

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	Joint submission from: The Council for Education of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, and The Council for Catechetics of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference.
Position	Rev Paul Connell, Executive Secretary, Council for Education, and Mr Patrick Logue, Executive Secretary, Council for Catechetics.
Organisation	Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference Columba Centre, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.
Date	30/12/2020
E-mail	

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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 Yes, we consent.

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*.

We thank the NCCA for this opportunity to engage with the consultation process.

We welcome the review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum.

We agree with the NCCA's assessment that there has been substantial change in Irish classrooms since the publication of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum, both in terms of the diversity of their composition, and in our growing understanding of children's early learning and development.

We welcome the NCCA's statement of commitment to working with patron bodies (p. 2).

In laying out your rationale for this review, you broach a "question about the role of the state in ensuring that education related to the religious and ethical aspects of human development is provided and that respect for all members of society is promoted and nurtured in the process" (p. 2). You then categorise the review as "an opportunity to further consider ... how patrons' programmes can continue to contribute to the child's holistic development in primary schools and whether or not there should be a more extended statement within the redeveloped curriculum about the religious, spiritual and ethical domain" (p. 3).

As representatives of the Catholic patron bodies, we take this opportunity to clearly restate our support for the on-going inclusion of the 'religious and ethical' component in the curriculum; we would like to see the consistent inclusion of "spiritual" in this phrase, and we note our desire for a clear statement in any redeveloped framework to uphold the status of the patron's programme in the "religious, spiritual and ethical domain." We consider this to be central to the holistic development of any child in a Catholic ethos school.

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.)

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- 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 broadly support moves towards meaningful assessment to enhance teaching and learning, and towards structures that utilise curricular areas rather than differentiated subjects for classes prior to third class.

We consider that the religious, spiritual and ethical dimensions of education, while the focus of a patron’s programme in Religious Education, or other such programme, are also present in and particularly enriching across the various other curriculum areas. In 2017, the Irish Catholic Bishops, in a submission to the NCCA, made the point that “It would be difficult to find an educator who would suggest that children’s spiritual and moral education is confined to Religious Education in any school or at any level. For example, children’s spirituality is enhanced through poetry, drama, literature, art, dance and music, to name but a few” (*Religious Education at the Heart of our Primary Schools*, p. 22).

We very much welcome the inclusion of spiritual health under the *Fostering wellbeing* heading as one of the key competencies of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (p. 8), and the further recognition of the importance of the spiritual dimension of living (p. 9), and again in Table 2 (p. 10).

However, the Draft Curriculum Framework outlines the *Curriculum areas and subjects* in Figure 3 on page 11. The text states that there will be “five broad curriculum areas”, and lists them as:

1. Language
2. Mathematics, Science and Technology Education
3. Wellbeing
4. Arts Education
5. Social and Environmental Education

It continues: “In addition to the five areas above, school patrons have a legal right to design their own programme in accordance with the ethos of their school. This programme forms part of children’s learning experience in primary schools.”

In our view, it would be much better if the document text on page 11 is amended to reflect the six areas laid out in the coloured diagram on the same page, to list the patron's programme as a sixth and equally significant component of 'curriculum areas and subjects'. It could then be noted that the sixth areas - Religious, Spiritual, Ethical Education - is the legal responsibility of the school patrons. We believe that its exclusion from the text leaves open the possibility of interpretation as a diminishment of relevance or import. At the very least, this discrepancy between diagram and text causes confusion as to whether there are five broad curriculum areas, or six (as portrayed also on pages 13-14), and we fail to see any need to separate the patron's programme from the other curriculum areas in this way. We suggest the simple addition of the following line to the list: "6. Religious, Spiritual, Ethical Education – Patron's Programme (designed by the school patron.)"

We further note here a move away from the earlier language of 'Religious, Spiritual, Ethical Education', towards 'Religious/Ethical/Multi-belief Education – Patron's Programme.' The former is perhaps more helpful, keeping to general terms rather than naming any particular programme.

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.

We understand that the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework envisages *Fostering Wellbeing* as a key competency which includes the fostering of spiritual health (p. 8), the recognition of the spiritual dimension of living, and the exploration of the life’s meaning (p. 9). This is depicted on page 11 as “Social, Personal and Values Education”, and expanded upon on pages 11-12 as encouragement “to value what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in the local and wider contexts. Wellbeing provides structured opportunities to be as physically and emotionally well and healthy as they can be ... Wellbeing also supports children to value positive and healthy relationships with others that include acquiring an understanding of human sexuality that is balanced and connected with the relational and emotional aspects.”

We have a difficulty with the stand-alone presentation of Wellbeing in this context, separate and distinct from any reference to the Patron’s Programme on Religious/Ethical/Multi-belief Education. In Catholic schools, the curriculum is always thought through the lense of the ethos of the patron body. This necessitates clear linkage between the Patron’s Programme and the *values* component of Social, Personal and Values Education. Otherwise, questions will surely arise as to *what values* are to be supported and promoted in Wellbeing. The maintenance of a consistent

approach to the characteristic spirit of any school requires that its particular ethos be respected across all curricular areas and subjects, and is clearly stated to do so. This same principle applies in Social and Environmental Education, where we acknowledge that there will be significant overlap with any Patron's Programme on topics like social justice, climate action and sustainability. It is similarly important that the characteristic spirit of the school remains the point of reference for these value teachings.

In relation to time allocation, the tables beginning on page 16 propose to allocate 2 hours per week to the patron's programme. This is not satisfactory; where our earlier comments addressed the possible appearance of an erosion of the status of the patron's programme, this move from 2½ to 2 actualizes and quantifies it. Most of our schools prefer to schedule 30 minutes per day to the patron's programme, and to further reduce the duration of each session is problematic. We strongly disagree with this proposal, and we request that 2½ hours per week be maintained. Otherwise, a perception emerges that Wellbeing is superseding the patron body's Religious Education content, rather than complementing it, and *vice versa*.

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 or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at dpo@ncca.ie.

Thank you for your submission.

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