

Report on the Consultation with Children on the Draft Primary Curriculum



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In March 2020 Marino Institute of Education successfully tendered for a research project, commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), to consult with children on their views of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. This reflects an educational policy focus on the voice of the child as observed by *The Chief Inspector's Report 2016-2020*. It noted “the active inclusion of student voice in policy-making has been a notable change in educational policy development.” (Dept of Education, 2022, p.3).

The context for the consultation is primary curriculum review and redevelopment leading to the development of a new primary school curriculum. *The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* was published in February 2020. Six key messages were identified as underpinning the new draft framework and those six key messages informed the questions put to children. They include as follows:

1. Supporting agency and flexibility in schools
2. Building connections between pre-school, primary and post-primary schools
3. Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented
4. Emerging priorities for children's learning
5. Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning
6. Building on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum and responding to challenges arising from it.

Children from pre-school settings, primary school and the first year of secondary school were consulted on what they liked, disliked, and would change about learning in school. Amongst other questions, children were asked about how they like to learn, whether they felt they had autonomy or were given choices in school and about their priorities for learning in the 21st century. Teachers in the schools collected the data and returned audio recordings, drawings and worksheets to the research team. Online questionnaires were returned online by each individual research participant. Teachers were provided with online training and ongoing support to engage with the research project.

Methodology

The sample comprised twelve educational settings, which included two preschools, eight primary schools and two secondary schools. The sample generated a considerable amount of data. It should be noted, however, that the sample size is relatively small and although many school types are represented (eg. urban, rural, vertical schools, English-medium, Irish-medium, Gaeltacht school, DEIS), there may be only one example of a particular school type. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalising the findings.

The methodological approach was informed by Participative Learning Theories (PLTs) putting the child at the centre of the research process. Clark and Moss', (2011) mosaic research approach, which emphasises the importance of listening to children's voices using appropriately child-friendly research, was also used.

The research team probed the six messages in depth and then devised a series of questions to ask children based on each key message. In preschools and the junior section of primary schools (Junior Infants to Second Class), children responded to questions orally in audio-recorded interviews and through drawings and worksheets. Questionnaires were used in the senior section of primary schools (Third to Sixth Class) and in the first year of secondary school. The children's teachers were the data gatherers and they sent the data to the research team, through pre-arranged channels, for analysis.

Key Findings

Findings will be summarised using each of the six key messages.

1. *Supporting agency and flexibility in schools.*

Play, physical movement, the Arts and technology are areas of the curriculum where, children tend to experience agency and a flexible or exploratory approach to learning. These are also the areas of learning that are reported as liked by children, therefore agency and flexibility may be a contributory factor to children's enjoyment of learning. In some respects, it appears that the primary school children's understanding of choice was quite narrow; they spoke about having choices in choosing what book to read or what picture to draw but they did not consider choice on a more macro level. Children in preschool indicated they had choice in deciding what to play with on the day they participated in the study. Children in senior primary school classes and in the first year of secondary school felt a lack of agency in relation to their schooling. 92%

of senior primary school students believed the teacher to be the primary decision maker. Secondary school children reflecting on their experience of primary school, emphasised the 'fun' they had and the great friendships but noted that primary school was strict and their preference was for the freedom they experience at second level.

2. *Building connections between pre-school, primary and post-primary schools*

Many young children agreed that they did similar activities in preschool and primary school such as play and art. Preschool was perceived as providing more of the comforts of home such as naps and access to food. Most children recalled discussing 'big school' when they were in preschool and talked about matters such as homework, play, friends and new teachers. They also felt that work might be harder. Children's drawings indicated that children may be more seat-bound in primary school than in preschool. Children in secondary schools, reflecting back on their experience of primary school, consistently talked about friendships, playing, break time and football with friends. Some children also mentioned the easier workload in primary school but others complained that there was too much homework in primary school and the workload made it difficult to fit in extra-curricular activities.

3. *Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented*

When asked about the structure of their school day, children talked about including longer break times, more play time, more field trips and they asked that subjects such as PE and Drama would take place more regularly. Senior primary school children asked for more activities, much like their junior counterparts. Secondary school children seemed to like the variety of subjects available to them and having different teachers for different subjects. The overall feeling from secondary school children, reflecting on the structure of the primary school curriculum, was that they would like to have experienced more autonomy in primary school. When asked how they learned in primary school, for example, the most common responses were through listening (323 responses), asking questions (304 responses), and watching (295 responses). Learning by doing was the next most popular option expressed, at 257 responses.

4. *Emerging priorities for children's learning*

Children's priorities for learning mirror societal concerns, namely learning about different aspects of diversity and inclusion, as well as family and peer relationships,

health, wellbeing, and climate change. The data revealed some divergence between what children liked learning and what they deemed to be important to learn. For example, the data shows that play is almost universally liked by young children; yet nearly a quarter of young children considered play as not important. Children in senior primary school rated Mathematics as the most important subject to learn in primary school, followed by English, History and then health and wellbeing. Secondary school children consider Mathematics to be by far the most important subject taught in primary school (109 responses). The next most important subject was considered to be English (43 responses), followed by sports (36 responses) and Irish (26 responses). Positive attitudes to the Irish language are linked to children's exposure to Irish. The Irish language was universally liked by children in Gaelscoileanna, but disliked by many children in English-medium schools.

5. *Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning*

Children indicated a strong preference for learning through activity-based and social approaches. Young children like playing, working in pairs or groups, and working alongside their teacher. Junior Infants particularly liked play (89%), asking teacher for help (81%) and watching a film to learn (78%). Senior Infants seemed to be moving away from dependence on the teacher with only 57% of children saying they liked asking teacher for help. 81% of Senior Infants said they liked learning by using technology. A noteworthy finding is young children's dislike of peer evaluation and self-evaluation, an area that needs further exploration. Children from the senior end of primary school and the first year of secondary school also indicated their preference for hands-on activity based learning but when asked how they learn/learned in primary school the highest number of responses were in relation to listening, asking questions and talk/discussion.

6. *Building on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum and responding to challenges arising from it.*

Children seemed to have a strong sense that the world of the 21st century has different priorities to the generations of learners that went before them. They mentioned the need to know more about other cultures, technology, languages, Science and the environment. Interestingly, older children did not ask for more exposure to

technology, stating they have quite an amount of exposure to technology outside of school. It is clear that all social aspects of learning in curriculum need to be preserved and opportunities for the development of relationships should continue to be fostered. For children, young and old, the main preoccupations for them are friendships and playtime.

Implications of the findings

The voices of children in the report are loud and clear. They draw a number of issues to our attention and ask us to consider the following –

1. More agency for children in the classroom
2. Increase in the use of active learning strategies and inquiry-based approaches
3. More time for Arts subjects, and P.E./sport activities.
4. A focus on issues relating to diversity, other cultures, other languages, the environment and wellbeing.
5. Consideration of the role of homework
6. Consideration of how to use the outdoor environment more for learning and provision of outdoor play resources.
7. More school field trips
8. Focus on how Irish is taught in English-medium schools
9. Review approaches to the teaching of handwriting.
10. Greater attention to how creative technologies are used in the classroom for learning purposes
11. More time for children to eat lunch and to play in school

INTRODUCTION

In March 2020 Marino Institute of Education (MIE) successfully tendered for a grant award commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to consult with children on the new *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2020). This consultation is part of a broader consultative process on the new *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. The finalised Primary Curriculum Framework will be the basis for the development of the new Primary Curriculum. Children's views from pre-school, primary school and the first year of secondary school were gathered. Teachers in situ in schools collected the data and the research team provided training on the data collection processes. Data was then analysed by the research team using NVIVO software. The findings from the data are presented here.

THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

The award coincided with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Third level institutions moved from face-to-face to online working on March 12th 2020. The Marino research team, in consultation with the NCCA, adapted their research plan and work moved to online platforms. The first online information session with the NCCA's School's Forum was held on June 24th, 2020. The team met with the Schools' Forum online and presented an outline of the research project. The plan at that point was to provide training in research methods to schools when schools returned from summer holidays in September 2020. However, the COVID -19 virus was posing difficult challenges for schools at that point and the NCCA felt it was unfair to ask schools to conduct research or facilitate research while they were tackling the virus. On November 5th, 2020, the Schools' Forum was informed by the NCCA that plans for the consultation on the Draft Primary Curriculum had been amended and the NCCA would re-engage with schools in the 2021/2022 school year.

Re-engagement with schools recommenced in November 2021. Schools continued to struggle with pressures associated with the COVID-19 virus and some schools who initially committed to the research were unfortunately unable to participate. Online training in data gathering was provided by the research team for a reduced sample of schools. The research plan was modified again to suit schools, considering the continuing COVID restrictions. Online training included guidelines on gaining parental and child consent and included two distinct types of training in data gathering: one for the pre-school to Second Class cohort and one for the senior end of primary school and first year of secondary school. Younger children were invited

to talk (recorded conversations) and draw about their likes and dislikes around school and older children were asked to complete an online questionnaire. Questions were informed by the six key messages of the new Draft Primary Curriculum, namely –

1. Supporting agency and flexibility in schools
2. Building connections between pre-school, primary and post-primary schools
3. Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented
4. Emerging priorities for children's learning
5. Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning
6. Building on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum and responding to challenges arising from it.

Following on from the training workshops, which were conducted through the medium of Irish and English, as appropriate, the research team emailed consent forms to schools. These were to be distributed to parents and children. Schools also received copies of instructions on how to conduct six brief research sessions with younger children and a questionnaire to be completed by older children. As teachers began to collect data, the research team provided them with follow-up drop-in online support sessions.

The next section of this report will describe in detail the methodological approaches devised by the research team and mediated to teachers who acted as data gatherers for the research project. We will look at the different methodological approaches used for different contexts. We will then address initial findings from the research.

METHODOLOGY

Participatory Learning Theories (PLTs) (Hedges & Cullen, 2012) informed the methodological approach used to gather the data. PLTs embrace learning approaches that are relational and dynamic and emphasize co-construction, dialogue, children’s funds of knowledge (knowledge gleaned outside schooling, in the domestic sphere) (Moll et al., 2001), belonging, and a partnership approach with families. This ensures that the child is at the centre of the research process, making inquiries, building, and refining knowledge, leading conversations, and working collaboratively. Thus, Clark and Moss’ (2011) *Mosaic* research approach, with an emphasis on listening to young children’s perspectives through a variety of instruments, was deemed suitable for use.

DATA COLLECTION

This research project utilised four different research strategies, geared towards the developmental needs and abilities of the students engaged in the project. These included interviews, drawings, worksheets and an online questionnaire. Table two illustrates the various methods used with each age group of child participants and the number of data received from each cohort. A large amount of data was generated from the sample.

Table 1: Data collection methods and responses received

Setting	Data Collection Methods	Numbers of data sets collected
Pre school	Interviews	9 audio files
	Drawings	Not yet received
Junior primary	Interviews	43 audio files (12 trí mhean na Gaeilge).
	Drawings	453 Drawings: 221 drawings from session 1 219 drawings from session 2 13 drawings from session 6
	Worksheets	373 worksheets: 186 worksheets from Session 4 187 worksheets from Session 5

Senior primary	Online Questionnaire	386 individual responses (39 through the medium of Irish). 69 questionnaires returned from Third Class 17 questionnaires returned from Fourth Class 95 questionnaires returned from Fifth Class 81 questionnaires returned from Sixth Class
Post-Primary (first year students)	Online Questionnaire	190 responses from two secondary schools.

Pre-school, primary and post-primary educators were invited to online training sessions on how to gather data from children and young people in their settings. These sessions were recorded and along with consent letters and guidance documents were sent out to the educators (see Appendices A-C). All materials were translated to Irish and bilingual versions of documentation were provided for Irish-medium schools (see Appendix B). Training sessions for the Irish-medium schools (Scoil lán-Ghaeilge and Scoil Ghaeltachta) were offered through the medium of Irish and the offer was taken up by some schools.

DATA COLLECTION IN PRE-SCHOOL SETTINGS.

One pre-school approached the research team to modify the methodology to suit the educational approaches adopted within the setting. The research team worked with the pre-school setting to adapt the research methodology, so it retained the same focus as Clark & Moss' (2011) *Mosaic Approach* yet was easier for the pre-school children to engage with. Thus, the revised protocol utilised learning stories and photos taken by the children in the setting as prompts for conversations in small groups or with individual children, rather than using drawings and plans as outlined in the original protocol. The other pre-school kept to the original protocol.

DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOL WITH JUNIOR PRIMARY.

The research team designed a series of questions (see Table 2) to be posed to children over six research sessions and they also designed activities for the children through which answers to those questions could be harvested. In the case of the Irish-medium schools, consideration

was given to the language of the questions and the needs of native, new, and additional speakers of Irish.

Table 2: Sample questions used with pre-school and junior primary school children

Sample questions from research session 1 (pre-school/primary level)
1. Tell me what you like to do in (pre-)school.
2. Do you get to do all the things you would like to do in (pre-)school?
3. Are there some things you must do in (pre-)school that you do not like?
4. Do you have any choices about what you want to learn? Can you give me an example?
5. If you had a magic wand, what would you make (pre-)school be like every day?
6. What have you drawn and why?

The six research sessions were carried out during November and December 2021. A small number of schools requested an extension until the February mid-term break, and these requests were granted. The training focused on data gathering sessions involving the children answering questions and then completing either a drawing or a worksheet. Teachers were invited to walk amongst the children, using a recording device and asking them specified research questions while the children also engaged in drawing their thoughts on specific prompts (such as school likes/dislikes, life in preschool in comparison to life in primary school). It was recommended that each session was 20 to 30 minutes in duration and guidance sheets were provided for each research session outlining the protocol, instructions, and questions to ask the children.

USE OF DRAWINGS AS A RESEARCH METHOD

The drawings which accompanied the recorded interviews with the young children were designed to serve three purposes. Firstly, following the principle of listening to children's many languages that forms of the core of Clark & Moss' (2011) *Mosaic Approach*, drawings were chosen to allow children to express themselves in more than one way, and more anonymously than what focus group interviews allow for. It is a known disadvantage of focus group interviews, for example, that participants can often repeat each other's responses. This can be due to issues of power or trying to copy a response that might be favoured by the interviewer (Kutrovátz, 2017). Although children also sometimes copy each other's drawings, it was hoped that allowing children to engage in individual drawings according to prompts

relevant to each research session would afford children an opportunity to express themselves more individually than the focus group interviews may allow them. A specific interview question was added to each of the research sessions that included drawings, providing children the opportunity to describe and discuss their drawings and thus prompting further conversation on the key research question for that research session. The combination of drawings and focus group interviews thus facilitated multiple expressive means for children and allowed them to answer the questions in different ways.

Secondly, drawings were chosen for some of the research sessions in order to provide pictorial representation to children's discussions on the research questions as an additional source of data. The research team did not request children's drawings to be labelled with their names as the intention was not to triangulate children's verbal responses to their drawings.

Drawings are used in a variety of ways for research purposes, including measuring children's cognitive development and as a project technique. For example, according to Burns-Nader (2016, p. 1809), "Drawings are a projective technique in which it is assumed that children display the feelings and thoughts that they may not verbally or willingly be able to express on paper." Some controversy exists in relation to the reliability of drawings as a research tool (Kortessluoma et al., 2008) and they are not a simple tool to use in research with children (Mitchel et al., 2011). However, drawings can in certain circumstances and for specific purposes be used reliably and validly for analysis of children's emotional states, in particular where validated drawing instruments have been designed and tested (Burns-Nader, 2016). However, we did not validate the drawings used in this research as no analysis was conducted on the children's emotional states. Thus, while drawings were chosen as part of the research methodology, it was not intended that quantitative or rigorous analysis on specificities of the children's pictorial representations of their answers would form part of the analysis.

Despite not intending to use drawings to assess children's thoughts and emotional states, the use of drawings was deemed by the research team to be highly valuable for a number of reasons, which will be outlined below. In this instance, drawings were chosen for a 'draw-and-talk' approach to focus group interviews, where children's drawings were primarily intended to "encourage collaborative meaning-making that allows the drawer to give voice

to what the drawing was intended to convey” (Mitchel et al., 2011, p.20). It is this understanding of drawings as a “participatory research method that relies on researcher-participant collaboration to make meaning of the drawing” (ibid.) that underpins the choice of drawings as a method in this research.

Thirdly, drawings were chosen for practical reasons. The research team were cognisant that employing a strategy of teachers-as-researchers meant that any method of data generation with children had to be doable with large numbers of children present and participating and without additional help from other teachers or adults in the classroom. Focus group interviews can be difficult to manage at the best of times; doing focus group interviews in junior classes with large numbers of children can be a particular challenge. Engaging children in drawings was thus intended to keep children engaged in the research task while the teacher moved around the classroom talking to smaller groups of children at a time. Asking children to draw according to certain prompts also meant that children were encouraged to reflect on the research question/topic while the teacher interviewed other groups of children.

Teachers were instructed to give the children prompts for what to draw. Thus, in Session 1 children were asked to make two drawings, one depicting what they liked in school, indicated by a happy smiley face and one depicting what they disliked in school, indicated by a sad face. The children were asked to start on these drawings before the research session commenced and once engaged in the drawings the teacher would circulate the classroom and engage children in the structured conversations around the interview questions. In Session 2 children were again asked to make two drawings, one depicting a preschool and one depicting a primary school. Again the teachers were only asked to give this simple prompt in advance of the structured conversation commencing.

Children’s conversations about their drawings formed part of the recorded research sessions and have thus been included in the analysis and presentation of findings presented in this report.

USE OF WORKSHEETS AS A RESEARCH METHOD

For two of the sessions where children’s views were sought on a number of different learning priorities and pedagogies, namely in relation to Key Messages 4 and 5, it was decided to use a different research method in order to generate more detailed and reliable data. Ethical

considerations regarding the teacher-as-researcher role also influenced this decision, as discussed below.

In relation to Key Message 4, (*Emerging priorities for children's learning*), a relatively long list of new learning priorities was generated and thus the consequent interview schedule (list of questions) was felt to extend the research session beyond the length decided as appropriate, namely 20-30 minutes. Other approaches to generate data to answer the research questions relating to this Key Message were therefore needed.

In relation to Key Message 5, (*Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning*), the focus on pedagogy and teaching strategies were felt to be difficult to approach when the teacher acts as the researcher or data generator. While the intention was never to evaluate a particular teacher's strategies and pedagogy, interview questions in relation to this Key Message were difficult to word in such a way that children could feel free to answer them without implicitly commenting on their own teacher and it was also feared that children would not feel free to answer questions about pedagogy and teaching strategies when such questions were posed by their teacher. In other words, the research team had concerns around protecting the teacher's integrity, navigating pre-existing power imbalances in the researcher-participant and teacher-child relationships and children's sense of ability to answer freely, all of which are key ethical considerations in educational research.

Thus, in relation to both of these Key Messages, another approach to data generation was considered more appropriate. In relation to Key Message 4, a worksheet was designed to gather children's views on a long list of learning priorities in a short amount of time, without exhausting children and requiring long and attention-demanding focus group interviews where all children's views may prove difficult to include. In relation to Key Message 5, a similar worksheet was designed in order to avoid some of the concerns or issues identified above in relation to the teacher gathering data on teaching strategies and pedagogy. Worksheets were deemed an appropriate research instrument as children are generally familiar with completing worksheets in school. Thus, while it is a relatively unused research instrument, it is something with which school children are accustomed, and therefore did not put excessive demands on the teacher in introducing another research instrument. It is also a research

method that one of the researchers with expertise in research with this age cohort has extensive experience of in other research contexts.

In creating these two worksheets, the research team had lengthy discussions around the particular items to include in the worksheets. In relation to Worksheet 4, learning priorities were identified in two ways. Firstly, the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) was consulted. This document sets out key aspects of the changing landscape for a new primary curriculum compared to the educational and societal landscape at the time of the publication of the current Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999). In particular, the document identifies a landscape dominated by increasing influence and use of technology, increased diversity and need for inclusive education both in relation to religious, cultural and linguistic diversity but also in relation to diversity of learning styles and needs, and finally climate change and increased environmental awareness. All of these emerging priorities were included in a number of different ways in the worksheet relating to Key Message 4 Emerging Priorities for Children's Learning. Well-being, health and feelings (as a proxy for mental health) were added to this list due to its inclusion as a key competency in the draft curriculum framework. The research team then drew on their own educational expertise to assess whether the list of learning priorities generated from the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) should be expanded further. In addition to the generated list, learning around social and emotional skills, especially in relation to peer and family relationships were added. These priorities of learning are crucial to learning priorities relating to diversity and inclusion as well as wellbeing and active citizenship and were thus deemed sufficiently essential to include as items in and of themselves.

In relation to Worksheet 5, a similar approach was taken. The draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) was consulted for references to pedagogy and teaching strategies. In particular, the sections on the proposed key competency 'Learning to be a learner' (NCCA, 2020, p. 9) and 'Teaching and learning' (NCCA, 2020, p. 20) were used as a guide for relevant pedagogical, teaching and assessment strategies to include in the worksheet. Once an initial list of items had been generated from the draft curriculum framework the research team again consulted internal expertise in the team in order to assess and potentially add to the list.

The lists of 15 items for each Key Message was then turned into a worksheet where these 15 items were depicted pictorially with a caption underneath. For the worksheet on emerging priorities for children's learning, children were asked to rate the importance of each item while for the worksheet on pedagogical and assessment strategies, children were asked to rate how much they liked each item. The teachers were instructed that they could either ask the children in their class to cut out each of the pictures and glue it onto another sheet in one of three columns according to how they rated them (see Appendix E), the sheets being provided ready made to the teachers, or ask the children to colour in each of the boxes with the pictures using a traffic light system for rating. About half the teachers chose the cutting-pasting option and the other half the colouring option for the children in their class.

Prior to data collection there was a concern that children may colour in the boxes according to the colours they liked rather than how they rated each item, however no such trends seemed apparent in the completed worksheets except for one worksheet for Key Message 5 where one child had coloured in the boxes according to specific pattern. Children in many cases appeared to give it considerable thought and, in several cases, changed the colour of their box on further reflection. They might first have coloured in a box red and then changed it to yellow, clearly indicating which colour was the final one or indeed asking the teacher to write the intended colour where confusion could arise.

The data gathered through these worksheets provided the research team with reliable quantitative data that afforded an excellent opportunity for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of significant trends emerging from children's responses.

DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOL WITH SENIOR PRIMARY AND FIRST YEAR SECONDARY SCHOOL

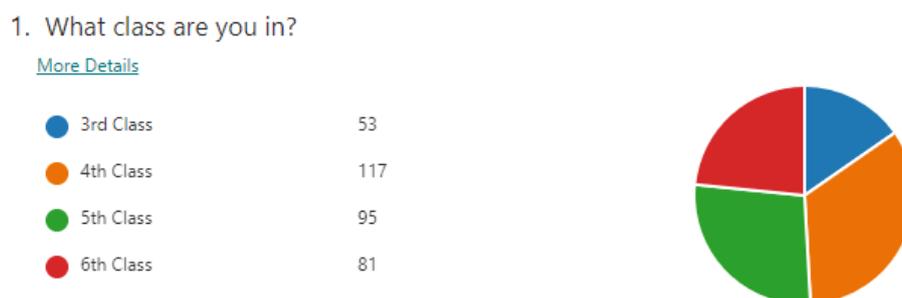
An online questionnaire was distributed to senior primary school children (see Appendix H) which explored their experiences and perspectives regarding life in primary schools in Ireland. A similar questionnaire (see Appendix I) was distributed to first year students in post-primary

schools, which asked students to retrospectively reflect on their primary school experiences and to offer suggestions for the improvement of the primary curriculum.¹

The questionnaires were hosted via Microsoft Forms and consisted of 18 closed and open-ended questions, which explored the following areas: likes & dislikes about primary school, agency and choice in schools, methods of teaching and learning, and learning priorities. On average, the questionnaire was completed by primary school children in 36 minutes, and by first year students in 10 minutes.

A total of 386 primary school children and 190 First year post-primary students completed the questionnaires. Figure 1 illustrates the class breakdown of primary school participants from English-medium schools: 15% (n=53) were in 3rd Class, 34% (n=117) were in 4th Class; 27% (n=95) were in 5th Class; and 23% (n=81) were in 6th Class.

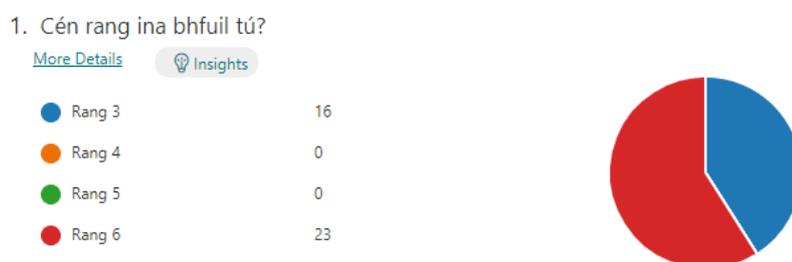
Figure 1: What Class are you in?



¹ Participating schools were given the option of also using this method of data collection with 3rd class pupils, rather than protocol for pre-school and junior primary, if they felt the questionnaire was more suitable to their abilities.

Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of participants in Irish-medium schools, where 41% (n=16) were in 3rd Class and 59% (n=23) were in 6th Class.

Figure 2 Cén rang ina bhfuil tú?



Teachers were responsible for administering the questionnaire to children and were provided with a shareable URL link to the relevant form. Teachers were asked to distribute this link to the children for completion at the same time during one class session.

SAMPLE

Convenience sampling was used to identify a variety of settings and access to children as participants. A subgroup of the NCCA School's Forum with six additional schools were identified by the research team for the research: a pre-school, a multi-denominational primary school, two post-primary schools, a bunscoil lán-Ghaeilge and a bunscoil Ghaeltachta. These specific types of schools were identified to fill gaps existing in the cohort of 12 participating schools from the forum (see Table 3). The eight primary schools comprised the following: one co-educational, urban, scoil lán-Ghaeilge; one co-educational scoil Ghaeltachta; one co-educational urban junior national school; two co-educational, urban, vertical, schools; one co-educational rural, vertical, DEIS school and two co-educational, rural, vertical schools. Table 3 illustrates the provenance of the sample, the number of educational settings involved, and the number of classes involved in the research. It should be noted that it is not possible to ascertain how many classes completed the questionnaires at each grade level in the seven senior primary schools and in the two secondary schools because questionnaires were returned anonymously to the research team via Microsoft Forms. We do know, however, how many children completed questionnaires from each grade level because children were asked what class they were in, as part of the questionnaire. This information is available in Table 1.

Table 3: Description of sample

Setting	Number of educational settings	Number of participating classes
Pre-school	2	3 pre-school groups
Junior primary school (Junior Infants to Second Class)	8	13 classes: 2 Junior Infant classes, 2 Senior Infants, 3 First Classes, 3 Second Classes and 3 multi-grade classes.
Lower Primary school (Third to Sixth Class)	7 (One of the eight primary schools is a junior school exclusively, thus the senior primary school numbers are one fewer than the junior primary school.)	Not Known*
Scoil Ián-Ghaeilge	1 (included in primary school numbers)	1 class: Junior Infants
Scoil Ghaeltachta	1 (included in primary school numbers)	2 classes: First and Second Class
Secondary school (1 st year cohort)	2	Not Known*
Total number of participating educational settings	12	

DATA ANALYSIS: PRE-SCHOOL AND JUNIOR PRIMARY.

The data were returned to the research team in MIE and were subsequently saved on encrypted files on password protected laptops. The data from the group interviews were sent to a third party for transcription and when they were returned, they were analyzed using NVIVO 12. Each transcript was read line by line and a series of initial codes were identified and then regrouped and collapsed into similar codes to identify emerging themes. The codes were then grouped into themes to address the research questions. In the case of data from the Irish-medium schools, the original Irish version of the transcript was analyzed to avoid any misinterpretation of the data in translation.

The drawings from Session 1 were analysed with a particular focus on what children have represented pictorially of their likes and dislikes about school, focusing on subjects, pedagogies and other aspects of school depicted in children's drawings. Psychological analysis of how children have depicted themselves (identity and self) in relation to school was not conducted. Drawings from Session 2 focused on children's comparisons of preschool and primary school, analysing similarities and differences across their drawings of the two different educational settings. The drawings were analysed separately by two different members of the research team for the purpose of triangulation. Both researchers read the drawings informed by the context of the task assigned, i.e., the questions to which children were responding in the moment.

The worksheets from Sessions 4 and 5 were analysed quantitatively using Microsoft Excel. Each worksheet was entered manually and each 'rating' given a value. Thus, for Worksheet 1 the rating 'Important' was entered with the value 3, 'A little important' with the value 2 and 'Not important' with the value 1. Where an item on the worksheet had not been rated by a child it was entered with the value 0. The same system was used for Worksheet 2. Descriptive statistical analysis was then conducted, and data were explored with the variables of language of instruction and class level.

DATA ANALYSIS: SENIOR PRIMARY AND FIRST YEAR.

The quantitative data from the questionnaires were used descriptively to illustrate children's preferences and priorities when it comes to teaching and learning in primary schools. Comparisons were made between the views of primary school children and those of first year secondary school children, with similarities and differences being noted and analysed.

Analysis of the qualitative questionnaire data from the senior primary and first year of secondary school children followed best practices as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) and is illustrated in the following steps:

Step 1: All data was downloaded from Forms into Microsoft Excel. The data set was then cleaned to remove any blank entries, wherein no responses were recorded.

Step 2: The qualitative data was uploaded to NVivo and was coded by grouping the comments into codes based on the key messages of the projects: likes, dislikes, learning priorities, and suggestions for improvement.

Step 3: Within each code, the data was further subdivided and organized into similar properties as emerged internally from the dataset. This allowed for a more accurate ordering of responses.

Step 4: Memos were created for each code and observations were made regarding the majority and minority responses, along with potential analysis for why these responses may have been given by children.

Step 5: The final report was written up, highlighting the most common responses to the key messages of the research project, showing majority and minority responses, as well as similarities and differences between the two datasets.

ETHICS

Ethical approval was sought and received for all research for this work from the research committee in Marino Institute of Education. Plain language statements and consent forms were sent to the teachers for the families of the children who took part, these were signed and returned to the principal investigator. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any stage and all participation was completely voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed with a limitation noted below.

A request came from the two secondary school principals for the use of passive consent, that is, consent would be assumed unless parents and children informed the teacher that they did not wish to participate in the project. Given the emphasis on child agency and child voice in this research project, the team deliberated for some time on this request. The following points outline the reasons why it was agreed that passive consent could be used for this cohort of secondary school students.

1. The principals in the participating secondary schools directly requested the option to use passive consent, as they already have consent agreements in place with parents and students which pertain to the conduct of research in their schools.

2. Students in the secondary school setting were thirteen years of age and able to understand they were participating in the research, the purpose of the research, and that they were free to withdraw at any time. Participating teachers were advised to inform their students, prior to starting the questionnaire, that they did not have to participate. Therefore, students were aware, in the moment of commencing the questionnaire, that they could opt-out of participating at any stage and were free to do so. Such approaches are also supported by Spence et al. (2014, p. 4) who state, "Research involving children needs to make clear that: participation is voluntary, there should be no pressure to participate, they can change their mind and leave the study at any point. If these are made clear to children from the outset of the study, our findings support the use of passive consent."

3. The research was low risk for students, and for most, completed quickly within a few minutes, therefore making few demands on the participants. As noted by Jason et al. (2001, p. 53), within the field of Psychology, "Investigators are [often] more comfortable in using passive consent that utilizes anonymous survey instruments which have minimal risk to the participants," such as in the case of this present research. Similar options have also been expressed by Spence et al. (2014, p. 4) who note, "There is an opinion that passive consent should be advocated in research where there is minimal risk to participants."

4. Using passive consent sped up the process of data collection. It also ensured a larger sample of participating students, and some would also argue, a less biased sample (Jason et al., 2001, p. 61) as compared to the time and numbers that would have been generated had principals sought active consent from parents and participants. Similar findings were also reached by

Spence et al. (2014, p. 1) who in their study concluded that “passive consent led to a higher participation rate and a more representative sample without compromising data quality.”

5. As the questionnaire was designed as an anonymous measure, using passive consent was one means of ensuring students’ and their parents’ anonymity. It may have also increased the trustworthiness of the results because students did not have to worry that their participation in the study might be deductively linked to their answers, and thereby temper their responses.

6. By allowing principals to use passive consent in their schools, this respected the authority and agency of the schools and teacher-researchers.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations of confidentiality are noted in the small sample size (Pre-school n=2; Primary n=8; Secondary school n=3) but this is mitigated by use of pseudonyms, along with the removal of any specific identifiers from the data which could lead to deductive identification of the individual who took part in this study. Despite the small sample size, data gathered here can be compared with relevant literature/research regarding the voice of the child.

