



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

Oral language in early childhood and
primary education (children aged 3-8
years)

Invitation to Tender

Closing date: 22nd August 2011

Contact: tenders@ncca.ie

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Introduction

Section One of this document provides the context for, and details of, the proposed research. Section Two provides important information for those tendering for the work, and details of how to tender.

Section One

The NCCA

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education and for primary and post-primary schools. Full details of the organisation and its remit can be found on www.ncca.ie.

In line with its current strategic plan, the Council is inviting tenders for this integrative review of research on oral language in early childhood and primary education to support the development of a new language curriculum for primary schools, beginning with the infant classes. The NCCA is also seeking tenders for a review of research on

- literacy in early childhood and primary education
- theory, principles and outcomes of an integrated language curriculum.

The invitations to tender for all three reviews are on the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie/en/Current_Tenders.

Background to the research

Language in the Primary School Curriculum

Language is one of seven curriculum areas in the [Primary School Curriculum](#)¹ (1999), and the curriculum acknowledges the vital role language plays in children's development, and the crucial relationship between language and learning in all curriculum areas. The language area includes two subjects: English and Gaeilge (Irish) which are taught in all primary school classes. These subjects are taught in three

¹Text underlined (and in blue) signifies a hyperlink to an online publication or online information. URLs for all web references are listed on page 16, to facilitate those reading hard copy.

different school contexts: English-medium schools in which English is the home language of the children and the principal medium of instruction; Gaeltacht schools where Irish is, typically, the language of the home and the medium of instruction in school; and scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge, where Irish may or may not be the language of the home but where it is the medium of instruction in school. There are two curricula for Gaeilge, one for schools where English is the medium of instruction and another for schools where Irish is the medium of instruction. All primary schools teach the same English curriculum.

Approximately 500 primary schools (15%) participate in the [Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative \(MLPSI\)](#). The languages taught are French, German, Spanish and Italian. Participating schools offer one of these languages to children in 5th and 6th classes. The NCCA has published *Draft Curriculum Guidelines* and *Teacher Guidelines for Modern Languages in Primary Schools* for teachers and schools involved in the Initiative.

In primary schools in Ireland there has been an increase in the number of children whose home language is neither English nor Irish. Approximately 10% of pupils in primary schools and 8% of pupils in post-primary schools come from families who have migrated to Ireland. Language support teachers are appointed to assist schools in meeting the needs of children for whom English is an additional language. The NCCA has produced guidelines for teachers: [English as an additional language in Irish Primary Schools](#). The EAL guidelines were developed to support principals and teachers in planning and implementing the curriculum for all.

While Irish Sign Language (ISL) is not included in the Primary School Curriculum, provision for students learning through ISL or other sign languages, including interpreting services, was defined as a support service for the purposes of the Education Act, 1998². Post primary students sitting the Leaving Certificate Applied can choose to follow modules in ISL, which are assessed as part of the overall Leaving Certificate award.

² From <http://www.deaf.ie/> accessed 19/04/2011

Current work on language in the Primary School Curriculum³

The Primary School Network was set up in 2008 to respond to challenges identified in the Primary Curriculum Review. In the area of language, the work began with *Curaclam na Gaeilge*, and focused on developing classroom approaches and strategies to support and monitor progression in the children's language learning. A number of video examples have been published on www.ncca.ie showing how the teachers gather evidence of progress, and encourage children to set their own goals for language learning. The NCCA's work on language with schools and teachers continues to focus on supporting progression, throughout the school year and across classes.

Communicating is one of the four themes in [Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework](#). The NCCA has begun to work with a small number of early childhood settings, including infant classes in primary schools, to gather examples of *Aistear* in action. Some of these examples will focus on the work of practitioners supporting children's learning through the theme of communicating, for example on supporting children's language and literacy development through the methodology of play and how this interfaces with more direct teaching.

The NCCA has recently published a commissioned desktop study *Effective language teaching: a synthesis of research* which synthesises research in the area of second language teaching and learning with a focus on classroom practice. The study identified practices that are considered effective for second language learners in contexts similar to primary schools in Ireland. The report also includes additional general principles for effective language teaching drawn from descriptive qualitative research.

