



**NCCA**

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

# Frequently asked questions on the Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications

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## Introduction

As part of the redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is consulting on the Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications in the following areas:

- Arts Education
- Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in the *Primary Language Curriculum*
- Social and Environmental Education (SEE)
- Science, Technology and Engineering (STE)
- Wellbeing.

The public consultation will run from March 6<sup>th</sup> 2024 to June 7<sup>th</sup> 2024.

This initial set of questions and answers has been developed in response to queries raised in advance of the consultation. The document begins by providing questions that apply to all draft specifications, followed by more specific questions on the five individual draft specifications. The FAQs will be reviewed and updated regularly to respond to further questions arising.

### Overview of NCCA's consultation on the Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications

<b>WHO?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NCCA wants to hear from anyone with views on <b>primary and special education</b> including teachers, school leaders, parents, children and other stakeholders.</li></ul>
<b>WHAT?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Draft Curriculum Specifications</b> in the areas of:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Arts Education</li><li>• Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in the <i>Primary Language Curriculum</i></li><li>• Social and Environmental Education (SEE)</li><li>• Science, Technology and Engineering Education (STE)</li><li>• Wellbeing.</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>WHY?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The current curriculum was introduced 25 years ago in 1999. <b>Irish society has changed</b> greatly and we have more <b>research on how children learn best and what is important for them to learn</b></li><li>• All feedback gathered during this consultation will help to inform the finalised specification for each of the five curriculum areas which will be published in Autumn 2025.</li></ul>
<b>WHEN?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The consultation will take place from <b>March to June 2024</b>.</li></ul>
<b>HOW?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You can have your say by attending face-to-face and online focus groups, completing online questionnaires, preparing written submissions and more. All information can be found on the NCCA website <b><a href="http://www.ncca.ie/primary">www.ncca.ie/primary</a></b>.</li></ul>

# Frequently asked questions about the Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications

## 1. Why have these curriculum changes come about?

The current primary school curriculum is 25 years old. When it was published in 1999, it was a cutting-edge curriculum, informed by extensive research. However, a lot has changed in our world since then, and research has provided important insights as to the kinds of learning experiences children should have.

In Ireland, what children experience before and after primary education has also changed with the provision of two years of universal preschool education, the publication of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Framework* (2009) and the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015). With these developments, it is timely that an updated curriculum is developed to equip our children with essential knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions as we seek to prepare them for life now and further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 2. How have changes to the primary curriculum come about?

The development of the five draft specifications has been guided by the *Primary Curriculum Framework* which was published in March, 2023. The development of each draft specification involved a comprehensive process informed by a range of perspectives, including:

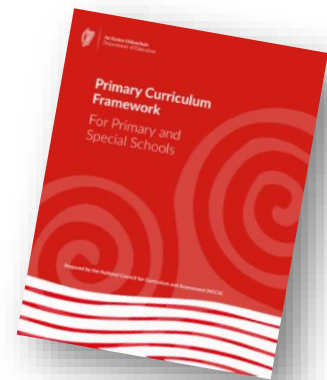
- Working with [Development Groups](#)
- Drawing on research such as the [Children's School Lives Study](#) and [Weaving the Literature on Integration, Pedagogy and Assessment Research](#)
- Considering commissioned research / literature reviews for each curriculum area
- Listening to children's voices, for example through consultation with children in collaboration with The Teaching Council, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and other stakeholders
- Establishing partnerships with a network of schools involved in the [NCCA Schools Forums](#)
- Engaging with stakeholders through *Re-Imagining Curriculum* and *Leading Out* seminars
- Collaborating with an Advisory Panel to learn from their experience of curriculum change in other jurisdictions (see the [Supporting Change](#) section of the NCCA website for more information on this aspect of our work).

## 3. How does this relate to the *Primary Curriculum Framework*?

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* sets out the purpose, structure and content for the redeveloped curriculum in all primary and special schools. It highlights what is important in primary education and why; and sets out what should be prioritised in children's learning.

Flowing from the framework, are five broad curriculum areas:

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



#### 4. When are schools expected to begin enacting the five new curriculum specifications?

The redeveloped Primary School Curriculum will be finalised in early 2025. NCCA will then present the curriculum to the Minister for Education for their consideration. Following approval from the Minister, the curriculum will be introduced to all primary and special schools.

A plan for the introduction and enactment of the curriculum is currently being devised by the Department of Education and will be communicated to schools in advance of the new curriculum being published.

#### 5. What curriculum supports will accompany the redeveloped curriculum?

Each of the five curriculum specifications will include a 'Toolkit' similar to the *Primary Language Curriculum* and the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum*. The toolkits will be accessible via the Curriculum Online website: [www.curriculumonline.ie](http://www.curriculumonline.ie)

#### 6. Will professional development be provided for teachers and schools for these new curriculum areas?

Yes. In order to develop all teachers' and school leaders' understanding of the redeveloped primary curriculum, the Department of Education support service, Oide, will provide professional development opportunities. The model of professional development is currently being considered.