There may be limitations in terms of misinterpreting what children, particularly younger children, have to say and the children’s responses on the worksheets, unless carefully facilitated and mediated by the teacher researcher. However, there is no evidence of children misusing the worksheets, for example, by colouring everything the same colour or colour-patterning their responses.

Another limitation may pertain in relation to the worksheet on emerging priorities that the junior primary children completed. The list of priorities (15 choices in all) was devised by the research team based on the vision, key competencies, and principles of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework: For Consultation* (NCCA, 2020). Children, therefore, identified their priorities for learning from a given list, rather than devising their own priorities freely. Children were asked to comment on whether each priority listed was very important to them, only a little bit important or not important. Arguably, it would have been very challenging for children to engage in ‘blue sky thinking’ in relation to what they considered to be priorities for primary education.

KEY FINDINGS

In this section we will look at three sets of findings: those from pre-schools, the junior end of primary school (Junior Infants to Second Class), the senior primary classes and first year of secondary school. Pre-schools and secondary schools are included so that children's voices looking forward to primary school and backwards from secondary school can also be captured.

FINDINGS FROM PRE-SCHOOL SETTINGS

The views of pre-school children, age 3 to 5 years, were gathered from two early childhood care and education settings in the greater Dublin area. One is a full day care setting in an area that comprises a mix of working- and middle-class families. The other is a sessional Montessori in a suburban village in the greater Dublin region. Like the first setting, the Montessori also caters for a mix of working- and middle-class families. The full day care setting was able to stay open since the initial reopening in June 2020 but the Montessori closed along with the schools during the COVID-19 school closures and lockdowns. According to the Montessori owner, attendance has not stabilised since the reopening of the Montessori, affecting attendance during the data collection period, thus delaying some of the sessions. The data is still being collected in the Montessori and thus the preliminary findings outlined in this report are from the full day setting only.

As expected, the research sessions with the pre-school children were shorter than the sessions conducted with primary school children as the children are much younger. The data was also collected during a period when the preparation work for children transitioning to school has generally not yet commenced and thus children are not necessarily thinking about or prompted to think about primary school or their own learning unless they have older siblings attending primary school, and even then children do not necessarily actively think about primary school. In the *initial* research design and timing of the research the data collection was scheduled to take place with pre-school settings during the period where children are generally engaged in preparation work in their pre-school to prepare for the transition to primary school. The *revised* timing due to COVID-19 is thus likely to have impacted the findings. The findings presented below should thus be understood as coming from pre-school children who are younger than planned for. For example, one child responded to the question about primary school "I haven't think about it" while another child

responded “I don’t know when I am going to school,” suggesting it is not something that is generally thought about by children in January or February when data was collected.

In terms of what pre-school children like to do in pre-school and how they like to learn, play strongly dominates. Children mentioned play with trucks, dolls, kitchen area and outside in their playground and sensory garden. Drawing and colouring also featured prominently, however this may be prompted by the fact that children were asked to draw/colour during the recorded sessions. The colouring activity prompted several conversations amongst the children about colouring and about the use of crayons. In addition to spending a lot of time playing, and liking this, children mentioned learning about numbers and letters through song/nursery rhymes and from literacy and numeracy found in their physical environment (e.g. clocks).

Children’s conversations about what they like to do in pre-school and what they expect to be doing in primary school prompted some interesting conversations around their expectations for primary school. The majority of children mentioned colouring and drawing as something they would be doing in primary school but also that they would be learning their ABCs and numbers. Some children were unsure what to think of primary school or expect and several answered “I don’t know” when asked what they think they will be doing in primary school or what they would like to do. The majority of children mentioned wanting to play with friends, colour, and draw. One child said they might get ‘fancier’ crayons in primary school compared to pre-school while another child was looking forward to playing with ‘bigger friends.’

When asked whether they have a choice about what they learn, the majority of children immediately responded that they had chosen what to play with that day. Only a few children responded they did not know, significantly fewer than for the primary school children. Interestingly, the only child who identified not being able to always choose what they want to do mentioned the impact of peers on such decisions, suggesting that one of the other children in the setting sometimes would not let others play with certain toys.

On the question of what pre-school would look like for children if they could change it with a magic wand, a mix of concrete and more magical answers were provided. Several children would like to change the physical environment by moving around some of the play

equipment. One child wanted to turn the pre-school into an airplane to fly, while another wanted to make the pre-school bigger.

Overall, pre-school children's views suggest that children emphasise the social aspects of pre-school and primary school (being and playing with friends) along with playful environments (as also suggested by junior infant children in the Children's Thoughts about School Study by the Preparing for Life team:

<https://www.childrensresearchnetwork.org/knowledge/resources/childrens-own-priorities-for-their-school-readiness>) but also that play reduces as they transition to primary school. The findings from this research also suggest that children's sense of choice in their own learning reduces along with the reduction in child-led play as their sense of choice seems intricately related to their opportunities for play

FINDINGS FROM JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

This section examines the audio recorded sessions on children's likes and dislikes and ability to make choices in school, children's awareness around transitions from pre-school to primary and from junior primary to senior primary and children's views on how school is different now from school in their grandparents' time. Rich data were collected from this cohort of children and teachers worked hard at recasting and reframing questions as the situation demanded. There were examples of children seeking clarity on what was being asked of them, illustrating how thoroughly the children engaged with the research. For example, one child asked "What is describing mean? We forget" (School 1, session 3) and the teacher re-worked the question. Some of the younger children struggled to answer questions around choice for example but were clear on their likes and dislikes in relation to school. The main themes that emerged from the data are examined here.

WHAT CHILDREN LIKE.

Children are diverse in what they enjoy and like in school, however some core trends emerged in the data from Session 1, which interrogated through open dialogue what children like and dislike in school and what they would change if they could, speaking to what has worked well and less well in the current 1999 PSC. Most frequently mentioned by children as something they like in school is playtime. Children's understanding of play here in itself warrants further interrogation but in brief what they mentioned in relation to play is both play based learning opportunities, small world play and hands on learning in the classroom, and free play time either as part of 'Golden Time' on Fridays or as part of break time in the yard or indoors. In Howe's (2016) study on children's perspectives on play, children considered something to be 'play' when they were with their friends, outdoors, and engaged in physical activity. This definition corresponds with what children in this study call 'playtime' but the children in this study seem to have a broader definition, encompassing some classroom activities as play, as described above. When discussing what children like in school, play, including time with friends, is by far the most frequently mentioned. Breathnach et al. (2017) similarly found in their study of children's perspectives of classroom activities that friends and social interactions are an important aspect of play for children. No child mentioned not liking play or spending time with friends in school. Also mentioned frequently by children in relation to their likes is time engaged in Physical Education (PE), playing ball, and doing other sports as

well as drawing and doing arts as part of the curriculum. Not dissimilar to play, hardly any children mentioned not liking engaging in these strands of the curriculum. Many children also mentioned liking specific subjects or strands of specific subjects such as reading, writing, Mathematics and Irish. However, for these four areas in particular children were particularly divided and seemed to either really like or really dislike these. It should be noted that in the case of Irish-medium schools, no children reported not liking Irish. Several children mentioned that they like the use of technology in various forms in the classroom, in particular when they engage in literacy activities on e-readers and tablets. Some schools have a school garden and where this outdoor space is available, children reported that they enjoyed spending time in it.

The importance of children's relationship with the class teacher was mentioned. Some children said their favourite thing about school was their teacher or 'talking to their teacher about stuff' (School 1, session 3).

WHAT CHILDREN DISLIKE.

The majority of children's dislikes revolved around specific subjects the children find difficult. The most frequently mentioned subjects in this regard are Irish, Mathematics, handwriting and writing generally. In schools where a specific hand-writing workbook is used, this seems to be disliked by many children. It must be noted that these subjects and strands were also liked by many children and thus seem to be something children either really like, possibly when they feel competent and confident in them, or something children really dislike, namely when they find them difficult. The handwriting seems to be disliked partly because children find it uncomfortable to write for long periods of time. Children also frequently mentioned homework as something they really disliked – only one child of all those consulted mentioned liking homework – and would get rid of it if they had a magic wand, reflecting previous national research conducted with children in Irish primary schools by members of the current research team (Kiely et al., 2021). Amongst other things that children do not like is when they hurt themselves or get hurt by others, or when they get in trouble with the teacher. Some children also mentioned not liking when they don't get to do what they want.

Key to children's likes and dislikes appears to be their own sense of ability in relation to a particular subject. This reflects findings from Kiely et al's previous research (2021) which

found that homework was particularly disliked when children found it difficult or generally found schoolwork difficult. Children like to feel competent and confident in relation to their learning and when such feelings are absent or not as strong as they could be, children appear to start to dislike a subject. This emphasises the importance of working to develop children's confidence in tandem with their subject/content knowledge, an emphasis that is core to Aistear (NCCA, 2009), the curriculum framework for early childhood.

IF I HAD A MAGIC WAND I WOULD...

Children were asked what they would make school like if they had a magic wand. The word 'magic' seemed to have triggered some very creative imagining. A common trend in children's responses was the need for a sense of fun and adventure. Thus, wishes of dinosaur lands, bouncy castles and trampolines, schools covered in pink fur and being turned into Hogwarts dominated these conversations. Getting treats and sweets in school was mentioned by the majority of children. Many children also thought deeply about it and said they wanted everyone to be kind and nice to each other, not to hurt, to be happy in school and to generally have school environments with more love and happiness. Other children mentioned specific subjects they wanted more of in school while others commented on wanting less work while in school or no homework at home. Again, play, time with friends and spending time in the outdoors/the yard were mentioned as something children wanted much more of (especially arts and PE). It is therefore interesting that they seemed to attribute little importance to play in Session 4 when doing the worksheet on important things to learn about.

CHOICE.

Children were asked questions about whether they get to do everything they would like in school or whether there are things they would like to do that they do not get to do. They were also asked if they ever had a choice in what they wanted to learn or learn about. Children's response to these questions, all of which relate to children's sense of agency and influence on their own learning, suggest that they struggled to understand what choice *means* in relation to school and learning and that it was difficult for children to imagine or conceptualise what they could be learning that they were not currently learning in school. Of particular interest here is that many children said they had no choice in what they wanted to learn. As many children suggested they do have a choice but when they were asked to provide examples, many of these examples suggest a very narrow understanding of choice. Such

choices include choosing between books in the library to read. Gambrell (2011) found a positive relationship between children experiencing choices around books and their motivation to read, which letter sound to learn about next, or which planet to learn about when covering the solar system. Some children mentioned having choice in relation to art as they could choose what to draw. One child suggested they had choice in relation to the Child Voice research, in terms of participating or not and what to say and draw during sessions. What such choices suggest is that children may be afforded some, but limited, choices in relation to specific items that do not suggest more profoundly agentic approaches to learning, such as meaningfully influencing or shaping the themes or topics they are learning about. The following quote highlights the role of power relationships and authority in forming children's perception of choice:

“Teacher: Do you get to do all the things you like to do in school?

Child: No

Teacher: Why? Tell me why.

Child: Because you're the boss of all of us. We can't do anything without your permission.”

Art and playful learning appear as two areas with more space for agency and choice as children have freer choices about what to play or draw/paint and thus in conceptualising children's understanding of choice within the school setting it is important to emphasise that children prefer art and play over most other subjects and activities in school. In future research, it would be important to explore whether children's increased sense of freedom and choice/agency in these subjects and activities impact on their preference for these areas. A starting point might be *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 2010). It proposes that choice is inherent in play and this proposition is borne out in research on children's perspectives that consistently shows that children value making choices, having freedom from structure and time to themselves (Kapasi & Gleave, 2009, as cited in Wood, 2014). Certainly, the children who provided further detail for this research suggested that one of the things they liked best about art was that they could choose what to do and in relation to play that they could choose what to play and with whom. In relation to choices provided by play, one child rated 'Golden time' as better for providing choice “Golden time means we get to pick what we want. But other days we have to do what we are ... em... stationed” (School 1, session 3). This is a reference to the carousel system of play

stations, usually set up by the teacher, which children visit on designated days of the week. Children have play choices within the stations but may feel obligated to play in a particular area as designated by the play rota.

CHILDREN'S REPORTS ON DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL.

Some children did not consider activities done in pre-school any different to those in primary school with a common answer of "*not really.*"

Answers included - "in primary school, you do more work than play school" with an emphasis on more play in pre-school and more work in primary school. This finding is in line with findings from Breathnach et al. (2017) who reported that children transitioning from preschool to primary school envisage school as a place where there is less play and more 'work'. One student explained that they "learn different language in primary school." Yet a small number of children from the English-medium schools (n=3) explained that Irish was done in both settings. The number of children from the Scoil Ghaeltachta who had attended an Irish-medium pre-school was high considering that most pre-school settings in the Gaeltacht operate through English (Department of Education & Skills, 2016), and children in this setting spoke about a continuity in the learning of Irish from pre-school to primary school.

Other differences included having homework in primary school but not in pre-school. Some children noted that their friends are different in the two settings and that they got lunch/toast in pre-school but not in primary school. In the Irish-medium schools, children associated more freedom with early years' learning and highlighted that they were not required to wear a uniform, that they could go home earlier, and that they were allowed to eat more regularly and to have lunch outdoors.

While it was acknowledged that the children had books in pre-school, one child commented that you have them but "you don't do em" instead "you just read them." This may be a reference to workbooks as distinct from picture books. Workbooks are used in school and must be 'done.'

Toys such as trucks, lorries and big Lego were identified as being different in pre-school.

One child commented that the settings were different sizes; hopscotch was played differently in pre-school as it had letters as opposed to numbers and there were more opportunities for

outdoor play in pre-school. Many children mentioned that the pre-school had a slide, swings and trampoline that was not in their primary school.

Children reported that they could sleep/take naps/go to bed in pre-school that they could access a sensory garden, could do more cutting out in pre-school and had harder instructions to do activities in primary school.

There was an emphasis on more work in primary school as opposed to pre-school and that this work was, in general, harder. Outdoor play facilities were better in pre-school and opportunities for outdoor play were greater. Overall, pre-school appears to have provided more of the comforts of home; naps could be taken, and children could eat more regularly.

CHILDREN'S REPORTS ON SIMILARITIES BETWEEN PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL.

The activities they reported to be similar in both pre-school and primary comprised cutting, playing, playing with toys, playing with friends, playing outside, drawing and painting. When probed, the majority of children referred to sand play happening predominantly in pre-school, with some children acknowledging that they have sand and play with it in primary school as well as pre-school. Children needed to be reminded about the sand in the primary school which could suggest that sand is not used much. One child explained that while numbers were done in both settings, the use of cubes for numbers was something different. This possibly refers to cubes being used for early Mathematical activities. Some children considered that the "fun" they had in pre-school was different to primary school but did not elaborate on this. Others considered the fun to be the "same." A small number reported that they did jigsaws, played with their friends in both pre-school and primary school. Baking and art were reported as being done in both settings. The children produced drawings of 'what I do in pre-school' and 'what I do in primary school'. Both sets of drawings focused on activities such as playing, toys, dressing up, reading, learning numbers, playdough, school events (Teddy Bears' Picnic, Jersey Day) and calendar (Halloween, Christmas) events.

TALKING ABOUT PRIMARY SCHOOL IN PRE-SCHOOL.

There were yes/no/cannot remember answers to the question on talking about primary school in pre-school.

The majority of children reported that in pre-school they spoke about primary school, some did not recall, and a small number (n=5) said no. When this was examined more closely the following topics were discussed about primary school: Homework, how much fun school would be, new and old friends in primary school, and teacher characteristics. They reported that they were informed that they would have male teachers suggesting that the majority of workers in pre-schools are female. One child recounted being “scared” when she met the male teacher but now it’s better “when I knowed him better.” One boy reported that he was told that “when you go to big school you will be a big boy and you will be able to do hard sums.”

Some children recalled visiting big school and looking around the classrooms. The majority reported that they were informed that big school would be harder.

IS THERE SOMETHING YOU REMEMBER THAT YOU LIKED TO DO IN PLAY SCHOOL THAT YOU WOULD STILL LIKE TO DO IN PRIMARY SCHOOL?

The children reported that playing with play dough, playing with toys, having more play time were activities that they enjoyed in both settings and one child noted that they carved pumpkins in pre-school, and they would like to do that in primary school. Other children noted that playing with shapes, having fun on the slides, making jigsaws, playing with magnets was something that they would still like to do. Baking/making toast was also a popular activity in pre-school that the children wished to continue in primary school.

Some children liked to learn about other countries such as Poland; liked to play hide and seek; to play with kinetic sand; and to play on swings. These were all memories of pre-school that they wished they did in primary school.

LEARNING DIFFERENTLY IN THE OLDER CLASSES.

In response to the questions “Do you think you should learn in a different way in older classes in school? How do you think older classes might be different?,” children tended to comment on how difficult the work would be in older classes. Only one or two children referred to how teaching and learning methods might be different. There was a perception that work would be more abstract, less hands-on. “Eh, you should think in your head and listen to the teacher.” Some suggestions offered on how work would be different centred around “doing your

handwriting,” learning harder words, harder work, harder maths, harder Irish, doing more writing and learning different things. Children commented that you get less time to play in older classes. Some children seemed happy with this increased challenge and were looking forward to learning a musical instrument in older classes. In the Irish-medium schools, children identified that they would learn and speak more Irish in senior classes.

Children stated that they would learn differently in older classes and made connections between being more confident and listening more attentively as something inherent in the older classes in big school. A child in Second Class, looking back on her/his years in infant classes said “What we do in Junior Infants and Senior Infants, we don’t do now. We don’t act the maggot.” There was a desire to paint more and a fear that this would be minimised in the older classes. Overall, there seemed to be a sense amongst the children of developing maturity as one progressed through school but also a sense of having less playful time and more demands on them to listen.

HOW CHILDREN WOULD SCHEDULE THEIR TIME IN SCHOOL.

Some interesting findings have also emerged in relation to how children would plan their day in school. Children were asked to first identify what their current day looks like and then how they would like it to look. In some classes the children did this together as a class while in other classes the children did this individually. Children have identified typical day schedules of news, different subjects, breaks and yard time, and learning through play. They agreed that it is good to know what is going to happen (a timetable) every week but there could be flexibility within that, especially for thematic weeks such as mental health week. They wanted to be able to make sure that Drama and Art happened every week, which suggests that these subjects are sacrificed for others at times and are not regularly taking place.

Children’s proposals for alternatively planned days reflect findings from the other sessions, namely that children want more time for play, yard, breaks, learning in the outdoors and more time for learning through play. Children have also identified that they want more fun activities and less work during the school day. Subject areas children have requested more of are PE, drama, visual arts, and in one junior infant class, phonics. One child mentioned they would like more “trying it out, like Aistear”, meaning more time to explore and to be free to learn through trial and error. Some further ideas suggested for children’s ideal days are learning

about specific things like space, learning about the past, “the pyramids and all that,” learning about toys, sewing, woodwork, DEAR (Drop Everything & Read) time and learning about different people and languages.

Interestingly, a couple of classes have suggested longer days in school to allow more time for fun things to do, including a junior infant and Second Class. Both several whole classes and individual children in different classes have suggested that they would like more time in school to complete their homework and not get homework to take home with them in the afternoons. Individual children also identified wanting more time for technology-based learning, including things such as chrome books. One child suggested they would also have a calm corner in the classroom and be given time to spend in that calm corner. A multi-grade as well as a Second Class in two different schools incorporated time for naps in their daily or weekly schedule. Along with the request for time in a calm corner and more breaks, it may suggest that children need more calm time or break time built into their day. Classrooms are busy and fast-paced environments. Perhaps a more relaxed pace in the classroom would be welcome at times. Watching movies was also built into many ‘ideal days’ in schools, reflecting the preference for this mode of learning identified in Worksheet 2.

Other suggestions identified in children’s ideal days are more school trips and opportunities for going on walks and small informal or less structured entire day trips. Reflecting findings from the magic wand question in Session 1 children would also like more fun and treats in school, for example through tea and biscuit breaks and tea/cake parties. In most classes normal subjects are also incorporated into the ideal day but to a lesser extent than in their current schedules. Thus, children have also included subject areas like Gaeilge, English, Phonics, reading, Maths, and Art. In several of the classes children also identified wanting more choice in the activities they do or what they learn about, as well as in relation to what they have in the classroom. In one instance a special education teacher took a couple of children out of their class to work with them on the research and the children in this group identified wanting the opportunity to “talk to the teacher whenever you want,” suggesting that they feel restricted in their access to their teacher within the larger class.

DID YOU LIKE BEING ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL?

Children indicated that they enjoyed being asked their opinions on school, commenting that it was “fun,” “cool” and “super-duper duper duper.” Some children said they enjoyed communicating their views in pictorial form and orally. Many children mentioned their love of drawing and painting. A small number reported enjoying the reflective tasks and liked being quiet but did not elaborate on the reasons for this. When asked what you would want the researchers to know about what you think of school, many children answered, “I like it,” “I love it,” “It’s fun learning,” and “I like it really really much.” Some children wanted researchers to know they wanted “longer yard,” that is, longer recreation periods, and all children should mix at recreation periods. This response is a reference to the restrictions brought into schools during the COVID-19 period, where recreation periods were staggered to avoid the spread of the virus. Other information that children wished researchers to know was they wanted more computers and iPads, no homework or just homework projects. Also “I would like them to know how hard I’m working.”

SCHOOL IN OUR GRANDPARENTS’ TIME.

It was clear from the children’s responses in this section that children had a sense that things were different in their grandparents’ time. While children generally spoke readily to this topic, a sizeable number of them said “I don’t know” when asked questions, a reasonable response to a question where they are asked to speculate on what their grandparents might have thought of school. Sometimes, also, the children parroted one another.

The children’s responses indicated that they felt the world was a smaller place when their grandparents were in school. Grandparents, they felt, did not need to know about different people or different languages or different jobs. A small number believed that children today know more about science and learn more about the environment. Children have a sense that the past was a more homogenous place. In an exceedingly small number of cases, they referred to parents’ experiences of corporal punishment. Some children associated their grandparents’ school days as being in the far distant past and spoke of their grandparents writing with feathers that had ink in them. Others had a more accurate sense of time and talked about how their grandparents would have used chalk (blackboards) instead of markers (whiteboards).

Children noted that their parents and grandparents did not have access to technology (iPads and an interactive whiteboard), and that they did not spend time in the school garden. They perceived that previous generations did more academic subjects e.g., writing and Mathematics, and that there was less emphasis on play. They believed that their parents did not have the same access to concrete materials when learning e.g., toys, and that they did not engage in as much active learning such as building things in science. In the case of Irish-medium schools, a small number believed they had an advantage in being able to speak Irish all day long in school. They recognised that their parents did not have this same experience so the children could sometimes teach Irish words to their parents. In the Gaeltacht school, some children reported that their parents or grandparents had attended this school too and a minority of parents have active links with the school e.g., work on a part-time basis in the school community. Some children also had a sense that not everyone went to school in their grandparents' day and one child mentioned that her grandparents would have said to her parents "I am super proud of you getting into school." So, in summary, it could be said that children had a sense that children nowadays have more classroom and play resources, broader experience of the world, more knowledge about technology, languages, science, and the environment, including gardening, and better educational opportunities.

FINDINGS FROM CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS

During Session 1, children engaged in drawing to represent their likes and dislikes of school. During Session 2, children were asked to draw what happens in preschool and primary school. The drawings were executed while the audio-recorded interviews were being conducted in the class. The drawings were used to triangulate the findings from the interviews and provided some interesting additional insights into children's thinking.

There is significant diversity in children's drawings in terms of whether colours, and how many colours, were used. Many classes seemed to only use pencils to make the drawings and many of these drawings appear much simpler than the drawings where children had access to colours. Children's drawings are therefore not analysed for use of colours as such, except if there is a clear difference in use of colours between two of the same child's drawings for the same research session. Drawings from children in First and Second Class were easier to read and interpret than those of the younger children due perhaps to the maturity of their drawing

skills. Many children used written text, including Irish text in the Irish-medium schools, in their drawings as captions and this supported interpretation.

In some schools, children only completed one drawing and the other side of the paper was left blank. This is more than likely due to time constraints. However, for the majority of drawings of the preschool/primary school distinction in the Irish-medium schools, children only drew the primary school and not the preschool and thus a comparative analysis was not possible to conduct for these classes.

One consideration the research team had not preempted with the drawings was the labelling of the drawing topics for the preschool/primary school drawing. The older children could label these themselves but teachers labelled the paper for the younger children. In one instance of such labelling, the teacher included a small drawing next to the label to show the children, which side was which. The teacher drew a teddy bear for preschool and a building, the numbers 123 and blocks for primary school. These teacher's drawings may well have influenced the children's own drawings. In that particular class many children drew playing with teddies for preschool and hopscotch and Mathematics for primary school to an extent not observed for any other class and providing a consistency across drawings within this class that was also not observed for other classes (in terms of what children chose to draw). This potential bias was taken into consideration when analysing the drawings and thus it has not been reported in the findings that children associate preschool with teddies and school with numbers and hopscotch.

What I like and dislike about school as depicted in drawings (Session 1)

Likes

Children's drawings in the main reflect what they described in the interviews, yet some children have also elaborated with more personal likes that are not necessarily reflected in the interviews. Such likes include a particular football team that the child supports or very specific likes, such as cutting out snowflakes as a particular activity within art.

The vast majority of drawings depicting what children liked were drawings of children outdoors in the sun with blue skies, grass, flowers and in the company of other children. This aligns with findings from the interviews and the literature (Breathnach et al., 2017) that children like playing outdoors with their friends. They were mostly playing football. Such

drawings included both boys and girls and did not suggest obvious trends in relation to 'gendered' play preferences. Children were sometimes holding hands and were smiling. Other 'likes' included playing ball games such as basketball, playing with cones, skipping ropes and there were a lot of pictures of children using outdoor play/gym equipment. Playing with skipping ropes was the only form of play where girls seemed to be represented more than boys. There were also pictures of children eating lunch and playing on digital devices. Adults were not present in most pictures. In their study on children's perspectives of classroom activities, Breathnach et al. (2017) suggest that the presence of an adult and the locations of activities in classrooms can have an impact on children's views of whether they are engaging in work or play. If this is the case, the children's pictures predominantly featured play. Only two children drew an adult, which must be presumed to be the teacher, and in both cases the teacher was depicted monitoring playtime. The teachers were smiling, suggesting that the children welcome a teacher's presence among them at playtime, perhaps as an arbiter of disputes, or provider of first aid or a comforting presence. Those children who depicted curriculum subjects they like mentioned Mathematics, a commercial, Irish language programme, P.E., Art, 'Golden Time,' playing with blocks, Lego, and other toys, doing Science experiments, free writing, reading, working collaboratively, learning letters, and using the library.

Dislikes

There were a good number of instances where children did not draw anything to represent what they dislike about school. This could be because they are happy in school and had nothing to say about what they disliked, or it could also be that children ran out of time to complete the task. The most common dislikes were homework, working on their own at a single desk, having nobody to play with, and being upset due to fighting with others or injuring themselves at playtime. A very small number of children's 'dislike' pictures were of their teacher looking cross. Many children drew very clear pictures of being alone in the classroom and outdoors and this was a common 'dislike.' Curriculum subjects that were disliked included handwriting, of which there were many instances, Mathematics (liked and disliked in almost equal measure) and Irish. A particular, commercially available, Irish programme, designed to support the work of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), was mentioned several times as being liked and disliked by children. A few children drew pictures of rewards charts as dislikes and one child drew a very clear representation of children urging one another to hurry

so that they could win a classroom competition. The child drawing the picture drew herself alone, looking sad and clearly not performing adequately to ensure her class group won the competition. Kohn (1999) argues that competitive awards can damage motivation and self-esteem and undermine a sense of community and collaboration. Wilson, as cited in Patrick, 2019, maintains that rewards should be about celebrating the individual, not about comparison with others. The topic of classroom rewards, especially in relation to junior classes, merits more exploration. The literature suggests that student teachers tend to rely on rewards because one of their greatest fears when being assessed on their student placement is that they will not be able to manage class behaviour (Hall et al., 2018, p. 154). When more experienced teachers develop rich relationships with the children in their care and have established mutual understandings around boundaries and behaviours, rewards systems, especially ones where children are pitted against their peers, are, arguably, not necessary.

Finally, in relation to children's dislikes, one child wrote about her dislike of 'doing the magnets', presumably a Science lesson or as part of the planned play activities in junior classes, and another disliked the sun in her eyes.

Some interesting trends also emerge in relation to children's drawings that shed further light on children's thinking in relation to likes and dislikes in school. In children's drawings of what they like and dislike in school, one way in which many children have chosen to depict their like or dislike of a particular subject in school is through drawing an image of the main text book used in the school for that subject. This was evident in relation to Irish and mathematics in particular but also in relation to English. This may be because children find it easier to depict a subject this way when drawing – others chose simply to write the names of the subjects – but it may also indicate that their attitudes towards certain subjects may be linked in some way to their impression of or engagement with the textbooks used in the school for that subject. Thus, for Irish it was a specific programme/text book used in English-medium schools associated with Irish as a subject that figured across the majority of children's drawings that depicted Irish as either a like or dislike.

DRAW WHAT HAPPENS IN PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL (SESSION 2)

The instruction from the second research session was to draw what children do in preschool on one side of a page and draw what children do in primary school on the other side of the page. The main finding was that there were no striking contrasts between children's depictions of what they do in preschool and primary school. In general, the preschool pictures tended to be outdoors, featuring swings and slides and smiling children, again with very few adults depicted (yet more than in the 'likes' and 'dislikes' drawings). There were many pictures of toys, cars and tractors for children to drive around in, picnics, lunch-time, pictures with happy educators, art materials and footballs. There were one or two pictures where educators did not look happy; one included a speech bubble where the educator was telling the child to "Just Pick", indicating a choice of materials with which to play. One child wrote 'No work' on the preschool page. Another child summed up their preschool experience with the words "More games, more fun." The preschool pictures tended to feature a lot of movement and lots of play materials and were generally very colourful.

Pictures of what happens in primary school also featured play scenes, outdoors and indoors, outdoor play equipment and children playing ball games. Teachers, largely absent in the drawings on children's likes and dislikes, were much more present in the primary school drawings. They were standing at whiteboards or standing in front of children. Some children had their hands up in the air, as if responding to a question posed. One drawing depicted both children and the teacher with multiple limbs, suggesting that there were multiple tasks to be done and the atmosphere in the room was one of busy-ness. There were many drawings of children sitting at tables, looking happy as they worked collaboratively and less happy when sitting alone. Chairs and tables featured much more in drawings of primary school than preschool. This could indicate a less active approach to learning in primary school or it may simply reflect the reality of the layout of primary school classrooms, which caters for larger numbers of children than do preschool rooms. Interestingly, where children have drawn children they have drawn much bigger numbers of children than in preschool drawings, perhaps again indicating the larger class sizes in many primary schools compared to preschools. It may also suggest that children's network of friends and children to play with are expanding as they grow and develop.

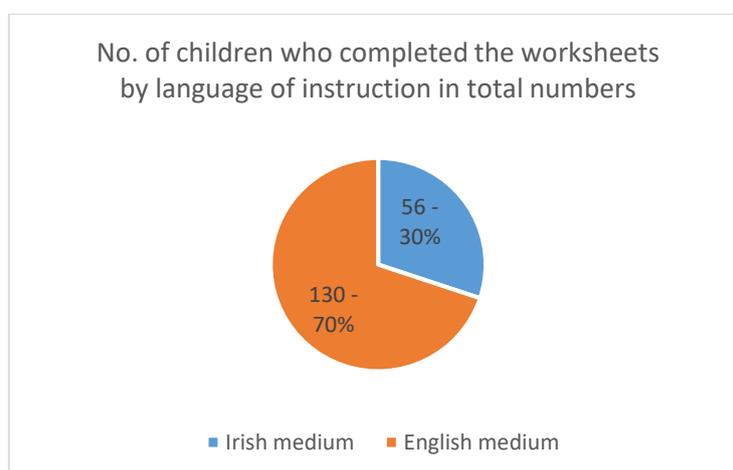
FINDINGS FROM KEY MESSAGES 4 AND 5: ANALYSIS OF WORKSHEET DATA (JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL)

As outlined, children in the junior end of primary school completed two worksheets as part of the research. The first worksheet asked children about their priorities for learning and the second asked children about the ways in which they like to learn (Appendix E). In total, 186 children completed Worksheet 1 and 187 children completed Worksheet 2. In the majority of schools, the worksheets were completed on different school days as part of different research sessions. In the worksheet data, language of instruction and class level have been considered as variables with potential impact on findings and thus some findings will be presented related to class level and language of instruction.

PROFILE OF CHILDREN WHO COMPLETED THE WORKSHEETS

With regard to language of instruction, of the eight schools that participated in the junior primary research, 22% (n=2) of schools are Irish-medium schools and 77% (n=7) are English-medium schools. In terms of numbers of children, of the 186 children who filled in Worksheet 1, 130 are in English-medium schools while 56 are in Irish-medium schools, which corresponds to 70% and 30% respectively.

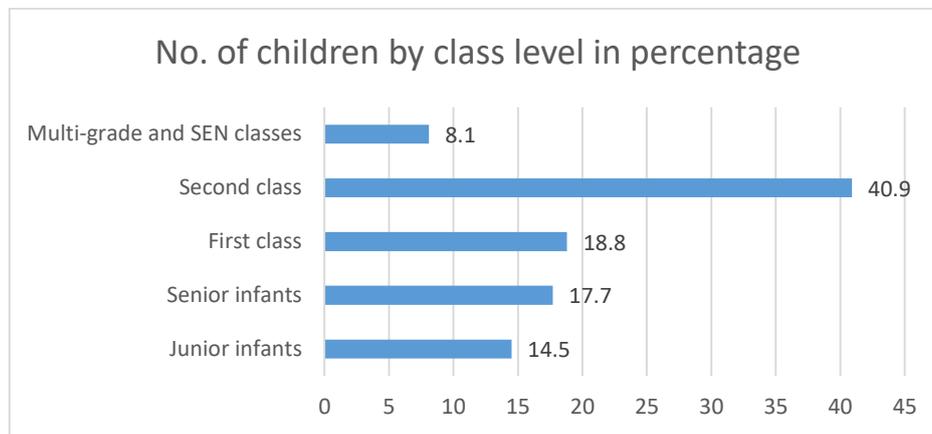
Figure 3: Sample by language of instruction



In relation to class level, 27 children (14.5%) attend junior infant classes, 33 children (17.7%) attend senior infant classes, 35 (18.8%) attend First Class with the majority of children attending Second Class, 76 in total or 40.9%. Another 15 (8.1%) children attend multigrade classes (n=12) or completed the worksheet in their special class in a mainstream school (n=3).

The fact that twice as many children attend Second Class compared to any other class suggests that teachers may feel more confident in participating in research when they teach older classes.

Figure 4: Number of children by class level in percentages



FINDINGS FROM WORKSHEET 1: CHILDREN'S PRIORITIES FOR LEARNING.

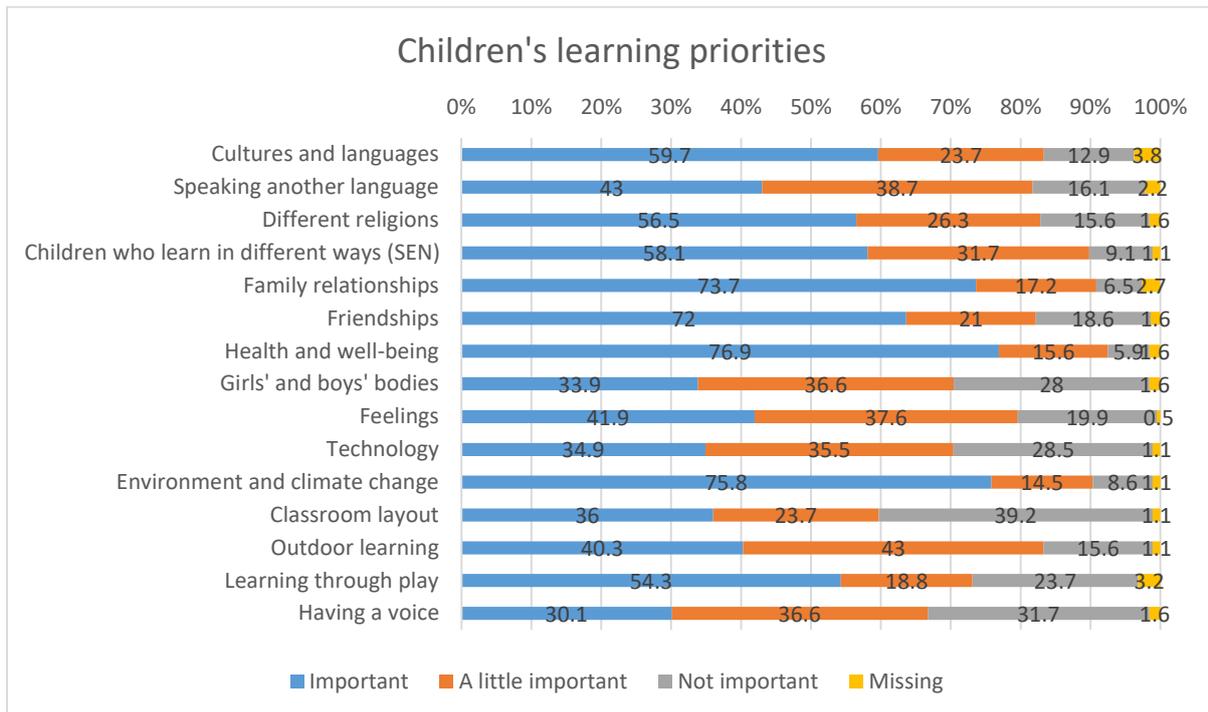
In order to answer the research question relating to emerging priorities for children's learning, a worksheet was developed by the research team to identify children's views on a list of topics that were identified by the research team (by referencing the vision, key competencies, and principles of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework: For Consultation* (NCCA, 2020) as potential priorities for children's learning currently and into the future. The following topics were identified as emerging priorities:

- Learning about different cultures and languages
- Being able to speak another language
- Learning about different religions
- Children who learn in different ways or have disabilities can learn in the same classroom
- Learning about the environment and climate change
- Learning through and about creative technologies
- Learning to make friends (social relationships)
- Learning about family relationships
- Feelings
- Relationships and sexual education (learning about boys' and girls' bodies)

- Health and wellbeing
- Learning through play
- Learning outside
- Classroom layout
- Having a voice and decision-making power in relation to education

Some clear patterns emerged from the worksheet. Learning about different aspects of diversity and inclusion, as well as family and peer relationships, health and well-being and climate change were consistently highly rated by children. For example, well-being and health which scores the highest in children's priorities for learning, was rated with 'It is important' by 77% of children with another 16% of children rating it as a little important. Similar trends are observed for Environment and Climate Change, Friendship and Family relationships, explaining the particularly high scores for these four learning priorities. What is of particular interest is the high value placed on the top four priorities and the low value placed on the bottom four learning priorities, namely how the classroom looks (layout), children have a say / choice in what they learn, learning about girls' and boys' bodies (as a proxy for Relationships and Sexuality Education) and technology. What this suggests is that children are relatively clear and univocal about their priorities for learning in primary school. Children's top two priorities reflect two issues that are pressing for society and much discussed on the media; well-being, as society struggles to emerge from a global pandemic and climate change. Along with children's reflections on differences in school learning now and when older generations were in school, their ranking of learning priorities illustrate an acute awareness of current societal issues.

Figure 5: Children's rating of their learning priorities



The emerging priorities for children's learning were not grouped for children on the worksheets but can be grouped as follows for further analysis (other ways of grouping the learning priorities are also possible):

1) Learning about diversity

- Learning about different cultures and languages
- Being able to speak another language
- Learning about different religions
- Children who learn in different ways or have disabilities can learn in the same classroom

2) Relationships, emotions, and sexual education

- a. Learning to make friends (social relationships)
- b. Learning about family relationships
- c. Feelings
- d. Sexual education (learning about boys' and girls' bodies)
- e. Health and well-being

3) New learning priorities

- a. Learning about the environment and climate change

- b. Learning about creative technologies
- 4) Pedagogy and teaching methods
- a. Learning through play
 - b. Learning outside
 - c. Classroom layout
 - d. Having a voice and decision-making power in relation to education

Technology can arguably also be grouped in the fourth category of teaching methods. For ease of reading and analysis, the worksheet data have been displayed in Figure 5 with the learning priorities grouped in this way. What is interesting to observe is that those learning priorities that can be generally categorised as learning about diversity have been rated as important by the majority of children with over half of children deeming most of these learning priorities as important. The learning priorities rated important by the highest number of children, however, all fall under Category 2, which covers a broader range of social relationships, health and wellbeing, while those learning priorities that can generally be categorised as pedagogy and teaching methods or approaches (Category 4) were more likely to be rated as either only a little important or not important. Of this fourth category, learning through play was most likely to be rated as important, by just over half of all children. Yet nearly a quarter of all children deemed play as not important on this worksheet. Thus, while nearly as many children deemed play important as deemed various aspects of diversity important, more children deemed play as not important compared to children who deemed diversity related priorities not important. Children thus seem somewhat more divided on whether play is important as a learning priority than many of the other priorities. This finding is interesting to triangulate with the findings from the interviews and drawings where no child mentioned not liking to learn through play. Indeed, the strong presence of play in children's drawings and discussions of what they like in school makes it particularly interesting that children seem relatively divided on whether they consider it an important learning priority. This may indicate that children distinguish between what they like and what they deem to be important. They are clear that they like play but are more equivocal about its importance. Perhaps children do not associate play with learning and therefore play is not considered important.

Choice and decision-making.

Children have not rated choice ('you can help decide what/how to learn') highly in Worksheet 1. In the qualitative data choice and having a say in their education was something children evidently struggled to understand and respond to. Where they identified choices, it was a very narrow understanding of choice (choosing between two books or planets to learn about). The finding relating to choice in the worksheet may thus reflect children's understanding or sense of having a say. If they do not have extensive experience of having choice in their education, it may be difficult for them to rate the importance of it. Choice and decision making are abstract concepts for young children, and it was clear from the teachers' recordings of the conversations that many teachers had to explain and rephrase the question to children several times for the children to understand the focus group questions relating to choice. It may be these difficulties in understanding that are reflected in the worksheet. Interestingly, in Session 3 however, which preceded the worksheet sessions, several of the participating classes identified wanting more choice in what they learn about in the schedules for their 'ideal days'. Thus, children could identify wanting more choice when not directly asked about their choices in relation to education. It is interesting also that preschool children found it less difficult to answer this question, albeit still needing guidance in understanding it, and preschool children were generally able to identify where they had choice and give concrete examples. The examples provided by preschool children also suggested a less narrow sense of choice (choosing what to play or which activity to engage in vs choosing which book to take out from the library). Children's ratings of emerging priorities show some interesting trends when the data is segregated by language of instruction and class level. Where differences have been found in the data according to these variables, these findings will be presented below.

Learning about other cultures and languages and speaking another language.

Children's views in relation to learning about other cultures and languages are particularly interesting. Across all schools it is generally something that children rated highly, achieving an overall ranking of the 6th most important priority. However, children in Irish-medium schools rated learning about cultures and languages significantly higher than children in English-medium schools. This finding needs further interrogation.

Figure 6: Learning about other cultures and languages

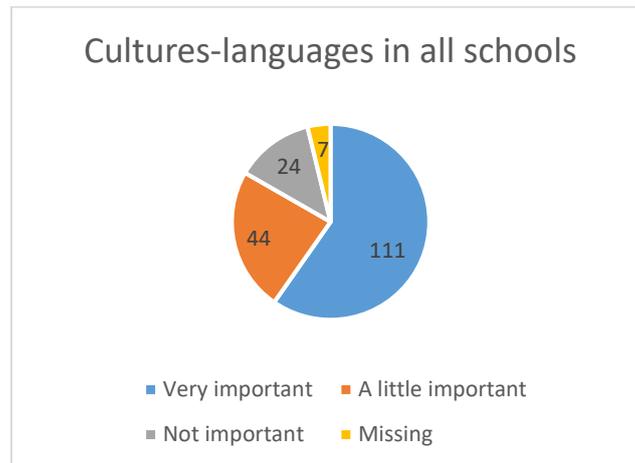


Figure 7: Learning about other cultures and languages in Irish medium schools

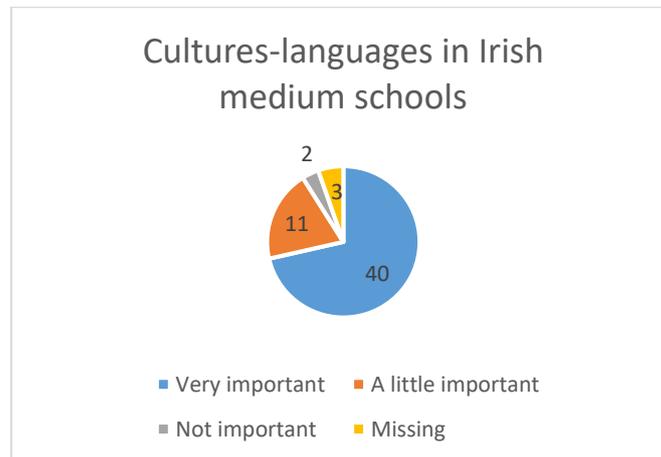
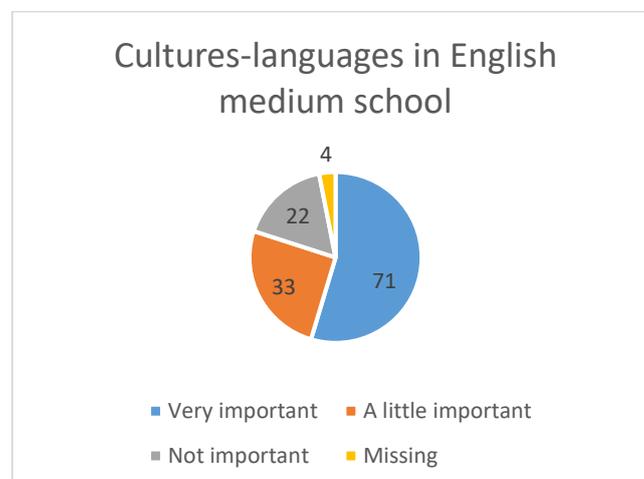


Figure 8: Learning about other cultures and languages in English medium schools



Complementing the above findings relating to children's rating of learning about other cultures and languages, the worksheet data clearly show that children in Irish-medium schools prioritise being able to speak another language more than children in English-medium schools. This is possibly linked to the increased emphasis on Irish language and culture in these school settings (McCoy et al., 2012). In the case of minority languages, immersion education systems have a critical role in language and cultural revitalisation and maintenance (Harris & Ó Laoire, 2006; Ní Chuaig et al., 2021). Baker and Wright (2021) note that a benefit of bilingual education, such as Irish-medium education, is an enhanced awareness of identity and culture. Compared to English-medium schools and compared to the entire data set children in Irish-medium schools are more likely to rate being able to speak another language as important whereas children in English-medium schools are more likely to rate it either as only a little important or not important. The findings from the English-medium school are nearly identical to the entire data set.

Figure 9: Speaking other languages in Irish medium schools

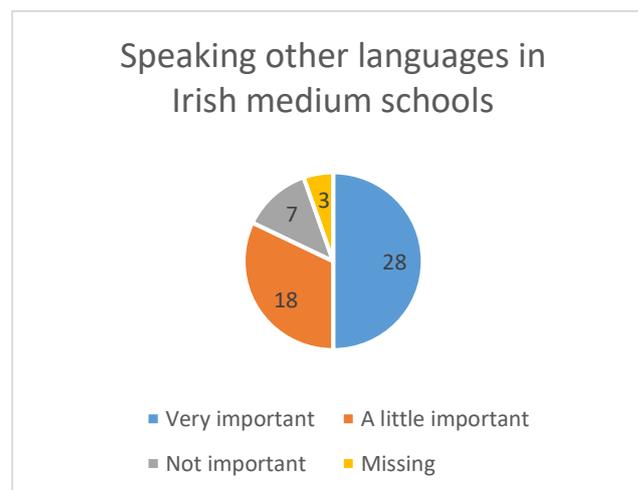


Figure 10: Speaking other languages in English medium schools

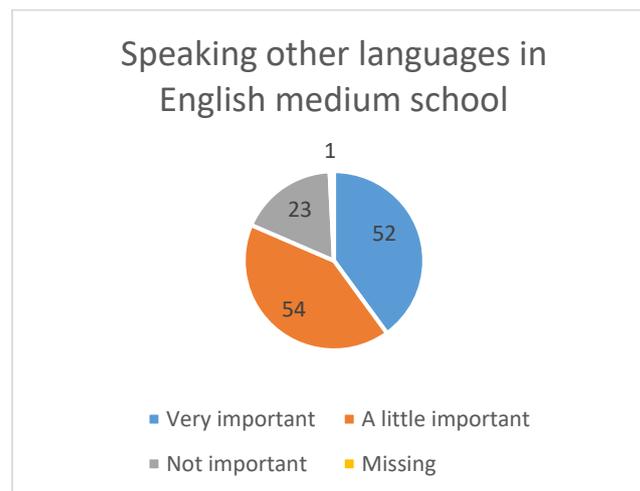
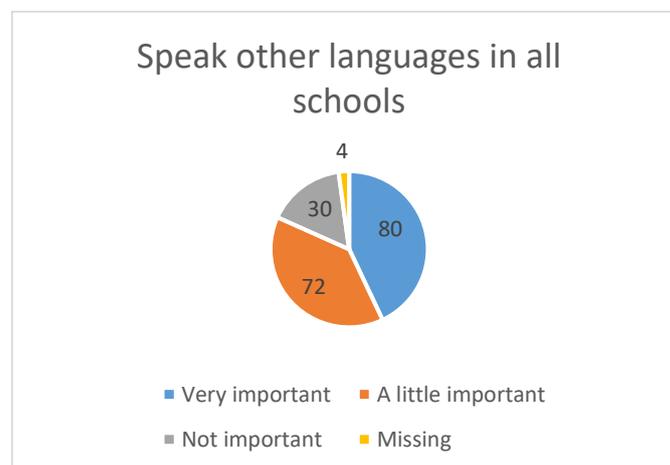


Figure 11: Speaking other languages in both English and Irish medium schools



Another interesting finding relates to the general ranking of learning priorities by language of instruction. For example, it is interesting that well-being, environment and climate change and outdoor learning are ranked very differently, as is technology as mentioned above as these have little seeming relation to language of instruction. What is also interesting and important to note is that even though more children in Irish speaking schools compared to English speaking schools rated speaking another language as important in the overall ranking of emerging priorities for learning, speaking another language still achieves a very low ranking compared to other priorities, suggesting that even though children in Irish-medium schools are more likely to rate it as important they still rate it less important than other emerging priorities.

Table 4: How children ranked learning priorities

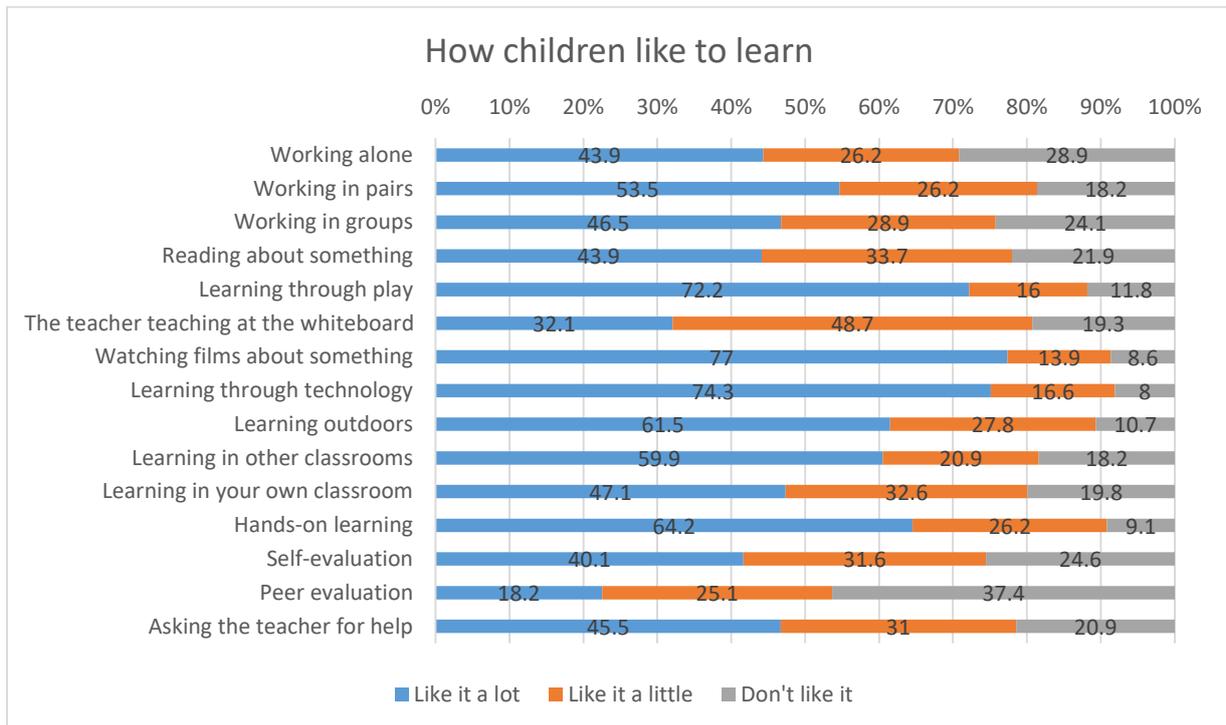
Ranking	All schools	Irish-medium	English-medium
1	Wellbeing and health	Environment	Well-being and health
2	Environment	Friendship	Friendship / family*
3	Friendship	Family / children who learn in different ways*	Friendship / family*
4	Family relationships	Family / children who learn in different ways*	Environment
5	Children who learn in different ways	Wellbeing and health Cultures and languages*	Children who learn in different ways
6	Cultures and languages	Wellbeing / Cultures and languages*	Religions
7	Religions	Religions	Cultures and languages
8	Play	Play	Outdoor learning
9	Outdoor learning / Being able to speak another language*	Technology	Speak another language
10	Outdoor learning / Being able to speak another language*	Feelings / classroom layout*	Feelings / play*
11	Feelings	Feelings / classroom layout*	Feelings / play*
12	Technology	Speak another language	Girls' and boys' bodies
13	Girls' and boys' bodies	Outdoor learning	Choice
14	Choice	Girls' and boys' bodies	Technology
15	Classroom layout	Choice	Classroom layout

** These learning priorities achieved equal ranking when the total values were added up hence why they are repeated.*

FINDINGS FROM WORKSHEET 2: HOW CHILDREN LIKE TO LEARN.

187 children filled in Worksheet 2 across the eight schools. Findings from this worksheet support the findings from the interviews and drawings, namely that children have a strong preference for active and technology based learning, and learning alongside their peers. Findings from Worksheet 2, however, also puts into perspective and challenges previous findings outlined in this report, adding depth and complexity to children's views on different aspects of teaching in schools.

Figure 12: How children like to learn



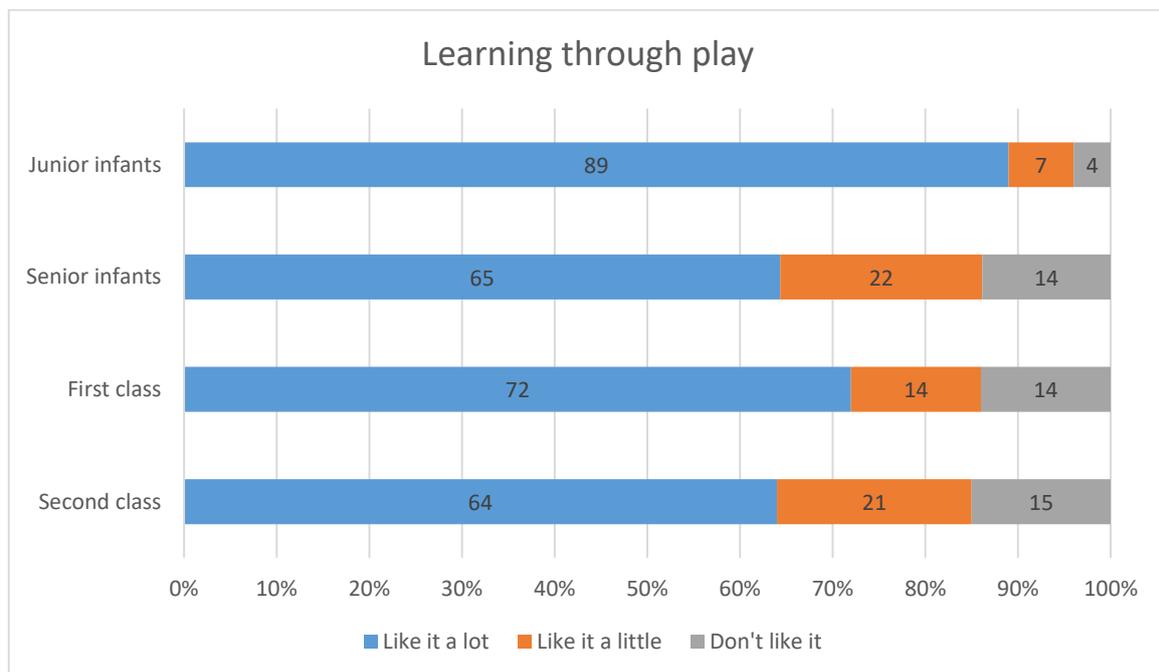
As evident in Figure 12, children have a strong preference for learning by watching films about something, closely followed by learning through other forms of technology with over three quarters of children expressing a like for such learning methods. This is closely followed by learning through play and hands-on learning. As will be discussed below, however, it is particularly junior infant children who express a strong liking of learning through play. Over half of the children who participated in the research also expressed that they like learning in the outdoors and in rooms in the school other than their classroom, with slightly fewer children (just under half) expressing they like to learn in their own classrooms, again a preference that ranks high primarily due to junior infant children's expressed like of it. Over half of the children also expressed a preference for working in pairs over working in groups or working alone. While the difference is not significant there is a greater proportion of children who expressed a dislike of learning alone at the desk or in groups compared to working in pairs. Roughly the same percentage of children like the three ways of working 'a little', thus the difference is primarily between those who really like and those who really do not like it. The preference for working in pairs reflects children's clear preference for being with their friends as expressed in the drawings and interviews.

Children are univocal in not liking peer-evaluation, which gets a markedly lower total value when all children's scores are added up compared to all other learning methods. Two things could be at play here. It may be that children either really do not like peer-evaluation or it may be that it is generally not something they are asked to do and therefore have stated that they do not like it. Children's rating of peer evaluation and self-evaluation do not change much across the different class levels, as do the more highly rated learning methods of hands-on, play- and technology-based learning approaches in contrast, and warrant attention regarding children's very low rating of learning through such assessment approaches. Peer-evaluation appears as particularly disliked by children. The findings for peer evaluation are interesting. In the figures depicting how children like to learn broken down by class level it becomes evident that a large proportion of junior and senior infant children chose not to rate peer evaluation at all. As the only item across both worksheets it has a 'missing' rate of over 40%. No other items have a rate higher than 7% and most items have no missing answers at all. This may indicate either that children have not known what it means or may have had suggested by their teacher not to rate that item if it is a practice they do not use within the class. By First Class the rate has dropped to a more normal level of 6%. For the children who have rated their like of peer evaluation, the majority of children either do not like it or only like it a little, with only 11% and 19% of children in junior and Senior Infants respectively liking it. Similarly, across first and Second Class there is a very low number of children who have indicated they like peer evaluation with the majority of children either not liking it (53% for First Class and 38% for Second Class) or only liking it a little (19% and 41% respectively). There is a slight trend towards children's like of peer evaluation increasing a little, or at least their dislike of it decreasing, as children get older.

Two things could be at play here. It may be that children either really do not like peer-evaluation or it may be that it is generally not something they are asked to do and therefore have stated that they do not like it. Children's rating of peer evaluation and self-evaluation do not change much across the different class levels, as do the more highly rated learning methods of hands-on, play- and technology-based learning approaches in contrast, and warrant attention regarding children's very low rating of learning through such assessment approaches.

Interestingly working alone at their desk and self-evaluations are also not particularly liked, reflecting children's emphasis on being with their friends when asked about what they like in school. Perhaps surprisingly children do also not generally like to ask their teacher for help, except in Junior Infants, and also do not favour reading about something in order to learn or working in groups. Working in pairs and in other classroom/school environments than their own classroom are more favoured, except for by junior infant children as discussed further below. What these findings suggest overall is that children prefer active or technology-based learning where they have the opportunity to learn alongside and with peers rather than alone or in bigger groups.

A key finding in relation to children's ranking of learning method is that the general ranking as evidenced below looks remarkably different for junior infant classes than all other participating class levels. Already by Senior Infants the data does not look significantly different to the overall data set (all class levels combined). While learning by watching films is still ranked highly, play is ranked the highest in Junior Infants as how children like to learn and learning through technology beyond film is ranked much lower compared to the older classes. As a significant amount of learning is facilitated through play in Junior Infants this finding is perhaps unsurprising, however the stark difference between junior and Senior Infants is surprising. A lot of learning still happens through play in Senior Infants and thus it is interesting that children's preferences change between these two class levels and not between Senior Infants and First Class where the amount of play normally reduces much more substantially.

Figure 13: Learning through play

What is interesting to observe in the worksheets are children's rating of learning through play. In the worksheet on emerging priorities, play scored in the middle of children's priorities. However, in the worksheet on HOW children like to learn it scored in the top three along with watching film and learning through technology. 135 out of 187 children (72.2%) of children said they like learning through play with another 30 children (16%) saying they like it a little. Of the 187 children who filled in Worksheet 2 only 22 do not like learning through play, corresponding to 11.8%. Thus 88.2% like to some extent to learn through play. The data also suggests that the younger children are, the more they enjoy play, not unsurprisingly as play as a learning method is particularly dominant in junior infant classrooms. Thus, when the data was segregated by class level, learning through play ranked the highest with only 1 child not liking learning through play, corresponding to 3.7% of junior infant participants, and the percentage of children who either like learning through play or like it a little going up to 96.3% for this cohort. This effect disappears already in Senior Infants where children's rating reflects that of the overall data in relation to learning through play. The findings from Worksheet 2, presented above, on how children like to learn are also reflected in the qualitative data where many children spoke about play time and learning through play as what they enjoy most about school.

What is also interesting is that children in Junior Infants like being able to ask their teacher for help when there is something they do not understand, which was much less liked by older classes. Junior infant children also favour learning in their own classroom more than older children. This could potentially be related to their favouring of learning through play as junior infant classrooms are typically much more set up for play than older classes and thus, they may look more favourably on their classroom. It may however also be that Junior Infants are still new to school and feel safer or more comfortable in their own space rather than in other more unfamiliar spaces in the school. Junior infant children are also less likely to like learning by reading about something, however this is unsurprising as most junior infant children have not yet learned to read and this is thus not a method of learning they have acquired yet.

The somewhat different findings for junior infant classes warrant a closer look at children's ranking broken down by class level. This is presented in Figures 14 to 17, which displays the data for each class level. What is important to note here is that the Second Class sample is twice that of any other class level (see Figure 4). Second Class children's ranking thus influences the overall sample data. Also important to note is that the data for junior infant children looks substantially different, however because the junior infant sample is much smaller the findings relating to junior infant classes do not impact on the overall ranking by all class levels combined. This particularly influences the overall ranking of learning through play as will be discussed in detail below.

Figure 14: How children like to learn – Junior infants

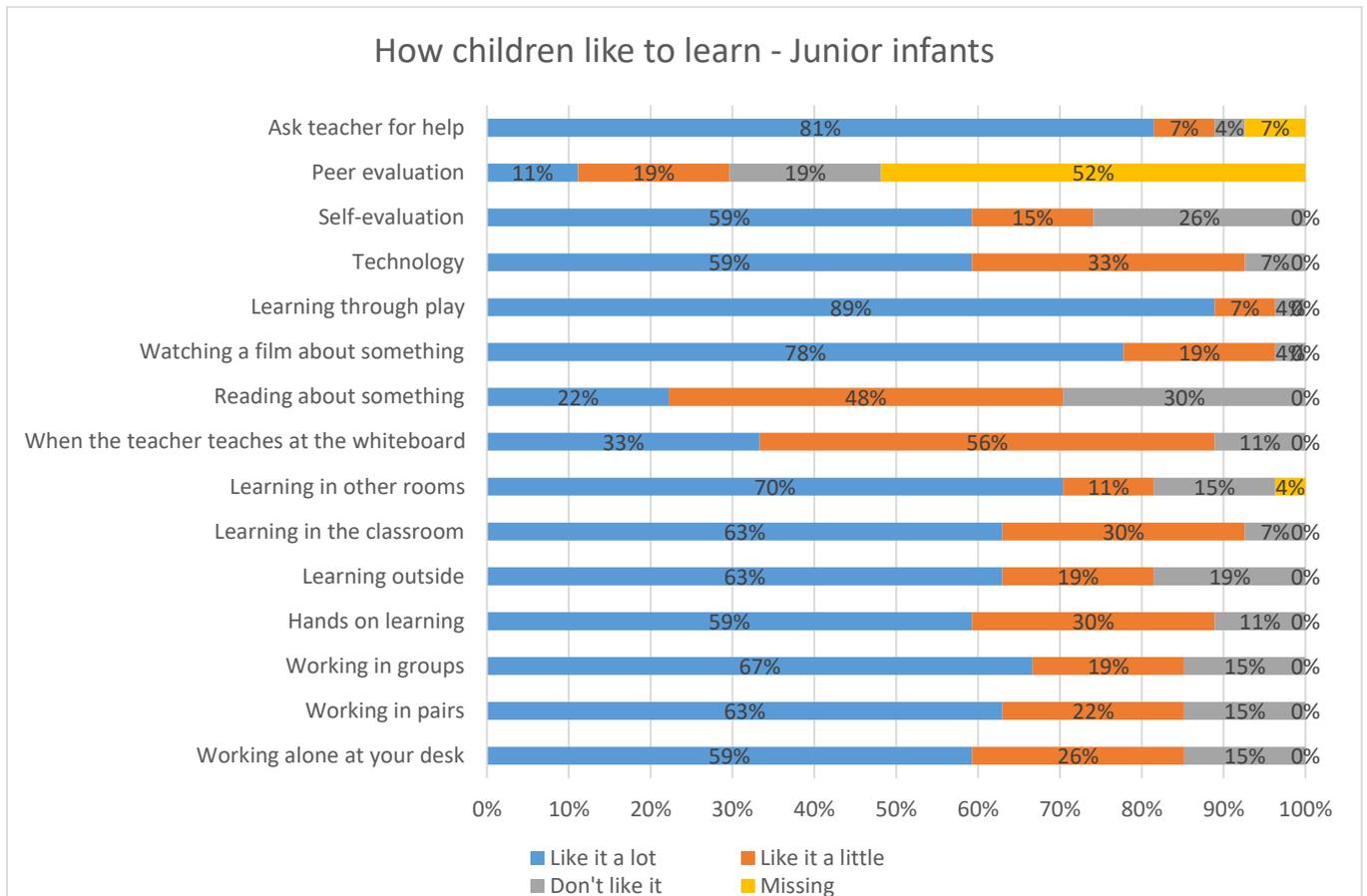


Figure 15: How children like to learn – Senior infants

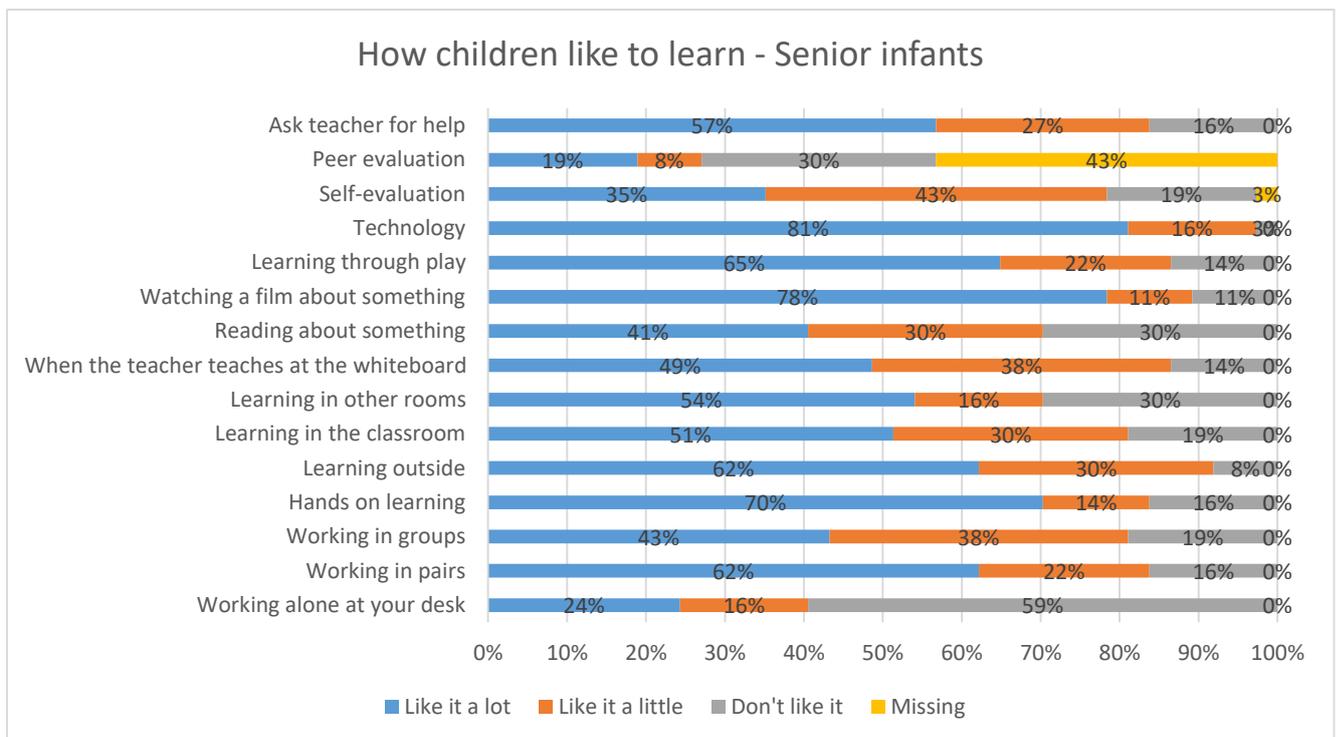


Figure 16: How children like to learn – First class

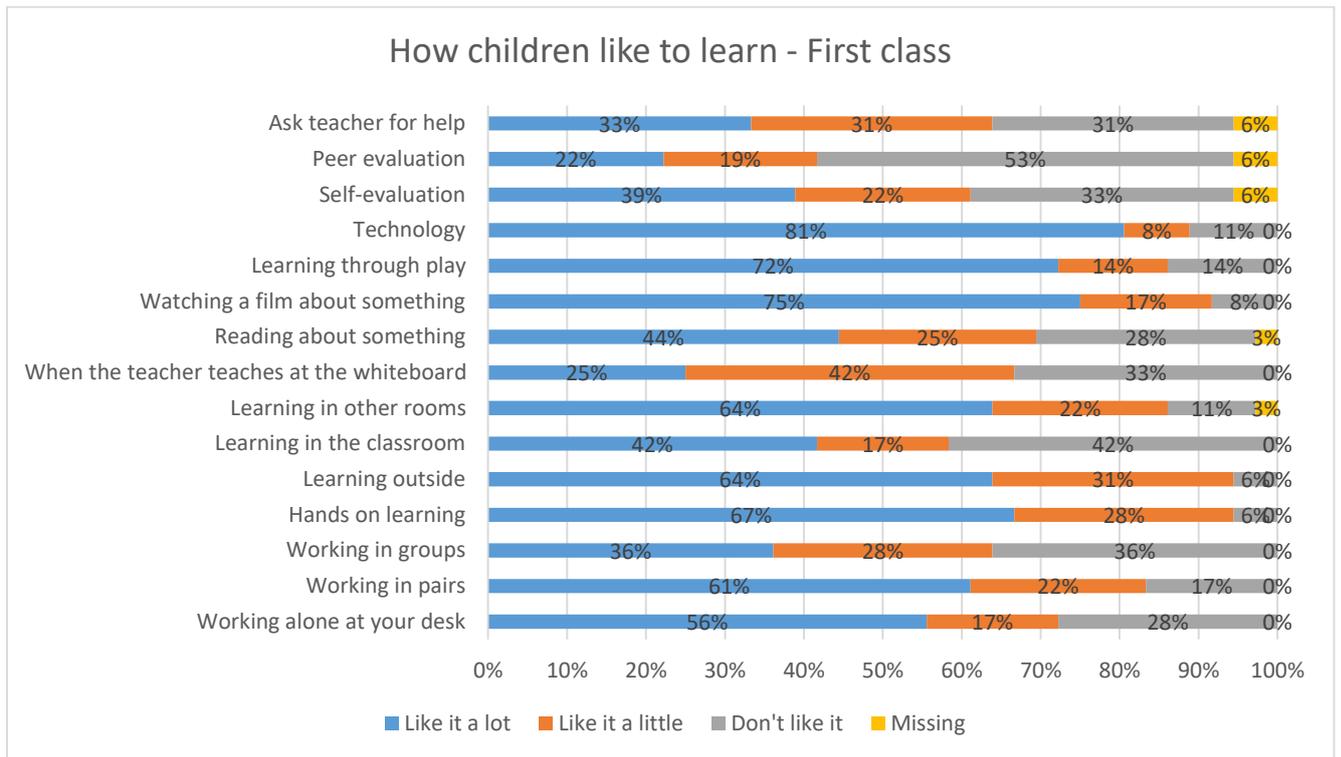
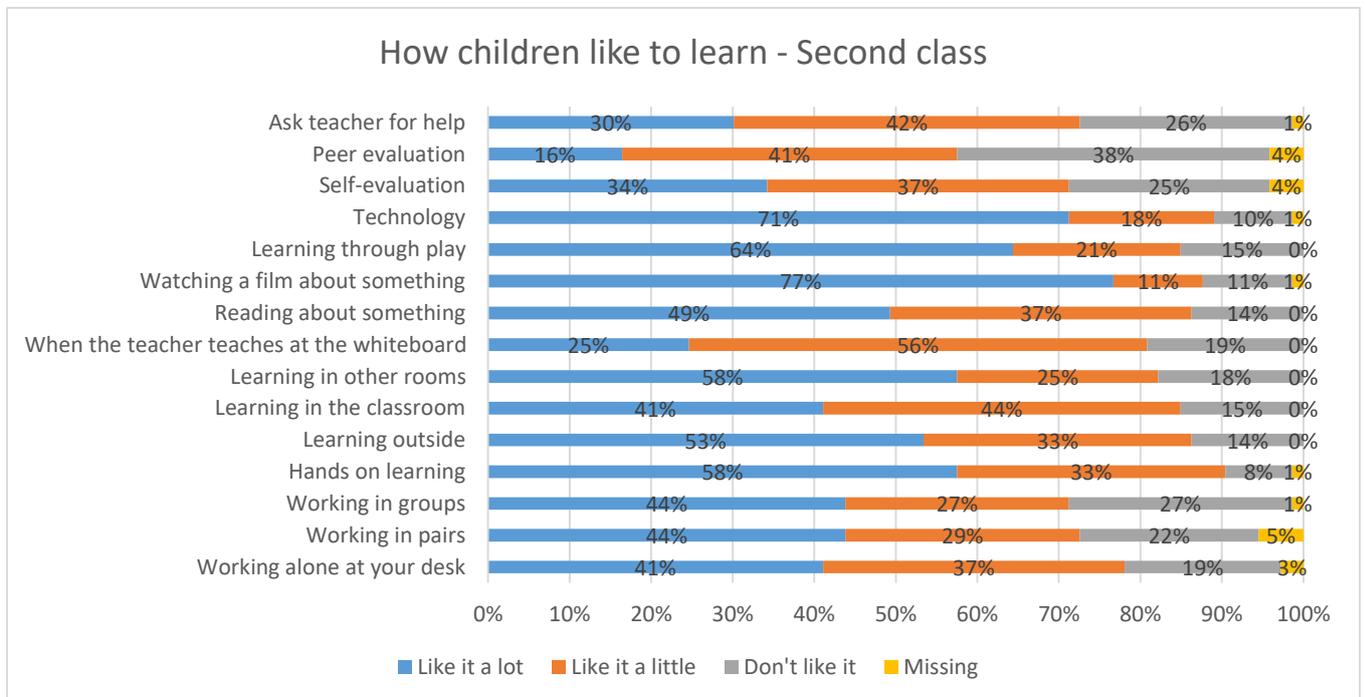


Figure 17: How children like to learn – Second class



Another interesting observation is children's rating of asking their teacher for help if they do not understand something. Children in junior infant classes have clearly expressed that they like to ask their teacher for help if they need to, with 81% indicating they like to do so and only 4% indicating they do not like to do so. This balances changes steadily as children get older with only 30% of children in Second Class indicating that they like to do so and 26% indicating they do not like to do so.

The findings do not indicate a consistent change across class level for the item 'when the teacher teaches at the whiteboard'. In first and Second Class 25% of children indicated they like this while in Junior Infants 33% of children indicated they like this and 49% in Senior Infants. Interestingly, senior infant children are less likely to like to learn alone at their desk than both Junior Infants and first and Second Class with Junior Infants children most likely to like it.

Table 5 : How children like to learn

Ranking (highest to lowest)	Entire dataset	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	First Class	Second Class
1	Watching a film about something	Learning through play	Learning through technology	Learning through technology	Watching a film about something
2	Learning through technology	Watching a film about something	Watching a film about something	Watching a film about something	Learning through technology
3	Learning through play	Asking the teacher for help	Hands-on learning / Learning outside	Hands-on learning	Learning through play
4	Hands-on learning	Learning in the classroom		Learning through play / Learning outside	Hands-on learning
5	Learning outside	Learning through technology / Working in groups	Learning through play	Learning in other rooms	Learning outside / Learning in other classrooms
6	Learning in other rooms in the school		Working in pairs		
7	Working in pairs	Learning in other rooms / Hands-on learning /	Asking the teacher for help	Working in pairs	Learning by reading about something
8	Learning in the classroom	Working in pairs	When teacher teaches at the whiteboard	Working alone at the desk	Learning in the classroom

9	Working in groups		Learning in the classroom	Learning by reading about something	Working alone at the desk
10	Learning by reading about something	Working alone at the desk	Learning in other rooms / Working in groups	Learning in the classroom / Working in groups	Working in groups
11	Asking the teacher for help	Learning outside			Working in pairs
12	Working alone at the desk /	Self-evaluation	Self-evaluation / learning by reading about something	Self-evaluation	When teacher teaches at the whiteboard
13	When teacher teaches at the whiteboard	When teacher teaches at the whiteboard			Asking the teacher for help /
14	Self-evaluation	Learning by reading about something	Working alone at the desk	When the teacher teaches at the whiteboard	Self-evaluation
15	Peer-evaluation	Peer-evaluation	Peer-evaluation	Peer-evaluation	Peer-evaluation

As the junior infant ranking looks different to the other classes, it was explored whether removing the junior infant worksheet data would change the above ranking labelled 'entire dataset'. However, when the ranking was generated excluding only junior infant data the ranking did not change from the one provided in Table 5. Thus, while Junior Infants have ranked several items significantly different to older classes their ranking does not alter or skew the overall ranking of learning approaches. The Second Class sample, as discussed above, has a greater statistical impact on the overall ranking by all class levels.

The importance attributed to specific learning priorities, such as classroom layout, technology, play and choice, are interesting to triangulate with the findings from the qualitative data, Worksheet 2 analysis and the findings from Session 3 where children were asked to design the schedule for their ideal time in school.

Learning environments

In relation to how the classroom looks, included in Worksheet 1, this was one of the least likely learning priorities to be rated as important by children. The physical learning spaces identified in Worksheet 2 were also not rated particularly highly by children. Thus, it may be that the physical space in which they learn is not children's highest priority in relation to learning. What appears to be of higher importance, in children's own views, is the activities

and learning methods that take place in those spaces, emphasising the crucial role of the teacher and of pedagogy in children's learning experiences (eg. Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hosan & Hoglund, 2017; Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009). These findings can however be interpreted in different ways. It may be that when considered in relation to the list of learning priorities and teaching methods and approaches, classroom and learning environments is deemed less important than the other items on the worksheets but if children were asked specific questions only relating to the important of learning environments, the outcome may have been very different. For example, children's drawings of what they liked and disliked in school and their understanding of pre- and primary school, respectively, suggest that specific learning spaces do figure extensively in their school experiences. Sunshine, gardens and school yards with play equipment dominate children's positive experiences of school and their memories of preschool while sitting at tables working dominate their representations of school subjects they don't like and are central in children's differentiation between preschool and primary school. It is nonetheless still interesting that all worksheet items to do with the physical learning environment was rated relatively low in terms of importance or like/dislike by many children. This stands in contrast to approaches such as the Reggio Emilia approach and extensive literature on early childhood education that shows the value to children's learning and wellbeing of learning environments (Kershner & Pointon, 2000; Amirul et al., 2013), that can act as a 'third teacher' and afford children rich opportunities for engagement and learning (Kelsey, 2009). From engagement with both preschools, for example, it emerged that they had both recently been prompted by the children in their setting to change certain aspects of the physical layout of the settings, suggesting that children engage extensively in and do rate their learning environment as very important but such perspectives may need to be sought in very particular ways with children. The specific schools that participated in the junior end of the research are not as known to the research team and it is therefore not known if the schools have engaged in similar learning environment assessments with children. The types of learning environments in the schools are also not known but it must be assumed due to the history of each school that such learning environments differ across the schools in terms of school buildings, facilities and availability of outdoor learning spaces.

According to Amirul et al. (2013), the learning environment involves the social context, the psychological and pedagogical elements that influence learning, achievement and attitudes of students. Also according to Amirul and colleagues, the physical and psychosocial elements

are two of the major components. The physical refers to the classroom, facilities and materials inside and outside while the psychosocial refers to interaction between peers, teachers and the environment. According to this distinction, the worksheet findings suggest that children value the physical elements of the learning environments less than the psychosocial elements which were prevalent in drawings and interviews, along with the value placed on learning through play in Worksheet 2.

Technology

The findings in relation to technology are less consistent across the two worksheets and it is therefore particularly interesting to interrogate the findings in relation to technology further. Technology was not rated highly in Worksheet 1, i.e. as a learning priority. However, in Worksheet 2 it was rated very highly as a method for learning. This may be explained by the different framing of technology in the two worksheets. In Worksheet 1 technology is positioned as an emerging priority in learning whereas in Worksheet 2 it is positioned as a method for learning. This would indicate that children enjoy learning *through* technology but not *about* it. What is particularly interesting in relation to technology is that the Irish-medium schools are more likely to rate technology as important compared to children in English-medium schools in Worksheet 1 but less likely to rate it as important in Worksheet 2. In relation to both these findings, statistical analysis suggests that these findings are statistically significant with a low to medium effect. In the interviews and drawings, children indicate that they like to learn through technology. Thus, for the schools that use chromebooks and I pads for learning in class, these figured extensively in children's drawings and their discussions of what they like in school. The perceived importance of technology in these schools may be linked to children's engagement with online language communities or may be linked to the individual school factors such as the emphasis that teachers place on technology, the digital tools available in the school and ICT expertise of staff.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM WORKSHEET DATA

Children's priorities for learning mirror societal concerns, namely learning about different aspects of diversity and inclusion, as well as family and peer relationships, health and well-being and climate change. This indicates that children are aware of current societal issues. When the emerging priorities are examined in the order chosen by children, it could be read that children are less preoccupied with the physical space in which they learn but more preoccupied with what they are learning. It could also mean that because they have suitable physical learning spaces, this matter is not an issue for them. It is likely that if children felt cramped and constrained by their physical space that this would then become an issue for them.

While children do not place great priority on learning about technology, they do show a preference for learning through technology along with hands-on, active and play-based forms of learning. This was clearly expressed in the interviews with children.

Interestingly, children did not rate having a say/voice in what or how they learned very highly in the worksheets. This could be because it is not an issue for them – they are quite satisfied with the way things are. It could also mean that they are not sure what it means to have a choice or a say because they have not experienced it. Certainly, in interviews, children seemed to have had a limited understanding of what was meant by the question, but many children did give examples of choices they had when it came to art or play or book choices.

In relation to play, it did not rate highly as a *priority* for children but rated in the top three choices for how children like to learn. This is akin to other findings in the data where children expressed a great desire to play but did not rate it as important when asked about their learning. Perhaps this is because children may not consider playing to be learning. It should be noted that Junior Infants rated play as their first choice in how they wish to learn.

In relation to how children like to learn, they like the social options such as playing, working in pairs or groups, and working alongside their teacher. What is noteworthy is children's dislike of peer evaluation and self-evaluation. This is surprising as arguably self and peer evaluation gives children voice and autonomy. As already stated, it could be the case that children do not have much experience of peer evaluation and self-evaluation and therefore give it a poor rating.

SUMMARY OF INITIAL FINDINGS (PRE-SCHOOL AND JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL)

In this section, we will structure our initial findings, in summary form, under the six key messages of the new draft primary curriculum. The six key messages are -

1. Supporting agency and flexibility in schools
2. Building connections between pre-school, primary and post-primary schools
3. Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented
4. Emerging priorities for children's learning
5. Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning
6. Building on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum and responding to challenges arising from it.

1. SUPPORTING AGENCY AND FLEXIBILITY IN SCHOOLS.

The questions posed by the research team under this key message were as follows: Tell me what you like to do in school. Do you get to do all the things you would like to do in school? Are there some things you must do in school that you don't like? Do you have any choices about what you want to learn? Can you give me an example. If you had a magic wand, what would you make pre/school be like every day? What have you drawn and why?

This key message was addressed using audio recorded interviews with children and drawings. The data indicates that children are happy in school. They value their relationship with their teacher and are enthusiastic about most areas of the curriculum. Children professed to like play, outdoor activities, Art, PE, and technology. These findings resonate with previous consultative processes with children (NCCA, 2019). Play, physical movement, the Arts and technology are areas of the curriculum where, children tend to experience agency and a flexible or exploratory approach to learning. This may be a contributory factor to children's enjoyment of these areas of learning. There were no universally disliked areas, but some children said they disliked handwriting, some mentioned Mathematics, and some mentioned Irish. No children in Irish-medium schools said they disliked Irish. Children reported that they were given choices in school but found it difficult to identify, in the moment of the interview question, examples of choices they were given. The examples of choices children did think of were confined to matters such as choosing a book or a letter and sound to study or weekly

golden time. Children did, however, identify play and Art as two subjects where they felt they could make choices. Given a magic wand, children would opt to make school a little more like home, having time for naps, more time to eat, more playground equipment, more time to play, more 'yard time,' i.e., time to play during school breaks, and no homework. The ability to make choices is arguably a driver of agency and it could therefore be deduced from the findings that children feel they have some degree of agency in school and that agency is most felt when engaged in playful learning and recreational play, art activities and physical activity. It is clear, however, that more opportunities to exercise agentic behaviours would be welcomed in primary school.

2. BUILDING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PRE-SCHOOL, PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL.

The questions posed by the research team under this key message were as follows: Do you do activities or things here in big school that you did in play school? Are they the same or different? How? When you were in playschool did you ever talk about big school with your teacher? Is there something you remember that you liked to do in play school that you would still like to do in primary school? Do you think you should learn in a different way in older classes in school? How do you think learning older classes might be different? What have you drawn and why?

This key message, like the first key message, was addressed using audio-recorded interviews with children and drawings. To summarise, many children agreed they did similar activities in pre-school and primary school, especially play and Art. Books were 'worked on' in primary school, rather than simply read for plot and pleasure. Differences identified were that in pre-school there were more home comforts such as access to food and to naps. Most children recalled discussing 'big school' when they were in pre-school and talked about matters such as homework, play, friends, and new teachers. They mentioned playing with friends and with their toys as activities that they liked in pre-school that they would like to continue in primary school. Children interpreted the question about learning differently in older classes as doing more difficult work rather than using different learning methods. There seemed to be a fear that there might be less fun in senior classes and fewer opportunities to paint. Drawings featured children playing and many children drew the pre-school or primary school building.

3. CHANGING HOW THE CURRICULUM IS STRUCTURED AND PRESENTED

The questions posed by the research team under this key message were differentiated for children in pre-school and primary school.

PRE-SCHOOL

There were two questions posed to the children in pre-school: 1. How do we learn in play school and 2. How would you like to learn when you go to the next school? In brief, children talked about playing with friends and toys and drawing and colouring in pre-school and their wish was for that to continue in big school. The social aspect of school is very important to pre-school children.

JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

The questions posed by the research team to the children from primary school were as follows: How is our day in school planned at the moment? Can you describe what we do each part of the day for each day of the week? Is this a useful way to structure our learning or can we do it differently?

Children described the timetable of their days, punctuated by breaks and frequent handwashing. Handwashing was mentioned many times, reflecting the additional focus on hygiene in schools since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The most interesting responses were to the question about structuring the day differently. Some children wanted a longer day so that they could play more, others wanted more field trips, to play outside for longer and to have more time to eat lunch. They also wanted more time for ipads or to 'go on the computer'. They looked for guarantees that subjects such as P.E. drama and the visual arts happened when they were supposed to happen. As mentioned earlier, this suggests the possibility that Arts subjects and P.E. are being sacrificed to cover other work.

4. EMERGING PRIORITIES FOR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Children were asked to rank fifteen priorities. The list of priorities included the following: Different cultures and languages, different religions, the environment and climate change, technology, friendships, family relationships, being able to speak another language, learning about boys' and girls' bodies, how your classroom looks, learning with children who learn in different ways, feelings, being healthy and well, learning outside, having choice about how to learn and play. The priorities for children's learning that ranked highest were well-being

and health, the environment and climate change, (mirroring societal concerns) and friendships/relationships. Lowest priorities were the classroom layout and the importance of choice in learning. An interesting point to emerge is the indication that children seem able to differentiate between what they like and what they deem important; the data consistently shows that children like play a lot but it was not rated as highly important in the list of priorities for learning. This may be that children do not equate play with learning. Having a choice in how you learn was also not rated very highly on young children's list of priorities, despite coming across quite strongly as important in the audio recorded data. The reason for this may be that some children struggled with the notion of choice.

5. SUPPORTING A VARIETY OF PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES WITH ASSESSMENT CENTRAL TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

Children very much gave the thumbs up to pedagogical approaches involving working with others such as playing, working in pairs or groups, and working alongside their teacher. They also liked learning by watching a film about something and through the use of technology. Children expressed a preference for working with others over working alone. Junior Infants particularly liked play (89%), asking teacher for help (81%) and watching a film to learn (78%). Senior Infants seemed to be moving away from dependence on the teacher with only 57% of children saying they liked asking teacher for help. 81% of Senior Infants said they liked learning by using technology. Young children recorded a dislike of peer evaluation and self-evaluation. The literature indicates that practice at peer evaluation supports the development of skills of self-evaluation (eg. Ho, 2014; Lapan & Boseovski, 2017). If children dislike both, this may impede children's opportunity to become adept and comfortable with self-evaluation. The dislike of peer and self-evaluation found in this study may be because children are not entirely familiar with these processes. This is an area that merits further exploration.

6. BUILDING ON THE STRENGTHS OF THE 1999 CURRICULUM, AND RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES ARISING FROM IT.

The questions posed by the research team under this key message were as follows: Did you like being asked questions about school? What do you want the researchers to know about what you think of school? If the researchers had asked your parents or grandparents, what

do you think they would have said about school? Are there things you need to learn about now that you do not think your parents and grandparents needed to learn about?

Children seemed to really enjoy being asked questions about school. They wanted the researchers to know how hard they work in school and they wanted more playtime, more engagement with technology and less homework. They had a sense that the world has changed since their grandparents' time; that, as noted earlier, children nowadays have more classroom and play resources, broader experience of the world, more knowledge about technology, languages, science, and the environment, including gardening, and better educational opportunities.

FINDINGS FROM SENIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL AND SECONDARY SCHOOL

KEY FINDINGS: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

This section of the report examines the key findings obtained from an online questionnaire that was distributed to primary school students in Third Class through Sixth Class, which explored their experiences and perspectives regarding life in primary schools in Ireland. Additionally, a similar questionnaire was distributed to post-primary schools, which asked First year students to retrospectively reflect on their primary school experiences and to offer suggestions for the improvement of the primary curriculum.

WHAT THEY LIKE ABOUT PRIMARY SCHOOL.

Views of primary school students.

When asked whether there was anything they liked about primary school, the overwhelming majority of 82% (n=317) answered affirmatively, while in comparison, only 5% (n=21) chose to answer “no” to this question.

Figure 18: Anything you like in particular about primary school?

2. Is there anything in particular like you like about primary school?

[More Details](#)

● Yes	285
● No	18
● I don't know	42



Figure 19: An bhfuil aon rud faoi leith a thaitníonn leat faoin mbunscoil?

3. An bhfuil aon rud faoi leith a thaitníonn leat faoin mbunscoil?

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

● Tá	32
● Níl	3
● Níl a fhios agam	4



Children were given the option to elaborate on the specific elements they liked about primary school, and the following word clouds from the English-medium schools provide a visual graphic of their responses:

120 respondents (43%) answered **friends** for this question.



Representative comments from the Irish-medium classes are provided in the figure below.

Figure 20: Specific elements liked in Irish medium classes

Mo chairde a fheiceáil
Ealaíon, tá cairde agam ar scoil
Spóirt
Spraoi le mo chairde. Is maith liom bheith ag foghlaim
Ealaíon, spóirt agus spraoi taobh amuigh
Tá na múinteoirí go deas. Daoine deasa sa rang. Níl aon bullaíocht.
Sport drama leabh ag spraoi amach sa chlóis
Is maith liom ag ám lón a bheith amach le mo chairde
Is maith liom foghlaim rudaí nua mar shampla, rudaí faoin ghealach agus cén caoi thosaigh sé.
Is maith liom stair agus tíreolaíocht
An tecnolocht agus an Leabh agus an spóirt

A number of dominant trends emerged from their qualitative responses. Firstly, among the academic subjects mentioned, Art and Mathematics were the two most mentioned subjects that participants enjoyed. History and Science also commonly mentioned by the children. While Art may be understandable, given children's natural ability and interest in creativity (McConnon, 2016), Mathematics was an interesting finding, given that many people may struggle with this area of study (Amidon et al., 2020), particularly as they progress through the school system and curriculum. As such, the positive attitudes towards mathematics expressed by students in this research are in alignment with previous research which suggests that complimentary attitudes towards mathematics are common among children who often express favourable attitudes towards the subject, however, these attitudes tend to deteriorate as they age (Dowker et al., 2019). However, research also suggests that numeracy play in early childhood years may lead to increased favourable attitudes towards mathematics later in life (Clerkin & Gilligan, 2018). Within the Irish context, such findings may link to learning themes found in *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) such as *Communicating and Exploring and Thinking* which researchers believe may support the development of mathematical thinking

in toddlers and young children (NCCA, 2014, p. 21). Additionally, the positive attitudes witnessed in this present study may be due to the more practical nature of the subject at this level, however, it may also reflect changes in the teaching of the subject using more active learning and child centred approaches as advocated in the 1999 PSC (NCCA, 1999).

Physical activity was ranked highly among the qualitative responses in the online questionnaire, and students consistently named PE highly among their favourite subjects, but also noted the importance of playing, spending time outside, and movement breaks. Previous research tells us, “Physical activity is important for a child’s mental health and physical development” (Department of Education, Inspectorate, 2020, p. 94). Within this present study, children’s preference for physical activity may be related to the high level of quality PE provision offered in Irish primary schools, as reported in the most recent *Chief Inspector’s Report (2016-2020)*, which also observed “pupil’s engagement and enjoyment levels to be very high in PE lessons and praised the strong emphasis placed on active learning” (NCCA, 2020, p. 121).

The findings in this present research also align to previous research conducted in Canada, which utilised group interviews to obtain the perspectives of primary school students on physical activity engagement (Harvey et al., 2018). Similarly, this study found that students shared their enjoyment of physical activity and listed numerous benefits such as alleviating boredom, skill building and enhanced self-esteem. Additionally, students found that physical activity benefited them in the classroom by promoting clearer thinking and enhanced readiness to learn (Harvey et al., 2018, p. 433). The findings from the present study are important, given that previous research has suggested that “many Irish children are failing to meet the recommended guidelines for physical activity” (Gavigan et al., 2021, p. 1). As such, retaining and even increasing physical activity in the Irish primary school curriculum may help to address these deficits among children, while also fostering the positive benefits of physical activity among primary school children in Ireland.

Friendships and relationships with peers were also ranked high on the list of things participants enjoyed about primary school. This included learning and playing with friends and eating lunch together. For example, one participant commented, “All the people are very nice to me and I have made a lot of friends here,” and similarly, another explained that what they most enjoyed about school was, “Playing with my friends [and] getting to see my

friends.” Children also commented on enjoying time with friends particularly at lunch, “Is maith liom am lóin agus a bheith amuigh le mo chairde.” Carter & Nutbrown (2016, p. 395) argue that friendship among children is an area often overlooked by teachers and researchers alike. As such, this present research makes an important contribution in understanding the value and significance that Irish primary school children place on their friendships during this time of learning and development, as well as the social nature of learning in Irish primary schools.