In June 2010, Council signalled a move from review to reconstruction of two aspects of the curriculum—the Language Curriculum and the Infant Curriculum. Children's development of language and literacy in the first two years in primary school is a natural starting point for this work (see the document [Primary School Curriculum: Mapping the Developments](#)). The NCCA [submission to the Department of Education and Skills \(DES\) Draft Plan](#) to improve numeracy and literacy in schools noted that the

³ See Appendix 4 (page 24) for information on curriculum review and development by the NCCA which outlines the background to the work on reconstructing the curriculum for language.

language curriculum should provide a common structure for planning appropriate language experiences in all languages for all children in infant classes.

The NCCA is currently carrying out a comparative analysis of language curricula, for children from three years old to the end of compulsory education, across jurisdictions, gathering information on priorities for language teaching and learning, the structure of the curriculum, the articulation of targets, expectations, outcomes and/or standards, and assessment⁴.

In 2011, the NCCA is also asking, 'What's a primary education for?' Members of the public are invited to 'have your say' on the purpose of primary education in 100 words or less. This information will be used by NCCA to inform changes to the primary curriculum beginning with language in the infant classes. The invitation to 'have your say' and a collection of podcasts representing a range of perspectives on primary education are published online at: www.childrentheirlivetheirlearning.ie.

Other relevant research and policy developments

The work of the NCCA to develop the language curriculum for the first years of primary school is taking place in the context of a number of other recent publications and policy developments, and these will frame the work. They include

- [*Better Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People – A Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools*](#) (DES, November 2010)
- [*Incidental Inspection Findings 2010. A Report on the Teaching and Learning of English and Mathematics in Primary Schools*](#) (DES, November 2010)
- [*The 2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading*](#) (ERC, November 2010)
- [*20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language*](#) (Government of Ireland, December 2010)
- [*PISA 2009: The Performance and Progress of 15-year-olds in Ireland*](#) (ERC, December 2010)

⁴ A draft of this work can be made available to the successful tenderer(s).

The proposed research

The proposed research paper will help shape the theoretical background for oral language in an integrated curriculum for language in primary schools. In doing this, the paper will focus on children aged 3-8 years. A clear theoretical framework for children's oral language development should be described which is grounded in the most relevant literature and research. The paper should include sources produced in the past decade and should also reflect current thinking in the field. Qualitative and quantitative research and findings from other research reviews should be considered, as appropriate. The final report should answer the key questions below and provide a relevant source of information for the NCCA in developing a new language curriculum for primary schools and for all educators concerned with these questions.

Key questions

The research should address the following key areas and questions:

Theoretical perspectives

1. What are the theoretical perspectives underpinning recent and current research and reflection on children's oral language development?
2. Does current and recent research propose distinct stages in children's oral language development? If so, how are these defined and what are the essential indicators and skills at each stage (*including, but not limited to vocabulary, morphology, complexity, fluency, pragmatics*)?

Practice

3. According to research, what are the features of good oral language pedagogy for children aged 3-8 years
 - a) at individual teacher/classroom level?
 - b) at school level?
 - c) through partnerships with parents and the wider community?

4. In the case of each of the above, what strategies does research highlight as being particularly effective in supporting children's oral language development in different language learning contexts including children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, children whose first language is not the language of instruction, and children experiencing language delay/difficulties?
5. What practical advice does the research offer on assessing and planning for progression in children's oral language development (with reference, where relevant, to the stages in Q2)
 - a) at teacher/classroom level?
 - b) at school level?

Curriculum integration

6. How can teachers ensure that children's oral language development supports their literacy development?
7. How can children's oral language development be promoted across the breadth of the curriculum?

The structure of the research paper

The paper should be organised and structured around the categories of key questions above. Its concluding section should draw together the important messages across the questions and discuss their implications for NCCA's work in developing an integrated language curriculum for early childhood and primary education. As part of the paper, the researchers should also provide a glossary of terms.

Timescale

Action	Completion Dates (2011)
Issue request for tender	Friday, 17 th June
Receive all tenders	Monday, 22 nd August
Evaluate tenders/shortlist	Wednesday, 24 th August
Award contract	Friday, 26 th August
Complete plan of work	Monday, 26 th September
Complete interim report	Tuesday, 1 st November
Complete final report	Monday, 5 th December
Present completed report to NCCA (team, committees, Council)	Approximately three dates, TBD*

* Based on the schedule of NCCA team and committee meetings.

