

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	<i>PDST Primary Health & Wellbeing Team</i>
Position	
Organisation	PDST
Date	
E-mail	

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

Yes

yes

No

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

PDST, as an agency of the Department of Education, is the largest support service in Ireland, offering professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas. The Health and Wellbeing team facilitates teacher professional development in all areas of primary health and wellbeing including Physical Education (PE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), Child Protection, Anti-bullying, Internet Safety, Physical Activity, Physical Literacy and Teacher Wellbeing.

Please email your submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

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.

Please email your submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

Section 1

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

The use of the Aistear framework in the Infant classroom since 2009 has the potential to create an environment where pupils can develop a positive relationship with learning, one where they feel valued, competent and confident. The holistic nature of the framework fosters the development and growth of each pupil through enjoyable, engaging and challenging activities. Children greatly relish the opportunity to participate in such child-centred learning activities. There is certainly a future for the place of Aistear in the Infant Curriculum.

- *Play - The framework puts play at the front and centre of the early childhood classroom. Children make sense of their world through play and through the discussion on this play. It is important that children are exposed to as many opportunities as possible to participate in imaginative play. Aistear provides enjoyable, stimulating, meaningful and worthwhile learning experiences and environment for children.*
- *Primary School Curriculum - The 1999 Primary school Curriculum is underpinned by the 'constructivist' theory, Aistear is an ideal setting for pupils to experience discrepancies between what they know already and what they can discover in the school environment and then to adjust their ideas accordingly.*
- *Structure - Using the Aistear framework added great structure to play in the classroom and to planning for play time. It gives vast opportunities to integrate other Curriculum subjects using play as the main focus. Activities can be scaffolded and repeated over the course of the week/month, providing pupils with many opportunities to develop their own skills and learning over a period of time.*
- *Pupil needs – the Aistear framework provides a great sense of freedom and flexibility for each school community to implement the framework according to how each school context sees best to meet the pupils' needs. Pupils' needs should always be at the beginning point when approaching the implementation of the Aistear framework in the classroom.*
- *Diversity - Ireland has become more socially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse. Schools as microcosms of society have become equally diverse. Aistear can be an opportunity to explore diversity in the classroom.*
- *Skills - Use of the Aistear framework allows pupils many learning experiences to develop a wide variety of life-skills; creativity, problem-solving, language development, forming and building relationships, expression, design, communication, interpreting & understanding, role play, team work and self talk (commentary on play).*

- *Integration with the Primary Language Curriculum - The Primary Language Curriculum synergises with the Aistear Curriculum Framework through its promotion of playful learning experiences as a means of developing children's language learning.*
- *Thematic planning - This is very effective and useful in the Infant classroom. The framework gives time, rich learning opportunities to explore suitable themes in a most indepth way and can be easily integrated with other subjects.*
- *Toolkit- The Aistear toolkit provides excellent means of learning and sharing Aistear inspired practice- please bring back the excellent videos relevant to primary school years.*

Recommendations:

- *Interagency consultation – due to the increased variety of needs presente in the Infant classroom it may be helpful to consult with NCSE, NEPS, Occupational Therapists, Pscycologist, Psychotherapist, Play Therapist for further expert advice on how to cater for different needs through Aistear*
- *The style of presentation of the Aistear framework could be more stream-lined for ease of access for teachers*
- *Teacher training should be provided for all infant teachers who wish to avail of it*
- *Aistear could be a compulsory element of teaching and learning in all infant classes*
- *Additional funding and resources made available to support schools*
- *Aistear should be subject to inspection as part of a Whole School Evaluation (WSE).*
- *Explore how the updated Aistear framework could be explored as a tool for wellbeing promotion through the School Self-Evaluation process, using the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2018-2025)*

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.

The Aistear 12 Principles are still relevant today in the Irish Primary school context. They align very well with the SPHE Curriculum and also with the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018 - 2025. The explanation of the principles from the child's perspective is particularly effective and should be retained.

Recommendations:

Children and their lives in early childhood:

- Beginning with self is a great starting point that allows pupils to explore the themes: Myself, My family, My body, My feelings etc. Today, it is more important than ever that pupils are aware of and value their own uniqueness. However, in order to fully capture the child's uniqueness – more communication between preschool, primary school and parents is required to fully share important and relevant information about the child, their development to date and how best the child learns.
- **Equality & Diversity:** It is most important that this principle is continued and further developed to reflect diversity within schools and to ensure that all pupils feel a sense of belonging. The provision of further supports and resources for this area is required where all pupils can see and identify themselves and their communities in the classroom.
- **Children as citizens:** This principle allows the provision for pupil's voice and their own areas of interest to be included in the Infant classroom. This principle could be developed to allow for opportunities to link with other areas of the school where pupils voice is expressed – Assembly, student councils, school flags initiative committees etc

Children's connection with others:

- **Relationships**
Building, forming and maintaining relationships are the bedrock of school life. Aistear provides an ideal setting for children to learn to play with a partner, team or group and to further develop social skills and co-operative skills. This principle links very well with the area of relationships and partnerships in the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018- 2023.
- **Parents, family and community**
This principle could be further expanded to include an element of different families which would help children to understand that all families are special. Invite families in to support learning, invite members of the local community in to share knowledge, experience and talents with pupils.