Interestingly, only a few participants mentioned relationships with teachers as something they liked about primary school. When teachers were mentioned, they were commonly described as being “nice.” However, it is interesting that positive relationship with teachers did not feature more prominently in this element of the survey, and the nature of student and teacher relationships in Irish primary schools may be an area for future research, especially given that previous research tells us that relationships with teachers often play “a crucial role” and can powerfully impact students in numerous domains, such as attitudes towards school and subjects, and their overall attendance rates (Smyth, 2017, p. 8).

It should also be noted that very few participants mentioned the use of technology as something they enjoyed in primary schools, which is somewhat surprising given that students of this age might naturally be drawn to the use of technology and IT in learning. A few individuals did mention enjoying the use of “Chromebooks” in their school, however, given the very small number of students who mentioned this specific type of technology, the results suggest that these instances may highlight students who came from the same school, which may be an anomaly in using IT when compared against the majority of Irish primary schools. These findings somewhat contradict previous research examining children’s perspectives on the use of IT in primary school, which reported that children believed the use of tablets in schools fostered playful learning, competition, choice, and creativity in the classroom (Dunn et al., 2018). Within this present study, the lack of mention regarding IT in learning at the primary level may highlight that this methodology is not highly utilised in primary schools and may raise questions regarding whether change should be brought about in this area, particularly to prepare them for second level and beyond.

Views of first year secondary school students.

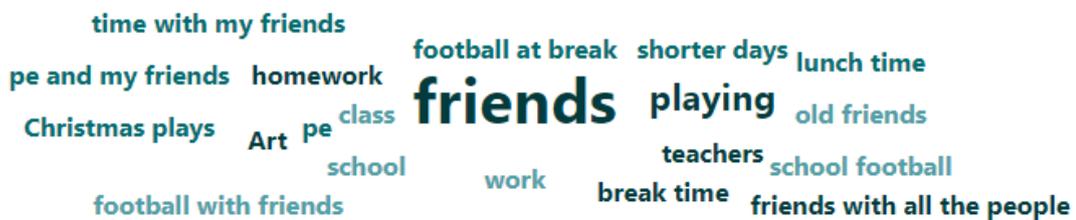
When asked if there was anything they liked about primary school, 72% (n=136) of first year students answered affirmatively, while 14% (n=27) answered no.² These findings show a 10% decrease in positive responses, and an increase of 9% in negative responses when compared to the views of primary school students.

Figure 21: Secondary school students asked about what they liked about primary school



A number of similarities can be drawn between the views of first year secondary school students as they reflected on the things they enjoyed during their time in primary school, and the views of the current primary school students.

34 respondents (26%) answered **friends** for this question.



As the above word cloud illustrates, friends and peers featured highly among the things that first year students enjoyed about primary school, and some students recalled everyone being friends with each other. For example, “You were in a class with your friends for 8 years,” and “You were friends with all the people.” It is important to note that such memories may be indicative of the importance that primary schools place on fostering community among students, or the nature of local primary schools wherein classes are smaller and students

² No Irish-medium schools were present in this phase of data collection.

typically come from the same regional catchment area. These comments may also be reflective of the nature of secondary schools, which tend to draw students from wider catchment areas, and have larger numbers of pupils. Similar parallels can be drawn with research conducted in the UK by Maxwell (2006), which examined the views of students with special educational needs towards primary school. Maxwell (2006, p. 20) also found that these students highly prioritised interpersonal relationships with friends and peers, and concluded that “Peer relationships were paramount and these defined the positive or negative experiences the pupils had of school in general,” thus showing the importance of fostering positive relationships among primary school students for their overall growth, development, and experience of school.

Numerous first year students also commented on the enjoyment they derived from the physical activity they engaged in while at primary school. For example, playing football at lunch or break was mentioned time and again, as was their fond memories of PE class. Illustrative comments include the following: “Break and lunch time with my friends playing tip the can or build up,” “Being able to run in the yard and field,” and “I liked playing football on the pitch at lunch.” These findings align with the primary school student data as well, showing the importance of physical activity and active learning for students.

The next most common memory of primary school that first year students liked (and often missed) was the perceived “easier” workload of primary school. According to these students, their days in primary were shorter and their workload was lighter. As some recalled, there wasn’t any/as much homework as they now experience in secondary school. Comments included the following: “I liked having shorter days,” “less homework,” and “longer breaks.” Interestingly, such comments may conflict with previous concerns raised about possible curriculum overload in Irish primary schools (INTO, 2015a; NCCA, 2010), and with current debates over the role and possible eradication of homework in primary schools (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021; McMahon, 2018). However, these comments may also be reflective of First year students’ retrospective memories of primary school, comparing their previous workload and daily structure to what they presently experience in secondary school.

One area of divergence between primary and First year students was around the issue of academic subjects. While primary students commonly mentioned specific subjects they enjoyed, very few secondary school students mentioned any subjects when recalling positive

memories of school. This may be because secondary schools provide a greater number of subjects and more subject choice for students. It could also refer to the fact that there is a segmented approach to teaching subjects in secondary school while primary school subjects are more integrated. So, a secondary school student looking back at primary school may not remember the segregation of subjects in the way they now experience it at secondary school. When First year students did mention academic subjects, however, Art was the most commonly mentioned, and this aligns with primary school students who similarly favoured Art class. This may show the importance of art and creative outlets for young people.

WHAT THEY DISLIKE ABOUT PRIMARY SCHOOL.

Views of primary school students.

Participants were also asked whether there was anything they disliked about primary school? Interestingly, 46% (n=176) of respondents answered affirmatively to this question, with 35% (n=134) answering “no.”

Figure 22: Asking primary school children - Is there anything you dislike about primary school?

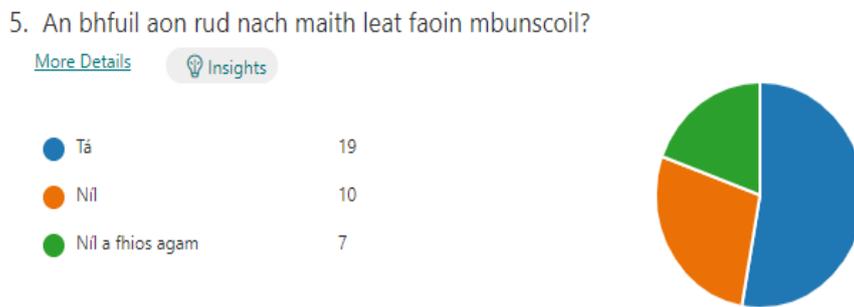
4. Is there anything you **dislike** about primary school?

[More Details](#)

● Yes	157
● No	124
● I don't know	61

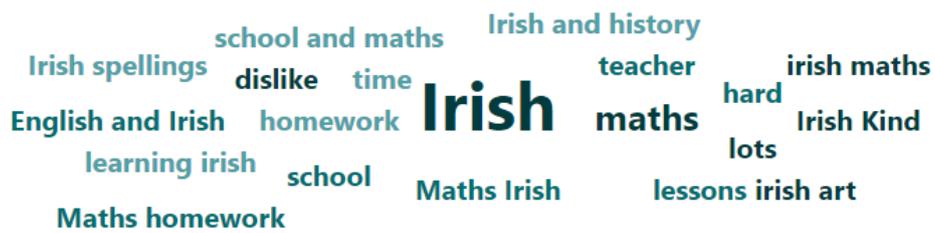


Figure 23: Asking primary school children in Irish medium schools – An bhfuil aon rud nach maith leat faoin mbunscoil?



Participants were also given an opportunity to elaborate on the specific elements they disliked about primary school, but interestingly, fewer students chose to write anything for this short answer, as compared to how many provided written commentary on the query regarding what they did like.

61 respondents (39%) answered **Irish** for this question.



Representative comments from the Irish-medium classes are provided below.

Figure 24: Elements of school disliked in Irish medium classes³

Ní deana muid sport
An obair bhaile
Obair bhaile
Mata, ní déanann muid spóirt, obair agus obair bhaile
Mata obair bhaile
Mata star
go leor ureantaí ta sé leathdráneach agus ní deanain muid spoirt
Tá an obair céanna le deanamh chuile lá agus ní deannan muid go leor ealíon
Ma tá an aimsire go deas,uaireanta,ní dean muid spoirt
Nil
mata agus go with flow
Ní dhéanan muid a dóthan coirpoideachas.

The main dislikes centred around certain academic subjects with Irish being the most disliked subject in the English-medium schools. No children in the Irish-medium classes reported not liking Irish. This overwhelming dislike of Irish in English-medium schools raises questions in a number of areas such as: the reasons for their strong dislike of the subject, the ongoing debate regarding how Irish is taught, what can be done in the future to support teachers in developing proficiency, how to improve teaching and learning of Irish, and how to foster positive attitudes and promote the active use of Irish amongst young speakers (Department of Education & Science, 2005; 2007; Department of Education & Skills, Inspectorate, 2013, 2018; Devitt et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2006). There is a danger in interpreting these findings as unchangeable, however, especially since interventions that focus on increasing engagement with the language have been shown to impact positively on children’s attitudes

³ Word-cloud features were not available in Microsoft Forms for data in Irish.

to Irish, such as the introduction of Content and Language Integrated Learning (Seoighe, 2014), and where children have role models who use the language (Nic Fhionnlaoidh, 2019). Other factors that can impact on children's engagement with and enjoyment of learning Irish include the textbooks available (Harris et al., 2006), the child's relationship with the class teacher, and the experience of transition from primary school to secondary school (McCoy et al., 2012). More research needs to be done regarding children's contemporary experiences of learning Irish as well as the positive impact that schemes and initiatives such as *Gaelbhhratach* (<https://gaelbhhratach.ie>) and *An Bosca Leabharlainne* ([An Bosca Leabharlainne – Children's Laureate \(childrenslaureate.ie\)](https://anboscaleabharlainne.ie)) can have in English-medium schools. It should also be noted that Devitt et al. (2018) reported that data published in the 2009 *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI) report showed no major decline in children's attitudes towards Irish, and that attitudes were broadly similar to those found amongst young speakers of other minority languages. However, more research is clearly needed in relation to children's experiences of learning Irish.

The workload students encountered in primary school was the second most commonly mentioned dislike. Early mornings and long days in school were commonly lamented, as one student noted, "I would prefer if we started at a later time like half nine or nine." Homework was also a commonly mentioned dislike. One student noted, "I think primary school is good but we have too much work and homework." Similarly, another explained, "Sometimes we get a lot of homework and it can be a pain when you come back from school and say you have GAA training later and by the time you finish your homework it [sic] most likely [time] to almost leave for GAA training." These comments raise important questions about students' workload in primary school, and align with previous concerns raised about curriculum overload in Irish primary schools (INTO, 2015a; NCCA, 2010), as well as current debates over the role and possible eradication of homework in primary schools (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2020; McMahon, 2018). However, more research is clearly needed in this area as there is a dearth of research considering the student voice when it comes to workload and homework in Irish primary schools, as the literature in this area tends to focus mainly on teachers' workload (for example, see: INTO 2015b).

A few students also mentioned they spent too much time inside at school, "sitting down all day," and that they are inactive for too long. As one student commented, "I dislike having to stay inside at school." Some children perceived that PE and Art were not done frequently

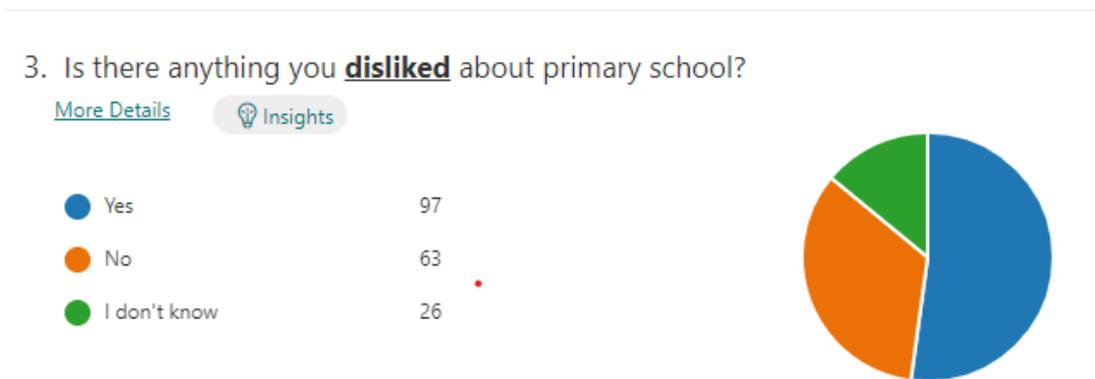
enough throughout the week. Such views align with the strong emphasis primary school students place on enjoying PE, Sports, and playing in the yard, and may highlight the need for the incorporation of more physical activity and active learning during the school day.

Interestingly, given that this research was conducted following the reopening of primary schools after the lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, very few participants mentioned disliking issues related to COVID-19. Of the few who did make mention of this issue, the most common responses were “being cold” in school, not getting enough mask breaks, and disliking the mask mandates.

Views of first year secondary school students.

When asked whether there was anything they disliked about their primary school experience, 52% (n=97) of First year students answered affirmatively, while 34% (n=63) answered no. This shows a slight increase of 6% in the level of dislike among First year students, as compared to students currently in primary schools.

Figure 25: Secondary school students asked if they disliked anything about primary school



The following word cloud illustrates the most common qualitative responses that First year students provided when explaining the elements of their primary school experience that they disliked:

26 respondents (28%) answered **teacher** for this question.



Within the qualitative responses, “teachers” featured prominently as a dislike among First year students and there were numerous issues that students raised in relation to their primary school teachers. Some students alluded to teachers being too strict, and one student mentioned they disliked, “How they treated us like 3-year-olds,” while another explained, “The teacher more or less treated us like babies and didn't listen to what we had to say.” Others disliked having “the same teacher every day” and having “the same teacher for all the subjects.” It is important to remember that these students may be retrospectively comparing their primary school experiences to what they encounter now in secondary school, where they may be given a greater level of freedom and autonomy. Thus, this may be why they perceive their primary experience as lacking. Also, in secondary school, students are exposed to a greater number of teachers. However, it may also be the case that these findings highlight the importance of ensuring that children in upper primary are being treated appropriately for their age and developmental level and being afforded a reasonable and increased amount of freedom, agency, and autonomy in the school. As such, this may be an important area for further investigation in the future. It is also interesting to note that in comparison, primary school students on average said very little about their relationships with teachers. It does raise the question of whether primary students were concerned their teacher might have access to the results of the questionnaire, and as such, they may have been wary of answering honestly, whereas it might have been the case that First year students felt more confident in answering openly, as their comments were about previous teachers, and not their current ones.

As previously mentioned, while some First year students appreciated what they perceived as the easier and lighter workload of primary school, other students mentioned issues related to this area, such as, the work was too easy, too repetitive, there was too much homework, and they had to complete too much writing. For example, one student mentioned that “Classwork was easy and boring,” while another commented, “We had homework that was mostly pointless.” This finding is somewhat similar to primary school students, who also had distinct dislikes regarding the level of workload in school.

Another issue raised by First year students were dislikes related to routine and scheduling. For example, they disliked being in the same classroom all day, having the same teacher all day, and having the same subject taught at the same time each day. As one student explained,

“The routine was very similar each day.” This finding is likely due to the diversity students now encounter in post-primary and a reflection for their current preference. Scheduling issues or a desire for greater variability in their daily studies were not raised by primary level students, perhaps because they have no other knowledge or experiences to compare the current structure of primary school to. However, this finding does raise important questions regarding whether a greater level of timetable variability should be introduced into upper primary as a way of preparing students for the transition to post-primary.

CHOICE AND AGENCY IN LEARNING.

Views of primary school students.

The questionnaire also explored students’ perceptions regarding agency and decision making in schools, and asked students to declare who they believed decides what they learn about and do in schools. Overwhelmingly, 92% (n=354) of primary school students believed that the teacher was the main decision maker in these areas. This was followed by 60% (n=233) who chose the “principal” as the key decision maker.

Figure 26: Primary school children – Choice

6. Who decides what you get to learn about and do in school (tick all that apply):

[More Details](#)

● The Teacher	316
● Students	71
● The Principal	205
● Parents/Guardians	56
● Someone Else	50

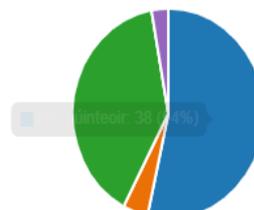


Figure 27: Irish medium school – Choice

7. Cé a roghnaíonn na rudaí a bhfoghlaímíonn tú fúthu agus na rudaí a dhéanann tú i do scoil (cuir tic le gach ceann cu):

[More Details](#)

● An múinteoir	38
● Na daltaí	3
● An Príomhoide	28
● Tuismitheoirí/Caomhnóirí	0
● Duine eile	2



Interestingly, 19% (n=74) of participants chose “students” and only 15% (n=56) chose parents/guardians as decision makers. In the Irish-medium school, no children believed that parents and carer had a role in deciding children's learning. This signals that student may believe they have more choice and agency in their learning, than their caretakers. However, if the findings are correct, this does suggest that students are not given a high level of choice and agency related to what and how they learn in primary schools, with teachers and principals being the main determinators. This may also signal that changes for the future primary school curriculum may need to incorporate additional choice and agency for students.

The questionnaire also explored the ways in which academic learning takes place in schools, and the findings are illustrated in the chart below.

Figure 28: Questionnaire asking How you learn in school

11. Tick all the ways that you learn your subjects in school:

[More Details](#)

● By listening	323
● By reading	278
● By watching	295
● By exploring	135
● By experimenting	200
● By asking questions	304
● By doing	257
● By playing	125
● By singing	58
● By talking	231
● By using technology	204

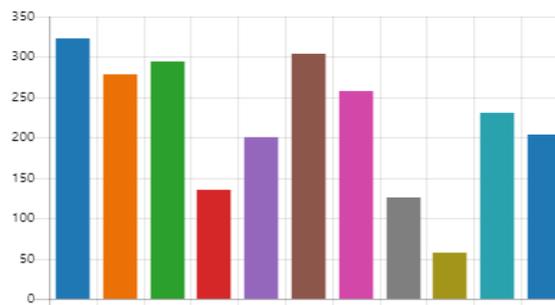
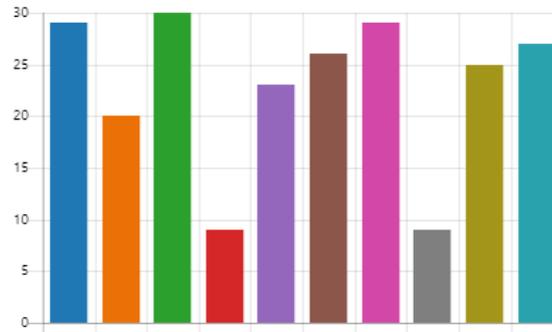


Figure 29: Questionnaire (Irish medium) How you learn in school

12. Tá liosta thíos de bhealaí difriúla inar maith le páistí foghlaim. Cuir tic in aice le gach ceann a thaitníonn leatsa.

[More Details](#)

Éisteacht	29
Léitheoireacht	20
Breathnú	30
Iníúchadh	9
Ceisteanna a chur	23
Rudaí a dhéanamh	26
Spraoi	29
Canadh	9
Caint	25
Tecineolaíocht	27



In some ways, these findings may also link to students' perception on agency in schools, given that the top method of learning reported by students is through "listening" (91%). This suggests that most teaching and learning may take place through teacher-directed and more passive methods of instruction, whereby students are required to listen and observe. Indeed, when taken as an overall measure, the top three methods selected by students are all of a more passive nature, i.e., listening (91%), watching (84%), and reading (77%). It is also worth questioning if these methods are being chosen and utilised by teachers over more active methods of learning (which may take more time to implement in the classroom), due to the overextension of the curriculum and the associated demands and workload placed on teachers (INTO, 2015a, 2015b).

However, it should be noted that learning "by doing" was chosen by 283 participants (73%), making it the fourth most common method of learning. In the Irish-medium classes the most popular choices were learning through watching (n=30), followed by learning through listening (n=29) and play (n=29). These findings are similar to previous research examining primary students' views and experiences of studying Science in the Republic of Ireland, which suggested active and hands-on learning and experimentation in primary schools was infrequent (Department of Education, 2022; Murphy et al., 2011, p. 415). Additionally, it is important to consider that previous research by McCoy et al. (2012, p. 35) suggests there may be an important correlation between teaching methods utilised in primary schools and the

age of the teacher and the size of the class. These researchers suggest that younger and newly qualified teachers use more active forms of learning, with a decline in the use of these methods as the length of teaching experience increases. Similarly, teachers of smaller class sizes tend to use more active approaches, while those with larger classes revert to “more traditional approaches” (McCoy et al., 2012, p. 35).

Views of first year secondary school students.

The views of First year pupils on agency in teaching and learning closely mirror those of primary aged students. As the following chart illustrates, 61% (n=163) of First year students similarly believed their teacher was the main decision maker when it came to what they learned about in school, followed by the principal who was selected by 24% (n=63) of First year respondents. Similarly, only 7% (n=19) believed that “students” had any say or agency when it came to learning in Irish primary schools.

Figure 30: Secondary school children reflecting on choice/autonomy in primary school

5. Who decided what you learned about in primary school? Tick all that apply.

[More Details](#)

● Teachers	163
● Students	19
● The Principal	63
● Parents/Guardians	10
● Someone Else Not Listed Above	12

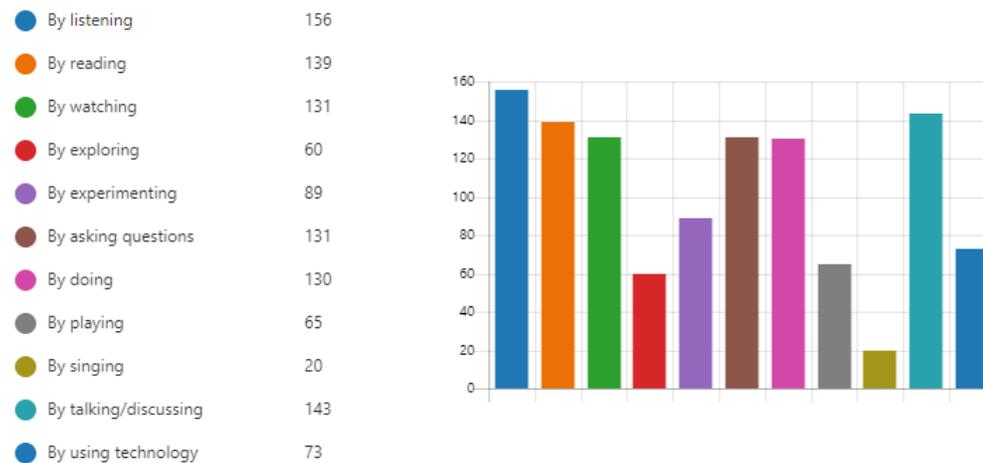


When it comes to methods of learning, again, we see similarities between the views of First year and primary school students. When reflecting on their experience of learning in primary school, First year students similarly reported learning “by listening” as the most common (n=156) method of learning.

Figure 31: Secondary school children reflecting on how they learned in primary school

10. Tick all the ways that you learned your subjects in primary school:

[More Details](#)



However, an interesting divergence is seen in the 2nd most common method of learning ranked by First year students, which was “by talking/discussing” (n=143). Primary school students ranked this method much lower on their scale—and this suggests that First year students, who may now be utilising discussion more in secondary school, could be retrospectively applying this method to their primary school experience. The finding does, however, raise an important question regarding whether learning through social means of talking and discussion should be utilised more in the new primary curriculum, especially in light of what we know regarding the social nature of school and the importance of peer relationships to students in primary school, as also highlighted in this present study.

IMPORTANT ACADEMIC SUBJECTS.

Views of primary school students.

Students were queried regarding which subjects they felt were most important to learn in school. The following chart illustrates primary school student choices, and interestingly, Maths (n=356) was the top subject chosen, followed by English (n=332), History (n=297), and Health and Wellness (n=271). It is important to note, that while “Irish” was a key dislike expressed by students in the questionnaire, within this particular measurement, Irish was ranked as the 6th most important subject to learn in English-medium schools. Therefore, this may indicate that while they dislike the subject, they also realise its importance for learning.

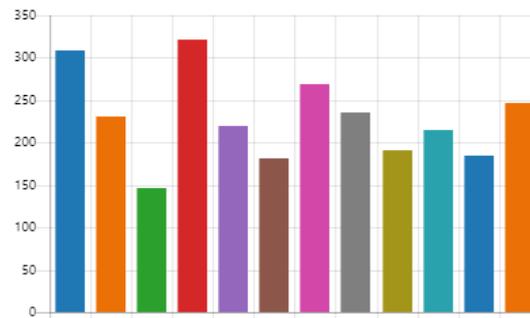
Interestingly, “other languages” was ranked as the least most important subject to study by students in English-medium schools.

Figure 32: Primary school children on what they consider the most important subjects in primary school

15. What are the most important subjects to learn in primary school? Tick as many as you'd like:

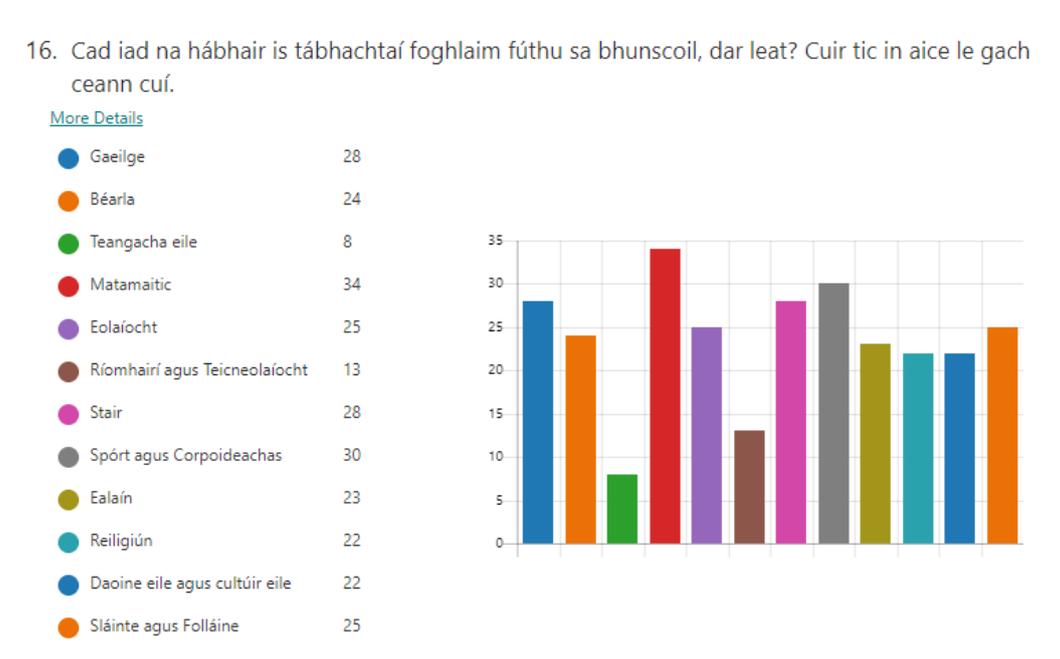
[More Details](#)

● English	308
● Irish	230
● Other Languages	147
● Maths	322
● Science	220
● Computers & Technology	182
● History	269
● Sports/PE	236
● Art	191
● Religion	214
● Other People & Cultures	184
● Health & Wellness	246



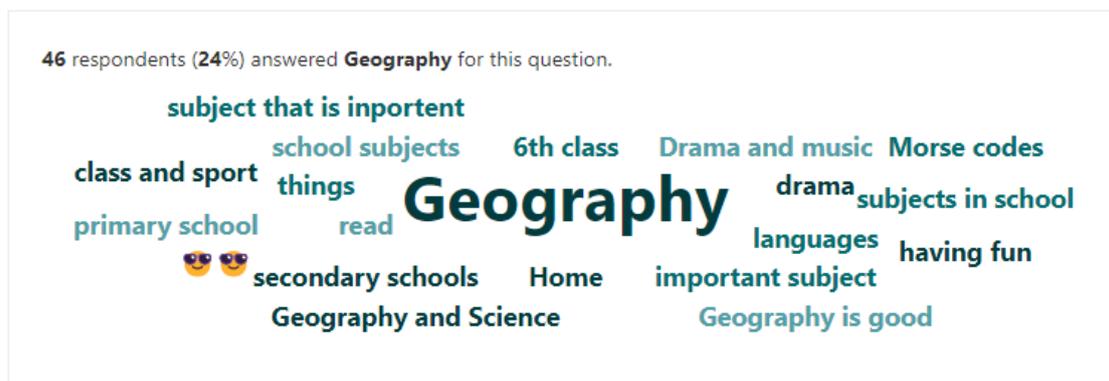
In Irish-medium schools, Mathematics was also the top chosen subject (n=34), Sports/PE was the second most important (n=30), followed by the Irish language (n=28) and History (n=28) both chosen as the third most important subjects to learn in school. The least important subject chosen by students in the Irish-medium schools was “other languages” (n=155), and this also aligns as the same choice for the English-medium students.

Figure 33: Primary school children in Irish medium schools on what they consider the most important subjects in primary school



It is important to question whether the findings above reflect students’ unique choices and opinions about their subject preferences, or if these choices are more a reflection of which subjects receive the greatest allotment on the timetable? For example, research by McCoy et al. (2012, p. iii) suggests that more experienced primary school teachers in Ireland tend to spend more time teaching core subjects like English, Irish, and Mathematics. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to consider that the above findings may be influenced by timetabling and teacher choices in the classroom, in addition to student preferences.

Primary aged students were also asked if there were any other subjects which they felt were important to study in primary school. The word cloud below illustrates their key suggestions:



Representative comments from Irish-mediums classes are presented below.

Figure 34: Irish medium school - Any other subject that you think is important?

Níl a fhios agam
Níl
Nope
Agricultural science
Níl
Eolaíocht talamhaíochta
Níl
Níll
Ealaíon
Cúrsaí reatha

This section of the data illustrates children's learning priorities. Geography featured as the subject most often mentioned. Physical activity and learning about specific types of sports was the second most noted priority, along with STEM subjects such as Math. In the Irish-medium schools, children also suggested Agricultural Science and current affairs. A few students also commented on the reasons for their subject choices, and typically, responses centred around studying subjects that are useful and practical in everyday life. For example, in relation to Geography, one student commented, "I think geography is also a very important subject because you can learn where different places are," while another explained, "Geography, to learn about the earth around you."

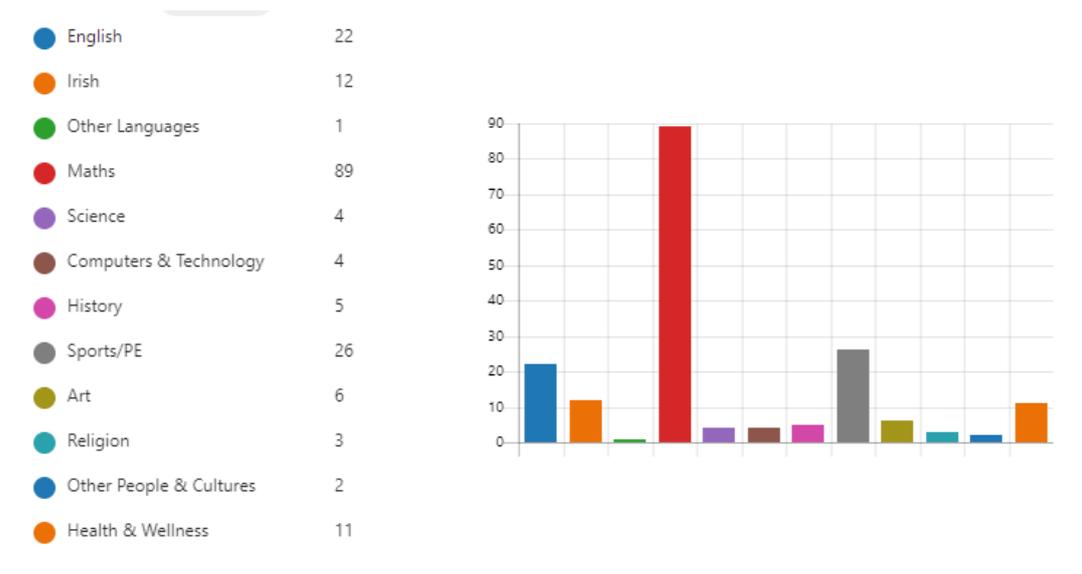
Interestingly, a minority of students mentioned the importance of learning skills and aptitudes, like being able to speak well, learning Irish Sign Language, being able to read and comprehend what was read, leadership skills, and mindfulness training. The above insights into primary school students' views of academic subjects are important to consider, particularly as research from the *Growing up in Ireland Study* appears to suggest that "Primary schools provide the foundational literacy and numeracy skills needed to be able to fully participate in secondary education, and engagement with primary school subjects sets the tone for later academic intentions" (Smyth, 2020, p. 190). Therefore, it may be wise to review

the present curriculum to ensure that primary school students receive exposure to a broad array of subjects to prepare them more fully for the transition into secondary school.

