Bloomsbury Academic.

[4] Clark, A. (1997) *Being there: Putting Brain, Body and World Together Again*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

[5] Donaldson, M. (1978) *Children's Minds.* London: Fontana

Provision is made for the inclusion of *Wellbeing* with specific mention of the time allocation for this area to be included in Social and Environmental Education, Arts Education and flexible time (p. 16). When 'computer education' was initially introduced, it was treated as a separate topic rather than being seen as a tool to aid learning of all kinds. Is wellbeing not something that should pervade the ambiance of the classroom, school community, building and environs, and subject/topic areas?

Thank you for the opportunity to engage with you in this consultation process and congratulations on the work achieved to date.

We remain willing to collaborate in this important process and look forward to the publication of the next stage of this Primary Curriculum Framework.

Best wishes to all in NCCA and the educational partners involved in this venture,
The One Voice for Languages Executive Committee.

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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;
    o Language
    o Mathematics, Science and Technology Education
    o Wellbeing
    o Social and Environmental Education
    o 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.

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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.

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Thank you for your submission.

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