

Updating *Aistear*

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals

This template is intended to help you (and your colleagues) develop a written submission in relation to Updating *Aistear*. Please e-mail your completed submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

Individual submission details

Name	
Date	
E-mail	

Organisation submission details

Name	Catriona O'Reilly
Position	
Organisation	Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN)
Date	
E-mail	

Do you consent to this submission being posted online including your name and organisation*?

Yes

No

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

IPPN is the officially-recognised professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools. It is an independent, not-for-profit voluntary association with a local, regional and national presence. Recognised by the Minister for Education as an official Education Partner, IPPN works with the DE, the National Parents' Council, management bodies, unions, education agencies, academic institutions and children's charities towards the advancement of primary education. The Republic of Ireland has approximately 540,000 children attending 3,320 primary schools. IPPN articulates the collective knowledge and professional experience of 6,600 Principals and Deputy Principals. As a registered charity, IPPN complies with the requirements of the Charities Act 2009.

Please email your submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

IPPN welcomes the invitation from the NCCA to attend consultations and to make a submission on the review of Aistear. For IPPN to provide feedback that reflects the views and meets the needs of its membership, it must seek the views of school leaders and practitioners in all types of primary school. They need time and space to respond as reflective feedback cannot be provided through a box-ticking exercise. For IPPN to be truly included in consultation with any organisation, the impact of practitioner burnout, the increasing volume of requests for submissions and the timing and the timescales involved also need to be considered.

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured according to the Principles, Themes and Guidelines for Good Practice. Each section is briefly summarised as a support for working on the submission.

Section 1

Please outline your overall comments and observations on updating *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*

Aistear is the Curriculum Framework for learning for children from birth to 6 years, in early years settings, primary schools and in the home. Based on 12 principles and 4 themes, Aistear was published in 2009 after 8 years of preparation and by January 2017, 77% of primary school leaders reported that Aistear was being implemented either wholly or in part in their schools. There was no strategy at a national level for professional development on Aistear so the credit for this high level of uptake must rest with school leaders and practitioners who took it upon themselves to learn about the Curriculum Framework in their own time, and to implement it in their schools.

Irish society has become more socially and culturally diverse since Aistear was published and this is reflected in primary schools all over Ireland. There have been many changes in the early childhood sector such as the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, Department of Education (DE) inspections of early childhood settings, First 5, Better Start, the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). Covid-19 experiences and the current situation in Ukraine have brought about reflection and review of practice. In the context of an expanded early childhood stakeholder base, developments in policy strategy, the development of the early childhood workforce and in particular, the changed and changing lived experiences of children, IPPN believes that a review of Aistear is timely.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework is currently under development. This represents a change in approach at primary level, i.e., moving from a Curriculum to a Curriculum Framework, and presents an ideal opportunity to align Aistear (already a Curriculum Framework) with the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. There is an increased understanding of the importance of transitions in the lives of our pupils. The transition from an early childhood setting to a primary school is a significant step for children. The vast majority of pupils entering primary school are not yet 6 years old. A curriculum framework that bridges, enables and supports the transition between the two settings can only result in an enhanced experience of entry to primary school for children, their families and their teachers. IPPN submits that this period of transition may be an area for reflection and enhancement in any review of Aistear. The Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) reinforces and supports active and play-based learning so the opportunity to align Aistear with the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework should not be missed. However, the challenges of

time to implement Aistear in an already crowded curriculum, and the lack of sufficient human resources and physical space must also be considered and addressed.

A reviewed Aistear that is aligned with a Primary Curriculum Framework will take time to implement and to embed. In this context, IPPN submits that any plans to implement a reviewed Aistear Curriculum Framework should include a comprehensive in-service programme for practitioners both at early childhood and primary levels. Opportunities for engagement with parents and families should also be considered to enable the development of a shared understanding of early childhood and early primary education, and a real and meaningful partnership between pupils, those who care for them at home and those who support their learning and development in formal education settings.

While this review needs to be cognisant of the current reality of policy and strategy development at national level and among stakeholders, IPPN believes it is important to remember that developing 'Competent and Confident Learners' is at the heart of Aistear. It is acknowledged that some aspects of Aistear should be updated to reflect the developments that have taken place since 2009. However, it would be unfortunate if the review of Aistear is focussed on aligning with policy and strategy rather than on serving our young learners in their most formative years.