Views of first year secondary school students.

First year students were asked to choose the subject they felt was most important for primary school students to study, and the following illustrates their responses, with Mathematics clearly ranking as the #1 choice:

Figure 35: Secondary school children’s views on the most important subject in primary school



Students were then asked to comment on whether there were any other subjects they felt were important for primary students to study, and the following word cloud represents their choices:



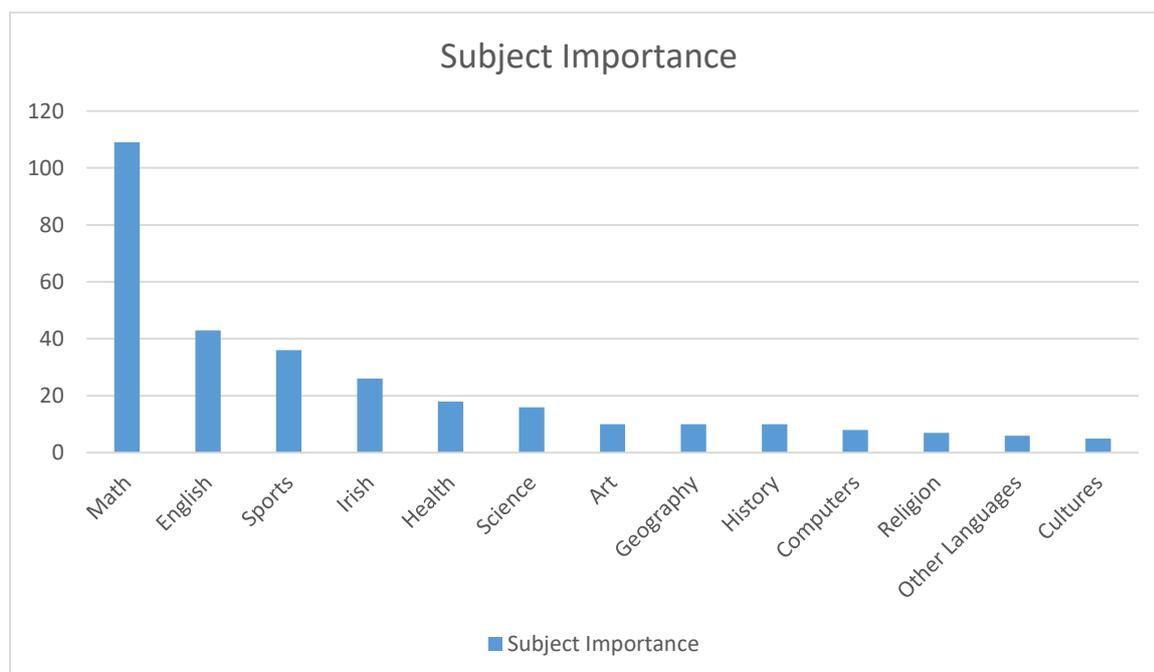
Taken together, the following chart illustrates the ranking of subjects that First year students believe are important for students in primary schools to study.⁴ (Note: some of the subjects were “tied” for the same ranking).

Figure 36: First year secondary school children rank importance of primary school subjects

Subject	Qual	Questionnaire	Total	Rank
Maths	20	89	109	#1
English	21	22	43	#2
Sports	10	26	36	#3
Irish	14	12	26	#4
Health	7	11	18	#5
Science	12	4	16	#6
Art	4	6	10	#7
Geography	10		10	#7
History	5	5	10	#7
Computers	4	4	8	#8
Religion	4	3	7	#9
Other Lang	5	1	6	#10
Cultures	3	2	5	#11

The following chart illustrates the final count of subjects, ranked in order of importance, by First year students:

Figure 37: First year Secondary school children rank importance of primary school subjects (2)



⁴⁴ Qual=subject named in qualitative comments; Questionnaire=the count of subjects from the questionnaire item.

In summary, First year and primary students agree on a number of different points when it comes to the most important subjects to study within the primary curriculum:

1. Both primary and post-primary ranked Maths as the most important subject to study.
2. Both primary and post-primary ranked English as the second most important subject. In Irish-medium schools, PE and sports was the second most important subject.
3. Primary students in English-medium schools ranked History as the 3rd most important subject to study, while Irish was the third most important subject for children in Irish-medium schools. Post-primary students ranked Sports/PE as their third choice.
4. Primary students in English-medium schools jointly ranked Irish and Sports/PE as the fourth most important subjects, while Health & Wellness was ranked 4th in Irish-medium schools. In comparison, Irish was the fourth most important subject for First year students. Also, it should be noted that overall, First year students did not appear to express as strong a level of dislike for Irish as primary students did.
5. Both primary English-medium and First year students ranked Health and Wellness as their fifth most important subject.

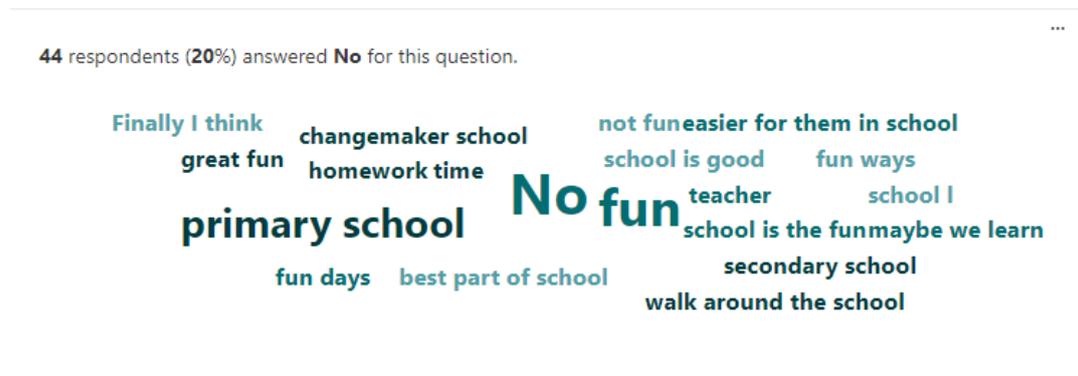
First year students were also asked, “Why do you feel the subjects you chose are important for primary students to learn?” and it was clear that within their responses, most focused on the utility and usefulness of learning a subject for their daily lives. For example, “Other languages are important if you want to go on holidays or to work in a different country. You can speak there [sic] national language,” “You will use Maths in everyday life,” and “You need to learn English to do many other subjects. You also need it to do basic tasks such as reading or writing.” Similarly, others commented on the importance of these subjects in preparing students for the transition to secondary school. For example: “Because it helps in secondary school” and “Because u [sic] need them for secondary school.” These findings which illustrate primary students’ awareness of the utility of subjects for later in life have also been found in other studies, such as Grootenboer’s (2003, pp. 3-6) exploration of primary students’ affective views of mathematics. While the views on mathematics were more diverse in Grootenboer’s work as compared to this present study (with students expressing both negative and positive perceptions of mathematics), one interesting similarity is the importance that students placed on the utility of the subject, in particular noting that mathematics would be important later

in life, for work and employment, as something useful in daily life, and as a preparation for secondary school.

FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT PRIMARY SCHOOL.

Views of primary school students.

The final item on the questionnaire asked students, “Is there anything else you'd like to say about primary school?” and as the word cloud below illustrates, there were a wide array of responses to this question.



Representative comments from the Irish-medium classes are presented below.

Figure 38: What primary school children in Irish medium schools said as their final thought about primary school

Níl

Is breá liom é

Níl

Níl

Níl

Ta sé an maith le an sport

Níl

Include na páistí san obair níos mó na ach ag insiacht iad

While the majority of students who chose to respond to this question generally reiterated that they liked school and commented on the “fun” nature of it, for example “I like it a lot,”

“Is breá liom é,” and “I think it’s fun and the teachers are kind,” a number of students offered suggestions for improvement in their experience of education in the primary context.

When it came to academics, a number of students commented on their desire for lessons to be easier to understand. For example, one student commented, “Maybe primary schools could make learning a bit more fun and make lessons easier for children that might find them hard.” Similarly, other students commented on the difficult workload and long school days, asking for these to be reconsidered. For example, one student asked decision makers to “take away homework we don't need it and also can you please please shorten the time.” Similarly, another student commented, “I think primary school is good but we have to [sic] much work and homework.” It should also be noted that a minority of students called for more work in specific subjects, like English, Maths and Irish. When it came to the teaching of Irish, one student had this to say, “In Irish I think we should be focusing more on what to say in a conversation instead of things that you would rarely say in Irish.” Interestingly, another left this comment about topics they felt were important for primary school students to learn:

I would like learning to be more active and for the subjects that we learn to be more diverse. For example, I think it is important to learn about world history and human rights. I think it would be good to learn about women [sic] rights in school. I think it is important in primary school to learn about different job opportunities and career paths in life. I think it would be good to expose students to a wide variety of jobs and future career paths in life.

A number of students also commented on the importance of more movement breaks, physical activity, active learning, and sports in primary school. For example, “I do like primary school, but if we can have a little bit more yard time I would really like that.” Similarly, other students commented on the importance of more break and leisure time in school, “we should get 20 mins for break and about 30 or 45 mins for lunch.” Also, a number of students asked for more time for PE class, “I also think it should be mandatory that we have 2 hours of PE a week because it is good to get outside and refresh you [sic] minds and our body's every once and a while.” Similarly, “I think primary school has been great fun over the years but I think children should have more time outside such as doing lessons outside, PE and free time.”

When it comes to the issue of teaching and learning in primary schools, views were wide ranging. Some students commented on the importance of having different teachers throughout their primary school experience. For example, “we should not get the same teacher in the whole 8 years because you should get someone different,” while others called for more variability in their school day, “I think we need different lessons every day and not have the same lessons every day at the same time.” In comparison, others advocated for greater student choice & say when it comes to their learning. For example, “I also think Children should have a bit of a say in what they learn.”

A minority of students commented on the status of their school as a “change maker” school, and noted the positives associated with this. For example, “I love our change maker school I think there should be more changemaker schools out there.” Similarly, another student commented, “Our school is a changemaker school. It's good for us to be allowed to make decisions and changes in the world and in our lives and in school too.”

One student commented on improvements they would like to see to their physical learning space, and expressed a desire for a library, cafeteria/lunchroom, and more outdoor areas to be added to their school. “It would be really nice to have the following: a library, room designated for eating lunch outside of the classroom, outdoor seating, playground & grass area.”

A recent study by Gültekin and Özenç Ira (2021, p. 188) which examined classroom teachers’ views on the physical learning spaces of primary schools in Turkey reported that “primary school buildings should have a structure that supports the physical, affective, cognitive, kinaesthetic, and intellectual development of primary school children, that is; primary school buildings should be child friendly.” Additionally, research suggests that we should not neglect to utilize students’ local environments in teaching and learning during primary school, particularly with subjects like Geography, which may hold the potential to foster and promote children as “active citizens” in their communities (Pike, 2011, p. 139). As such, one implication from this present study may be the need to assess primary school buildings in Ireland, to ensure the infrastructure properly supports the development of students, and that all students have access to facilities and equipment for learning, such as gymnasiums, libraries, outdoor play and learning spaces, and canteens.

In summary, it was clear that many students felt primary school was an important time in life, with many benefits to them in learning and life. As one student concluded:

Primary school is the best thing a child can have and nobody should miss the experience of it.... Some peopel [sic] say they hate primary school but that is a lie...Primary school...is so much better in present day. Kids with different [sic] learning abilities are more accepted and its easier for them in school, this is why I love primary school!!!

Views of first year secondary school students.

At the end of the questionnaire, First year students were asked, “Is there anything else you’d like to mention about your experience of primary school or the curriculum?” While only a minority of students opted to provide a response, their insights were quite varied, as the following word cloud illustrates:



Most students commented on the “fun” nature of primary school and reiterated the positive times they had learning with friends. For example: “Primary was really fun” and “I learned a lot and had lots of friends.” Similarly, another student commented, “my experience of primary school was really good and I loved it.” This aligns closely to the feedback received from primary school students.

Another student commented on the fun nature of primary school, and noted how active learning through games and play was important, “It was so much fun because you could play games and draw pictures etc., it was easier to learn that way.”

However, other students commented on the strict nature of primary school, and some noted their preference for the freedom they experience in second level. For example, one student commented, “It [primary school] felt very controlling, like I wasn’t able to speak my mind. I

constantly felt/feel like I have to bottle up my emotions and try to control myself,” and another noted, “They are really strict for some reason 😞.” Finally, one student explained that secondary school gave them more freedom to be themselves, “I personally prefer secondary school as I have more freedom to be who I want.” This viewpoint is somewhat divergent from those of primary school students, but may be a reflection of their time in secondary school, and adjustment to a different system which allows for more flexibility and freedom in personal expression. As previously noted, it may also be the case that these findings highlight the importance of ensuring that children in upper primary are being treated appropriately for their age and developmental level and being afforded a reasonable and increased amount of freedom, agency, and autonomy in the school. As such, this may be an important area for further investigation in the future

MAKING CONNECTIONS

This section outlines the key similarities and differences between the views of early childhood and junior primary school children, as compared with those in upper primary and First year of secondary school.

Similarities in Perspectives

1. ***The importance of active learning and play.*** The majority of children in both early childhood, primary, and secondary school commented on the importance of active learning and play during the primary school years. Children consistently commented on the desire to have more time for play in the yard and increased movement breaks. When First year students reflected on their memories of primary school, they often recalled having more time in primary for fun and playing games in the yard with friends. Children also commented on the importance of active learning as something they strongly desired. However, this sharply contrasted with the ways they reported actually learning in class, which typically occurred through more passive methods such as listening and watching.

2. ***The Fun and Social Nature of School.*** Overwhelmingly, children across the sectors commented on the “fun” nature of school, and school was generally portrayed as something they enjoyed. In particular, children also commented on the social nature of school, wherein they spend time learning and socialising with friends. Similarly, when First year students reflected on their time in primary school, relationships with friends was very important to them.

3. ***Learning Priorities: Art and Physical Education.*** When asked about their learning priorities, both early childhood and primary school children commented on the importance of Art and Physical Activity. Indeed, these were two subjects that children wanted included more in the curriculum, and these may link into their desire for more active learning. Similarly, post-primary students also commented on enjoying Art & PE during their time in primary school.

Differences in Perspectives

1. ***Agency & Choice.*** When asked about who has agency and choice in schools, interesting differences emerged between early childhood and primary school children. For example, early childhood children reported having greater levels of agency and choice in what and how they learn, which may be a reflection of the Aistear curriculum (NCCA, 2009), with its strong

emphasis on these components. However, an importance divergence emerged among primary and post-primary children, who felt that teachers and principals ultimately made the decisions about what and how they learned.

2. *The Role of Technology in Learning.* Early childhood children tended to emphasise the importance of using technology in schools, and expressed a desire to use more technology, such as Chromebooks in their learning. In comparison however, primary school and First year children did not emphasise technology as being important in their learning. When asked about how they learn, “by using technology” rated as one of the least common ways, and some children commented that they received enough interaction with technology outside of school, thus, it was not needed within the school day.

3. *The length of the school day & workload.* Children across sectors differed in their opinions on the length of the school day and their workload. For example, some young children expressed a desire for the school day to be lengthened, often because they wanted “more time to play.” Children in primary school often commented on the high level of workload, noting the difficulty of early morning starts, and of having to complete additional work once they returned home. Some children also expressed a desire for homework to be abolished altogether. First year students, in reflecting on primary school, often felt their workload was easier, in comparison to what they now experience in secondary school.

4. *Learning Priorities:* As previously noted, while children commonly named Art and Physical Education as core learning priorities, there were also key differences among the subjects that students felt were important to learn about. For example, younger children in early childhood and junior primary school felt that learning about other cultures, languages, religions, and the environment were of great importance. In comparison, these subjects ranked lower on the list of priorities for upper primary and First year students. Rather, when selecting learning priorities, these cohorts focused on the utility of subjects for daily life, getting jobs, and for succeeding in secondary school. As such, the priority subjects identified were in areas such as: English, numeracy/Maths, Irish, Science, History, and Geography.

5. *Relationships with Teachers.* While some early childhood children commented on the importance of relationships with their teachers, senior primary and First year students focused less on student-teacher dynamics. Indeed, some students in First year felt their

primary school teachers treated them like “babies” and did not afford them the level of freedom (particularly of self-expression) they would have liked. This raises important considerations regarding how children in upper primary school are treated (as compared to younger children) and the rules and regulations that govern their days. The dissatisfaction expressed in this area may also be linked to the level of agency and choice that upper primary children are afforded. Perhaps children of this age should be given increased levels of autonomy as they move into the senior classes of primary school.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the data and findings highlighted in this report have given us an insight into the daily experiences and perspective of students preparing for primary school, those currently learning within the system, as well as a retrospective account from those who have moved through the system into post-primary education.

Insights gained include the following from the junior section of primary school: Children are happy in school, and this is very clear from the data. When asked, younger children said they want more play time, more time to socialise with friends, longer breaks, more time outdoors, more field trips, more time with ipads and computers, more P.E, and arts subjects. They would also like more choices about how they work and would like less homework. They would like more of a focus on well-being and relationships in school and on environmental issues.

Insights from senior primary and secondary school children include the following: Children desire more autonomy in their school lives. They see principals and teachers as the key decision makers. They are strategically aware of the importance of subjects for their future. More active learning is required, experimenting, learning by doing “instead of just listening, reading and watching.” Children in secondary school consider their workload too high and the school day too long. Unlike the children in the junior section of the school, older children did not ask for more exposure to technology. One child said “We don’t need more technology because we get so much of it outside school.” More exposure to Irish was linked to more positive attitudes towards the language and to learning the language. This was found in both the junior and senior sections of primary school.

These insights and there are many others, hold tremendous wealth and potential to shape and influence the Irish primary school curriculum, so that all students can experience a child-centred education which promotes not only knowledge and understanding, but also their holistic growth and development as active and responsible global citizens. It is important to listen to and act upon the views and perspectives of these young people regarding their educational experiences, given the far-reaching implications for future learning and outcomes. For example, as previous research by the ESAI tells us, children’s perceptions, and experiences of primary school, for better or worse, commonly influence how they perceive and experience secondary school (Smyth, 2017, p. 7). Similarly, their experiences of primary

and secondary school profoundly shape their views and expectations--both of themselves as a learner, but also expectations of their future potential and outcomes (Smyth, 2020, p. 174).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Student Information and Assent Sheet (Preschool to Second Class)

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APPENDIX A**Student Information and Assent Sheet (Preschool to Second Class)**

Please read and talk about this with your parent/guardian at home.

We would like to find out about what school is like for you and other children in Ireland! Do you think this is something you would like to help your teacher with?

What will your teacher ask you about?

Your teacher will ask you questions about what you do in school each day, what it was like learning in school, and what your favourite things in school are.

What will you get to do?

If you want to help your teacher and answer their questions, you will get to do some drawings, worksheets and talk to your teacher and have your answers recorded.

What is good about helping us out?

By talking to your teacher, you get to share your ideas with them. What you say could help make school better for you and other children too.

Will everybody know what you said?

You do not have to put your name on your drawings or on the worksheets, so except for your teacher, no one will know that this is your work.

What happens after you talk to your teacher?

The people in charge of the project will look at all the drawings and worksheets and listen to the answers from children like you, and think about what they mean. They will then talk to other important people, so they too can understand what school is like, and how we can make it better for children.

Do you have any questions?

If you have any questions, please talk to your teacher, or your parent/guardian.

Please see next page.

Confirmation of Understanding:

Instructions: Draw a circle around the picture that best shows how you feel:

Would you like to take part in this project? It is OK to say no if you do not want to.

Do you understand that your teacher will have a chat with you about what school is like?

Are you happy to draw some pictures and do some worksheets to share with others?

Are you happy that your teacher will audio record the chat with the class?

Draw a smiley face in the space below if you are happy to help your teacher with this project by answering their questions and completing the activities:

Informed Assent to be signed by child

Please sign your name here: _____

To be completed by Parent/Guardian

Parent's name (printed): _____

Parental/guardian consent sheet received & signed: YES NO

Teacher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Please return this page to your teacher.

APPENDIX B

Bileog Eolais agus Aontú don Dalta (Aoiseanna 3 go dtí a 7)

Le do thoil, léigh é seo agus labhair faoi le do thuismitheoir/chaomhnóir sa bhaile.

Ba mhaith linn a fháil amach conas atá an scoil duitse agus do pháistí eile in Éirinn! Meas tú an mbeadh tú ag iarraidh cabhrú le do mhúinteoir leis seo?

Cén sórt ceisteanna a chuirfidh do mhúinteoir ort?

Cuirfidh do mhúinteoir ceisteanna ort faoin méid a dhéanann tú ar scoil gach lá, conas mar a bhíonn sé foghlaim ar scoil, agus cé na rudaí is fearr leat ar scoil.

Cad a bheidh tusa in ann a dhéanamh?

Má tá fonn ort cabhrú le do mhúinteoir agus a gcuid ceisteanna a fhreagairt, beidh an seans agat roinnt pictiúr agus bileoga oibre a dhéanamh agus labhairt fúthu. Déanfaidh do mhúinteoir taifeadadh ar an méid a deir tú.

Cad atá go maith faoi chabhrú linn?

Trí labhairt le do mhúinteoir, beidh tú in ann do smaointe a roinnt leo. Is féidir go bhfeabhsóidh cibé rud atá le rá agat an scoil duitse agus do pháistí eile chomh maith.

An mbeidh a fhios ag gach éinne cad a dúirt tú?

Níl ort d'ainm a chur ar do chuid pictiúr mar gheall air sin, ní bheidh a fhios ach ag do mhúinteoir gurb é seo do chuid oibre.

Cad a tharlaíonn i ndiaidh duit labhairt le do mhúinteoir?

Breathnóidh na daoine atá i gceannas ar an tionscnamh ar na pictiúir ó pháistí cosúil leatsa, agus déanfaidh siad machnamh ar cén bhrí atá leo. Labhróidh siad i ndiaidh sin le daoine tábhachtacha eile, cosúil le thuismitheoirí agus múinteoirí, le gur féidir leosan chomh maith a thuiscint conas mar atá an scoil, agus conas ar féidir linn é a dhéanamh níos fearr do pháistí.

An bhfuil ceisteanna ar bith agat?

Má tá ceisteanna ar bith agat, le do thoil labhair le do mhúinteoir, nó le do thuismitheoir/caomhnóir.

Breathnaigh ar an gcéad leathanach eile, le do thoil.

Dearbhú Tuisceana

Treoracha: Tarraing ciorcal timpeall ar an bpictiúr is fearr a léiríonn conas a mhothaíonn tú:

Ar mhaith leat páirt a ghlacadh sa tionscnamh seo? Ná bí buartha mura bhfuil fonn ort.

An dtuigeann tú go mbeidh comhrá ag do mhúinteoir leat faoi do smaointe faoin scoil?

An bhfuil tú sásta cúpla pictiúr agus bileog oibre a dhéanamh agus labhairt le do mhúinteoir fúthu?

An bhfuil tú sásta go ndéanfaidh do mhúinteoir taifeadadh ar na rudaí a deir tú?

Tarraing aghaidh ghealgháireach sa spás thíos má tá tú sásta cabhrú le do mhúinteoir leis an tionscnamh seo tríd a cuid ceisteanna a fhreagairt agus na gníomhaíochtaí a chur i gcrích.

Dearbhú Eolach le Síniú ag an bPáiste

Scríobh d'ainm anseo le do thoil:

Le Críochnú ag an Tuismitheoir/Caomhnóir

Ainm an tuismitheora (priontáilte): _____

Fuarthas agus síníodh an bhileog aontú tuismitheora/caomhnóra: Fuair

Ní bhfuair

Dáta: _____

Tabhair an bhileog seo ar ais chuig do mhúinteoir, más é do thoil é.

APPENDIX C

Parent/Guardian Information Sheet

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Thank you for your interest in this project. We ask you to read through the following document which outlines the various aspects of this study that are important for you to know and understand.

After reading through this information sheet, if you are still happy for your child to participate, you will be asked to sign the consent form at the end of this document. We will then ask your child to sign their own version as well to affirm their assent.

If you need help with understanding this letter, please contact your child's teacher.

Title of Project: *Child's Voice: Consulting with children on the 'Draft Primary Curriculum' framework*

Background Information: The primary curriculum utilised in Irish schools is presently under review, and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has recently published the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* for consultation. As outlined below, a variety of stakeholders, including parents and children, are being consulted during both the *Draft Curriculum* development and review periods.

The Purpose of this Research: The purpose of this research project is to consult with children to obtain their views and opinions in relation to the new draft Curriculum, along with gaining insight into their experiences in Irish schools. This research is founded on the six key messages that underpin the *Draft Primary Curriculum*, namely:

1. Supporting agency and flexibility in schools;
2. Building connections between pre-school, primary, and post-primary schools;
3. Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented;
4. Emerging priorities for children's learning;
5. Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches with strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning;
6. Building on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum and responding to challenges arising from it.

Why is this research important?

This research is being conducted because we want children to have a say in the new curriculum, and we feel this is important because the curriculum directly and significantly impacts upon their lives on a daily basis. Therefore, listening to their opinions and learning about their experiences in Irish schools is an important step prior to making any changes to

the curriculum and implementing it in schools. In summary, this project has the power to create positive change in Irish schools and the lives of young people, and listening to their voices is an essential part of this process.

What will your child be asked to do?

Child participants will be asked to engage in two forms of data collection, wherein they will discuss their opinions and experiences of the curriculum in their schools with their teachers who will be responsible for collecting data from the children and returning it to the research team for analysis.

The following chart outlines the data collection methods to be used with the age range of child participants in this study:

Age of Child	Data Collection Methods
Pre-school to 2nd/3 rd Class	Drawing Worksheets
4 th Class to Post-Primary (Optional 3 rd Class)	Online Questionnaire

During data collection, children will be asked questions related to areas such as their daily experiences in schools; what they enjoy about school; how they learn best; and what subjects they feel are important to learn.

Benefits and risks of participation

This study has been designed to pose minimal to no risks to your child. By participating in this study, your child will have the opportunity to reflect on and share their insights and experiences of the primary school curriculum, thereby having their voices listened to by interested adults. In turn, the data that we collect may be used to positively influence the curriculum and its delivery, thereby improving the experience and outcomes of future students in Irish schools.

Children's rights in this study

The rights of your child include the following:

1. Freedom of participation--your child should be freely participating in this study because they want to;
2. Your child has the right to only answer those questions they feel comfortable answering;
3. Your child has the right to stop participating in this study at any time;
4. Even if they do stop participating, your child is free to re-join the project at any time.
5. If you decide not to allow your child to participate in the study but your child insists on participating on the day with her/his classmates, we will allow your child to

participate in the activities but your child's work will not be forwarded to the research team as part of the data set.

Confidentiality

You and your child are assured of confidentiality in this project. Any specific details collected in the data that could be potentially used to identify you, your child or family, or the teacher, the school they attend will be omitted from the final publication of this project in order to protect your privacy and that of your family. The only time that confidentiality will be breached in this project pertains to cases where the child participant discusses or discloses something that makes the researchers seriously question the safety of the child, or those around them. In this case, the school's child protection protocol will be followed.

Data protection

All data and information collected from participants in this study will be kept in password protected files on the researchers' work laptops. Thirteen months after this study has been completed, all data will be completely destroyed.

How results and findings will be communicated

After data has been gathered, it will be analysed, and the researchers will look for important ideas and insights about the experience of the primary curriculum in Ireland. This information will be used to inform future drafts of the curriculum. Additionally, the findings will be published in executive documents from the NCCA, and possibly communicated in academic journals, and disseminated at national and international conferences so that educationalists can learn from it.

If you have any questions

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for considering your child's participation in this study.

If you need help with understanding this letter, please contact your child's teacher.

Should you have any questions about this study or your child's participation, please contact your child's teacher, or the lead researcher:

Dr Joan Kiely
Dean of Education: Curriculum and Education
Joan.kiely@mie.ie
01-853-5157

Please see consent sheet on next page

Consulting with children on the 'Draft Primary Curriculum' Consent Sheet

I _____ (parent/guardian name) agree on behalf of my child
 _____ (child's name) that the following is true:

Please tick as appropriate:

- I agree that my child may participate in this study if they wish to;
- I have read through and understand the information sheet;-
- I have had enough time to consider my child's participation in this study;
- I have been provided with the contact details of the lead researcher;
- I confirm that my child's participation in this study is voluntary;
- I understand that my child may stop participating in this study at any time, and if they wish, may re-join at a later date.

Name of Child (please print): _____

Name of Parent (please print): _____

Signature of Parent: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Please return this consent sheet to your child's teacher. You may retain the information sheets for your own reference.

APPENDIX D

Bileog Faisnéise do Thuismitheoirí/Chaomhnóirí

A Thuismitheoir/Chaomhnóir, a chara,

Go raibh maith agat as spéis a léiriú sa tionscadal seo. Iarraimid ort léamh tríd an doiciméad seo a leanas, ina leagtar amach na gnéithe éagsúla den staidéar seo ar gá duit bheith ar an eolas fúthu agus iad a thuiscint.

Tar éis duit an bhileog eolais seo a léamh, agus má tá tú fós sásta go nglacfiadh do pháiste páirt sa taighde, iarrfar ort an bhileog thoilithe ag an deireadh a shíniú. Iarrfaimid ar do pháiste ansin a leagan féin den fhoirm a shíniú chun aontú a léiriú.

Teideal an Tionscadail: *Guth an Linbh: Dul i gcomhairle le leanaí maidir le 'Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile'*

Faisnéis Chúlra: Tá athbhreithniú á dhéanamh faoi láthair ar churaclam na bunscoile a úsáidtear i scoileanna/socrúcháin luath-óige na hÉireann, agus d'fhoilsigh an Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta (CNCM) *Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile* le haghaidh comhairliúcháin le déanaí. Mar atá leagtha amach thíos, rachfar i gcomhairle le geallsealbhóirí éagsúla, lena n-áirítear tuismitheoirí agus leanaí, le linn an *Dréachtchuraclam* a fhorbairt agus a athbhreithniú araon.

Cuspóir an Taighde seo: Is é cuspóir an tionscadail taighde seo ná dul i gcomhairle le leanaí chun a dtuairimí a fháil ar an *Dréachtchuraclam* nua, mar aon le léargas a ghnóthú ar a n-eispéiris i scoileanna/socrúcháin luath-óige Éireannacha. Tá an taighde seo bunaithe ar na sé phríomhtheachtaireacht atá taobh thiar de *Dhréachtchuraclam na Bunscoile*, is iad sin:

1. Tacú le gníomhaíocht fhiúntach agus solúbthacht i scoileanna/socrúcháin luath-óige;
2. Ceangail a chothú idir socrúcháin luath-óige, bunscoileanna agus iar-bhunscoileanna;
3. Athrú a dhéanamh ar an struchtúr atá ar an gcuraclam agus ar an dóigh a gcuirtear i láthair é;
4. Tosaíochtaí atá ag teacht chun cinn d'fhoghlaim leanaí;
5. Straitéisí a úsáid chun tacú le cineálacha éagsúla cuir chuige oideolaíoch, áit a mbeidh an mheasúnacht ina cuid lárnach den teagasc agus den foghlaim;
6. Cur le láidreachtaí an churaclaim a foilsíodh sa bhliain 1999 agus freagairt do na dúshlán a tháinig as.

Cén fáth a bhfuil an taighde seo tábhachtach?

Tá an taighde seo á dhéanamh toisc go bhfuilimid ag iarraidh go mbeadh ionchur ag leanaí sa churaclam nua. Braithimid go bhfuil sé sin tábhachtach toisc go n-imríonn an curaclam mórthionchar díreach ar a saol ar bhonn laethúil. Dá bhrí sin, tá sé tábhachtach éisteacht lena gcuid tuairimí agus foghlaim óna n-eispéiris i scoileanna/socrúcháin luath-óige in Éirinn sula ndéanfar aon athruithe ar an gcuraclam agus sula gcuirfear na hathruithe sin chun

feidhme i scoileanna/socrúcháin luath-óige. I mbeagán focal, is féidir leis an tionscadal seo athrú dearfach a chruthú i scoileanna/socrúcháin luath-óige in Éirinn agus i saol daoine óga. Cuid riachtanach den phróiseas sin is ea éisteacht le guth daoine óga.

Cad a iarrfar ar an leanbh a dhéanamh?

