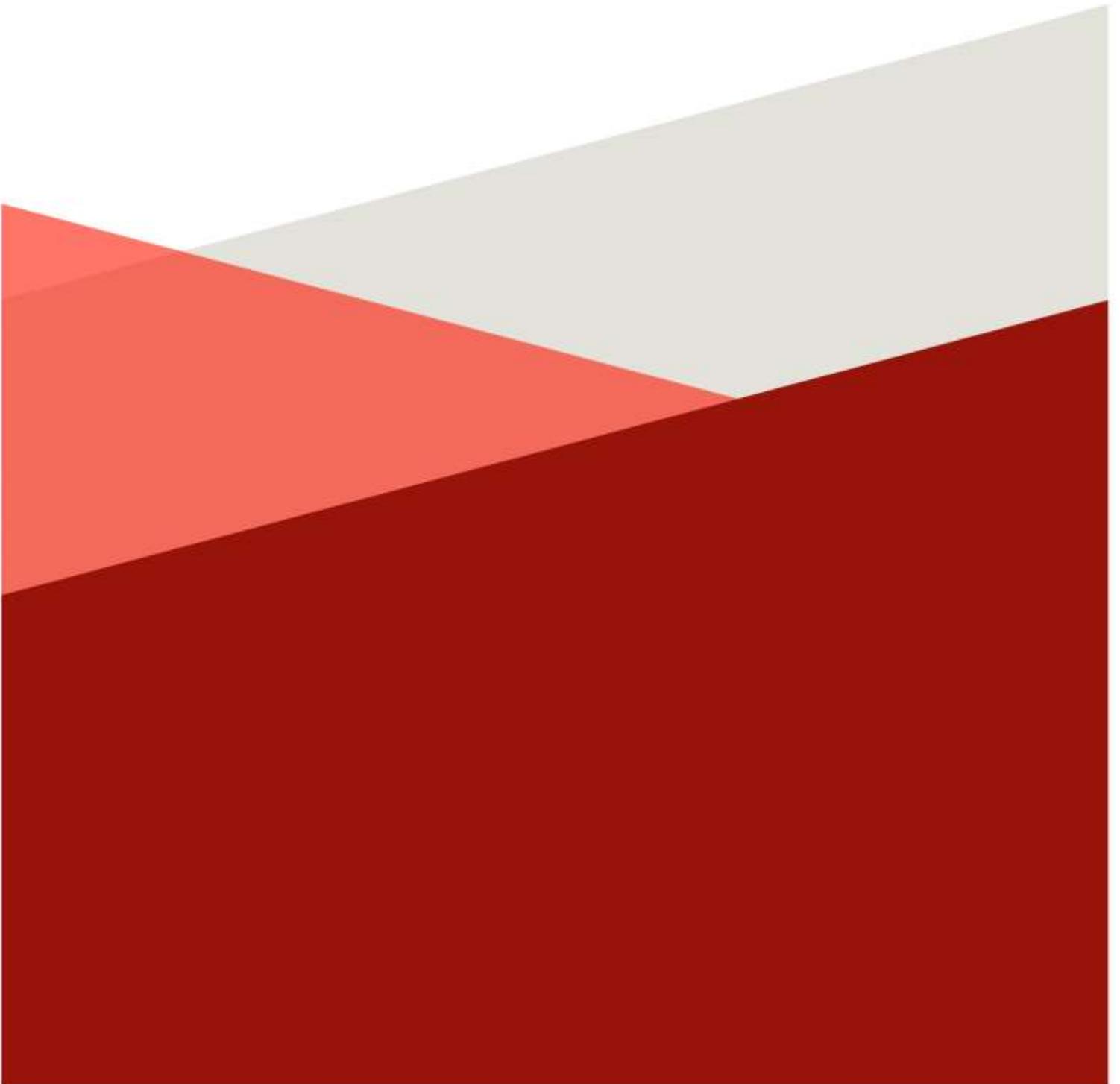




NCCA

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

Frequently asked questions about the *Primary Curriculum Framework*



Introduction

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) advises the Minister for Education on matters relating to:

- the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools, and
- the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum.

The NCCA has developed the [Primary Curriculum Framework \(PCF\)](#) through research, consultation, deliberation and work with a large network of schools.

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* was launched by the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, in March 2023.

This frequently asked questions (FAQ) document has been developed in response to initial queries and questions received by NCCA. It will be regularly reviewed and updated in response to further questions received.

What is the *Primary Curriculum Framework*?

