

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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Date	4/11/2020
E-mail	

Organisation submission details

Name	Holy Family Special School
Position	School
Organisation	
Date	4/11/2020
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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).

Holy Family Special School in Cootehill Co. Cavan. 174 pupils Cater for Mild/Moderate LD, Autism with LD and Severe/Profound pupils.

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*.

My thoughts regarding the New Primary Curriculum Framework are in reference to our Severe and Profound Learners and those with Multiple Medical and Physical Disabilities.

I have been teaching in the Holy Family Special School in Cootehill, Co. Cavan for the last 22yrs. We cater for mild/moderate, Autism with Learning Disability and pupils with Severe/Profound learning disabilities. I am currently working with pupils with Severe/Profound learning disabilities.

I am concerned that the New Primary Framework will not best meet the needs and will fail to provide a broad, balanced and individualised curriculum which pertains to the unique learning styles of these pupils.

I welcome the new Curriculum Areas and Subjects and feel that our Mild/Moderate pupils can be accommodated adequately within this framework; however I do not feel that there are enough specific learning outcomes targeting our S/P learners. I think that we as teachers of Severe and profound pupils will be using the lower echelons of the learning outcomes for the duration of the student's school life and accommodating them only by using the Progression Continua – a tokenistic approach to their learning.

I also feel that we are often forced to teach within 'pre-stage' areas of the present curriculum with the notion that these pupils will somehow move out of a stage but the reality is that the majority will not.

With regard to the New Primary Language Curriculum - Severe and Profound learners for the most part will be taking their learning from the Junior and Senior Infants Learning Outcomes regardless of their age (and even then will need the Progression Continua to 'fit ' them in) – they will never move on to a more age appropriate stage.

The introduction of the Level 1 and 2 Learning Programmes at second level have helped considerably to help us appropriately plan for our student 12yrs and up but it is the students aged 4-12 with Severe/Profound learning disabilities that I fear are being forgotten.

Perhaps it is time to consider the need for a discrete National Curriculum in this sector, together with a meaningful framework of assessment, based on what teachers of SPLD really ought to be teaching their pupils. We have been furnished with 'guidelines' in the past but I feel we are doing a disservice to this cohort of pupils if we do not explore the possibility of a separate curriculum more suited to the pupils needs and in turn more suited to teachers needs.

Learners working at very early stages of development need a holistic approach to learning. If we take a more holistic approach to their learning I feel that we can create developmentally appropriate objectives set within the context of functional and meaningful activities. I feel that as teachers we should be able to focus on the development of specific programmes in the essential areas of communication, social and early cognitive development which will also contribute to the learner's health and well being. The new language curriculum does not provide this for us. I know that it utilises the Progression Continua and that although we can 'find' our pupils within the Framework using it, I feel that we need to have the freedom to celebrate the different abilities of learners with the most complex needs, rather than trying to fit them into an existing framework not developed with their needs in mind.

The desire to create a seamless progression from the lower reaches of the LO to the upper LO's is understandable but not logical for our learners – the severe and profound pupils will never attain in most likely hood one or two of those progression milestones. It is not sufficient just to adopt and adapt teaching techniques (Progression Continua) that are common to all because it won't work with all. We need distinct kinds of teaching for these distinct kinds of children e.g. mark making is a perfectly acceptable rung to work on in the ladder of writing and should be encouraged in children who are at that level as much as possible: but this concept becomes ridiculous if we are encouraging mark making for fifteen years simply because some children with SLD are unable to get to the next level.

I believe that a more behavioural, interactive and functional approach to learning which is more practical and less theoretically based than the approach presently encouraged is needed. I feel that moving away from the teaching of small sequential steps, controlled by the teacher, and instead focussing on broader attainment which is not necessarily easy to measure or record should be the way forward for our severe/profound learners.