The final report

The final report should be a proofed MS Word document, in English, submitted in electronic and hard copy by the agreed date. The final report, and any interim reports, should be presented using the template that will be provided by NCCA, and a full reference list should be included.

Researchers will be asked to present their findings to the NCCA or to a nominated sub-committee on agreed dates as part of the research contract.

The researcher(s)

It is likely that the person(s) commissioned to undertake this work will have expertise and experience in the area of children's oral language development and will have previously published in the area, or have publications currently in a review process. In the case of a proposal from more than one researcher, at least one of the team will be required to meet this criterion.

Working with the NCCA

While all research work conducted for the NCCA falls under the responsibility of the Chief Executive, designated NCCA contact persons will be appointed on the award of the contract. These contacts will provide the researcher(s) with all relevant information in support of the work and receive all interim and draft reports. In the case of some research projects, more regular contact between the NCCA contact persons and the researcher(s) may be necessary. In such cases, the contact arrangements will be specified at the time of the contract.

The final report should be submitted to the CEO. The NCCA is not responsible for negotiating access to reports (for those projects where this is relevant) nor for sourcing texts etc.

Publication of research conducted for the NCCA

You will note in Section Two that the end product of the study is the property of the NCCA. However, the publication of funded research, whether in journals, book chapters or conference presentations is encouraged. In such cases the Council asks that it be notified in advance, that its funding of the study be acknowledged in the publication or presentation and that no such dissemination by the researchers be undertaken until 6 months after the submission of the final report. This is to allow for the implications of the research to be considered by Council in its role on advising the Minister for Education and Skills.

Web references (URLs)

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

<http://www.ncca.ie/earlychildhood>

Better Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/pr_literacy_numeracy_national_plan_2010.pdf

Curriculum Overload in Primary Schools: Experiences and reflections from the Learning Site

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Publications/Reports/Curriculum_Overload_in_primary_schools_Experiences_and_reflections_from_the_learning_site.pdf

EAL guidelines

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Inclusion/English_as_an_Additional_Language/Inclusion_-_English_as_an_Additional_Language.html

Effective language teaching: a synthesis of research

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Publications/Reports/Effective_language_teaching_a_synthesis_of_research.pdf

Incidental Inspection Findings 2010. A Report on the Teaching and Learning of English and Mathematics in Primary Schools

http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/insp_incidental_inspection_findings_2010.pdf?language=EN

Language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/PSN_Language/Language_and_Literacy_in_Irish-medium_Schools/

Modern Languages in the Primary School Curriculum: Feasibility and futures

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/PSN%20Language/Modern_languages/Mod_Langs_in_PSC_Feasibility_and_futures.pdf

Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI)

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/PSN_Language/Modern_languages/

NCCA submission to the DES Draft Plan

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Publications/Other_Publications/Better_Literacy_and_Numeracy_for_Children_and_Young_People_NCCA_Submission.pdf

PISA 2009: The Performance and Progress of 15-year-olds in Ireland

http://www.erc.ie/documents/p09national_summary_report2009.pdf

Primary School Curriculum

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/Download_Primary_School_Curriculum/

Primary School Curriculum: Mapping the Developments

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/PSC_mapping_developments.pdf

Re-presented content objectives in Irish and English

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/PSN_Curriculum_Overload/Re-presentation_of_the_PSC/

Review of the Primary School Curriculum

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/Primary_Curriculum_Review_PCR_/Primary_Curriculum_Review1.html

Structure of the English Curriculum: Additional support material

<http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/PCRsupportmaterials.pdf>

The 2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading. Final report.

http://www.erc.ie/documents/na2009_report.pdf

20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language (Government of Ireland, December 2010)

<http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/Strategy/StrategyEnglish.pdf>

Section Two

How to tender

Researchers interested in undertaking this work should submit a proposal of not more than one thousand words describing how they would undertake the work, taking account of section one above. The proposal should outline how each of the key questions on pages 12 and 13 will be addressed, and specify the main topics or aspects of children's oral language development that will be treated.

A statement of cost should be included. All costs to be quoted in Euro. Prices quoted in the tender cannot be increased during the currency of the tender. VAT, where applicable, should be shown separately.

