

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

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Position	
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Yes

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

This submission is an individual submission by Dr Dorothy Morrissey, who is a member of the Department of Arts Education and Physical Education, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

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*.

I welcome the following dimensions of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*:

- The overall vision, principles and key competencies identified therein
- The acknowledgment of schools and teachers as curriculum makers
- The repeated acknowledgment of ‘teachers as committed, skilful and agentic professionals’ (p.5) who are ‘capable of exercising professional judgment in response to individual learning needs in a variety of contexts’ (p.5)
- The primacy given to the role of children as agents in their own learning
- That subject areas are not specifically defined at stages 1 and 2, which builds on Aistear and reflects young children’s holistic world view. It is heartening that the need to ‘provide important foundations towards more subject-based learning’ (p.11) at these stages is also acknowledged
- A flexible approach to timetabling which takes cognisance of the need to provide children with access to a broad and balanced curriculum
- Attention to progression between early childhood education settings and primary schools and between primary schools and secondary schools as well as attention to progression from stage to stage within the primary school
- The specification of broad learning outcomes outlining progression from stage to stage and the recognition of the need for local interpretation by teachers so as to ‘allow for variations in children’s learning needs’ (p.21)
- The intention to present learning outcomes for the four stages side by side so that progression from stage to stage is clearly evident. This addresses one of the problems with the previous curriculum
- The inclusion of dance, film and digital media as part of the arts education curriculum in stages three and four

Some recommendations

- The allocation of specific time for PE so that time spent on physical activity is not subsumed by a more general focus on wellbeing
- That two hours per week be specifically allocated for PE as an antidote to the amount of time children are spending on screens outside of school hours and to increased obesity levels among children (as adults into the future)

Some concerns

- Many schools still do not have adequate facilities for PE and dance activities
- The provision of required CPD for teachers

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.

As outlined in section one, I welcome the recognition of the importance of agency and flexibility in schools. I also welcome the recognition of teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism in the enactment of curriculum in local contexts. However, in the context of a global culture of accountability and performativity, the last two decades have seen the incremental erosion of agency and flexibility in Ireland's primary schools. This is perhaps best exemplified in the introduction of incidental inspections and the publication of school inspection reports. While the recognition of the importance of teacher agency in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* is heartening, it is important to remember that any curriculum is nested not just in the broader educational context but in broader cultural and global contexts as well. So, if the flexibility and agency on which this redeveloped curriculum are predicated are to become realities, they need to be reclaimed from the ground up, by teachers (with the support of other key players).

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.

As indicated in section one, I welcome the focus on making curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools. It might be helpful if there was greater alignment with the *Framework for Junior Cycle* in relation to principles, key competencies and key skills e.g. ‘learning to be a learner’ is identified as a key competency in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* while ‘learning to learn’ is identified as one of the principles underpinning the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.

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 welcome the identification of seven key competencies which are relevant to children’s lives in the 21st century. I welcome the proposal too that these competencies will be ‘embedded across all curriculum areas and subjects from junior infants to sixth class through the learning outcomes’ (p.7). As iterated in section one, the increased emphasis on PE needs to be reflected in the specification of curriculum time for PE and in the provision of adequate facilities for PE in all schools.

Many teachers will not have the requisite skills to teach modern languages nor will they have the requisite digital skills to enable children to engage meaningfully with digital technologies. Careful consideration will need to be given to the ways in which these new areas are introduced: Will all teachers be expected to teach them? If so, how will teachers be equipped with the necessary skills? How will they be supported by teachers with specialist skills in these areas?

I welcome the broader approach to arts education but, have a number of concerns here too, which are linked to the questions posed above. It is well documented internationally, that primary teachers lack confidence and expertise when it comes to the arts. It is also well documented that arts education is most effective when it is led by teachers with confidence and expertise in the

arts (not by outside agents). So, what of modern language and digital technologies? Does the same principle apply?

If, as documented internationally, teachers lack discipline specific expertise in the arts, what are the implications for an integrated arts curriculum at stages one and two? There is a tendency to equate role play and socio-dramatic play with drama. Drama, however, is an art form with its own 'knowledge, concepts, skills and intrinsic value' (p.13). So, while role play and socio-dramatic play may be used in drama, they do not constitute drama *per se*. As stated in Aistear, 'Socio-dramatic play involves children playing with other children and/or adults. It provides opportunities for children to make friends, to negotiate with others, and to develop their communication skills' (p.54).

In the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, it is stated that:

Broad learning outcomes in Arts Education would continue to support learning in visual arts, music and drama, as well as supporting other aspects of arts education such as dance, film and digital media, and enabling schools to engage with local, national and international initiatives and opportunities. The learning outcomes would also support integrated learning experiences in stages 1-2. While disciplines within Arts Education have a common creative process and share transferable skills, each has its own knowledge, concepts and skills. Subject-specific learning outcomes in stages 3-4 alongside a set of broader outcomes overarching the subjects, would ensure children experience a broad and balanced Arts Education (p.11)

The above statement is, however, premised on the assumption that teachers have discipline specific expertise in the arts, but many do not. On one level, I welcome the notion of engaging with local, national and international initiatives and opportunities in the arts but I am also cognisant that such initiatives are most effective when they can be sustained and developed by teachers after the artists have left. This assumes that teachers have the discipline expertise to support progression in the arts and many do not. My concern in all of this is that outside agencies will be used to provide arts experiences for schools but that these will not be capitalised on to support progression in children's learning. For arts education to be effective, teachers with discipline expertise (who have the skills to plan for progression) need to be deployed to support their colleagues. All of these points also apply to PE and could well be issues when it comes to modern languages and digital technologies as well.

The current drama curriculum with its focus on ‘exploring feelings, knowledge and ideas leading to understanding’ is out of kilter with the rest of the arts education curriculum. It is, moreover, out of kilter with drama curricula internationally and with the recommendations on arts education put forward by UNESCO’s (2006) *Road map for arts education*. In all of these documents, the focus is on developing children’s discipline specific knowledge and skills through engagement in the following processes:

- Making or creating art
- Performing or presenting art
- Receiving or responding to works of art

Any new curriculum in drama needs to take the above into account. The alignment of drama with the rest of the arts would also enable the development of a more unified approach to the arts education curriculum at stages one and two.

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.

I am in broad agreement with the structure and presentation of the curriculum. See comments on drama in the previous section.

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.

I am in broad agreement with all of the above. In relation to teachers' professional judgement, see earlier comments on the need to equip teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills and to support progression in children's learning.

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.

The issue of curriculum overload has been very demoralising for teachers. When it comes to the arts, I think teachers should be encouraged to teach some of the arts all of the time. This would relieve any pressure to teach all of the arts all of the time. Teachers might even focus on particular art forms in particular classes if flexibility was provided to do so.

All extant strategies, initiatives and programmes need to be considered in terms of the ways in which they support the progression of children’s learning (linked to learning outcomes) and teachers need to be equipped with the skills to build on these initiatives after they have ended.

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Thank you for your submission.

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