A more relevant and developmentally appropriate approach suggests a focus on:

- Practical support for activities that are relevant and meaningful for the learner
- Teaching activities that are functional (have some use) for the individual
- All teaching, therapy or intervention taking place in a real-world setting. (Routes for Learning- Guidance (2020)

The Curriculum for Wales guidance supports schools in Wales to design their curriculum. They provide broad direction at a national level, while enabling flexibility for schools' curricula that are appropriate to specific contexts and each learner. This enables schools to focus on the communication and cognitive skills and sensory abilities which are fundamental for many learners with complex needs – I am not suggesting that each school prepare and implement their own curriculum but there are several options available to us as teachers of Severe/Profound learners already out there – it's just a matter of refining them to our pupils needs.

1. Several Special schools in England use the **ImPacts** assessment and curriculum model. ImPACTS is a curriculum designed by Rosewood Free School for pupils working at P-Levels 1 to 4.

The ImPACTS programme offers a specialised curriculum in five Key Skill Areas:

- Communication
- Cognition
- Environmental Control Technology (ECT)
- Personal, social, and emotional wellbeing
- Physical skills (gross and fine motor)

The curriculum recognises the value of learning through routines and provides opportunities for learning in daily activities such as arriving at school, personal care, eating and drinking, and departing school.

The development of each Key Skill includes multi-disciplinary working. The school uses the expertise of relevant professionals to enhance the content and accuracy of the assessments and curriculum delivery.

2. Peter Imray (Curricula for Teaching Children and Young People with Severe or Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties Practical strategies for educational professionals) has developed a Curriculum designed for Severe and Profound pupils entitled **EQUALS**
3. Wales have **Routes for Learning** and
4. Northern Ireland have adopted Routes for Learning and named it **Quest for Learning**

All of the above provide a broad and balanced curriculum that is stimulating, enriching and fulfilling whilst meeting the needs of the 'whole' child and promoting good communication skills and independence. They ensure that the pupil is at the centre of the assessment and planning process. This leads to an individualized, relevant and appropriate strategy of intervention that all professionals (including parents) can plan for each pupil.

Providing equal opportunities is about meeting individual needs – not treating everybody in the same way.

“for those individuals who consistently fail to show measurable progress on conventional assessments, a different model of progress is required. It is not that these individuals cannot make progress, but we would argue that the instruments by which progress is measured do not suit the people whose abilities are being measured.” Barber & Goldbart (1998)

When does treating people differently emphasize their differences and stigmatize or hinder them on that basis? And when does treating people the same become insensitive to their differences and likely to stigmatize or hinder them on that basis?

Inclusion is about giving time to diversity, respecting individual differences and accepting that the learning outcomes can be different for us all and providing equal opportunities is about meeting individual needs – not treating everyone in the same way.

Examples of positive discrimination are – pupil teacher ratio, teachers with special training, classroom assistants, specially adapted physical conditions, and a concentration in one building of specialists such as speech therapists, physio, OT etc

In short I believe that in order to provide an educational environment which is most appropriate for pupils with SPLD traditional subjects do not best fit their needs.

We need a curriculum to specifically meet the needs of these children and not to have to try to fit them in to the curriculum.

A curriculum that may include subjects such as:

Communication

Cognitive skills

Physical skills

Personal social and emotional wellbeing

Environmental control technology

Or

Learning Opportunities

Communication

Music

Sensory Cookery

Sensory Exploration

Sensory Stories

Movement, Physiotherapy and Hydrotherapy

Drama, Poetry and Literature

Art

Inclusive Community

Please find attached the introduction and background to the EQUALS Pre-formal Curriculum – I have drawn on many teachers and authors' writings and ideas and indeed sometimes quoted directly but they have managed to capture what I wanted to say far more eloquently than I ever could!!!

Regards Sinead Tierney

<https://equals.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/EQUALS-Pre-formal-PMLD-Curriculum-Preview.pdf>

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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.

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.)

- 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.

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.

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Thank you for your submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie