

# 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](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

### *Individual submission details*

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	

### *Organisation submission details*

<b>Name</b>	Leadership Team PDST
<b>Position</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	PDST
<b>Date</b>	December 2020
<b>E-mail</b>	

Please email your submission to [PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto: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

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.

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# Section 1

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

## Positives

1. The individuality of each child is promoted, encouraged and celebrated.
2. The curriculum recognises that teachers are reflective, competent and capable of exercising professional judgement in response to individual learning needs in a variety of contexts.
3. This framework reflects the dynamic and changing nature of education in Ireland since 1999.
4. The framework recognises the importance of support structures required for schools, teachers and school leaders. Leadership is understood as more than simply the work of the principal.
5. The principles underpinning the curriculum are positive, value based and recognisable to teachers, families and students
6. The curriculum framework is brave and willing to take risks in trusting the teaching profession to be recognised as curriculum developers and best placed to make informed decisions for their pupils

## Challenges

1. While the principles and rationale address school based elements they may not address the systemic issues which are critical to the success and development of such an approach to curriculum. For example, the principles focus on the issues that 'schools need to consider'. There may be additional principles that address systemic issues that will be necessary to address to ensure the success of this curriculum. Some of these challenges are listed below
  - provision of resources to ensure schools can access high quality and school-based continuing professional development
  - pairing teacher agency with a system that has traditionally relied heavily on output regulation
  - development of systems and structures in Irish schools allow for adequate time to address the level of collaboration, professional conversations, planning, reflection, data gathering and ongoing professional learning and evidence based practice for authentic teacher agency to occur.
  - Noting the significant Irish system focus on contact time outlined in the Eurydice reports and the change in culture and practice required to develop a more coherent approach to the development and use of non- contact time
  - Equity for all pupils in ensuring that the diverse nature of learning environments and schools does not facilitate inequitable outcomes for some pupils.

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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.**

**There are significant positives in the move to agency and flexibility.**

- 1. Acknowledgement this is a further reframing of the role of the teacher and the role of the school as curriculum collaborator and developer**
- 2. Capacity to provide meaningful rich learning opportunities, connected with their environment and community**
- 3. While agency and flexibility is a welcome acknowledgement of the professionalism of teachers it must be considered that this may be a new way of working for some. As such, it is important that time is given to teachers to engage in professional dialogue within their own schools and in networks of schools about how this agency will look like in their own school context. Teachers must feel confident and empowered to exercise this agency and flexibility to ensure that the redeveloped curriculum will be for every child resulting in greater opportunities and choice for children's learning.**
- 4. The importance of teachers at all class levels knowing about the work of teachers at each of the levels is important in order that there is a whole school understanding of**

the developmental nature of the curriculum. The danger sometimes is that the curriculum becomes fragmented and perceived as class group based.

There are also significant challenges in the trust placed in schools

1. The progress of pupils is inherently tied to the capacity of the schools to be have collaborative, agentic teachers. This will happen at different rates and different times for individual schools and this has challenges in terms of equity and outcomes for pupils. Appropriate supports are required to ensure that when flexibility and choice are exercised, quality educational experiences are occurring. In addition, other areas of support need to be addressed

- Time to plan, reflect and collaborate together is a critical need in the development of this curriculum. This should not be simple based on hop, good will or on the motivational capacity of school leaders. It should be structural and a norm within the system.
- Communicating effectively with schools and parents about the redeveloped curriculum should be an ongoing process rather than a series of events.
- Providing opportunities for schools to connect and learn from schools with both similar and different contexts in the education system - time for this, hugely important to allow schools and teachers to share learning and understandings of curriculum with one another, provision of and development of communities of practice
- Raising teacher awareness of the possibility of bias in favouring one subject over another when working with curriculum areas or deciding how much time is allocated to subjects on the timetable. While the benefits of flexibility are significant the focus on the use of this time should be on the needs of the pupils rather than the capacity of the teacher.

