Written Submissions

Consultation on Curriculum Structure and Time

primary developments
foráis sa bhunscolaíocht

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

Written Submissions

Written submissions are an important part of the NCCA consultation process. During consultation NCCA received 107 written submissions in total, 74 of which have permission for printing in this publication.

Aighneachtaí Scríofa

Is cuid thábhachtach de phróiseas comhairliúcháin an CNCM iad na haighneachtaí scríofa. Le linn an chomhairliúcháin fuair an CNCM 107 aighneacht scríofa ar fad. Fuaireamar cead 74 díobh siúd a chuir ar fáil san fhoilseachán seo.

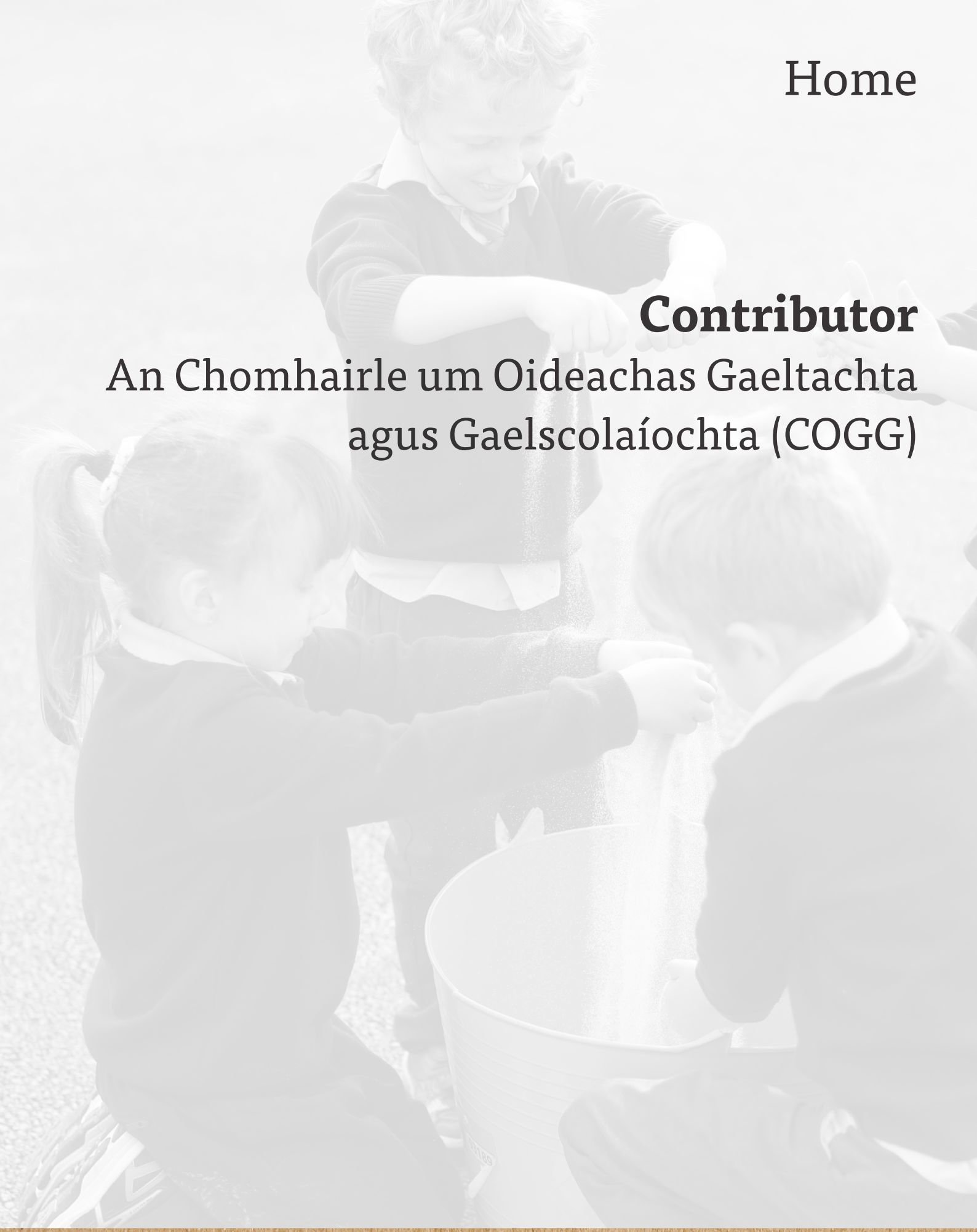
Contributors

1. An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
2. Anne Dolan
3. Association for Drama in Education in Ireland (ADEI)
4. Association of Childhood Professionals
5. Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS)
6. Brian Russell
7. Bridget Heffernan
8. Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA)
9. Catholic Schools Partnership
10. Ciara Fagan
11. Claire O'Callaghan
12. Clare Finnerty
13. CPSMA Council, Ossory Diocese
14. Curriculum Working Group, Institute of Education, DCU
15. Daniel O'Connell
16. Dermot Lane
17. DICE Project
18. Diocese of Elphin
19. Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin
20. Diocese of Killaloe
21. Diocese of Ossory RE Advisors for Primary School
22. Dorothy Morrissey
23. Dr Cliona Murphy, Dr Greg Smith and Ms Nicola Broderick
24. Dr Susan Pike and Mr Joe Usher
25. Early Childhood Education Group
26. Early Childhood Ireland
27. Elizabeth Mee
28. European Physical Education Association
29. EQUATE
30. Fr Michael O'Meara
31. Feale Biodiversity
32. Francis Nolan
33. Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood
34. Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)
35. Gerard Nash
36. Grainne Kavanagh
37. HSE Health and Wellbeing Division
38. History Education Team, DCU Institute of Education
39. Institute of Public Health in Ireland
40. Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)
41. Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA)
42. Joseph McMahon
43. Kinnitty National School
44. Knocknagree National School 1
45. Knocknagree National School 2
46. Lenore Mulvihill
47. Lifeways Ireland CLG
48. Máire Ní Mhaitiú
49. Margaret Buckley
50. Martin O'Brien
51. Mary Regan
52. Maurice Hurley
53. Mary Immaculate College
54. National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education
55. National Association of Primary Diocesan