#### 7. How do the new specifications address curriculum overload?

Addressing curriculum overload has been an important consideration in the development work and is reflected in the following measures:

- There is a significant reduction from 23 books to 6 more succinct documents (approximately 45 pages in each) that minimise duplication and unnecessary repetition.
- The draft specifications also help to address curriculum overload through the use of broad Learning Outcomes rather than very detailed, prescriptive content objectives.
- The collaborative process through which each of the draft specifications were developed enabled the identification of connections across curriculum areas.
- Each specification provides clarity on the purpose of the primary curriculum through the inclusion of Principles and Key Competencies.
- To further support teachers in exercising their agency, the flexible time allocation within the *Primary Curriculum Framework* gives schools and teachers greater choice in deciding how best to use time across the curriculum.
- Teachers, as skilled, agentic professionals, use their knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and children to enable them to make judgements on how best to enact the curriculum in their school context.

#### 8. How will teachers work with the key competencies when preparing for learning and teaching?

The seven key competencies within the *Primary Curriculum Framework* support children in developing essential knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values for life and learning.

The key competencies are embedded across all curriculum areas and subjects through the Learning Outcomes. As children learn through the Learning Outcomes of the curriculum they build and develop the key competencies.



#### 9. How do the five draft specifications promote integration?

The organisation of the curriculum into the five broad areas supports integration, and each of the five draft specifications identify opportunities for teachers and children to make connections in their learning within and between the curriculum areas.

The use of integrated Learning Outcomes support teachers in providing integrated learning experiences for children. Embedding the seven key competencies within Learning Outcomes also enables children to draw on multiple sources of knowledge.

#### 10. How are the draft specifications structured?

Each specification follows the structure, as presented in the *Primary Curriculum Framework*.

Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Rationale
Chapter 3	Aims
Chapter 4	Strands and Elements
Chapter 5	Learning Outcomes
Chapter 6	The Curriculum in Practice
Chapter 7	Toolkit
Chapter 8	Glossary

#### 11. What is the connection between *Aistear: the Early Childhood Framework* and the new primary specifications? Should teachers in Stage 1 be using *Aistear*?

[Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework](#) and the [Primary Curriculum Framework](#) are for different sectors, but alignment between both frameworks, in particular in the area of pedagogy (including play), is evident. *Aistear* is the curriculum framework for babies, toddlers and young children (from birth to six years) in all settings other than primary and special schools. The *Primary Curriculum Framework* is for all children in primary and special schools.

Each of the five draft specifications place a clear emphasis on playful approaches, demonstrating progression from *Aistear*. The draft specifications use the Learning Outcome stem ‘*through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences...*’ recognising the centrality of play and playfulness in primary and special schools.

#### 12. How will teachers plan for and organise their preparation for the five curriculum areas within the context of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*?

‘Preparation for teaching and learning’ is now the term used to recognise the array of activities that take place before, during and after teaching. [Guidance on Preparation for Learning and Teaching](#) was launched in 2021 providing a renewed understanding of preparation. This guidance emphasises the three equally valued components of preparation for learning and teaching - invisible, visible, and recorded preparation. Using this guidance as a framework, teachers will undertake their preparation for learning and teaching in the five curriculum areas.

#### 13. Will there be additional guidelines for assessment?

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* advocates a variety of pedagogical approaches with assessment central to learning and teaching. Within each of the five draft specifications, Chapter 6(c) outlines a range of approaches which are appropriate when assessing children’s learning in that particular curriculum area. Further information will be made available in the toolkits which are being developed in each curriculum area.

Teachers can refer to the [Assessment Guidelines for Primary Schools \(2007\)](#) and the [Guidance on Preparation for Learning and Teaching \(2021\)](#) when choosing assessment approaches to be used to gain an insight into children’s learning and/ or progress.

#### 14. Will schools still teach the Patron’s Programme?

Yes, in addition to the five curriculum areas which are currently open for consultation, all schools will continue to work with the Patron’s Programme which is applicable in their context. The Patron’s Programme is developed by a school’s patron with the aim of contributing to children’s holistic development, particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective, and underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school.

## Frequently asked questions relating to the Draft Primary Arts Education Specification

### 1. What are the Arts Education subjects?

The Arts Education subjects in this curriculum area are Art, Drama, and Music. Each of these subjects has its own essential learning, knowledge and concepts that can be explored and developed and applied to other art forms including dance and media arts among others.