### **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.

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**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.**

- 1. This is a very positive recognition of the need for cross curricular links but also for cross organisational engagements. Facilitation of cross school links and engagement with these need to be a structural part of school life rather than dependent on the collaborative capacities of individual organisations.**
- 2. Further relationship building between preschool and primary should be fostered and developed. Barriers to this can include the very different professional background of the staff in these environments, the belief that pupils need to reach a threshold of achievement in order to be 'ready' for the primary environment and the lack of ongoing engagements and collaborations between these settings.**
- 3. The issue of traditional homework, its perceived benefits and its impact on families needs to be addressed structurally within the curriculum framework.**
- 4. While the connections between preschool and primary are quite seamless at this stage (Síolta and Aistear), the key messages of the draft primary curriculum framework the long shadow of state exams impacts on the approaches at the upper end of primary. The knowledge of Junior Cycle reform needs to also feedback to primary schools to address the challenges in moving to an content focused or academic focused approach too early in the primary years.**
- 5. Potential for significant input in ITE settings regarding the importance of early years language acquisition**

### **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.

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- 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.**

- 1. The approach to the key competencies is laudable and of great benefit to all.**
- 2. Messages are positive but important that dependency is not only on individual teacher/school’s capacity to provide in these areas. There must be system thinking regarding equity of access to professional development, and to equity of provision for all pupils.**
- 3. The rationale underpinning the draft primary curriculum framework is noteworthy and reflects the learning needs of children for lifelong learning. However, ongoing CPD for teachers over a sustained length of time will be vital if there is to be meaningful learning opportunities for children which focus on developing their skills, dispositions, knowledge, values and attitudes. In addition, principals and other school leaders will need professional development support in effectively leading the teaching and learning in their schools in rolling out the draft curriculum framework.**

### **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

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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.**

- 1. Pedagogical leadership will need to be a recognised area within schools. The building of structure which would allow the influence of teachers with specialist knowledge and skills in these areas will be an important structure in schools. This is an important consideration in the leadership of this curriculum.**
- 2. Importance for all teachers of gaining knowledge and skills across all areas of the curriculum so skills are transferable between age groups and cohorts. The potential divergence between upper and lower primary could lead to a specialisation within the teaching profession which may not support development of skills.**
- 3. The potential for specialisation in discrete curricular areas may also provide the flexibility to harness the skills of individual teachers to impact on many pupils.**
- 4. Consideration from small rural schools where there may be three, four or more classes in a single classroom e.g. if a school has a second, third and fourth class in the one classroom how will the transition between curriculum areas and subject- based learning be managed.**

**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:*

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- 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.**

- 1. The continuum of assessment offers a coherent approach to assessing children's knowledge, dispositions, skills concepts and competencies**
- 2. Critical nature of leadership and learning in this regard. Leadership is for all and the influence and engagement of school leadership in these developments is critical to successful change cycles.**
- 3. There is an opportunity in this redeveloped curriculum to develop and strengthen home school links. However, communication to parents about the nature of the redeveloped curriculum will need to be clear.**

**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.

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*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.**

- 1. Important that these curriculum developments are not framed as a new dawn where old skills are no longer relevant. The acknowledgement of the importance of current skills is critical to the engagement of teachers.**
- 2. It is important that the strengths of the 1999 curriculum are not diminished but rather built on and developed further in the redeveloped curriculum.**
- 3. Prioritisation of changes and developments in parallel with curriculum change are very important. In order for schools to focus on curriculum development this area needs prioritisation, above other elements of systemic change. Schools need to develop capacity to make this prioritisation and need to be supported by similar system thinking. Schools will need practice space and low stakes environments in order to allow developments to embed in schools. School leaders need to understand this prioritisation and the mechanisms which will support embedding of new approaches. Schools will need to develop professional conversations, challenge existing understandings of curriculum and reimagine their role in this in order to make this happen. There is little capacity within current structures to allow this to happen.**

## **Data Protection**

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**Thank you for your submission.**

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