In addition to the proposal, the researcher(s) should submit relevant curriculum vitae of each of the researchers to be involved in the work. Experience and expertise of particular significance for the project should be highlighted.

The following should also be included:

- Name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the tenderer.
- Name of contact person dealing with the tender if different from the above.
- Name, address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address of any other person(s) involved in the tender and their role.
- A statement from the tenderer that none of the excluding circumstances listed in paragraph 1 of Article 20 of EU Council Directive 93/96/EEC (co-ordinating procedures for the award of public supply contracts) applies to him/her – See Appendix 1
- Confirmation of acceptance of the Terms and Conditions of Contract as detailed in Appendix 2.

Submission of tenders

Completed tenders should reach the NCCA on email no later than **5.00pm on Monday, August 22nd 2011**. Please submit tenders by email to tenders@ncca.ie.

Tenderers are reminded that responsibility for the delivery of the reply remains with the tenderer and that proposals received after the final date and time specified for receipt of tenders will not be considered. There is no charge associated with NCCA tender processes and the NCCA does not accept responsibility for information relayed (or not relayed) via third parties.

Evaluation of Tenders

Evaluation of tenders will take place on Wednesday, August 24th. The criteria by which the tenders will be evaluated, and the marks to be awarded are shown in Appendix 3.

Contract

A contract will be concluded with the researcher(s) whose tenders are deemed to be the most advantageous in terms of the criteria as stated in this document. The contract will not be concluded/take effect until 14 days after unsuccessful tenderers have been notified of the result of this tendering process.

Information and query handling

Every effort has been made to ensure that this documentation contains all the necessary information for completion of tenders. Requests for additional information, clarification on the content of this document and all other queries of substance (other than in relation to purely factual or procedural matters) must be made by email to tenders@ncca.ie. In the interests of equity, responses to queries will be published on www.ncca.ie/en/Current_Tenders.

All queries should be submitted by email before close of business on **Friday, August 12th** to enable issue of responses to all interested applicants.

Please ensure that you enter *Commissioned research paper on oral language development* in the subject field. It is NCCA practice to delete emails unless an obvious topic is placed in the subject line. Responses will be circulated to all interested parties. The identity of a person making a query will not be disclosed when circulating the response.

Appendix 1

Extract from Article 20, Paragraph 1 of EU Council Directive 93/36/EEC of 14th June 1993 co-ordinating procedures for the award of public supply contracts

Article 20

1. Any supplier may be excluded from participation in the contract who:
 - (a) is bankrupt or is being wound up, whose affairs are being administered by the court, who has entered into an arrangement with creditors, who has suspended business activities or who is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure under national laws and regulations;
 - (b) is the subject of proceedings for a declaration of bankruptcy, for an order for compulsory winding up or administration by the court or for an arrangement with creditors or of any other similar proceedings under national laws and regulations;
 - (c) has been convicted of an offence concerning his professional conduct by a judgement which has the force of *res judicata*;
 - (d) has been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authorities can justify;
 - (e) has not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which he is established or with those of the country of the contracting authority;
 - (f) has not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which he is established or those of the country of the contracting authority;
 - (g) is guilty of serious misrepresentation in supplying the information required under this Chapter.

Appendix 2

Terms and Conditions of Contract

1. The Invitation to Tender is issuing to a number of potentially suitable individuals and groups.
2. The NCCA does not bind itself to accept the lowest or any tender. It reserves the right to reject in whole or in part any or all tenders received.
3. Under the terms of the Tax Clearance Certification Scheme evidence from the Irish Revenue Commissioners that the successful tender's tax affairs are in order will need to be provided before the award of the contract. Where a Tax Clearance expires within the course of the contract, the NCCA reserves the right to seek a renewed certificate. All payments under the contract will be conditional on the contractor(s) being in possession of a valid certificate at all times.
4. Tenderers must be in good financial and professional standing. Tenderers to which any of the circumstances listed in paragraph 1 of Article 20 of EU Council Directive 93/36/ECC apply will be excluded from the competition. Such circumstances are set out at Appendix 1.
5. A statutory deduction of Withholding Tax at source may apply on the total invoiced. Withholding tax does not represent an additional tax, but rather a payment of tax on account.
6. A contract entered into on foot of this Invitation to Tender is subject to the Prompt Payments of Accounts Act.
7. This NCCA undertakes to hold confidential any information provided by the tenderer subject to the NCCA's obligations under law including the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, 1997. Should the tenderer wish that any of the information supplied should not be disclosed because of its sensitivity, the tenderer should, when providing the information, identify same and specify reasons for its sensitivity. The NCCA will consult with the tenderer about this sensitive information before making a decision on any Freedom of Information request received. If tenderers consider that none of the information supplied by them is sensitive, they should make a statement to that effect. Such information may be released in response to an FOI request.