### 2. What are some of the key changes in this area since 1999?

- Children will engage with a range of images, sounds, arts works and other stimuli from various contexts and environments supports children's learning and development in Art, Drama and Music, and in other artforms including dance and media arts.
- Learning will focus on both the process and the product of art making.
- Children will engage in appropriately challenging arts-making as part of a community of learners. They will be 'art-makers', 'drama-makers' and 'music-makers'.
- The draft specification places a focus on creativity, play, integration, learning through the senses and body, linking with artists, the community and broader cultures.

### 3. What is the role of integration in Arts Education?

Integrated Learning Outcomes can be found across each stage and these can contribute to integrated learning within the arts. Integration can occur *within* the arts and *through* the arts.

Integration within the arts involves making connections across artforms including, but not limited to, Art, Drama, and Music. Integration *through* the arts involves connecting ideas across curriculum areas.

### 4. Is there a possibility for schools to collaborate with external partner/s to facilitate some aspects of arts education?

Connections between schools and the broader arts community can enrich and extend children's learning. At times, schools might work in collaboration with a partner (be that a colleague in the school/neighbouring school, artist, external facilitator or digital resource) to facilitate learning in the arts. Where external inputs, programmes, and facilitators are featured, the classroom teacher retains a central and active role in the teaching and learning. This can include supporting children, team teaching and ensuring meaningful connections with prior and future learning.

## Frequently asked questions relating to the Primary Language Curriculum including Modern Foreign Language (MFL)

### 1. Is the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) being updated to include MFL at Stages 3 and 4?

Yes. MFL will be incorporated into the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC).

New Learning Outcomes specific to MFL will be added for Stage 3 and Stage 4. Sections 1 to 6 of the PLC will also be updated to reflect the introduction of MFL.

### 2. What will MFL learning and teaching be like in Stage 3 (3rd and 4th Classes)?

- Building an awareness of languages and cultures

The learning at this stage will explore and build on children's existing knowledge, experience and awareness of languages, and celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity within and beyond the school.

### 3. What will MFL learning and teaching be like in Stage 4 (5th and 6th Classes)?

- Building an awareness of languages and cultures
- Communicative Competence in the L3

MFL in Stage 4 will continue to build children's awareness of languages and cultures. It will also include learning to communicate in a third language (L3), at a basic level.

### 4. Who will teach MFL?

The draft Learning Outcomes have been developed to ensure MFL can be taught by the classroom teacher.

At Stage 3, the classroom teacher will continue with the development of language awareness and intercultural awareness, through the language of the school (English or Irish) and drawing on all languages of the classroom and school.

At Stage 4, with appropriate professional development, the classroom teacher will teach the third language to a basic level with a focus on oral communication.

The Department of Education will provide more specific advice on the professional development supports for teachers and the enactment of MFL in due course.

## Frequently asked questions relating to the Draft Primary Science, Technology and Engineering Education Specification

### 1. What are some of the key changes in this area since 1999?

Previously, Science was included in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education. Science is now included with Technology and Engineering and Mathematics to make up the STEM curriculum area.

In Science, Technology and Engineering children learn about nature, materials, the living world, energy and forces, human endeavours to design and create, and the rapidly changing advancements in digital technologies - all of which impact our daily lives.

### 2. How will children learn in Science, Technology and Engineering Education?

Three approaches which are promoted in this curriculum area:

**Scientific inquiry** is an approach which emphasises children's active participation in science.

**Design thinking** is an action-based and practical process to support creative problem-solving and innovation.

**Computational Thinking** draws on the principles of computing to think about and solve problems.

### 3. How will the Science, Technology and Engineering Education Curriculum and the new Mathematics Curriculum be integrated?

Once finalised the Science, Technology and Engineering specification will sit alongside the Primary Mathematics Curriculum in one curriculum document.

Integration is supported through the application of what children learn to real-life investigations and problem-solving.

In the draft specification, an approach to support integrated STEM learning is presented in Chapter 6d. This approach outlines five phases that teachers and children can follow and includes guidance and considerations for integrated learning.



## Frequently asked questions relating to the Draft Primary Social and Environmental Education Specification

### 1. What are the Social and Environmental Education subjects?

Social and Environmental Education comprises History and Geography. Children’s learning in this curriculum area is integrated in Stages 1 and 2 and are delineated into the subjects of History and Geography in Stages 3 and 4.

### 2. What are some of the key changes in this area since 1999?

- Children will work as historians and geographers as they engage in inquiry and project-based learning in Social and Environmental Education
- Children’s learning experiences in Social and Environmental Education are fully integrated in Stages 1 and 2 with learning becoming more differentiated by subjects from Third Class onwards.
- Children will learn about religions, beliefs and worldviews as part of Social and Environmental Education.

