



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment



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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Position	Climate Action Officer (Green-Schools)
Organisation	Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce
Date	02/02/2022
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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).

The Environmental Education Unit (EEU) of An Taisce is responsible for coordinating Ireland's most successful environmental programmes and prestigious award schemes for over twenty years. The EEU is the National Operator for all international programmes of the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) including Young Reporters for the Environment, Learning About Forests and of course Green-Schools, which is currently in operation across 93% of Irish schools. The EEU also operates several national programmes including Climate Ambassador, Neat Streets, Clean Coasts, National Spring Clean and Green Campus.

The Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) is partnered with some of the world's foremost organisations including UNEP, Earth Charter and UNWTO. FEE seeks to promote environmental education by carrying out campaigns and improving awareness. FEE is also recognised by UNESCO as a world-leader in Education for Sustainable Development.

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.

Section 1

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

The Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce would like to see a greater emphasis placed on outdoor learning, connection to nature and climate literacy in the new Primary Curriculum Framework. This is an incredible opportunity for Ireland to lead the way in world-class environmental education, creating active global citizens that are connected and empowered for decades to come.

Green-Schools organised a workshop upon request from several primary teachers entitled 'Centring climate action in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework'. It took place on Wednesday 19th January 2022. 33 teachers registered and 20 participated. The keynote speech was given by Won Jung BYUN, a Senior Project Officer in the Education for Sustainable Development Section at UNESCO. Won presented the core recommendations from the report '[Learn for our planet](#)' and provided several best practice examples of an ESD curriculum to inspire our discussions. UNESCO has stated that by 2025, climate change education should be a core curriculum component in every country in the world.

Action 36 in Ireland's [Climate Action Plan](#) states that the National Dialogue for Climate Action will "build climate literacy into the national education system at **primary** and secondary levels, and in adult education programmes with our partners in the Department of Education and Skills, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)". If this is to be achieved, the NCCA needs to be a key stakeholder and climate needs to feature prominently in the new primary curriculum.

Please find a summary below of the teachers' overall response to the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework.

"Overall, the competencies are positive and holistic, although the omission of any emphasis on connection with the natural world is potentially catastrophic. I firmly believe that connecting children emotionally and cognitively to the natural world is essential before we call upon them to take action on climate and biodiversity loss. Education must be in, for and about the environment beginning with the local. There is little/no recognition given to the climate and biodiversity crisis which [will] undoubtedly impact the children who are the focus of this curriculum. Its omission is incredibly worrying".

"I'm encouraged by the shift to a competencies-based approach and the focus on recognising teachers as agentic professionals best placed to make key decisions. However, I'm concerned about the plan to introduce several additional subject areas and think there's tension between the 'curriculum areas' and the time allocations".

"I would welcome an integrated approach for teaching, incorporating environmental science and engineering. We need to heighten the awareness of climate change".

“Very disappointed that Environmental Education is dropped from the curriculum in Key Stage 3 and 4 [to be replaced by an apparent sole focus on History and Geography]. Overall, [there is] a real missed opportunity to make our relationship to the natural world and our ecological citizenship central to the curriculum”.

[I would suggest] “replacing 'digital learning skills' with ‘connecting with the natural world’ or ‘connecting sustainably with the natural world’”.

“Disappointing. There is no major change with regard to this proposed new curriculum. It is more tinkering around the edges rather than providing a space to put the climate/environmental/biodiversity emergency at the heart of education”.

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.

Overall, teachers were in favour of much more flexible time, and promoting a thematic approach to learning and exploration, rather than subject driven timing. When asked to allocate the times themselves, they varied greatly from all 3 options proposed in the current Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. It was also noted that all time allocations provided in the Draft Framework present very little variation or flexibility.