8. The NCCA requires that all information pursuant to this Invitation to Tender will be treated in strict confidence. Under no circumstances may information be disclosed to other parties without the express permission of the NCCA.
9. Ethics in Public Office – Any registrable interest involving the tenderer and members of the Government, members of the Oireachtas, employees of the NCCA or their relatives must be fully disclosed in response to the Invitation to Tender. If such information becomes known subsequent to submission of the tender and before the award of the contract, it must be communicated immediately to the NCCA. The terms “registrable interest” and “relative” shall be interpreted as per Section 2 of the Ethics in Public Office Act, 1995.
10. The NCCA will not be liable in respect of any costs incurred in the preparation of tenders.
11. The successful tenderer shall be responsible for the delivery of all services provided for within the contract on the basis of a fixed price agreement set at the beginning of the contract. Similarly, terms and conditions cannot be altered.
12. The NCCA retains the right to withhold payment where a contractor has failed to meet his/her contractual obligations in relation to the delivery of all services provided for under the terms of the contract to an acceptable level of quality.
13. Tenders which are delivered late will not be considered and tenders which are incomplete will be rejected.
14. The award of a tender does not give rise to any enforceable rights by the successful tenderer. The NCCA may cancel the process at any time prior to a contract being entered into. In the event that the project must be revised or abandoned, provisions for termination of contracts will be made without undue costs being incurred by the NCCA. The NCCA reserves the right to go to tender again.
15. The successful contractor shall be responsible for the delivery of all work provided for within the contract on the basis of a fixed price agreement set at the beginning of the contract.
16. The NCCA reserves the right to update or alter any information contained in this document at any time. In the event that any addition or amendments to the Invitation to Tender, as set out in this document, be deemed necessary prior to the closing date for receipt of proposals, these will be issued to applicants in the

form of supplementary documents and will form part of the Request for Tendering.

17. The successful tenderer will be obliged to complete all work and submit it to the NCCA according to a schedule as shall be laid down in the agreed contract.
18. With the exception of research projects, the NCCA will remain the sole owner of all end-products, e.g. reports, training manuals, etc, irrespective of whether or not the project is terminated prior to its completion.
19. Any conflict of interpretation arising from differences between the wording used in this Invitation to Tender and in any proposal accepted shall be resolved by giving priority to this Invitation to Tender and then to any conditions imposed by the NCCA in writing when accepting this proposal.
20. The work carried out by the tenderer, irrespective of where their offices are located shall be deemed to be carried out in Ireland and shall be governed by the laws of Ireland.

Appendix 3

Rubric for evaluating research tenders

All of the requirements of the specification have been met	Yes	No
		Specify what is missing

Area	Total Mark	Mark	Comments
<p>Relevance</p> <p>The proposal shows evidence of reflection on the requirements of the specification taking due account of the broader purposes of the study. It addresses the research questions. The theoretical perspective(s) to be considered are identified.</p>	30		
<p>Design</p> <p>The criteria for selection of sources are made explicit and are appropriate. There is a strong relationship between the research questions and the proposed sources of evidence. The phases of work are clearly outlined.</p>	20		
<p>Researchers</p> <p>At least one of the research team has a published track record in the area.</p>	20		
<p>Quality of the writing</p> <p>The proposal is well constructed and written with clarity and coherence.</p>	20		
<p>Value for Money</p> <p>The overall cost of the research appears reasonable relative to the design and the scale of the study. A detailed breakdown of costs is provided for the different components of work.</p>	10		

