

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

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Organisation submission details

Name	
Position	
Organisation	
Date	
E-mail	

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Yes

No

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

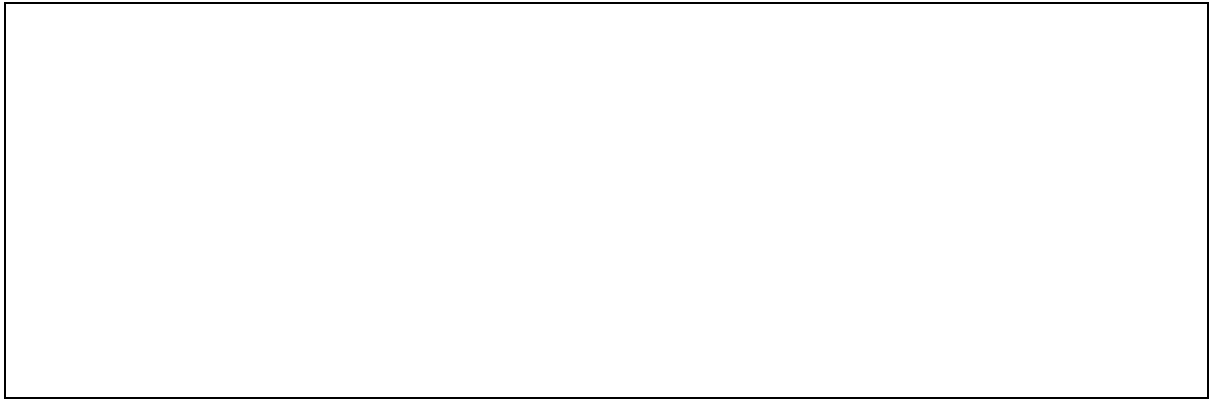
The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured to align with the six key messages related to the framework. Each message is summarised as a support for you in working on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

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Section 1

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

While welcoming the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and much of the developments it proposes, I think it would benefit from an articulation of an anthropology of the person. There seems to be a significant shift from the anthropology explicit in the 1999 curriculum, which includes the spiritual, moral and religious dimensions of the child. Although expressions of these dimensions vary greatly among individuals and communities, it is important to accept, nurture and celebrate them. According to Census 2016, 87% of the population in Ireland (Republic of) identifies with a religious tradition. It is important that any new curriculum responds to this reality, for instance in its understanding of and provision for Wellbeing and for Religious Education.



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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.

This proposal is welcome and the three bulleted principles outlined contribute towards a comprehensive view of compulsory education in Ireland. However, there is an apparent disconnect in curriculum connections where Religious Education (RE) is concerned. Whereas the subject RE clearly exists in the *Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)*, detailed by the *Junior Cycle Religious Education Specification (2019)*, it is not listed as one of the primary curriculum areas and subjects in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (p.11)*. It is very unclear what the column entitled Religious/Ethical/Multi-Belief Education – Patron’s Programme (Figure 3 p.11) refers to or its place in the draft curriculum.

There is also very little articulation in the draft curriculum of the role of the parent, which seems at odds with the third bulleted principle listed above.

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.

I am concerned that the draft curriculum will ‘focus on developing children’s . . . dispositions, values and attitudes’ without detailing what dispositions, values and attitudes it is referring to, or the rationale for same. It might be helpful if the draft curriculum connected a deep anthropological understanding of the person, and what it means to live a good life, to the values and attitudes it hopes to develop. An articulation of the legal and moral context might also help. For instance, constitutionally the parent is the primary educator of the child. Education is formational (by design or default) and it begins at home.

Second, it lacks a rationale for the introduction of Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, when there is already a subject of Religious Education (RE) in the curriculum (1999). These appear to cover much of the same terrain. It is unclear what the draft curriculum is proposing in this regard. Having two similar programmes running parallel appears confusing and problematic for schools, children and their parents. A clarification that, as recommended by the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics is for children who opt out of RE, would be helpful.