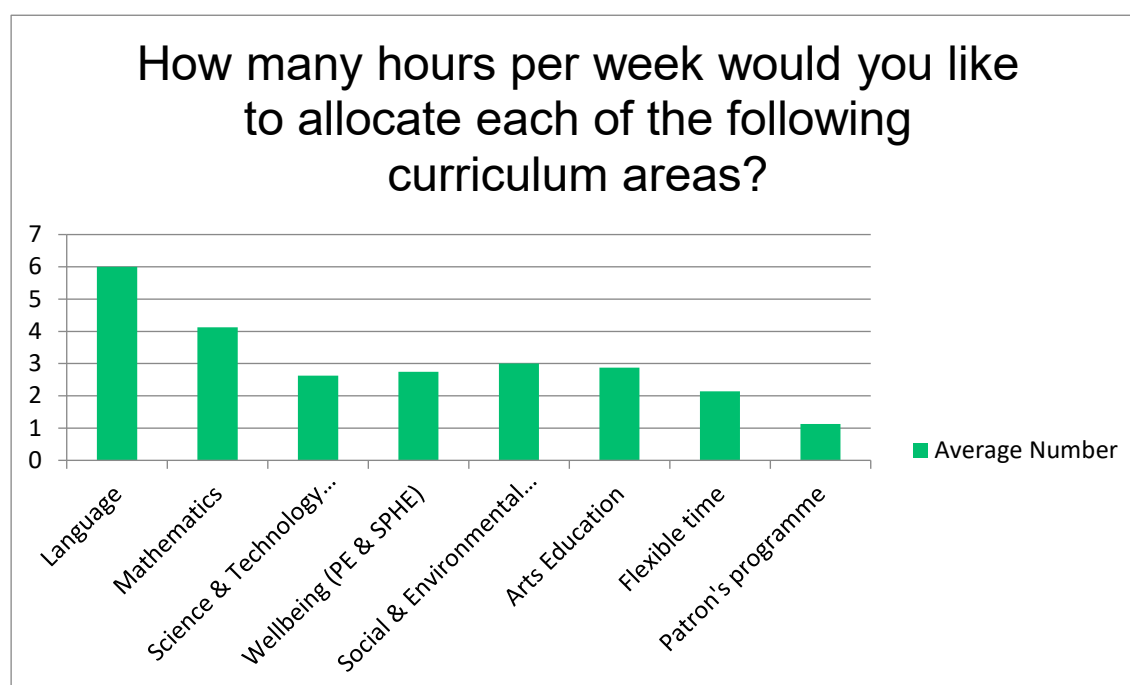


Table 1: Teachers were asked to allocate a number of hours to each of the curriculum areas.

On average, teachers wanted at least 2 flexible hours per week, with 3 hours for Arts and 3 hours for Social and Environmental Education. They also requested 2 hours 45 minutes for Wellbeing and 2 hours 30 minutes for Science and Technology. Maths was allocated 4 hours and Languages were given 6 hours. The Patron's Programme was given an average of 1 hour 15 minutes per week. Please see some additional comments from teachers below.

"In relation to time allocations, all time except literacy and mathematics should be flexible and Ethics and Beliefs should replace patron's time".

"I really have a difficulty with time allocation and believe in a holistic and thematic approach to teaching and learning".

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 we were under time constraints, this area was not discussed.

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.

Green-Schools asked teachers to rank the seven key competencies in order of importance. They were also requested to rank the emerging priorities in order of importance. Teachers were then asked what other emerging priorities they would like to see added to the Primary Curriculum Framework. Please see the results below.