Marking guide

Mark Range	Breakdown - guide	
0-10	0-3 4-7 8-10	little evidence presented in the proposal some evidence presented in the proposal considerable evidence presented in the proposal
0-20	0-6 8-14 16-20	little evidence presented in the proposal some evidence presented in the proposal considerable evidence presented in the proposal
0-30	0-7 8-15 16-21 22-30	very little evidence presented in the proposal some evidence presented in the proposal considerable evidence presented the evidence presented is of a high quality and is persuasive

Appendix 4

Curriculum review and development

This appendix describes, in chronological order, a number of reports and developments which set the scene for Council's decision to begin work on reconstructing the curriculum for language, beginning with infant classes:

- findings relating to Gaeilge and English in two phases of curriculum review
- NCCA work on language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools
- a report on the feasibility and future of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum
- the impact of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and
- findings from work with teachers exploring curriculum overload.

Another key factor in that decision was that although the *Primary School Curriculum* was informed by research of its time, much additional research has been published during the last decade in the areas of reading, writing and oral language. It is timely to explore the messages from research to inform us in addressing the curriculum and assessment challenges concerning children's language and literacy that arose from our curriculum reviews and current work in language in primary schools.

The NCCA carried out two phases of [review of the Primary School Curriculum](#) in 2005 and 2008 and has engaged with teachers and schools about the Primary School Curriculum on an on-going basis through teachers involved in the Primary School Network. A number of overlapping themes emerged across all six subjects reviewed during the two first two phases in 2006 and 2008. These included

- requirement for greater support in using a range of teaching methods
- requirement for greater support in using a variety of assessment methods
- curriculum overload.

In English, teachers identified the organisation of the English Curriculum according to overarching strands as a key challenge, and in response the NCCA published [Structure of the English Curriculum: Additional support material](#) providing an alternative structure using oral language, reading and writing. Other challenges relating to English that emerged in the review included mechanical reading of texts, insufficient emphasis

on the writing process, overdependence on workbook activities and the underutilisation of ICT.

Analysis of data about *Curaclam na Gaeilge* showed that although children are responding favourably to the communicative approach, a range of challenges have emerged. These include an overemphasis on communication to the detriment of correct structure, difficulties assessing children's speaking and listening skills, a limited range of language experiences for children and the use of two phonetic codes, one for Irish and one for English, in primary classrooms.

A review of literature and consultation on the development of children's [language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools](#), initiated by NCCA in 2006, revealed a variety of practices. Challenges highlighted were a reported lack of appropriate assessment instruments, a need for language support assistants, disparity between the curriculum for English and for Gaeilge (L1), the need for both pre-service and in-service professional development for teachers and a dearth of relevant research.

In 2008, the NCCA published [Modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum: Feasibility and Futures](#). This recommended that a language awareness or language education approach be adopted for all schools, in light of the challenges for Irish and English emerging through curriculum review and the changing linguistic landscape in Ireland. It suggested that this approach would address the commonalities and differences in the English Curriculum and *Curaclam na Gaeilge*; would differentiate for children for whom English is an additional language and would take account of the many languages and cultures present in our classrooms and communities today. The report noted that this approach would not preclude schools from sustaining or adopting a modern language competence model where capacity exists for it.

[Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework](#) for all children from birth to six years was published in October 2009. *Aistear* is informed by a significant body of evidence and research, much of which emerged since the publication of the Primary School Curriculum in 1999. *Aistear* builds on, enriches and extends the Infant Curriculum, and while there is much synergy between the two, there are also significant differences. These relate principally to how we, as a society, view children as young

learners, how contemporary theories and research describe how children learn and develop in their early childhood years, and how adults can support and nurture that learning. *Aistear* organises children's learning around four interconnected themes, rather than subjects, and communicating is one of these themes.

At the same time the NCCA began to tease-out the issue of 'lack of time' (for curriculum coverage and to meet the needs of all children), which teachers identified as a key challenge to curriculum implementation across all subjects in both reviews. Language and literacy were identified as clear priorities for children's primary education. As part of that engagement, the curriculum content objectives in [Irish and English were re-presented](#) in various formats for teachers and feedback was sought. The report, [Experiences and reflections from the Learning Site](#) notes that teachers preferred when the existing strand units in English and Irish were set aside and alternative structures focusing on development, skills, and other categories were used. Many respondents described the curriculum for both English and Gaeilge as vague and confusing, saying it was not clear what children were expected to learn, and reported gaps and inconsistencies in both.