Iarrfar ar na leanaí a bheidh páirteach sa staidéar gabháil do dhá chineál bailiúcháin sonraí, áit a bpléifidh siad lena múinteoir a gcuid tuairimí agus eispéireas ar an gcuraclam ina scoil/suíomh luath-óige. Beidh a múinteoir freagrach as sonraí a bhailiú ó na leanaí agus as na sonraí sin a sheoladh ar aghaidh chuig an bhfoireann taighde lena n-anailísiú.

Leagtar amach sa chart seo a leanas na modhanna bailiúcháin sonraí a úsáidfear de réir aoisraon na leanaí a bheidh páirteach sa staidéar seo:

Aois an Linbh	Modhanna Bailiúcháin Sonraí
3 bliana go 7 mbliana	Pictiúir a dhéanamh Bileoga oibre a dhéanamh Caint faoi na pictiúir agus na bileoga oibre
Bunscoil (Rang 3-6)	Ceistneoir ar líne

Le linn na sonraí a bhailiú, cuirfear ceisteanna ar na leanaí faoi na nithe a thaitníonn leo ar scoil/i suíomh luath-óige agus faoi conas a fhoghlaimíonn siad ar an tslí is fearr.

Na tairbhí agus na rioscaí a bhaineann le rannpháirtíocht

Ceapadh an staidéar seo chun nach mbeadh aon rioscaí ann do leanaí nó chun na rioscaí sin a sheachaint a mhéid is féidir. Trí pháirt a ghlacadh sa staidéar seo, beidh deis ag an leanbh machnamh a dhéanamh ar a léargais agus a (h)eispéiris féin ar churaclam na bunscoile, agus a g(h)uth á chloisteáil ag aosaigh a bhfuil spéis acu ina bhfuil le rá ag an leanbh. Ina dhiaidh sin, is féidir go n-úsáidfear na sonraí a bhaileoimid chun tionchar dearfach a imirt ar an gcuraclam agus ar an dóigh a soláthraítear é, rud a chuirfidh feabhas ar an eispéireas agus na torthaí do dhaltaí amach anseo i scoileanna/socrúcháin luath-óige in Éirinn.

Na cearta atá ag leanaí sa staidéar seo

Áirítear iad seo a leanas leis na cearta atá ag an leanbh:

A: Saoirse rannpháirtíochta - ba cheart páirt a bheith á glacadh ag an leanbh sa staidéar seo toisc go bhfuil sé/sí ag iarraidh déanamh amhlaidh;

B: Tá sé de cheart ag an leanbh gan freagra a thabhairt ach ar na ceisteanna sin a bhfuil sé/sí compordach freagra a thabhairt orthu;

C: Tá sé de cheart ag an leanbh stopadh ag glacadh páirte sa staidéar seo ag aon am;

D: Fiú amháin i gcás go stopfaidh sé/sí ag glacadh páirt ann, féadfaidh an leanbh filleadh ar an tionscadal ag aon am.

E: Má roghnaíonn tú gan cead a ligean do do pháiste páirt a ghlacadh sa taighde ach áitíonn do pháiste páirt a ghlacadh ar an lá lena c(h)airde ranga, tabharfaimid cead do do pháiste páirt a ghlacadh ach ní chuirfear obair do pháiste ar aghaidh chuig an bhfoireann taighde mar chuid den tacar sonraí.

Rúndacht

Dearbhófar do rúndacht agus rúndacht an linbh le linn an tionscadail seo. Maidir le haon mhionsonraí sonracha a bhaileofar agus a d'fhéadfaí a úsáid chun tú féin, an leanbh nó do theaghlach nó an scoil/suíomh luath-óige a bhfreastalaíonn an leanbh uirthi a aithint, fágfar iad ar lár ó fhoilseachán deiridh an tionscadail seo ar mhaithe le do phríobháideacht agus príobháideacht do theaghlach a chosaint. Is é an t-aon am amháin a shárófar an rúndacht sin le linn an tionscadail ná cásanna ina nochtfaidh leanbh rud éigin a chuireann amhras ar na taighdeoirí faoi shábháilteacht an linbh nó faoi shábháilteacht na ndaoine atá timpeall air/uirthi. Sa chás sin, leanfar prótacal cosanta leanaí na scoile/suíomh luath-óige.

Cosaint sonraí

Déanfar na sonraí agus an fhaisnéis ar fad a bhaileofar ó rannpháirtithe sa staidéar seo a choinneáil i gcomhaid atá cosanta ag pasfhocal ar ríomhairí glúine oibre na dtaighdeoirí. Scríosfar na sonraí ar fad trí mhí dhéag tar éis an staidéar seo a chríochnú.

Conas a chuirfear na torthaí agus na fionnachtana in iúl

Tar éis na sonraí a bhailiú, déanfar anailís orthu. Coinneoidh na taighdeoirí súil amach do smaointe tábhachtacha agus do léargais thábhachtacha ar an eispéireas ar churaclam na bunscoile in Éirinn. Úsáidfear an fhaisnéis sin chun bonn eolais a chur faoi dhréachtaí amach anseo den churaclam. Ina theannta sin, foilseofar na fionnachtana i ndoiciméid feidhmiúcháin ó CNCM, agus b'fhéidir go gcuirfí in iúl iad in irisleabhair acadúla, agus scaipfear iad ag comhdhálacha náisiúnta agus idirnáisiúnta ionas gur féidir le hoideachasóirí foghlaim uathu.

Má bhíonn aon cheisteanna agat

Go raibh maith agat as an am a thógáil chun an bhileog faisnéise seo a léamh agus as breithniú a dhéanamh ar rannpháirtíocht do linbh sa staidéar seo.

Má bhíonn aon cheisteanna agat faoin staidéar seo nó faoi rannpháirtíocht an linbh, déan teagmháil leis an bpríomhthaighdeoir:

An Dr Joan Kiely

Déan an Oideachais: Curaclam agus Oideachas

Joan.kiely@mie.ie

01-853-5157

Guth an Linbh: Dul i gcomhairle le leanaí maidir le 'Dréachtchreat Curaclaim na Bunscoile

Foirm Thoilithe

Tugaim _____ (ainm an tuismitheora/chaomhnóra) cead do mo pháiste _____ (ainm an pháiste) páirt a ghlacadh sa taighde agus dearbhaím go bhfuil an méid seo a leanas fíor:

Cuir tic i ngach bosca cuí

- Aontaím gur féidir le mo pháiste páirt a ghlacadh sa staidéar seo má tá sé/sí ag iarraidh sin
- Léigh mé an bhileog eolais agus tuigim í
- Bhí dóthain ama agam an cinneadh a dhéanamh go mbeidh mo pháiste páirteach sa staidéar seo
- Tá sonraí an phríomhthaighdeora faighte agam
- Deimhním go bhfuil mo pháiste ag glacadh páirte sa taighde seo ar bhonn deonach
- Tuigim gur féidir le mo pháiste stopadh de bheith ag glacadh páirte sa staidéar seo ag am ar bith, agus teacht ar ais aon uair is mian leis/léi

Ainm an pháiste (Scríobh amach é): _____

Ainm an tuismitheoir (Scríobh amach é): _____

Síniú an tuismitheora: _____

Dáta: _____

Tabhair an fhoirm thoilithe seo do mhúinteoir do pháiste le do thoil. Is féidir leat an fhoirm eolais a choinneáil más maith leat.

APPENDIX E

Instructions to Schools

Dear teacher of children in the early years (age 4-8, pre-school age to Second Class),

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research project to elicit children's views on the new primary school curriculum. Your involvement will ensure that children's views are heard in the design of the new primary school curriculum.

The research team are asking you to hold a series of **six brief research sessions** with children over a period of eighteen days, from Monday November 22nd to Wednesday, December 15th. We will guide you in how to do this and provide the questions and materials needed.

The six research sessions are based on the key messages of the new primary school curriculum as follows:

1. Supporting agency and flexibility in schools
2. Building connections between pre-school, primary and post-primary schools
3. Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented
4. Emerging priorities for children's learning
5. Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning
6. Building on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum and responding to challenges arising from it.

In this document, you will find a guidance sheet explaining the step-by-step process you should take for conducting the research during each of the 6 sessions. You can do one session each day or decide to do more than one in a day.

There are between 2 to 6 questions for each of your research sessions with children. Sometimes the children will be drawing pictures while chatting with you and sometimes they will be completing a worksheet based on one of the key messages of the new primary school curriculum listed above.

Please note that:

1. You do not have to focus on each child individually; ask questions of the group. Some children will be keen to talk; others may not, and that is perfectly fine. We envisage that each session will last approximately 20-30 minutes. If you go over or under this time, that is fine. We will leave it to your discretion to decide how much time suits your schedule for this research activity.
2. There is a series of questions we would like you to ask each day of the research. We recommend starting with the first question, and with your recorder on, circulate to each table, asking the first question and allowing children to answer. Then, proceed

to asking the second question and so on. The last question you ask each day (where relevant) should query students about what they have drawn and why.

3. Please ensure you hold the recording device close to the child who is speaking so that the data will be intelligible.
4. We recommend that you use either the stock voice recorder already on your device, or that you download an app such as the “Easy Voice Recorder” from the Apple App Store or Android Play Store.
5. Simply pause the voice recording if you are interrupted while speaking to the children and resume when you are ready to begin again.
6. At the end of each session, please put the drawings / plans / worksheets into a folder labelled with the correct Session number. The researchers will make arrangements to collect the drawings from your school at the end of the research period.
7. After the research session, please email the voice recording to us at the following email address: childvoice@mie.ie with ‘Session (number)’ written in the subject line. In the body of the email put your name, grade level, and school name. Please do not delete your recordings until the research team have confirmed receipt.

Session 1

Focus: Supporting agency and flexibility in schools

Session activity:

During this session, you will have a structured conversation with children as they are drawing. Instructions for the drawings and questions are below.

What children should draw:

On one side of the page children should draw what they like best about school – they should mark this page with a happy smiley face in the corner. On the other side of the page children should draw what they least like about school – they should mark this page with a sad face in the corner.

Instruction:

As the children are drawing, the teacher should circulate amongst the tables. We recommend that you begin by asking Question 1 as noted below, and circulate around the classroom to each table until every child who wishes to respond has had an opportunity to answer this question. Then, move on to Question 2 and continue until you have asked each question below. Question 6 should be the last question you ask for this session, and please allow all children who wish, to offer an explanation of their drawing.

You should use your phone (recording app) / recording device to record the full session from the time you ask the first question.

Questions:

1. Tell me what you like to do in school.
2. Do you get to do all the things you would like to do in school?
3. Are there some things you must do in school that you don't like?
4. Do you have any choices about what you want to learn? Can you give me an example.
5. If you had a magic wand, what would you make pre/school be like every day?
6. What have you drawn and why?

Finish:

Once you have asked all the questions stop the recording and when you get a chance, email it to childvoice@mie.ie with 'Session 1' written in the subject line. In the body of the email put your name, grade level, and school name.

Collect all the drawings and put them in a folder labelled Session 1. A member of the research team will be in touch to arrange collection of the drawings towards the end of the data collection period.

Session 2

Focus: Building connections between pre-school, primary and post-primary schools

Session activity:

During this session, you will have a structured conversation with children as they are drawing. Instructions for the drawings and questions are below.

What children should draw:

On one side of the page children should draw what they do in playschool – as a teacher you should write playschool on this side of the page. On the other side of the page children should draw what they do in primary school – as a teacher you should write primary school on this side of the page.

Instruction:

As the children are drawing, you as the teacher should circulate amongst the tables. We recommend that you begin by asking Question 1 as noted below, and circulate around the classroom to each table until every child who wishes to respond has had an opportunity to answer this question. Then, move on to Question 2 and continue until you have asked each question below.

For Pre-school children: Question 4 should be the last question you ask for this session, and please allow all children who wish, to offer an explanation of their drawing.

For junior primary children: Question 5 should be the last question you ask for this session, and please allow all children who wish, to offer an explanation of their drawing.

You should use your phone (recording app) / recording device to record the full session from the time you ask the first question.

Questions:

Questions for pre-school children

7. We are here in play school now. What do you know about the **next** school you are going to go to?
8. Do you think it will be different in the **next** school you go to? How?
9. Is there something you do here in this school that you would also like to do in the **next** school?
10. What have you drawn and why?

Questions for junior primary children

11. Do you do activities or things here in big school that you did in play school? Are they the same or different? How?

12. When you were in playschool did you ever talk about big school with your teacher?
13. Is there something you remember that you liked to do in play school that you would still like to do in primary school?
14. Do you think you should learn in a different way in older classes in school? How do you think learning older classes might be different?
15. What have you drawn and why?

Finish:

Once you have asked all the questions, stop the recording and when you get a chance, email it to childvoice@mie.ie with 'Session 2' written in the subject line. In the body of the email put your name, grade level, and school name. Collect all the drawings and put them in a folder labelled Session 2. A member of the research team will be in touch to arrange collection of the drawings towards the end of the data collection period.

Session 3:

Focus: Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

Session activity:

During this session, you will have a structured audio-recorded conversation around the questions listed below. Together, with the children, make one plan using an A3 size sheet of paper of how the children would like a typical day to be in school. Instructions for the drawings and questions are below.

Instruction:

Pre-school:

The children will respond to the questions below and the teacher will draw / write exactly what the children respond and use this information to design a plan of what the children would like to see as a day in school. We recommend that you begin by asking Question 1 as noted below.

Primary School:

1. Together with the children, speak to the questions below and record the children and draw a plan on an A3 piece of paper of what a day in school looks like.
2. Next brainstorm with children on how they would design a day in school and what they would choose to learn. Draw the children's alternative plan on an A3 sheet of paper.

You should use your phone (recording app) / recording device to record the full session from the time you ask the first question.

Questions:**Pre-school Questions:**

1. How do we learn in play school?
2. How would you like to learn when you go to the next school?

Primary School Questions:

1. How is our day in school planned at the moment?
2. Can you describe what we do each part of the day for each day of the week? (As the teacher, you can guide this set of questions according to how you plan your week with the children.)
3. Is this a useful way to structure our learning or can we do it differently? (This question should not be guided with suggestions from you as the teacher.)

Finish:

Put the plan in a folder labelled Session 3. A member of the research team will be in touch to arrange collection of the drawings towards the end of the data collection period.

Session 4:**Focus: Emerging priorities for children's learning**Session activity:

Pre-school: During this session, you will have an audio-recorded structured conversation around the questions listed below while children are drawing.

Primary school: Children will complete the worksheets with the guidance of the teacher.

Instruction:

Pre-school children talk about and draw the three most important things you need to learn in school.

You should use your phone (recording app) / recording device to record the full session from the time you ask the first question.

Junior Primary children complete the worksheet by cutting out pictures and paste them onto another page under a choice of headings. As the teacher, you should talk the children through the worksheet and make sure they know what each box in the worksheet represents, especially if they cannot read themselves.

Worksheet: Look at the pictures of things to do in school on your worksheet (Page 1). Look at the worksheet with three columns that says: *Important, A bit Important, Not important at all* (Page 2).

Cut out the pictures on the worksheet and stick them under the column where you think they fit.

Adaptation if required: If you feel the cutting and gluing is too difficult for some of the children in your class you can give them the alternative worksheet, which has a colouring option instead. See Page 4 of the worksheet section. Here children follow the traffic light system (Green for very important, yellow for a little important and red for no important).

Questions:

Questions for pre-school children

1. What do you think is important to learn about in pre-school?
2. What do you think is important to learn about in the *next* school you go to?
3. Do you think it is important that your family know what you are learning?

Finish:

Pre-school: Once you have asked all the questions stop the recording and when you get a chance, email it to childvoice@mie.ie with 'Session 4' written in the subject line. In the body of the email put your name, grade level, and school name. Collect all the drawings and put them in a folder labelled Session 4. A member of the research team will be in touch to arrange collection of the drawings towards the end of the data collection period.

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Emerging priorities</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">Children should cut out each square and glue them in the columns they think it belongs in according to whether they think it is important to learn about or not.</p>		
<p>Different cultures and languages</p> 	<p>Different religions</p> 	<p>The environment and climate change</p> 
<p>Computers, technology, coding</p> 	<p>Making friends</p> 	<p>Family relationships</p> 
<p>Being able to speak another language</p> 	<p>Learning about boys' and girls' bodies</p> 	<p>How your classroom looks</p> 
<p>Children who learn in different ways or have disabilities can learn in the same classroom</p> 	<p>Being happy, sad, angry</p> 	<p>How to be healthy and well</p> 
<p>Learning outside</p> 	<p>That you can help decide what/how to learn</p> 	<p>Play</p> 

Very important	Only a little bit important	Not important
		

Primary school: Collect all the worksheets and put them in a folder labelled Session 4. A member of the research team will be in touch to arrange collection of the drawings towards the end of the data collection period.

Draw your own ideas of what you also think you should learn about here

Emerging priorities

Colour the box under each photo

GREEN if you think it is important **YELLOW** if you think it is a little important **RED** if you don't think it is important

<p>Different cultures and languages</p> 	<p>Different religions</p> 	<p>The environment and climate change</p> 
<p>Computers, technology, coding</p> 	<p>Making friends</p> 	<p>Family relationships</p> 
<p>Being able to speak another language</p> 	<p>Learning about boys' and girls' bodies</p> 	<p>How your classroom looks</p> 
<p>Children who learn in different ways or have disabilities can learn in the same classroom</p> 	<p>Being happy, sad, angry</p> 	<p>How to be healthy and well</p> 
<p>Learning outside</p> 	<p>That you can help decide what/how to learn</p> 	<p>Play</p> 

Session 5:

Focus: Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning

Session activity:

Pre-school children: During this session, you will have an audio-recorded structured conversation around the question below and children will draw the best way to learn.

Primary school: Children will complete the worksheets with the guidance of the teacher.

Instruction:

Pre-school children talk about and draw how they would like to learn in primary school.

You should use your phone (recording app) / recording device to record the full session from the time you ask the question to when the children stop talking

Junior Primary school children complete the worksheet by cutting out pictures and paste them onto another page under a choice of headings. As the teacher, you should talk the children through the worksheet and make sure they know what each box in the worksheet represents, especially if they cannot read themselves.

Worksheet: Look at the pictures of things to do in school on your worksheet (Page 1). Look at the worksheet with three columns that says: *I like it a lot, I like it a little bit, I don't like it* (Page 2). On Page 3 there are empty boxes for children to draw their own ideas of how they would like to learn and have their work assessed (they only need to do this if they want to).

Cut out the pictures on the worksheet and stick them under the column where you think they fit.

Worksheet:

Adaptation if required: if you feel the cutting and gluing is too difficult for some of the children in your class you can give them the alternative worksheet, which has a colouring option instead. See Page 4 of the worksheet section. Here children follow the traffic light system (Green for like a lot, yellow for like a little and red for do not like).

Questions:

Question for pre-school children

- What is the best way for you to learn something in play school?

Finish:

- **Pre-school:** Once you have asked the question and the children have stopped talking, stop the recording and when you get a chance, email it to childvoice@mie.ie with 'Session 5' written in the subject line. In the body of the email put your name, grade level, and school name. Collect all the drawings and put them in a folder

labelled Session 5. A member of the research team will be in touch to arrange collection of the drawings towards the end of the data collection period.

- **Primary school:** Collect all the worksheets and put them in a folder labelled Session 5. A member of the research team will be in touch to arrange collection of the drawings towards the end of the data collection period.

How you like to learn		
<p>Working alone at your desk</p> 	<p>Working in pairs</p> 	<p>Working in groups</p> 
<p>When you get to try out what you are learning – experiments, role play, planting etc.</p> 	<p>When you do school work outside</p> 	<p>When you learn in the classroom</p> 
<p>When you learn in other rooms in the school</p> 	<p>When the teacher talks and writes on the whiteboard</p> 	<p>When you read about something?</p> 
<p>When you watch films about something?</p> 	<p>Play</p> 	<p>Working on iPads/computers</p> 
<p>When you have to correct your own work?</p> 	<p>When your friend has to correct your work?</p> 	<p>When you don't understand something and you have to ask your teacher for help</p> 

I like it a lot 	I like it a little 	I don't like it 

Draw your own ideas of how you also like to learn or have your work assessed	

<h2 style="text-align: center;">How you like to learn</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">Colour the box under each photo</p> <p style="text-align: center;">GREEN if you like it YELLOW if you like it a little RED if you don't like it.</p>		
<p>Working alone at your desk</p> 	<p>Working in pairs</p> 	<p>Working in groups</p> 
<p>When you get to try out what you are learning (experiments planting)</p> 	<p>When you do school work outside</p> 	<p>When you learn in the classroom</p> 
<p>When you learn in other rooms in the school</p> 	<p>When the teacher talks and writes on the whiteboard</p> 	<p>When you read about something?</p> 
<p>When you watch films about something?</p> 	<p>Play</p> 	<p>Working on iPads/computers</p> 
<p>When you have to correct your own work?</p> 	<p>When your friend has to correct your work?</p> 	<p>When you don't understand something and you have to ask your teacher for help</p> 

Session 6:

Focus: Building on the strengths of the 1999 curriculum and responding to challenges arising from it.

Session activity:

During this session, you will have an audio-recorded structured conversation around the questions below.

Instruction:

This is the final session with the children and is a reflection piece. Ask the children the questions below in order beginning with one and ending with four.

You should use your phone (recording app) / recording device to record the full session from the time you ask the question to when the children stop talking

Questions:

1. Did you like being asked questions about school?
2. What do you most want the researchers to know about what you think of school?
3. If the researchers had done this with your parents or grandparents instead, what do you think they would have said about school?
4. Are there things you need to learn about now that you don't think your parents or grandparents needed to learn about?

Finish:

Once you have asked the questions and the children have stopped talking, stop the recording and when you get a chance, email it to childvoice@mie.ie with 'Session 6' written in the subject line. In the body of the email put your name, grade level, and school name.

APPENDIX F

Leagan Gaeilge de na Treoracha

A mhúinteoir dhil pháistí óga, (4-8, aois réamhscoile go dtí rang 2),

Go raibh míle maith agat as páirt a ghlacadh sa tionscnamh taighde seo le tuairimí páistí ar an gcuraclam agus ar an scoil a nochtadh. Is cinnte go gcloisfear tuairimí pháistí agus an gcuraclam nua bunscoile á dearadh mar gheall ar do chabhair.

Tá an foireann taighde ag iarraidh ort **sé sheisiún ghearra taighde** a bheith agat le na páistí thar tréimhse ocht lá déag, ó Dé Luain, 29 Mí na Samhna, go dtí an Chéadaoin, 15 Mí na Nollaig. Tabharfaidh muidne treoir duit maidir le conas seo a dhéanamh, agus cuirfimid ceisteanna agus ábhair ar fáil chomh maith.

Tá na sé sheisiún taighde bunaithe ar phríomhtheachtaireachtaí an churaclam nua bunscoile mar seo a leanas:

1. Tacú le gníomhaíocht fhiúntach agus solúbthacht i scoileanna;
2. Ceangail a chothú idir réamhscoileanna, bunscoileanna agus iar-bhunscoileanna;
3. Athrú a dhéanamh ar an struchtúr atá ar an gcuraclam agus ar an dóigh a gcuirtear i láthair é;
4. Tosaíochtaí atá ag teacht chun cinn d'fhoghlaim leanaí;
5. Straitéisí a úsáid chun tacú le cineálacha éagsúla cuir chuige oideolaíoch, áit a mbeidh an mheasúnacht ina cuid lárnach den teagasc agus den fhoghlaim;
6. Cur le láidreachtaí an churaclaim a foilsíodh sa bhliain 1999 agus freagairt do na dúshláin a tháinig as.

Sa doiciméad seo tá treoibhileog duit ag míniú gach céime sa phróiseas agus tú i mbun taighde sna sé sheisiún éagsúla.

Tá idir 4 agus 8 gceist do gach seisiún taighde leis na páistí. Uaireanta beidh na páistí ag tarraingt pictiúir agus iad ag labhairt leat agus uaireanta eile beidh siad ag críochnú bileog oibre bunaithe ar cheist a chuir tú.

Tabhair faoi deara:

1 Níl ort díriú ar gach páiste go haonarach; fiafraigh den ghrúpa. Beidh fonn ar roinnt páistí labhairt, agus ní bheidh fonn ar pháistí eile. Tá sé sin go breá. Mairfidh gach seisiún thart ar 20-30 nóiméad. Má mhaireann an seisiún níos faide ná seo nó má chríochnaíonn tú níos luaithe, ná bí buartha. Fágfaimid fútsa é an cinneadh a dhéanamh maidir le fad na gníomhaíochta taighde.

2 Déan cinnte de go gcoinníonn tú an taifeadán gar don pháiste atá ag labhairt le go mbeidh an rud a bhfuil á rá acu sothuigthe.

3 Tá sraith ceisteanna ar mhaith linn go gcuirfidh tú i ngach seisiún mar chuid den taighde. Molaimid duit tosú leis an gcéad cheist agus an taifeadán a chur ar siúl. Téigh timpeall ar na boird ar fad ag cur na chéad cheiste agus ag tabhairt deis do na páistí an cheist a fhreagairt. Ansin, cuir an dara ceist agus ar aile. An cheist dheireanach a churifidh tú gach lá ná (nuair is cuí) ná faoin méid a rinne na páistí sa phictiúr agus cén fáth.

4 Molaimid duit an taifeadán ar an bhfón/ngléas a úsáid nó an aip Easy Voice Recorder a íoslódáil ó Apple App Store or Android Play Store.

5 Má chuirtear isteach ort agus tú ag labhairt leis na páistí, cuir an taifeadán ar sos agus cuir ar siúl arís é nuair atá tú réidh le tosú arís.

6 Ag deireadh gach seisiúin, cuir na pictiúr nó na bileoga oibre i bhfillteán. Cuir uimhir an tseisiúin ar an bhfillteán. Déanfaidh na taighdeoirí socruithe chun na pictiúir a bhailiú ó do scoil ag deireadh na tréimhse taighde.

7 Ag deireadh an tseisiúin taighde, cuir ríomhphost le do thoil leis an gcomhad fuaime chuig childvoice@mie.ie. Scríobh ‘Seisiún (uimhir) sa líne Maidir le. Sa ríomhphost féin, cuir isteach d’ainm, an rang, agus ainm na scoile. Ná scrios na comhaid fuaime le do thoil go dtí go ndeimhníonn an fhoireann taighde go bhfuil siad faighte acu.

Seisiún 1

Tacú le gníomhaíocht fhiúntach agus solúbthacht i scoileanna

Gníomhaíocht sa seisiún:

Le linn an tseisiúin seo beidh comhrá struchtúrtha agat leis na páistí nuair atá siad ag déanamh pictiúir. Tá treoracha thíos maidir leis an bpictiúr agus na ceisteanna.

Déanfaidh páistí pictiúr den mhéid seo a leanas:

Ar thaobh amhain den leathanach, déanfaidh páistí pictiúr de na rudaí is fearr leo faoin scoil/naíonra. Iarr orthu aghaidh shona a dhéanamh i gcúinne an leathanaigh.

Ar an taobh eile, déanfaidh páistí pictiúr de na rudaí is lú a thaitníonn leo faoin scoil. Iarr orthu aghaidh bhrónach a dhéanamh i gcúinne an leathanaigh.

Treoracha:

Nuair atá na páistí ag déanamh pictiúir, téigh timpeall ar na boird ar fad. Molaimid duit tosú le Ceist 1 ag tabhairt deis do na páistí an cheist a fhreagairt. Má tá páiste ann nach bhfuil ag iarraidh an cheist a fhreagairt, tá sé sin go breá. Ansin, cuir an dara ceist agus lean ar aghaidh go dtí go bhfuil gach ceist curtha agat. An cheist dheireanach a chuirfidh tú don seisiún seo ná faoin méid a rinne na páistí sa phictiúr agus cén fáth. Tabhair deis do na páistí ar mian leo labhairt faoin bpictiúr.

Ba chóir duit d’fhón (aip taifeadta) / gléas taifeadta a úsáid chun an seisiún iomlán a thaifeadadh ón uair a chuireann tú an chéad cheist.

Ceisteanna:

1. Inis dom cad is maith leat a dhéanamh ar scoil.
2. An éiríonn leat gach aon rud sa liosta sin a dhéanamh ar scoil?
3. An bhfuil ort roinnt rudaí a dhéanamh ar scoil nach dtaitníonn leat?
4. An bhfuil rogha ar bith agat faoi cad a fhoghlaimíonn tú? An féidir leat sampla a thabhairt?
5. Dá mbeadh slat draíochta agat, cén chuma a bheadh ar an naíonra nó an scoil gach lá?
6. Cad atá sa phictiúr agat, agus cén fáth?

Clabhsúr:

Nuair atá na ceisteanna go leir curtha agat, stop an taifeadán agus nuair a bheidh deis agat cuir ríomhphost chuig childvoice@mie.ie. Ná scrios na comhaid fuaime le do thoil go dtí go ndeimhníonn an fhoireann taighde go bhfuil siad faighte acu. Scríobh le do thoil ‘Seisiún 1’ sa chuid ‘Maidir le’. Sa ríomhphost féin, cuir isteach d’ainm, an rang, agus ainm na scoile.

Bailigh na pictiúir ar fad agus cuir iad i bhfillteán darbh ainm Seisiún 1. Déanfaidh na taighdeoirí socruithe chun na pictiúir a bhailiú ó do scoil ag deireadh na tréimhse taighde.

Seisiún 2**Ceangail a chothú idir réamhscoileanna, bunscoileanna agus iar-bhunscoileanna**Gníomhaíocht sa seisiún:

Le linn an tseisiúin seo beidh comhrá struchtúrtha agat leis na páistí nuair atá siad ag déanamh pictiúir. Tá treoracha thíos maidir leis an bpictiúr agus na ceisteanna.

Déanfaidh páistí den mhéid seo a leanas:

Do pháistí réamhscoile: Déanfaidh páistí pictiúr de na rudaí a dhéanann siad sa naíonra. Cuir isteach ‘naíonra’ sa chúinne le do thoil.

Do pháistí bunscoile: Déanfaidh páistí pictiúr de na rudaí a dhéanann siad sa bhunscoil. Cuir isteach ‘bunscoil’ sa chúinne le do thoil.

Treoracha:

Nuair atá na páistí ag déanamh pictiúir, téigh timpeall ar na boird ar fad. Molaimid duit tosú le Ceist 1 ag tabhairt deis do na páistí an cheist a fhreagairt. Má tá páiste ann nach bhfuil ag iarraidh an cheist a fhreagairt, tá sé sin go breá. Ansin, cuir an dara ceist agus lean ar aghaidh go dtí go bhfuil gach ceist curtha agat.

Do pháistí réamhscoile: Is í ceist 3 an cheist dheireanach a chuirfidh tú sa seisiún seo. Tabhair deis do na páistí ar mian leo labhairt faoin bpictiúr.

Do pháistí bunscoile: Is í ceist 4 an cheist dheireanach a chuirfidh tú sa seisiún seo. Tabhair deis do na páistí ar mian leo labhairt faoin bpictiúr.

Ba chóir duit d'fhón (aip taifeadta) / gléas taifeadta a úsáid chun an seisiún iomlán a thaifeadadh ón uair a chuireann tú an chéad cheist.

Ceisteanna:

Ceisteanna do pháistí réamhscoile

1. Táimid sa naíonra anois. Cad atá ar eolas agat faoin **gcéad scoil eile** a mbeidh tú ag dul chuici?
2. An dóigh leat go mbeidh sé difriúil sa **chéad scoil eile** a dtéann tú chuici? Conas?
3. An bhfuil rud a dhéanann tú anseo ar mhaith leat a dhéanamh sa **chéad scoil eile**?
4. Cad atá sa phictiúr agat, agus cén fáth?

Ceisteanna do pháistí bunscoile

1. An ndéanann tú rudaí anseo sa scoil mhór a rinne tú sa naíonra chomh maith? An bhfuil siad cosúil nó difriúil? Conas?
2. Nuair a bhí tú sa naíonra, ar labhair tú le do mhúinteoir riamh faoin scoil mhór?
3. An bhfuil rud a thaitin leat sa naíonra ar mhaith leat a dhéanamh anois sa bhunscoil?
4. An dóigh leat go mba chóir duit foghlaim ar bhealach éagsúil agus tú i ranganna níos airde sa scoil? Meas tú conas a bheidh foghlaim sna h-aranganna éagsúil?
5. Cad atá sa phictiúr agat, agus cén fáth?

Clabhsúr:

Nuair atá na ceisteanna go leir curtha agat, stop an taifeadán agus nuair a bheidh deis agat cuir ríomhphost chuig childvoice@mie.ie. Ná scrios na comhaid fuaime le do thoil go dtí go ndeimhníonn an fhoireann taighde go bhfuil siad faighte acu. Scríobh le do thoil 'Seisiún 2' sa chuid 'Maidir le'. Sa ríomhphost féin, cuir isteach d'ainm, an rang, agus ainm na scoile.