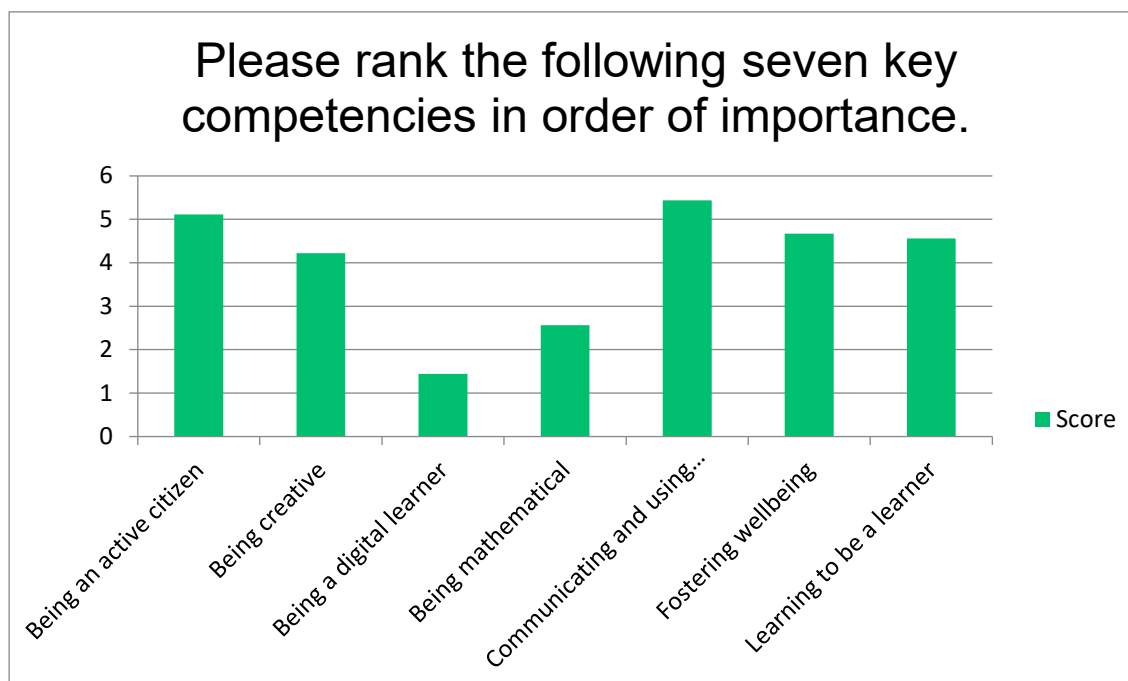


Table 2: Teachers were asked to rank the seven key competencies in order of importance.

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Unsurprisingly, Communicating and using language ranked first, closely followed by Being an active citizen, Fostering wellbeing, Learning to be a learner and Being creative. Please see additional comments from teachers below.

“I would suggest that the inclusion of 'becoming a digital learner' is misguided, rather digital learning skills should be seen as a methodology by which one becomes an active citizen, more creative, develops language etc”.

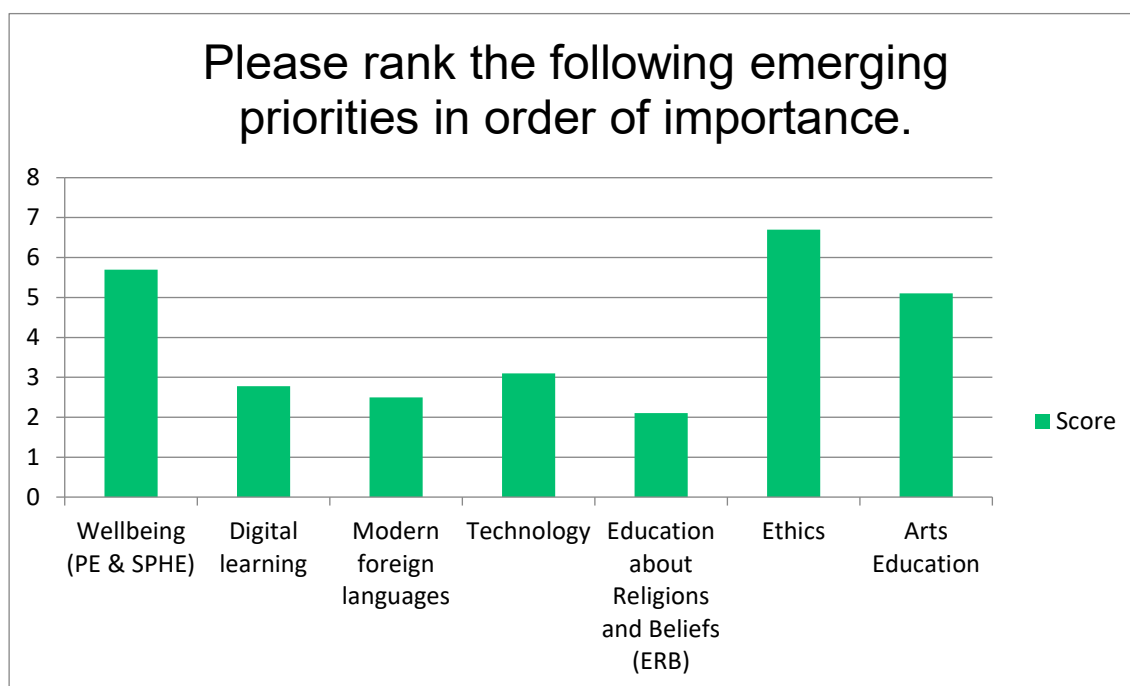


Table 3: Teachers were asked to rank the emerging priorities in order of importance.

