

Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals responding to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*

This template is intended to support you (and your colleagues/organisation) in developing a written submission in response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Please e-mail your completed submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Individual submission details

Name	
Date	
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Organisation submission details

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The NCCA will publish written submissions received during the consultation. The submissions will include the author's/contributor's name/organisation. Do you consent to this submission being posted online?

Yes

No

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC) is a non-governmental organisation which aims to prevent the harm and heal the trauma of rape and sexual abuse in Ireland. We have provided crisis counselling and long-term therapy services to adult women and men who have experienced rape, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse and have provided our expertise and experience for policy and advocacy purposes for over 40 years. Our services include a national 24-hour helpline and webchat, one-to-one counselling and support and accompaniment services for those reporting to An Garda Síochána or attending court. We make policy interventions and carry out public awareness campaigns to prevent sexual violence.

Our training programmes include *BodyRight* <https://www.drcc.ie/getinformed/education-and-training/bodyright/> developed by the DRCC, delivered to equip teachers, guidance counsellors, Youth Reach workers and others working in alternative education settings, to raise awareness about sexual violence, to assist in its prevention and to develop healthy relationships programmes. In response to the emerging needs of young people, recent years have seen the addition of modules addressing sexting, advertising, popular culture, pornography and the meaning of consent. The BodyRight Programme has mainly been delivered at secondary level but there are a number of primary school aged children who have completed the programme. In 2021 the programme will be developed further to include a specific version of BodyRight for primary school in consultation with educational settings that have been facilitating the programme at this level. This programme will be accessible to teachers at Stage 3 and 4 of primary school.

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured to align with the six key messages related to the framework. Each message is summarised as a support for you in working on the submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Section 1

Please outline your overall response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*.

This draft primary curriculum provides a framework which sets out the aims of the programme of education, highlighting the knowledge and understanding to be gained at each stage of the curriculum and how that knowledge and understanding is to be implemented and evaluated in terms of impact and achievement. Embedding the principles and competencies set out in the framework document into the entire curriculum represents a whole school approach to achieving the curriculum vision of providing every child with a strong foundation to thrive and flourish. Reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum provides an important opportunity to set out the learning journey of children during their primary education while at the same time forging connections with their future post-primary experience. It is also an opportunity to instil in children the nature and meaning of respect and its opposite, abuse and bullying, including sexual abuse. By instilling such knowledge and language, children may be better able to resist grooming and abuse, and to articulate and seek help for such abuse if it happens to them or within their families or environments. This is in accordance with protecting and promoting a child's fundamental human rights to education as well as to be free from abuse and violence.

The key competencies outlined in the framework document are wide-ranging and fit within the approach DRCC have adopted in working with educators of children on topics such as respect, boundaries and healthy relationships. Of the seven competencies we have focused on these four because of their correlation with our preventive work:

- **Being a digital learner**: educating young people on being responsible, respectful and safe when using online communication and educating them about the possible impacts of harmful online engagement is a key component of DRCC's prevention programmes for young people. While digital learning harnesses imagination and expands critical thinking and expression, DRCC recognises the potential for harm in children's exposure to the digital world. We support the inclusion of this competency in empowering children to be active digital citizens and thus developing their safe use of technology. This is an emerging priority and one that we would advocate for early exposure to positive messaging on communication, self-awareness and healthy relationships as tools to enable children to become critical consumers of the digital world;

- Communication and using language: effective, healthy and respectful communication underpin the ethos of DRCC's prevention programmes which would marry well with this competency;
- Fostering wellbeing: enriching children's self-awareness and resourcefulness is key to developing their ability to assess how they are feeling or how they might be impacted by particular behaviours. Supporting healthy relationships in real life, embedded within this competency, is a key objective of DRCC's youth programmes agenda where value is placed on positive and healthy relationships;
- Being an active citizen: this competency of imparting children with knowledge, skills and values to help them to participate and act in a world where they promote equality and are working towards empowering their own rights and the rights of others, clearly aligns with the protection and promotion of human rights including their right to be free from all forms of abuse and violence including sexual violence and unhealthy relationships. The framework clearly embodies human rights and social justice which is paramount in DRCC's vision and plans for children and young people. This will also encourage children to challenge cultural and social norms that are at odds with equality and human rights.

Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Be for every child.
- Recognise teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context.
- Give more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling to identify and respond to priorities and opportunities.
- Connect with different school contexts in the education system.
- Give greater opportunities for flexibility and choice for children's learning.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to agency and Flexibility in schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

With regard to the message in relation to agency and flexibility in schools, DRCC recognise the benefit to teachers and principals in having the flexibility to tailor the curriculum, to take into consideration alternative content approaches to use within diverse groups, provided that guiding principles are adequately laid out in the framework. This message reflects the importance of a needs based approach to children's learning provided it is contained within a general rights based framework focused on building a culture of self-respect and respect for others.