Bailigh na pictiúir ar fad agus cuir iad i bhfillteán darbh ainm Seisiún 2. Déanfaidh na taighdeoirí socruithe chun na pictiúir a bhailiú ó do scoil ag deireadh na tréimhse taighde.

Seisiún 3:

Athrú a dhéanamh ar an struchtúr atá ar an gcuraclam agus ar an gcaoi a gcuirtear i láthair é

Gníomhaíocht an tseisiúin:

Le linn an tseisiúin seo, beidh comhrá struchtúrtha agat maidir leis na ceisteanna thíos. Déanfaidh tú taifeadadh ar an gcomhrá. I gcomhpháirt leis na páistí ar leathanach A3, déan plean den ghnáthlá scoile ar mhaith leis na páistí a bheith acu. Tá treoracha maidir leis na pictiúir agus na ceisteanna thíos.

Treoracha:

Páistí réamhscoile:

Freagróidh páistí do na ceisteanna thíos agus déanfaidh an múinteoir pictiúr/scríobhfaidh an múinteoir amach an méid beacht a deir siad. Bainfidh an múinteoir úsáid as an eolas seo chun plean a chur le chéile den ghnáthlá scoile ar mhaith leis na páistí a bheith acu. Molaimid duit tosú le Ceist 1 thíos a chur.

Páistí Bunscoile:

1. Cuir na ceisteanna thíos ar na páistí agus dean taifeadh ar fhreagraí na bpáistí. Déan plean ar leathanach A3 de ghnáthlá scoile. Scríobh ‘Gnáthlá Scoile’ sa chúinne.
2. Ina dhiaidh sin, déan tobsmaointeoireacht leis na páistí faoin gcaoi a ndéanfaidh siadsan an lá scoile a dhearadh agus an méid a roghnódh siad le foghlaim. Déan pictiúr/scríobh amach an plean altéirneach seo ar leathanach A3. Scríobh ‘Plean Altéirneach’ sa chúinne.

Ba chóir duit d’fhón (aip taifeadta) / gléas taifeadta a úsáid chun an seisiún iomlán a thaifeadadh ón uair a chuireann tú an chéad cheist.

Ceisteanna:**Páistí Réamhscoile**

1. Conas a fhoghlaimimid ar scoil?
2. Conas ba mhaith leat foghlaim nuair a théann tú ar aghaidh chuig an gcéad scoil eile?

Páistí Bunscoile

1. Conas mar atá an lá scoile pleanáilte faoi láthair?
2. Inis dom faoin méid a dhéanaimid i ngach cuid den lá, gach lá ón Luan go dtí an Aoine. (Mar mhúinteoir, is féidir leatsa na ceisteanna seo a stiúradh de réir mar a dhéanann tú an tseachtain a phleanáil leis na páistí).
3. An plean úsáideach é seo meas tú? An féidir linn an fhoghlaim a dhéanaimid a phleanáil ar bhealach difriúil? (Mar mhúinteoir, is féidir leatsa na ceisteanna seo a stiúradh de réir mar a dhéanann tú an tseachtain a phleanáil leis na páistí).

Clabhsúr:

Nuair atá na ceisteanna go leir curtha agat, stop an taifeadán agus nuair a bheidh deis agat cuir ríomhphost chuig childvoice@mie.ie. Ná scrios na comhaid fuaime le do thoil go dtí go ndeimhníonn an fhoireann taighde go bhfuil siad faighte acu. Scríobh le do thoil ‘Seisiún 2’ sa chuid ‘Maidir le’. Sa ríomhphost féin, cuir isteach d’ainm, an rang, agus ainm na scoile.

Bailigh na pictiúir ar fad agus cuir iad i bhfillteán darbh ainm Seisiún 3. Déanfaidh na taighdeoirí socruithe chun na pictiúir a bhailiú ó do scoil ag deireadh na tréimhse taighde.

Seisiún 4:

Tosaíochtaí atá ag teacht chun cinn d'fhoghlaim leanaí

Gníomhaíocht sa seisiún:

Páistí réamhscoile: Le linn an tseisiúin seo, beidh comhrá struchtúrtha agat maidir leis na ceisteanna thíos nuair atá na páistí ag déanamh pictiúir.

Páistí bunscoile: Déanfaidh na páistí na bileoga oibre faoi threoir an mhúinteora.

Treoracha:

Déanann páistí réamhscoile **pictiúr** de na trí rud is tábhachtaí a chaithfidh tú a fhoghlaim ar scoil, agus **labhróidh siad** faoi na trí rud sin.

Ba chóir duit d'fhón (aip taifeadta) / gléas taifeadta a úsáid chun an seisiún iomlán a thaifeadadh ón uair a chuireann tú an chéad cheist.

Gearrfaidh páistí amach na pictiúir ar an mbileog oibre agus greamóidh siad iad de leathanach eile faoi theidil éagsúla. Mar mhúinteoir, ba chóir duit labhairt lei faoi gach cuid den bhileog oibre agus a chinntiú go dtuigeann siad an méid atá i gceist le gach bosca, go háirithe mura bhfuil siad in ann na treoracha a léamh iad féin.

Bileog oibre: Breathnaigh ar na pictiúir ar an mbileog de na rudaí is féidir a dhéanamh ar scoil (Tosaíochtaí atá ag teacht chun cinn). Breathnaigh ar na trí cholún ar an gcéad bhileog eile: An-tábhachtach, Tábhachtach go pointe, Níl sé tábhachtach. Gearr amach na pictiúir ón mbileog oibre agus cuir iad sa cholún ceart.

Oiriúnú más gá: Má bhraitheann tú go bhfuil an gearradh agus greamú ródheacair do roinnt páistí i do rang, is féidir bileog eile a thabhairt dóibh agus déanfaidh siad í a dhathú isteach. Breathnaigh ar leathanach 4 de na bileoga oibre. Leanann na páistí córas soils tráchta (Glas = An-tábhachtach; Buí = Tábhachtach go pointe; Dearg = Níl sé tábhachtach in aon chor).

Ceisteanna:

Páistí réamhscoile

1. Cad iad na rudaí atá tábhachtach le foghlaim sa Naíonra?
2. Cad iad na rudaí atá tábhachtach le foghlaim sa *chéad* scoile eile?
3. An dóigh leat go bhfuil sé tábhachtach go bhfuil a fhios ag do theaghlach cad atá á fhoghlaim agat?

Clabhsúr:

Páistí réamhscoile: Nuair atá na ceisteanna go leir curtha agat, stop an taifeadán agus nuair a bheidh deis agat cuir ríomhphost chuig childvoice@mie.ie. Ná scrios na comhaid fuaime le do thoil go dtí go ndeimhníonn an fhoireann taighde go bhfuil siad faighte acu. Scríobh le do thoil 'Seisiún 4' sa chuid 'Maidir le'. Sa ríomhphost féin, cuir isteach d'ainm, an rang, agus ainm na scoile.

Páistí bunscoile: Bailigh na bileoga oibre ar fad agus cuir iad i bhfillteán darbh ainm Seisiún 4. Déanfaidh na taighdeoirí socruithe chun na bileoga oibre a bhailiú ó do scoil ag deireadh na tréimhse taighde.

Tosaíochtaí atá ag teacht chun cinn		
Ba chóir do pháistí gach cearnóg a ghearradh amach agus a ghreamú sa cholún cui dar leo de réir mar a mheasann siad an bhfuil sé tábhachtach foghlaim faoi nó nach bhfuil.		
<p>Cultúr agus teangacha éagsúla</p> 	<p>Reiligiúin éagsúla</p> 	<p>An timpeallacht agus athrú aeráide</p> 
<p>Ríomhairí, Teicneolaíocht, Códáil</p> 	<p>Cairde a dhéanamh</p> 	<p>Gaoil teaghlaigh</p> 
<p>A bheith in ann teanga eile a labhairt</p> 	<p>Foghlaim faoi choirp buachaillí 's cailíní</p> 	<p>An chuma atá ar do sheomra ranga</p> 
<p>Is féidir le páistí a fhoghlaimiú ar bhealaí éagsúla nó atá faoi mhíchumas foghlaim sa seomra ranga céanna</p> 	<p>A bheith sásta, brónach, nó feargach</p> 	<p>Conas a bheith slán agus folláin</p> 
<p>Ag foghlaim lasmuigh</p> 	<p>Is féidir leatsa cabhrú le roghnú cad/conas foghlaim</p> 	<p>Spraoi</p> 

<p>An- tábhachtach</p> 	<p>Tábhachtach go pointe</p> 	<p>Níl sé tábhachtach</p> 

Cad ba chóir duit foghlaim faoi ar scoil?

Déan pictiúir thíos.

Tosaíochtaí atá ag teacht chun cinn (Oiriúnú)

Dathaigh an bosca faoi gach grianghraf

GLAS = Tá sé tábhachtach BUÍ = Tá sé tábhachtach go pointe DEARG = Níl sé tábhachtach

<p>Cultúir agus teangacha éagsúla</p> 	<p>Reiligiúin éagsúla</p> 	<p>An timpeallacht agus athrú aeráide</p> 
<p>Ríomhairí, Teicneolaíocht, Códáil</p> 	<p>Cairde a dhéanamh</p> 	<p>Gaoil teaghlaigh</p> 
<p>A bheith in ann teanga eile a labhairt</p> 	<p>Foghlaim faoi choirp buachaillí 's cailíní</p> 	<p>An chuma atá ar do sheomra ranga</p> 
<p>Is féidir le páistí a fhoghlaimiú ar bhealaí éagsúla nó atá faoi mhíchumas foghlaim sa seomra ranga céanna</p> 	<p>A bheith sásta, brónach, nó feargach</p> 	<p>Conas a bheith slán agus folláin</p> 
<p>Ag foghlaim lasmuigh</p> 	<p>Is féidir leatsa cabhrú le roghnú cad/conas foghlaim</p> 	<p>Spraoi</p> 

Seisiún 5:

Straitéisí a úsáid chun tacú le cineálacha éagsúla cuir chuige oideolaíocha, áit a mbeidh an mheasúnacht ina cuid lárnach den teagasc agus den fhoghlaim

Gníomhaíocht sa seisiún:

Páistí réamhscoile: Le linn an tseisiúin seo, beidh comhrá struchtúrtha agat maidir leis an gceist thíos agus déanfaidh na páistí pictiúr den chaoi is fearr le foghlaim.

Páistí bunscoile: Déanfaidh na páistí na bileoga oibre faoi threoir an mhúinteora.

Treoracha:

Déanann páistí réamhscoile **pictiúr** de conas ba mhaith leo foghlaim ar scoil, agus **labhróidh siad** faoi.

Deanfaidh na múinteoir **comhrá struchtúrtha** leis na páistí nuair atá siad ag déanamh pictiúir den chaoi ar mhaith leo foghlaim sa bhunscoil. Déanfaidh an múinteoir taifeadadh den chomhrá.

Ba chóir duit d'fhón (aip taifeadta) / gléas taifeadta a úsáid chun an seisiún iomlán a thaifeadadh ón uair a chuireann tú an chéad cheist go dtí go stopann na páistí ag caint.

Deanfaidh **páistí bunscoile** gach cearnóg a ghearradh amach agus a ghreamú ar leathanach eile faoin teideal ceart. Mar mhúinteoir, ba chóir duit labhairt lei faoi gach cuid den bhileog oibre agus a chinntiú go dtuigeann siad an méid atá i gceist le gach bosca, go háirithe mura bhfuil siad in ann na treoracha a léamh iad féin.

Bileoga Oibre: Breathnaigh ar na pictiúir de na rudaí a dhéanann tú ar scoil (Bileog: Conas is maith leatsa foghlaim). Breathnaigh ar na trí cholún sa chead bhileog eile: Is maith liom go mór, Is maith liom go pointe, Ní maith liom.

Gearr amach na pictiúir ar an mbileog oibre agus greamaigh iad sa cholún cuí.

Ar an gcéad bhileog oibre eile, tá boscaí folmha ann agus déanfaidh na páistí pictiúir dá smaointe féin maidir le conas is maith leo foghlaim agus conas is maith leo go ndéanfaí measúnú ar an bhfoghlaim (déanfaidh siad é seo más mian leo).

Oiriúnú más gá: Má bhraitheann tú go bhfuil an gearradh agus greamú ródheacair do roinnt páistí i do rang, is féidir bileog eile a thabhairt dóibh agus déanfaidh siad í a dhathú isteach. Leanann na páistí córas soilse tráchta (Glas = Is maith liom go mór; Buí = Is maith liom go pointe; Dearg = Ní maith liom in aon chor).

Ceisteanna:

Páistí réamhscoile

- Cén bealach is fearr duit rud a fhoghlaim sa naíonra?

Clabhsúr:

- **Páistí réamhscoile:** Nuair atá na ceisteanna go leir curtha agat, stop an taifeadán agus nuair a bheidh deis agat cuir ríomhphost chuig childvoice@mie.ie. Ná scrios na comhaid fuaimne le do thoil go dtí go ndeimhníonn an fhoireann taighde go bhfuil siad faighte acu. Scríobh le do thoil 'Seisiún 5' sa chuid 'Maidir le'. Sa ríomhphost féin, cuir isteach d'ainm, an rang, agus ainm na scoile.
- Bailigh na pictiúir ar fad agus cuir iad i bhfillteán darbh ainm Seisiún 5. Déanfaidh na taighdeoirí socruithe chun na pictiúir a bhailiú ó do scoil ag deireadh na tréimhse taighde.
- **Páistí bunscoile:** Bailigh na bileoga oibre ar fad agus cuir iad i bhfillteán darbh ainm Seisiún 5. Déanfaidh na taighdeoirí socruithe chun na pictiúir a bhailiú ó do scoil ag deireadh na tréimhse taighde.

<p style="text-align: center;">Conas is maith leatsa foghlaim</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Gearr amach na pictiúir agus cuir gach ceann faoin gcolún ceart ar an gcéad bhilleog eile</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Obair i d'aonair ag do bhord</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Obair bheirte</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Obair ghrúpa</p> 
<p>Nuair is féidir leat triail a bhalint as na rudaí atá á bhfoghlaim agat - turgnaimh, rólímirt, plandáil, srl.</p> 	<p>Nuair a dhéanann tú obair scoile lasmuigh</p> 	<p>Nuair a fhoghlaimíonn tú sa seomra ranga</p> 
<p>Nuair a fhoghlaimíonn tú i seomraí eile sa scoil</p> 	<p>Nuair a labhraíonn an mhúinteoir nó nuair a scríobhann siad ar an gclár bán</p> 	<p>Nuair a léann tú faoi rud</p> 
<p>Nuair a bhreathnaíonn tú ar scannán faoi rud</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Spraol</p> 	<p>Ag obair ar iPad/riomhairí</p> 
<p>Nuair atá ort d'obair fhéin a cheartú</p> 	<p>Nuair atá ar do chara d'obair a cheartú?</p> 	<p>Nuair nach dtuigeann tú rud agus tá ort ceist a chur ar do mhúinteoir chun cabhair a fháil</p> 

<p>Is maith liom go mór</p> 	<p>Is maith liom go pointe</p> 	<p>Ní maith liom in aon chor</p> 

Conas is maith leat foghlaim? Conas is maith leat go ndéanfaí measúnú ar d'obair?

Déan pictiúir thíos.

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Conas is maith leat foghlaim (Oiriúnú)</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">Dathailigh gach bosca thíos</p> <p style="text-align: center;">GLAS = Is maith liom go mór SUÍ = Is maith liom go pointe DEARG = Ní maith liom in aon chor</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Obair i d'aonair ag do bhord</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Obair bheirte</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Obair ghrúpa</p> 
<p style="text-align: center;">Nuair is féidir leat triail a bhaint as na rudai atá á bhfoghlaim agat - turgnaimh, rólímirt, plandáil, srl.</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Nuair a dhéanann tú obair scoile lasmuigh</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Nuair a fhoghlaimíonn tú sa seomra ranga</p> 
<p style="text-align: center;">Nuair a fhoghlaimíonn tú i seomraí eile sa scoil</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Nuair a labhraíonn an mhúinteoir nó nuair a scríobhann siad ar an gclár bán</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Nuair a léann tú faoi rud</p> 
<p style="text-align: center;">Nuair a bhreathnaíonn tú ar scannán faoi rud</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Spraol</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Ag obair ar iPad/riomhairí</p> 
<p style="text-align: center;">Nuair atá ort d'obair fhéin a cheartú</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Nuair atá ar do chara d'obair a cheartú</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Nuair nach dtuigeann tú rud agus tá ort ceist a chur ar do mhúinteoir chun cabhair a fháil</p> 

Seisiún 6:

Cur le láidreachtaí an churaclaim a foilsíodh sa bhliain 1999 agus freagairt do na dúshláin a tháinig as

Gníomhaíocht sa seisiún:

Le linn an tseisiúin seo, beidh comhrá struchtúrtha agat maidir leis na ceisteanna thíos.

Treoracha:

Seo é an seisiún deireanach leis na páistí agus is seisiún machnaimh é. Cuir na ceisteanna thíos ó 1-4 ar na páistí san ord ina bhfuil siad .

Ba chóir duit d'fhón (aip taifeadta) / gléas taifeadta a úsáid chun an seisiún iomlán a thaifeadadh ón uair a chuireann tú an chéad cheist.

Ceisteanna:

1. Ar thaitin sé leat a bheith ag freagairt ceisteanna faoin scoil?
2. Smaoinigh ar na tuairimí atá agat faoin scoil. Cén rud is mó ar mhaith leat go mbeadh na taighdeoirí ar an eolas faoi?
3. Dá ndéanfadh na taighdeoirí é seo le do thuistí nó le do sheantuistí, meas tú cad a déarfadh siadsan?
4. An bhfuil ort aon rudaí a fhoghlaim anois nach raibh ar do thuistí nó ar do sheantuistí a fhoghlaim faoi, meas tú?

Clabhsúr:

Nuair atá na ceisteanna go leir curtha agat, stop an taifeadán agus nuair a bheidh deis agat cuir ríomhphost chuig childvoice@mie.ie. Ná scrios na comhaid fuaime le do thoil go dtí go ndeimhníonn an fhoireann taighde go bhfuil siad faighte acu. Scríobh le do thoil 'Seisiún 6' sa chuid 'Maidir le'. Sa ríomhphost féin, cuir isteach d'ainm, an rang, agus ainm na scoile.

APPENDIX G

Student Information and Assent Sheet
(4th Class to Post primary—Optional 3rd Class)

Title of Project: *Child's Voice: Consulting with children on the 'Draft Primary Curriculum' Framework*

Dear Student:

Please read this with your parent/guardian at home.

You are being invited to take part in a project on the curriculum in your school. "Curriculum" means the topics you study and the activities you complete during your school day.

The reason for this project is to listen to your opinions about school and to learn about your daily experiences.

If you participate in this project, what will you get to do?

If you participate in this project, you get to fill out an online form that asks you a few questions about things like: what you like to do in school; how you learn best; and what you do each day in school.

What is good about helping us out?

By helping us out, and talking about what school is like for you, you get to share your ideas with others, who want to know what you have to say. The things you say may also make school a better place for other children in the future.

Will everybody know what you said?

No, no one will know what you have said. The online form will not ask for your name, so we won't know that it was you who filled it out.

What happens at the end of the project?

The people in charge of the project will read the answers from the online form and will look for important ideas. These will be written up in a report, so that other people can read and understand what children think about their experiences in Irish schools, and then, make improvements going forward.

What to do if you have questions?

If you would like to find out more information about this project, or if you have any questions, please talk to your teacher, or your parent/guardian. We have asked them if you would like to participate, and they said 'yes' but only if you want to. If you do not want to take part, that is perfectly fine too.

Confirmation of Understanding:

Instructions: Draw a circle around your answer to the following questions.

Are you happy to take part in this project by filling out an online form about your experiences in school?



Do you understand that you do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to?



Do you understand that you can stop participating at any time, and even re-join if you change your mind?



Informed Assent to be signed by Student

Please print your name here: _____

Please sign your name here: _____

To be completed by Parent/Guardian

Parent's name (printed): _____

Parental/guardian consent received & signed: **YES** **NO**

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Please return this page to your teacher.

APPENDIX H

Questionnaire for Primary School Students

Survey on Primary School Experiences

For pupils in 3rd Class to 6th Class

1. What class are you in?

- 3rd Class
- 4th Class
- 5th Class
- 6th Class

2. Is there anything in particular like you like about primary school?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

3. Please give some examples of the things you like about primary school.

4. Is there anything you **dislike** about primary school?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

5. Please give some examples of what you **dislike** about primary school.

6. Who decides what you get to learn about and do in school (tick all that apply):

- The Teacher
- Students
- The Principal
- Parents/Guardians
- Someone Else

7. Is there anything **the same** between junior classes (Junior Infants to 2nd class) and senior classes (3rd to 6th class)?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

8. Please give some examples of what is **the same** between junior & senior classes.

9. Are there any **differences** between junior class (Junior Infants to 2nd class) and senior classes (3rd to 6th class) in primary school?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

10. Please give some examples of the **differences** between junior & senior classes.

11. Tick all the ways that you learn your subjects in school:

- By listening
- By reading
- By watching
- By exploring
- By experimenting
- By asking questions
- By doing
- By playing
- By singing
- By talking
- By using technology

12. Are there any other ways that you learn which are not listed in the question above? If so, describe them here:

13. How do you show your teacher what you have learned? Tick all the ways:

- Tests
- Quizzes
- Projects
- Debates
- By writing (for example: a report or story)
- By telling the teacher
- By singing
- By demonstrating/showing the teacher
- By using technology

14. Are there any other ways you show your teacher what you learn that are not listed in the question above? If so, describe them here:

15. What are the most important subjects to learn in primary school? Tick as many as you'd like:

- English
- Irish
- Other Languages
- Maths
- Science
- Computers & Technology
- History
- Sports/PE
- Art
- Religion
- Other People & Cultures
- Health & Wellness

16. Are there any other subjects not listed in the question above that you think are important to learn in primary school? If so, list them here.

17. Does your teacher ever talk with your class about what secondary school might be like?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

18. Is there anything else you'd like to say about primary school? If so, please write your ideas here.

APPENDIX I

Questionnaire for Post-Primary School Students

Survey on Primary School Experiences

For First year Students in Secondary School

1. Is there anything in particular that you **liked** about primary school?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

2. Please give some examples of the things you **liked** about primary school.

3. Is there anything you **disliked** about primary school?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

4. Please give some examples of what you **disliked** about primary school.

5. Who decided what you learned about in primary school? Tick all that apply.

- Teachers
- Students
- The Principal
- Parents/Guardians
- Someone Else Not Listed Above

6. Are there any **similarities** between primary school and secondary school?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

7. Please give some examples of **similarities** between primary and secondary school.

8. Are there any **differences** between primary and secondary school?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

9. Please give some examples of **differences** between primary and secondary school.

10. Tick all the ways that you learned your subjects in primary school:

- By listening
- By reading
- By watching
- By exploring
- By experimenting
- By asking questions
- By doing
- By playing
- By singing
- By talking/discussing
- By using technology

11. Were there any other ways you learned in primary school not listed above? If so, describe them here:

12. How did you show your teacher what you learned in primary school? Tick all the ways:

- Tests
- Quizzes
- Projects
- Debates
- By writing (for example: a report or story)
- By telling the teacher
- By singing
- By demonstrating/showing the teacher
- By using technology

13. Were there any other ways you showed your teacher what you learned not listed above?

If so, describe them here:

14. In your opinion, what are the most important subjects to learn in primary school?

- English
- Irish
- Other Languages
- Maths
- Science
- Computers & Technology
- History
- Sports/PE
- Art
- Religion
- Other People & Cultures
- Health & Wellness

15. Are there any other subjects not listed above that you think are important to learn in primary school? If so, list them here.

16. Why do you feel the subjects you chose are important for primary school students to learn? Please explain.

17. Did your primary school teachers ever talk with your class about what secondary school might be like?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

18. Is there anything else you'd like to mention about your experience of primary school or the curriculum? If so, please write your comments here:

APPENDIX J

Bileog Eolais agus Aontú don Dalta (Aoiseanna 8+)

Teideal an Tionscnaimh: *Guth an Pháiste: Comhairliúchán le páistí maidir leis an gCreat ‘Dréacht-Churaclam na Bunscoile’*

A Dhalta, a chara:

Le do thoil, léigh é seo le do thuismitheoir/chaomhnóir sa bhaile.

Tá cuireadh á thabhairt duit páirt a ghlacadh i dtionscnamh maidir leis an gcuraclam i do scoil. ‘Séard is brí le ‘curaclam’ ná na topaicí a ndéanann tú staidéar orthu agus na gníomhaíochtaí a dtugann tú fúthu le linn do lae scoile.

An chúis leis an tionscnamh seo ná éisteacht le do thuairimí faoin scoil agus le foghlaim faoi d’eispéireas laethúil.

Má ghlacann tú páirt sa tionscnamh seo, cad a bheidh ort a dhéanamh?

Má ghlacann tú páirt sa tionscnamh seo, beidh tú in ann ceistneoir ar líne a chomhlíonadh a chuirfidh ceist nó dhó ort faoi rudaí cosúil leis na nithe seo a leanas: cad is maith leat a dhéanamh ar scoil, cad e an bealach is fearr bhfoghlaimíonn tú, agus cad a dhéanann tú gach lá ar scoil.

Cad atá go maith faoi chabhrú linn?

Trí chabhrú linn, agus labhairt faoi conas mar atá an scoil duitse, beidh an seans agat do smaointe a roinnt le daoine a bhfuil spéis acu sna rudaí atá le rá agat. Seans go bhfeabhsóidh cibé rud atá le rá agat an scoil do pháistí eile as seo amach.

An mbeidh a fhios ag gach éinne cad a dúirt tú?

Ní bheidh. Ní chuirfidh tú d’ainm leis an gceistneoir, agus mar sin ní bheidh a fhios againn gurb é tusa a chomhlíon é.

Cad a tharlaíonn ag deireadh an tionscnaimh?

Éistfidh na daoine atá i gceannas ar an tionscnamh le tuairimí na ndaltaí ar fad a ghlac páirt sa tionscnamh seo, agus lorgóidh siad smaointe tábhachtacha. Scríobhfar na smaointe seo i dtuarascáil, le go mbeidh daoine eile in ann í a léamh agus tuiscint a fháil ar na tuairimí atá ag páistí ar a gcuid eispéiris i scoileanna Éireannacha, agus ansin, feabhsúcháin a dhéanamh amach anseo.

Cad le déanamh má tá ceisteanna agat?

Má tá níos mó eolais uait faoin tionscnamh seo, nó má tá ceisteanna ar bith agat, labhair le do mhúinteoir, nó le do thuismitheoir/caomhnóir. Chuireamar ceist orthu an mbeadh fonn ort bheith páirteach, agus dúirt siad go mbeadh, sa chas go bhfuil tusa ag iarraidh. Mura bhfuil fonn ort páirt a ghlacadh, tá sé sin go hiomlán ceart go leor.

Dearbhú Tuisceana:

Treoracha: Tarraing ciorcal thart ar do fhreagra ar na ceisteanna seo a leanas.

An bhfuil tú sásta páirt a ghlacadh sa tionscnamh seo trí cheistneoir ar líne a chomhlíonadh faoi d'eispéiris ar scoil?

An dtuigeann tú nach bhfuil ort ceist ar bith a fhreagairt mura bhfuil fonn ort?

An dtuigeann tú go bhfuil tú in ann stopadh de bheith ag glacadh páirte aon uair is mian leat, agus fiú teacht ar ais isteach má athraíonn tú d'intinn?

Aontú Eolach le Síniú ag an Dalta

Scríobh d'ainm anseo le do thoil: _____

Sínigh d'ainm anseo, le do thoil: _____

Le Críochnú ag an Tuismitheoir/Caomhnóir

Ainm an tuismitheora (priontáilte): _____

Fuarthas agus síníodh an bhileog aontú tuismitheora/caomhnóra: **Fuair** **Ní bhfuair**

Dáta: _____

Tabhair an bhileog seo ar ais chuig do mhúinteoir, más é do thoil é.

Leagan Gaeilge den Suirbhé do Pháistí Bunscoile

Suirbhé maidir le Taithí Bhunscoile

(Páistí 8+)

Tá ceisteanna thíos faoi:

- cad is maith leat a dhéanamh ar
- scoil cad e an bealach is fearr

fhoghlaimíonn tú cad a dhéanann tú gach lá ar scoil.

Tógfaidh an suirbhé seo thart ar 10-15 nóiméad ort le déanamh. Go raibh míle maith agat as do thuairimí a roinnt linn!

1.Cén rang ina bhfuil tú?

- Rang 3
- Rang 4
- Rang 5
- Rang 6

2.Cén scoil ina bhfuil tú?

3.An bhfuil aon rud faoi leith a thaitníonn leat faoin mbunscoil?

- Tá
- Níl
- Níl a fhios agam

4.Tabhair cúpla sampla le do thoil faoi na rudaí is maith leat faoin mbunscoil.

5.An bhfuil aon rud nach maith leat faoin mbunscoil?

- Tá
- Níl
- Níl a fhios agam

6.Déan cur síos le do thoil ar na rudaí nach maith leat faoin mbunscoil.

7.Cé a roghnaíonn na rudaí a bhfoghlaímíonn tú fúthu agus na rudaí a dhéanann tú i do scoil (cuir tic le gach ceann cuí):

- An múinteoir
- Na daltaí
- An Príomhoide
- Tuismitheoirí/Caomhnóirí
- Duine eile

8.An bhfuil aon rud **mar an gcéanna** idir na bunranganna (naíonáin bheaga go dtí rang a 2) agus na hardranganna (rang a 3 go rang a 6)?

- Tá
- Níl
- Níl a fhios agam

9. Tabhair cúpla sampla, le do thoil, de na rudaí atá **mar an gcéanna** idir na bunranganna agus na hardranganna.

10. An bhfuil aon **difríochtaí** idir bunranganna (naíonáin bheaga go rang a 2) na agus ardranganna (rang 3 go rang 6) sa bhunscoil?

- Tá
- Níl
- Níl a fhios agam

11. Tabhair cúpla sampla, le do thoil, de na rudaí atá **difriúil** idir na bunranganna agus na hardranganna.

12. Tá liosta thíos de bhealaí difriúla inar maith le páistí foghlaim. Cuir tic in aice le gach ceann a thaitníonn leatsa.

- Éisteacht
- Léitheoireacht
- Breathnú
- Iniúchadh
- Ceisteanna a chur
- Rudaí a dhéanamh
- Spraoi
- Canadh
- Caint
- Tecineolaíocht

13. An bhfuil aon rud eile is maith leat a dhéanamh nuair atá tú ag foghlaim nach bhfuil sa liosta thuas?

14. Conas a thaispeánann tú do do mhúinteoir an méid atá foghlamtha agat?

- Scrúduithe
- Tráth na gCeist
- Tionscadail
- Díospóireachtaí
- Scríbhneoireacht (mar shampla, tuairisc nó scéal)
- Labhairt leis an múinteoir
- Canadh
- An rud a dhéanamh/a thaispeáint don mhúinteoir
- An teicneolaíocht a dhéanamh

15. An bhfuil aon bhealaí eile agat chun d'fhoghlaim a thaispeáint nach bhfuil sa liosta thuas? Má tá, déan cur síos orthu anseo.

16. Cad iad na hábhair is tábhachtaí foghlaim fúthu sa bhunscoil, dar leat? Cuir tic in aice le gach ceann cuí.

- Gaeilge
- Béarla
- Teangacha eile
- Matamaitic
- Eolaíocht
- Ríomhairí agus Teicneolaíocht
- Stair
- Spórt agus Corpoideachas
- Ealaín
- Reiligiún
- Daoine eile agus cultúir eile
- Sláinte agus Folláine

17. An bhfuil ábhair eile atá tábhachtach le foghlaim faoi sa bhunscoil, dar leat, nach bhfuil sa liosta thuas? Déan liosta de na hábhair sin le do thoil.

18. An labhraíonn do mhúinteoir riamh le do rang faoin meánscoil agus conas mar a bheidh sé?

- Labhraíonn
- Ní labhraíonn
- Níl a fhios agam

19. An bhfuil aon rud eile gur mhaith leat a rá faoin mbunscoil? Má tá, scríobh do chuid smaointe anseo.

Go raibh maith agat!

Trí chabhrú linn, agus labhairt faoi conas mar atá an scoil duitse, tá an seans agat do smaointe a roinnt le daoine a bhfuil spéis acu sna rudaí atá le rá agat. Seans go bhfeabhsóidh cibé rud a