The PCF sets out the purpose, structure and content for the redeveloped curriculum in primary and special schools. It highlights what is important in primary education and why; and provides a description of what should be prioritised in children's learning. *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) and *The Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) are similar frameworks supporting children's learning before they begin primary school and when they move to post-primary school.

Where can I read the *Primary Curriculum Framework*?

You can read the *Primary Curriculum Framework* [here](#).

What are the key features of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*?

The Framework:

- is for all primary and special schools
- sets the vision and principles for a redeveloped curriculum
- introduces key competencies for children's learning
- sets out the main features and components for the full redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum, detailing curriculum areas and subjects; and time allocations
- introduces and expands aspects of learning including STEM Education, Modern Foreign Languages and a broader Arts Education
- places increased emphasis on existing areas such as Physical Education and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
- links with learning experiences provided through the themes of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and connects with the *Framework for Junior Cycle*
- promotes greater agency and flexibility for teachers and children.

What are the curriculum areas/subjects within the Primary Curriculum Framework?

The framework provides for an integrated learning experience, with curriculum areas in stages 1 and 2 (Junior infants – Second Class). These areas recognise younger children’s ages and stage of development and give the teacher greater choice in facilitating rich learning experiences through playful and engaging approaches.

The curriculum supports older children’s learning and development in stages 3 and 4 (Third to Sixth Class) by building on the curriculum areas of stages 1 and 2 and becoming more differentiated into subjects to reflect children’s growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising the world.

The curriculum is presented in five broad curriculum areas:

- Language (English, Irish, and a modern foreign language from stage 3 onwards)
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education
- Wellbeing (Social, Personal and Health Education and Physical Education)
- Arts Education (Art, Music and Drama)
- Social and Environmental Education (History and Geography).

An outline of each of the five curricular areas can be found on pages 17 and 18 of the [Primary Curriculum Framework](#). In addition to the five areas, school patrons have a legal right to design their own programme in accordance with the ethos of their school. This programme forms part of children’s learning experience in primary and special schools.

What will the curriculum area of ‘Language’ consist of in the Primary Curriculum Framework?

Language consists of English and Irish, and the introduction of a Modern Foreign Language in stages 3 and 4.

To read more about the curriculum areas of the framework see page 17 [here](#).

What is ‘Arts Education’ in the Primary Curriculum Framework?

In Stages 1 and 2 (Junior Infants to Second Class), children will learn within a broad area of Arts Education. In Stages 3 and 4 (Third to Sixth class), learning will be delineated into the more specific subjects of Art, Drama and Music. By drawing on more than one subject, learning in other art forms can be enhanced, therefore there will be opportunities for learning in media arts and dance.

To read more about the curriculum areas of the framework see page 18 [here](#).

What is ‘STEM Education’ in the Primary Curriculum Framework?

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education supports children’s capacity to understand and engage fully with the world around them. It will enable children to learn how to approach challenges and real-world problems using science, maths, technology and engineering in an integrated manner. It gives children the opportunity to explore, discover and interpret our world together.

To read more about the curriculum areas of the framework see page 18 [here](#).

What is 'Wellbeing' in the *Primary Curriculum Framework*?

Wellbeing supports children's social, emotional, and physical development now and into the future. Wellbeing incorporates learning related to Physical Education (PE) and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). In Stages 1 and 2 (Junior Infants to Second Class), children will learn through broad and integrated learning experiences. In Stages 3 and 4 (Third to Sixth Class), learning will be more delineated into the subjects PE and SPHE.

To read more about the curriculum areas of the framework see pages 18 [here](#).

What is 'Social and Environmental Education' in the *Primary Curriculum Framework*?

The curriculum area of Social and Environmental Education supports children's awareness, appreciation and understanding of the world through learning about the rich diversity of peoples: their experiences, cultures, religions, beliefs, and environments in different times, places and circumstances. In Stages 1 and 2, children will learn through a broad and integrated area of Social and Environmental Education, with learning becoming more differentiated into the specific subject areas of Geography and History in Stages 3 and 4.

To read more about the curriculum areas of the framework see page 19 [here](#).

When will the specifications for each curriculum area be available?

The PCF will guide the development of the specifications for each of the five curriculum areas. The NCCA has established Development Groups for each curriculum area and a draft specification will be available for public consultation in 2024. The NCCA envisages the completion of the development of all curriculum area specifications in 2025. A timeline for schools' work in enacting the redeveloped curriculum will be set out by the Department of Education. For more information on Development Groups click on the link below:

[Boards and Development Groups | NCCA](#)

What are the suggested time allocations in the *Primary Curriculum Framework*?