Please email your submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

- **The adult's role**

This principle could be developed to include differentiating for children with varying needs. Additionally this principle could examine how skills and learning developed in Aistear could be supported at home/community? A Home/School link guide could be created.

How children learn and develop:

- **Holistic learning and development:** This principle is extremely important and takes into account the whole child. It aligns well with the aims of the PE Curriculum and also the elements of developing the physically literate pupil in the PE lesson.
- **Active Learning:** Practical tools and ideas on teaching social skills such as turn taking, communicating, teamwork, fair play could also be included here.
- **Play and hands on experience:** Aistear can provide time and opportunities for play and hands on experience, it recognises the value of play in the infant classroom.
- **Relevant and meaningful experiences:** Suggestions for assessment methodologies that capture all pupils needs, progress, style of learning etc would be most helpful
- **Communication and language:** This principle could be further expanded to include activities to develop communication skills e.g. sing to me, say nursery rhymes with me, make eye contact with me.
- **The learning environment:** Use of the outdoors/forest school approach, the importance of a calm learning environment could be included here in advance of beginning Aistear. For children to learn they need to feel calm, safe and supported.

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.

The *Aistear* themes remain appropriate and important for the Infant Classroom. They align well with the SPHE Curriculum and also link well with the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018 -2025. The development and promotion of the *Aistear* themes ensure that the holistic development of the child is at the centre of the planning for and implementation of *Aistear* activities. The *Aistear* themes provide the opportunity for pupils to develop and strengthen life long skills.

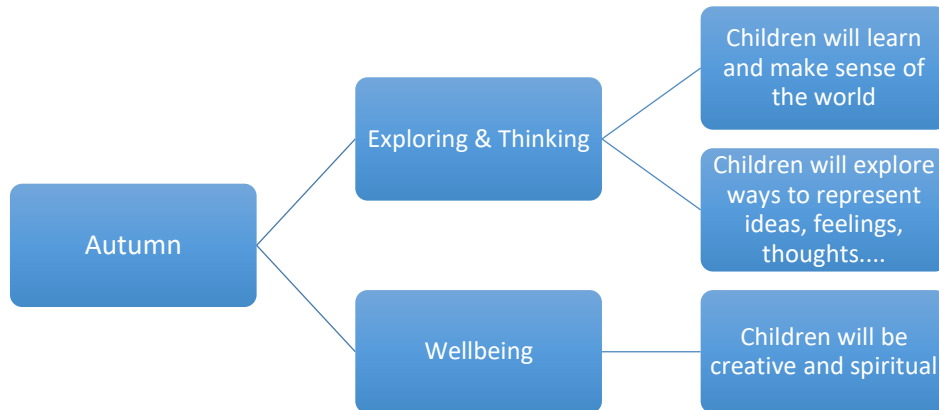
Recommendations:

- **Assessment:** The aims and learning goals of the *Aistear* themes are laid out clearly. It could be helpful to develop assessment templates/pupil record templates for pupils and teachers to assess progress or track development for each themes.
- **Updates:** The definition of Wellbeing would also need to be changed to reflect more updated definitions of this term. Some learning goals would need to be updated to reflect the current pupil needs. The sample learning opportunities provided are excellent and should be retained. Consider adding additional updated opportunities.
- **Curriculum Links:** The learning opportunities could be linked with the strands and strand units of 1999 Curriculum, it could be helpful for pupils to continue to explore an *Aistear* theme in another area of teaching and learning e.g. Wellbeing – Aim 2 – *children will be as healthy and as fit as they can be – gain increasing control and co-ordination of body movements*. This theme and aim could also be further explored in the PE lesson. This type of planning provides more continuity between *Aistear*, the Curriculum and further opportunities and experiences for pupils to develop skills, abilities and attitudes.
- **Connect Principles and Themes:** It would also be effective to reflect the *Aistear* principles through the themes. Each theme could be viewed through three lenses – children and their lives in early childhood, children’s connection with others, how children learn and develop. The school

Please email your submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie

community could collaborate together on how each theme's aims and learning goals could be successfully developed through each of the three lenses.

- Thematic Planning: Sample thematics plans would be very useful for teachers and schools when planning for Aistear. Schools can decide how to develop the learning aims through the suggested learning goals or through experiences that will meet the needs of the pupils in an individual context that is inclusive of all.



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.

All of the four guidelines are relevant and important in today's Infant classroom.

Layout:

- Perhaps placement of themes, aims, learning goals on a two page spread. This would make planning for meaningful play experiences more achievable.
- Perhaps tabs on the side of the manual similar to the Primary Language Curriculum document.
- *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide has excellent content. Some of the videos/planning advice from the *Aistear* toolkit did not transfer to the new platform.

Learning experiences:

- Include development of fundamental movement skills
- Include use of picture books to develop social skills, as a stimulus for movement, creativity and physically expressing emotions and as a means of exploring and developing wellbeing.

Aistear places play and active learning at the heart of the Infant curriculum- this needs to continue being encouraged. The benefits to play to include:

- Problem solving and learning cause and effect.
- Learning how to play with others through compromise, conflict resolution and sharing.
- Development of fine and gross motor skills.
- Nurturing their creativity and imagination.
- Discovering their independence and positive self-esteem

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.

Please email your submission to aistearsubmissions@ncca.ie