Section 2

Principles of Aistear

Aistear is based on 12 Principles of early learning and development. Each principle is presented using a short statement. This is followed by an explanation of the Principle from the child's perspective. This explanation highlights the adult's role in supporting children's early learning and development. The Principles can be accessed [here](#).

Please give your feedback in relation to updating the Principles of Aistear. Please indicate what is working well with the principles and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

In general, the principles of Aistear are working well and from a primary school perspective, they align well with the domains and standards of *Looking at our Schools (LAOS) 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools*. The statement of each principle directs the practitioner's attention to the child's understanding and experience of the world. Presenting explanations of the statements from a child's perspective not only highlights the role that the adult plays in supporting early learning, but it also challenges the adult to respond by providing appropriate learning experiences, to 'differentiate teaching and learning' and to 'promote and facilitate the development of pupil voice, pupil participation, and pupil leadership' (LAOS2016).

The principles of Aistear recognise the role of family and community in a child's life. As one practitioner reported, 'I very much appreciate the 12 principles underpinning the Aistear Framework & their significance in the life of every child'. Communication with pupils and effective communication between the significant adults in the pupils' lives are recurring themes. As society changes and diversifies, finding new ways to connect with and to engage with pupils and their families becomes even more important. This review may provide an opportunity to look at how technology can be incorporated as a tool to support communication.

Section 3

Themes of *Aistear*

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework presents children’s learning and development using four Themes. These are:

1. Well-being
2. Identity and Belonging
3. Communicating
4. Exploring and Thinking.

The themes describe what children learn—the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding. Each theme begins with a short overview of its importance for children as young learners. The theme is then presented using four aims. Each aim is divided into six learning goals. *Aistear*’s Themes can be accessed [here](#)

Please give your overall feedback in relation to the themes of *Aistear*. Please indicate what is working well with the themes and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

Together, the four Themes of *Aistear* aim to produce ‘Competent and Confident Learners’. There is general agreement that the four Themes in the current *Aistear* Framework are working well and are relevant to children’s early learning and development. Feedback from practitioners suggests that the Themes encourage children ‘to have a positive sense of who they are, to feel valued and respected, to share their experiences and discoveries with their classmates and to develop physically, cognitively, socially and creatively, as thinkers, language users and problem solvers’.

Since *Aistear* was first published, young children have been increasingly exposed to digital technologies. Any review of *Aistear*’s themes needs to take account of the access that our early learners have to various devices and to how ICTs can be incorporated in their learning in age-appropriate ways.

The importance of resilience and an ability to manage change and upheaval have been highlighted for everyone as society dealt with a pandemic over the past two years. A review of the Wellbeing theme of *Aistear* provides an opportunity to focus on how we can support our early learners in developing resilience and the foundations for a lifetime of positive mental health. This can be further enhanced through the Communicating theme with learning experiences that provide children with the means to express their feelings and concerns.

Section 4

Guidelines for Good Practice

Aistear has four sets of guidelines, focusing on different aspects of practice:

1. Building partnerships between parents and practitioners
2. Learning and developing through interactions
3. Learning and developing through play
4. Supporting learning and development through assessment

These describe how the adult can support children's learning and development across *Aistear's* principles and themes. *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice can be accessed [here](#)

Please give your overall feedback in relation to updating *Aistear's* Guidelines for Good Practice. Please indicate what is working well with the guidelines and what might need to be enhanced or updated.

Aistear's Guidelines for Good Practice are wonderful documents that support a common understanding of how *Aistear* may be implemented across early childhood, primary and home settings. They are centred around building partnerships, where the child is key, supporting learning through play and interactions and creating opportunities for children to experience success in their learning. However, for practitioners at primary level, they are four guidance documents with which teachers need to engage in addition to the Primary School Curriculum (1999), the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) and Looking at Our Schools 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools. It is essential that any review of *Aistear* would be aligned fully with the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and that *Aistear* would be viewed as an integral part of the curriculum framework at primary level rather than a separate, additional framework.

Data Protection

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit <https://www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement> or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at dpo@ncca.ie.

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