Interestingly, Ethics ranked by far the highest, followed by Wellbeing and then Arts. Education about Religions and Beliefs ranked lowest. Teachers were also asked if there were any other emerging priorities, they would like to see in the new Curriculum Framework. Please see the valuable additional comments from teachers below.

“In light of the present crisis an emphasis on ethics and values and ecological citizenship is essential”.

“Climate Action, Environmental Awareness and Sustainability”.

“Climate education”.

“Climate and biodiversity”.

“Climate action and sustainability”.

“Outdoor Learning; learning in, about and for the environment, focussing initially, for the first four years at least on the local environment”.

“Focus on nature, growing food and a low carbon lifestyle”.

“Nature”.

“I'd like to see a greater focus on facilitating children to develop a relationship with nature through the development of toolkits and CPD for teachers that would encourage outdoor learning and the use of nature pedagogy particularly in the junior classes”.

“Ethics, this shouldn't depend on the patron's programme. MUCH greater emphasis needs to be put on integration, which would allow teachers time to explore a theme or concept with a much greater period of time for in depth exploration and development of competencies”.

“Global citizenship education incorporating ESD, HRE, STEM, SESE”.

“Global Citizenship Education”.

“Civics and society - education around becoming a responsible citizen and getting involved in local community projects”.

“Emphasis on the everyday - what a person can do to make good sustainable choices that do not negatively impact others and the environment”.

“Civics”.

“Civics education”.

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 pleased with the 5 Broad Curriculum areas to key stage 1-2 but more concerned about the subject areas in key stage 3 and 4. Climate Action needs to be identified as a subject area in e.g. environmental education [or climate literacy]"

"In relation to time allocations, all time except literacy and mathematics should be flexible and Ethics and Beliefs should replace patron's time"

"Very disappointed that Environmental Education is dropped from the curriculum in Key Stage 3 and 4 [to be replaced by a subject focus on History and Geography]. Overall, [there is] a real missed opportunity to make our relationship to the natural world and our ecological citizenship central to the curriculum"

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Green-Schools would like to propose that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) or Climate Change/Climate Justice/Climate Action forms its own core subject alongside History and Geography in 3rd-6th Class. Please see the teachers' responses in the table below.