### 3. What will children learn in Social and Environmental Education’?

Children will learn through ‘Working as a Historian’ and ‘Working as a Geographer’. ‘Working as a historian’ and ‘Working as a Geographer’ supports the development of concepts and skills, including:

Concepts	Skills
Empathy	Using evidence and sources
Multi-perspectivity	Interpreting and analysing
	Evaluating and decision-making
	Communicating
	Questioning/Investigating
Time and chronology	Historical thinking
Cause and effect	Chronological thinking
Change and continuity	Using historical evidence
Sense of place	Mapping/Graphicacy
Sense of space	Visual interpretation and communication
Sense of environment and sustainability	

### 4. How will children learn in Social and Environmental Education?

- Children will engage in inquiry, participating in investigations asking questions, generating ideas, creating and/or gathering data to develop understanding and drawing conclusions.
- Children will learn through and from story, providing insight into the lives of other peoples, places, cultures and traditions, past and present.
- Children’s learning is enhanced by an environment that promotes playful and engaging exploration of the world around them.
- Children will engage directly with the world around them in real-life contexts through place-based learning.
- Children will engage in dialogical pedagogy which promotes open, interactive, and reciprocal communication and involves an active exchange of ideas, perspectives, and knowledge.
- Children will apply digital skills through the use of a vast range of audio, visual, interactive and virtual sources and applications which can greatly enrich their historical and geographical understanding.

## Frequently asked questions relating to the Draft Primary Wellbeing Specification

### 1. What are the subjects in the curriculum area of Wellbeing?

Wellbeing includes the subjects of Physical Education (PE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

### 2. What are some of the key changes in this area since 1999?

- Learning in *Wellbeing* is organised across four Strands: Movement Education, Emotional and Relational Education, Health Education, as well as Community and Belonging.
- In stages 1 and 2, where appropriate, *Wellbeing* supports an integrated approach to learning and teaching in Physical Education (PE) and Social Personal Health Education (SPHE).
- For stages 3 & 4, Learning Outcomes are further divided into PE and SPHE.
- There is a recognition of the importance of physical literacy and meaningful PE to help children value and recognise how PE can enhance the quality of their lives.
- New areas of learning include consent, diversity in family structures, media & digital wellbeing, as well as a renewed emphasis on emotional and relational learning across both PE and SPHE.
- Learning Outcomes are the main focus in PE, and these are developed through a broad and balanced set of PE activity areas.

### 3. What is meant by the term 'wellbeing'?

It is recognised that the development of children's wellbeing goes beyond any specific curriculum area and is also shaped by a variety of other influences within the broader community and society. With this in mind, wellbeing is present when children realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of purpose and belonging to a wider community.

The Wellbeing curriculum area plays an important role in supporting children's formal learning 'about' and 'for' wellbeing.

Alongside Wellbeing, the key competency 'being well' emphasises the important role all curriculum areas and the whole school community play in nurturing children's wellbeing.

### 4. Is Aquatics mandatory?

The organisation of aquatics will be influenced by access to a suitable aquatic environment, transport, and the availability of suitably qualified swimming teachers. For some schools access to aquatics is challenging, and every effort should be made to provide for aquatics.

### 5. Will the Stay Safe Programme still be taught in SPHE?

Circular 0065/2011 outlines that all primary schools must teach the Stay Safe programme. The Learning Outcomes in Wellbeing have been developed to align with the Stay Safe programme, and the programme must still be taught.

### 6. What will be main topics to be taught in Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)? What has changed since 1999 curriculum?

The Wellbeing curriculum aims to provide children with a balanced, inclusive, age and developmentally appropriate understanding of human development and sexuality. This includes fostering healthy attitudes and relationships while recognising the diversity of human experience. Building on the [Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education RSE in primary and post-primary](#)

[schools \(2019\)](#), new areas of learning are included. For example, consent, digital wellbeing, and diversity of family structures, as well as a renewed focus on relationships, emotions and feelings.

The draft specification also recognises that many children are now older starting school and that, in some cases, children are experiencing puberty earlier. The curriculum supports teachers to make professional judgements and be responsive to the needs of the children in their class. Learning related to puberty can be taught as appropriate in stages 3 and/or 4.

**7. Is the same SPHE curriculum taught across all schools?**

Yes. While the curriculum will set out the topics to be taught, schools and teachers have flexibility to judge how and when topics should be taught, including the resources they use.

**8. How do NCCA ensure that the learning in Wellbeing is age and developmentally appropriate?**

In developing the curriculum, significant work goes into ensuring that learning is age and developmentally appropriate. A key part of NCCA's mission is to work in partnership with children, teachers, parents, school leaders and others. Decisions about what to include in the curriculum are based on national and international research and best practice, and have included a consultation with children; discussion and deliberations by NCCA's Council, Boards and the Wellbeing Development Group; and working with our networks, including the Schools Forum. In the finalised curriculum, account will also be taken of what we hear during our extensive consultations with parents/guardians, teachers and children/young people.