

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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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).

Alcohol Action Ireland (AAI) was established in 2003 and is the national charity for alcohol-related issues. We are an independent voice for advocacy and policy change, working to reduce levels of alcohol harm in Ireland and improve public health, safety and wellbeing.

Silent Voices, an initiative of Alcohol Action Ireland, seeks to highlight the harm caused by parental alcohol misuse (PAM) and its impact across the lifespan.

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.

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Section 1

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

Alcohol Action Ireland welcomes the proposed new primary curriculum framework and in particular the aim of fostering well-being and recognising that children must have healthy relationships with themselves, their peers, their family and the wider world in order to achieve their full potential.

As noted in the national wellbeing for primary school [guidelines](#), mental health should permeate all aspects of school life and learning. Educators are very well placed to identify children experiencing problems in their young lives. As our understanding of how trauma in childhood deepens, it becomes ever more important that children are nurtured to garner coping skills they may need to deal with issues that arise in their home lives. Growing up in a home with parental alcohol misuse has been recognised internationally as an adverse childhood experience for over 20 years, and the physical and mental consequences of parental alcohol misuse have also been studied. Studies have found that there is a serious risk that parents with alcohol problems may neglect their children. Such neglect can have a negative impact on children's emotional and physical development and education, and put them at risk of physical and sexual abuse.

In some cases, school is the only protective factor for children and it is here they must learn coping skills and have reliable adults who can nurture their potential and build their resilience. We believe that teachers, especially those delivering Social Personal and Health Education curriculum (SPHE) should be trauma-informed and that training in relation to Adverse Children Experiences should be examined at teacher training level, and at all levels of professional development – from teachers to principals to education welfare officers. Ireland must work towards a model of trauma-informed schools in order to recognise and adequately deal with the issues that stem from adversity in childhood.

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.

AAI welcomes the principles outlined above. If implemented, this framework will allow that schools and teachers are open to innovative research-based concepts and resources, and that they can not only make contemporaneous decisions based on best practice and new research, but also share their knowledge across the school system.

Educators are well placed to identify children experiencing parental alcohol use, also known as hidden harm. The provision of specific training in relation to Adverse Children Experiences should be examined at teacher training level, and at all levels of professional development – from teachers to principals to education welfare officers. The Social Personal and Health Education curriculum (SPHE) provides educators with a suitable opportunity to raise awareness amongst students about this issue. Ireland must work towards a model of trauma-informed schools and communities so that the burden of identifying, and assisting, this cohort does not fall onto any one professional group. Schools should seek to strengthen its collaboration with Tusla and the Gardai to identify a child who might be at risk of hidden harm.

We would further recommend the establishment of a central well-resourced hub where teachers can draw best practice information and resources from, like for example the [Schools in Mind](#) initiative in the UK. Practical assistance such as this is vital for teachers in tapping into best practice

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and the most up to date resources. The NGO sector has a wealth of knowledge around social and emotional issues that young people may face and is more than willing to lend a hand where possible and appropriate.

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.

n/a

Emerging priorities for children’s learning

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

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- 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.

Positive mental health and well-being enables young people to lead fulfilling lives. Teachers, too, must feel supported, and must be able to recognise and deal with issues that arise in children’s lives while they attend school. AAI acknowledges the government’s commitment to and investment in children and families and prevention and early intervention. As well as continuing this work, there is a real need to develop properly funded and resourced supports for children experiencing parental alcohol misuse. It must also be ensured that children, as an individual right, can access services even where parents are not in treatment. Educators are often best placed to identify young people in need of assistance. The Social Personal and Health Education curriculum (SPHE) provides teachers with a suitable opportunity to raise awareness amongst students about matters that may cause them, their families and their peers concerns. It is likely that issues will arise while young people are learning skills around social and emotional development. Schools therefore should have access to external psychology supports when a child does require further assistance. In terms of parental alcohol misuse, children from such families are often afraid of breaking the family secret for fear that they themselves will get into trouble or that their parents will. So any adverse childhood experience which is internal to the family such as PAM, domestic abuse etc, presents additional and particular challenges for a child in difficulty.

AAI strongly supports the national policy vision outlined in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014), “for Ireland to be one of the best small countries

in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future”.

In order that this commitment is a reality, mechanisms must be in place to support young people to have their voices heard in relation to matters affecting them. Schools in particular should have child-friendly policies and information about their rights and avenues for having their voices heard should be in place.

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.

n/a

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.

AAI welcomes the focus on well-being in the proposed new curriculum, and is in particular pleased that the redeveloped curriculum will: 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. In order that these aims are achieved, teachers will require support and training. We would strongly encourage the department of education to set up a resource hub to keep schools up to date with current research taking place in relation to young people's wellbeing and mental health. The initiative would also encourage and foster collaboration between education, academia and the NGO sector.

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.

n/a

Data Protection

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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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