During the [consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum](#), teachers, school leaders, parents and other stakeholders indicated:

- support for change in how time is allocated across the curriculum
- support for schools having greater flexibility in deciding how time is allocated in the curriculum
- support for the restoration of Flexible Time
- general agreement for the proposal of two categories of time allocation (Flexible Time and Minimum Curriculum Time)
- concern for the amount of time allocated to Physical Education (PE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
- concern that in a redeveloped curriculum, some subjects may 'lose out' in a review of how time is allocated.

Taking these findings into account, the PCF presents time allocations in two categories: Minimum Curriculum Time (weekly and monthly) and Flexible Time (monthly). In response to

the strong calls for greater flexibility the framework presents a monthly block of Flexible Time. In response to strong calls for more time for PE and SPHE the framework increases the time for Wellbeing (PE and SPHE).

To make these changes, all other areas of the curriculum have relinquished some time. You can find the new suggested time allocations in the Appendix of the [Primary Curriculum Framework](#).

How much time is allocated to Religious/ Ethical/ Multi-Belief and Values Education – the Patron’s Programme in the Primary Curriculum Framework?

In addition to the five curriculum areas outlined in the PCF, school patrons have a legal right to design their own programme in accordance with the ethos of their school. In Stage 1 (Junior and Senior Infants), 1 hour and 40 minutes per week is allocated to the school’s Religious/ Ethical/ Multi-Belief and Values Education – the Patron’s Programme reflecting the shorter school day, whilst 2 hours per week is allocated to the programme for Stages 2 - 4 (First to Sixth Class).

Beyond the Religious/Ethical/Multi-Belief and Values Education – the Patron’s Programme, how does the Primary Curriculum Framework support children’s understanding of religions and beliefs that are a feature of our world?

Social and Environmental Education supports children’s awareness, appreciation and understanding of the world through learning about the rich diversity of peoples: their experiences, cultures, religions, beliefs, and environments in different times, places and circumstances. Within the curriculum area of Wellbeing, children will have the opportunity to develop their own ethical understanding of the world, including reflecting on choices, exploring opportunities and commitment to responsibilities.

What will schools be required to do with the Primary Curriculum Framework this year (2023/2024)?

The introduction of the PCF requires school leaders and teachers to engage and become familiar with the structure and content of the framework at whole-school level. It is recognised that teachers and school leaders will require time and support to become familiar with the contents of the PCF. They are advised to read the document, discuss it with colleagues, avail of professional development opportunities, and engage with the support materials published.

A hard copy of the Framework will be made available to all teachers and school leaders working in primary and special schools. A half-day school closure is permitted to facilitate whole-school review of the framework. This closure should be taken before the end of the 2022/2023 school year. Schools can decide on a half-day that suits their school calendar. Schools have the option of combining this closure with a *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* webinar half-day closure in the school year 2022/23.

Over the intervening period from the launch of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* to the introduction of the specifications in the 2025/2026 school year, schools are encouraged to engage with the Framework as best suits them. In becoming familiar with the Framework, schools may wish to:

- Implement the suggested time allocations which details minimum curriculum time and flexible time.
- Reflect on the principles of learning, teaching, and assessment and how they might be reflected in school planning and practice;
- Consider the key competencies and opportunities to further enhance learning through them;
- Consider the statements on Learning, Teaching and Assessment and how these build on and extend current practice.

What supports are available for schools to assist them in becoming familiar with the *Primary Curriculum Framework*?

In order to develop all teachers' and school leaders' understanding of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*, the Department of Education support services will continue to provide their suite of professional development opportunities at primary level, now drawing connection with the Framework content. Discrete professional development will also be provided for each of the forthcoming subject specifications.

In order to support the half-day engagement, mentioned above, the following resources are provided to schools:

- An interagency video to present the key messages of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*
- A video on the *Primary Curriculum Framework*. The video is designed to be viewed in conjunction with the interagency video.

These resources will support teachers and school leaders in becoming familiar with the Framework and prompt whole-staff professional discussions as they work through the Framework document together.

How does the *Primary Curriculum Framework* support a child's transition from preschool to primary and special schools?

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* is aligned with *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* to support continuity and progression for all children as they make the transition from preschool to primary and special schools. This alignment is particularly evident in the focus in both frameworks on a pedagogy of play. The *Primary Curriculum Framework* provides clarity and certainty on the appropriateness and centrality of play and playful approaches in primary and special schools, where they are key elements of learning and teaching.



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