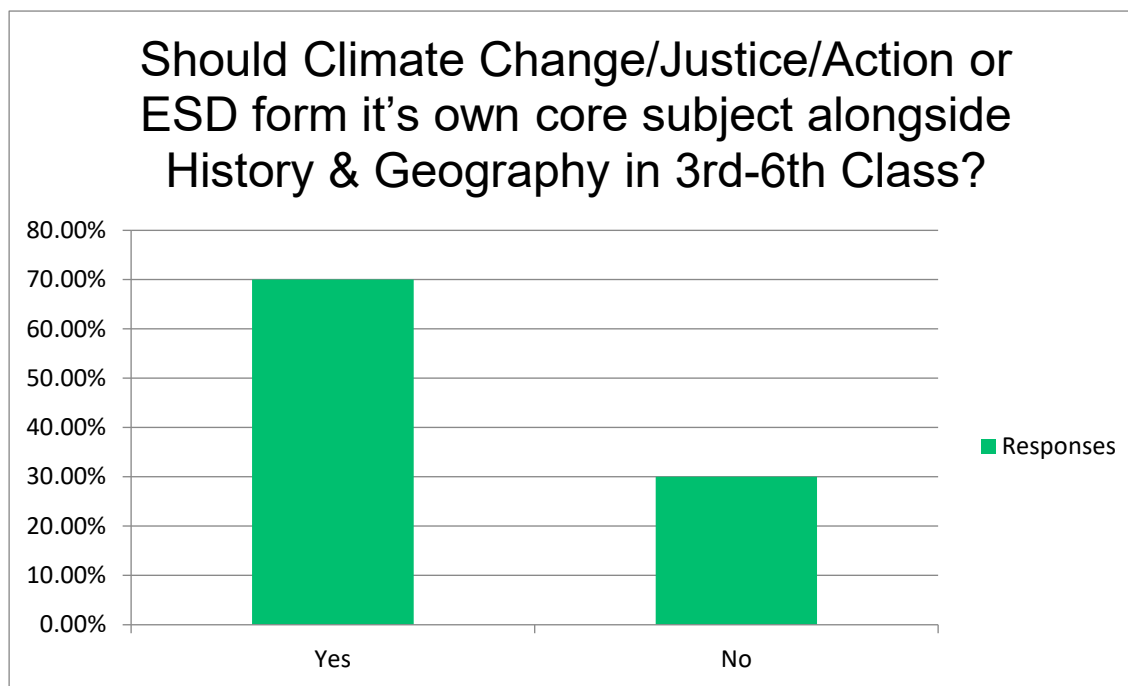


Table 4: Teachers responded yes or no to the question above.

Please see the additional comments from teachers below.

- 'Environmental Education', which could incorporate Climate Change, Climate Justice and Climate Action as well as ESD would be a fantastic subject. Nature Studies would also need to be included through this subject or Science or ideally through both. However, it needs to be more overarching and not necessarily just all covered in one subject. Limiting discussion of Climate Change to one subject is in some ways diminishing its importance.
- Climate change is not just geography, it deserves more time and consideration than a chapter [or two] in a busy SESE book that teachers are trying to get through to meet curriculum and planning expectations.
- While I'd like to see Climate Change and ESD form part of a core requirement I think there's major pressure on the timetable so I think it would be more useful to name it as a key priority and to detail ways of integrating it into Wellbeing, Ethics and Languages.

- I think it should form a core component that underpins all subject areas. I think that it should be named as a core subject for third to sixth.
- I feel that increasing the number of specific subjects will overwhelm the timetable and cause a great deal of unnecessary stress to teachers. However, I do feel that climate/development/global citizen education should be embedded in the curriculum through existing subject areas of geography, science and social studies. SPHE should include an element of social responsibility and global citizenship.
- It must be integrated with History/Geography/STEM/SPHE otherwise it is decontextualised; children need to understand the history, geography, maths, social justice/global and local citizenship elements of Climate action/justice otherwise it is simply an add on!
- It needs to have its own core subject otherwise it will become an add on to other subjects at the discretion of the teacher. If it is a core subject teacher education and in-service education will have to provide training in this area.
- Possibly ESD but there should be a focus on environmental issues and nature rather than just climate change/justice/action. So, a subject called environment and nature might be better than a climate change subject.

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.

As we were under time constraints, this area was not discussed.

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.

Please see the comments from teachers below.

- Huge variety in topics and learning objectives/skill development. Not updated enough to be relevant to today's world.
- The greatest weakness was in the content focused nature of the objectives.
- Strengths [include]: The flexibility it gives teachers, the focus on skills in SESE and other areas (although I think adequate training was not given to allow teachers transfer to a skill rather than content based learning), potential for integration, inclusion of Drama as a standalone subject, the Environmental Awareness and care across Science, Geography and SPHE
- Weaknesses [include]: Separation of subjects rather than exploration of topics, themes and concepts in a more holistic fashion, lack of focus on the local and outdoor learning, absence of play-based learning particularly in older classes, 'Very safe' doesn't address or give a framework to address controversial issues, lack of time allocated to SPHE, sheer amount of content.

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- The curriculum is fragmented and overloaded. It places huge pressure on the teacher and has diminished the autonomy of the teacher. Its strength lay in linking the teaching of Gaeilge and English; a deeper understanding than was previously given to the importance of Arts in education and the importance of STEM. Unfortunately, while re-emphasising many areas of importance it lacked a holistic approach.
- Integrated approach is good but it is way too prescriptive and gives teachers very little autonomy. Very little freedom or elasticity there to allow pupils and teachers to explore interests and no time to reflect on learning.
- It allowed for huge developments in the teaching of maths and literacy. The arts were not given the support needed, especially drama.
- The broad menu-based approach. The overall social constructivist underpinning.
- It was child-centred.

Covid-19

Since the publication of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, Covid-19 has presented a big challenge for schools. Please give your views on the implications of schools' experience of the pandemic for the finalisation of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*.

As we were under time constraints, this area was not discussed.

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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