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Provide a clear vision for children’s learning across the eight years of primary school.
- Link with learning experiences provided through the themes of the *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and connect with the subjects, key skills and statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.
- Support educational transitions by connecting with what and how children learn at home, in preschool and post-primary school.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

Establishing and maintaining connections across the learning environments provide a cohesive and holistic approach to learning throughout a child’s lifetime in school or other educational settings. Alongside the building block basis on which to gradually layer knowledge in an age and stage appropriate manner for children and young people, is the need for guidance for educators as to how the sections of the curriculum interrelate across the educational settings from pre-school, primary to secondary level.

Emerging priorities for children’s learning

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Embed seven key competencies across children’s learning outcomes from junior infants to sixth class.
- Focus on developing children’s skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. The Learning Outcomes and the Key Competencies are broad in nature to describe this wider understanding of learning.
- Have increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning, and have new aspects such as Modern Foreign Languages, Technology, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, and a broader Arts Education.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to emerging priorities for children’s learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

Embedding the principles and competencies set out in the framework document throughout their curriculum at primary level is key to providing every child with a strong foundation in which to realise their potential.

DRCC fully supports an increased emphasis on SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning. Digital learning in particular is a priority area which we have encountered in our training of those working with children and young people. A recent addition to our BodyRight programme is a module on sexting. Feedback has shown that the module works well in raising the issue with young people and allowing them to consider the impact of how, once an image or record has been sent or re-sent, they cannot be sure where it may end up. Nor may they understand the harm that such an image can cause. Worrying feedback that arose was how children as young as 11 and 12 years of age are sexting which highlights the need for those in our primary schools to know why and how important it is, to stay safe online. Providing basic information at a young age establishes the foundation on which more complex knowledge can be built up over time. We cannot, and should not eliminate digital activity. Supervision and control can only be a partial answer. Children need and deserve education to understand how to read the digital world.

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Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Be broad and balanced in purpose and content.
- Be structured in five broad curriculum areas;
 - Language
 - Mathematics, Science and Technology Education
 - Wellbeing
 - Social and Environmental Education
 - Arts Education.

(In addition to the five areas above, the Patron's Programme is developed by a school's patron with the aim of contributing to the child's holistic development particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective and in the process, underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school. These areas connect to the themes of *Aistear* and to the subject-based work in Junior Cycle.)

- Provide for an integrated learning experience, with curriculum areas in Stages 1 and 2 (junior Infants – second Class) and more subject-based learning in Stages 3 and 4 (third class – sixth class).
- Use broad learning outcomes to describe the expected learning and development for children.
- Incorporate the new *Primary Language Curriculum / Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to changing how the curriculum is structured and presented. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

With regard to the message in relation to changing how the curriculum is structured and presented, DRCC, while mindful that time management will be an ongoing challenge for all that the curriculum must cover, would still advocate that the role and profile of wellbeing subjects should be elevated within the curriculum even if they are competing for time and space with more academic subjects. Wellbeing provide children and young people with knowledge, understanding and skill about trust, respect and communication to enhance their interpersonal relationships, now and into the future.

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

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Promote high quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Conceptualise assessment as an essential and critical part of teaching and learning.
- Highlight the importance of teachers’ professional judgement in supporting progression in children’s learning.
- Encourage teachers to make meaningful connections with children’s interests and experiences.
- Recognise the significance of quality relationships and their impact on children’s learning.
- Recognise the role and influence of parents and families in children’s education.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

With regard to this message, DRCC support the diversity of approaches and strategies for teaching and recognise the importance of teacher’s professional judgement in supporting the progression in children’s learning and how critical the relationship between the teacher and child is. However, this needs to be within an overall framework of principles and guidelines so that teachers have clarity on the outcomes that should be achieved.

DRCC would also recommend training for teachers in examining their own attitudes and beliefs in many areas and themes that arise in the curriculum because of the substantial evidence that exists of a high prevalence of bias and misunderstanding of what constitutes sexual violence in society. This is an aspect of our BodyRight training which facilitates educators to best prepare for teaching in an open-minded, non-judgemental way that is free from conscious or unconscious internal bias. Supporting teachers in training on this approach is an important feature of teaching and learning.

Connecting the curriculum to a child’s life in and outside school is vital. Involving the family in projects and themes throughout the curriculum ensures that children are further supported in their learning. This whole school and community approach is key in areas such as wellbeing where children are supported in learning from different sources and within different relationships.

Building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to the challenges and changing needs and priorities.

The 1999 curriculum contributed to many successes including:

- Enhanced enjoyment of learning for children.
- Increased use of active methodologies for teaching and learning.
- Improved attainment levels in reading, mathematics and science as evidenced in national and international assessments.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Address curriculum overload at primary level.
- Take stock of strategies, initiatives and programmes and clarify priorities for children’s learning.
- Link with *Aistear* and *the Framework for Junior Cycle*.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to challenges and changing needs and priorities. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

DRCC support the introduction of reviewing the methodologies used in the 1999 curriculum and believes that the review is urgent and overdue because of the very changed world in which that curriculum was set and the need to respond to needs and challenges present for children right now. We would advocate for more time being allocated to well-being, digital learning and personal development in the new curriculum to enable children to understand the relationship between self-respect and respect of others, rights and responsibilities and empower them to contribute positively to the society in which they grow up.

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.

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