Third, the understanding of Wellbeing as PE and SPHE is limited, and at odds with the more holistic understanding of wellbeing in the Junior Cycle and in the field of research. Internationally, wellbeing is understood as encompassing *all* dimensions of the person; it can be nurtured across *all* aspects of the curriculum (both formal and informal). This understanding is in keeping with the literature in the field, for instance,

- Meehan, Amalee. 2019. Wellbeing in the Irish Junior Cycle: the potential of Religious Education. Irish Educational Studies, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2019.1656100>
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). 2017a. Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle. Dublin: NCCA
- O’Brien, Maeve and Andrew O’Shea. 2017. *A Human Development (PSP) Framework: For Orienting Education and Schools in the Space of Wellbeing*. Dublin: NCCA <https://www.ncca.ie/media/2488/a-human-development-framework-psp.pdf>

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.

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- 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.

There is a difficulty with the conception of wellbeing as a distinct curricular area. The research shows that every aspect of education, at its best, can foster wellbeing. It is important to note the strong research base identifying a direct correlation between participating in a religious tradition and wellbeing, for instance

- Meehan, A. (2020). Religion as a Source of Well-Being: Implications for Second-Level School Programs in Ireland and Beyond, *Religious Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2020.1789416>
- PEW Research Center. (2019). *Religion’s Relationship to Happiness, Civic Engagement and Health Around the World*. <http://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/01/Wellbeing-report-1-25-19-FULL-REPORT-FOR-WEB.pdf>
- Spencer, Nick, Gillian Madden, Clare Purtill, and Joseph Ewing. 2016. *Religion and Well-Being: Assessing the Evidence*. London: Theos.
- Ying, C. & VanderWeele, T.J. (2018). ‘Associations of Religious Upbringing With Subsequent Health and Well-Being, From Adolescence to Young Adulthood: An Outcome-Wide Analysis’ in *American Journal of Epidemiology*, Vol 187, No 11, pp.2355-2364. See: <https://academic.oup.com/aje/article/187/11/2355/5094534>
- Ying, C., Koh, H., Kawachi, I., Bottichelli, M. and VanderWeele, T. (2020) ‘Religious service attendance and deaths related to drugs, alcohol, and suicide among US health care professionals’, *Jama Psychiatry* July 77(7) 737-744 available: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.0175

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.

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- 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.

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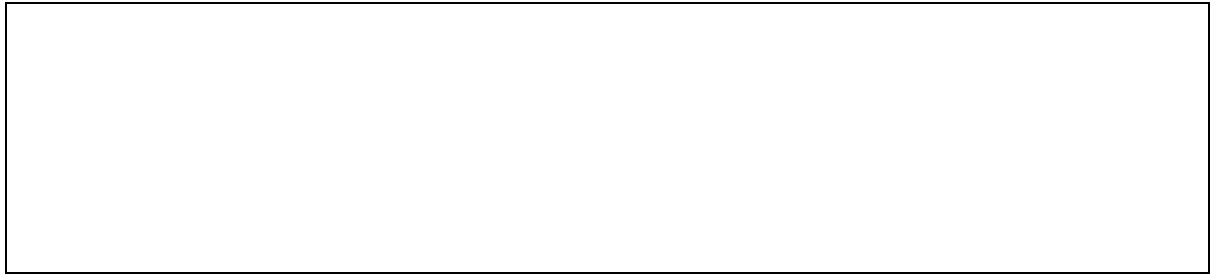
- Increased use of active methodologies for teaching and learning.
- Improved attainment levels in reading, mathematics and science as evidenced in national and international assessments.

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.

While welcoming the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and much of the developments it encompasses, it seems impoverished by the shift in anthropological understanding explicit in the 1999 curriculum. The 1999 curriculum includes the spiritual, moral and religious dimensions of the child. Although expressions of these dimensions vary greatly among individuals and communities, it is important to accept, nurture and celebrate them. According to Census 2016, 87% of the population in Ireland (Republic of) identifies with a religious tradition. It is important that any new curriculum responds to this reality, for instance in its understanding of and provision for Wellbeing and for Religious Education.



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Thank you for your submission.

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