Contributors

Advisers

56. Paula Kelly
57. Physical Education, Physical Activity, Youth Sports (PEPAYS Ireland)
58. Physical Education Unit, Institute of Education, Dublin City University
59. PLÉ Ireland
60. Rev Dr Seán Corkery
61. Richard Casey
62. Royal Society of Chemistry
63. Sligo School Project
64. Safefood
65. Science Foundation Ireland
66. Scoil Bhride
67. Scoil Mhuire Girls' National School
68. SPHE Network
69. St Fiacc's National School
70. St John Bosco Senior Boys' School
71. St Laurence's National School
72. St Mary's Parish Primary School
73. St Patrick's National School
74. St Vincent's Girls' National School



Contributor

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)

Aighneacht: Struchtúr agus Leithdháileadh Ama i gCuraclam Athfhorbartha Bunscoile -

Fáiltíonn an An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) roimh an gcuireadh aighneacht a chur faoi bhráid na Comhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta maidir le na Moltaí le haghaidh comhairliúcháin i dtaca le struchtúr agus leithdháileadh ama i gcuraclam athfhorbartha na bunscoile.

Aontaíonn COGG go bhfuil athruithe suntasacha tagtha ar shochaí na hÉireann le fiche bliain anuas agus fáiltíonn siad roimh an taighde a rinneadh ar fhoghlaim agus ar fhorbairt leanaí i mblianta na luath-óige agus na bunscolaíochta atá mar bhonn eolais leis na moltaí atá á phlé.

Is liosta le háireamh na treoirlínte agus moltaí atá curtha ar fáil chun tacú le múinteoirí Curaclam na Bunscoile a chur i bhfeidhm i gcaitheamh na seacht mbliana déag ó foilsíodh an curaclam chun freagairt dos na héilimh agus na hionchais atá i bhfearann oideachais atá ag síor athrú, Ní haon ionadh gur thuairiscigh múinteoirí in gurbh é ró- ualach curaclaim – an iomarca le déanamh agus gan dóthain ama chuige- na constaici ba mhó a bhí le hábhair an churaclaim a chur i ngníomh (CNCM 2017:3) 'Tá sé iarrtha ag múinteoirí nach mbeadh an curaclam chomh plódaithe céanna, agus go leagfaí níos mó béime ar chleachtadh agus ar thacú le dul chun cinn na bpáistí ó thaobh foghlama agus forbartha de' (Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile 2015:9)

Tagann COGG leis an moladh gur gá féachaint athuair ar churaclam na bunscoile agus an cheist seo a leanas a chur: *conas is féidir é a fheabhsú chun tacú le foghlaim leanaí sna deich mbliana atá romhainn amach? (CNCM 2017:5)*

Bunaíodh an Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) i 2002 faoi fhorálach Alt 31 den Acht Oideachais (1998) le go mbeadh sainstruchtúr ann le freastal a dhéanamh ar riachtanais oideachais na scoileanna Gaeltachta agus lán-Ghaeilge.

Feidhmeanna reachtúla:

- Soláthar téacsleabhar agus acmhainní do mhúineadh trí Ghaeilge a phleanáil agus a chomheagrú
- Comhairle a chur ar an Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta maidir le cur ar fail agus cur chun cinn oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge
- Seirbhísí taca a chur ar fail trí mheán na Gaeilge
- Taighde a dhéanamh ar ábhar a bhaineann leis na cúraim sin
- Soláthar téacsleabhar agus acmhainní do mhúineadh na Gaeilge a phleanáil agus a chomheagrú
- Comhairle a thabhairt don Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta maidir le nithe a bhaineann le múineadh na Gaeilge, le hoideachas a chur ar fail trí mheán na Gaeilge agus riachtanais oideachais na ndaoine a chónaíonn i limistéar Gaeltachta

Is sa chomhthéacs seo gur mian le COGG na tuairimí a leanas maidir le struchtúr an churaclaim agus leithdhaileadh ama a chur faoi bhráid na CNCM

D'aithin an straitéis litearthachta agus uimhearthachta 2011 go raibh riachtanais foghlama an éagsúil ag foghlaimeoirí i scoileanna Gaeilge agus moladh go mbeadh siad ag forbairt a gcumais chun bogadh go héasca idir an dá theanga agus a gcumais lena bhfoghlaim litearthachta a aistriú ó theanga amháin go dtí an ceann eile. (ROE, 2011: 12)

Sonraíodh i dTuarascáil an Phríomchigire 2010- 2012 ‘go raibh deacrachtaí ag baint le cáilíocht an teagaisc don Ghaeilge sa chúigiú cuid de na ceachtanna a ndearnadh iniúchadh orthu le linn cigireachtaí teagmhasacha agus go raibh deacrachtaí ag baint le cáilíocht fhoghlama na teanga ag daltaí i thart ar an ceathrú cuid (24%) de na ceachtanna sin’ (ROE,2012:51)

Is léir go bhfuil go leor dúshláin le sarú ag scoileanna ó thaobh teagasc na Gaeilge. Aithníonn an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge, arb é ceann dá príomhaidhmeanna seasamh na Gaeilge sa chóras oideachais a neartú go bhfuil ‘an córas oideachais ar cheann de na príomhmhodhanna chun an cumas teanga a chothú. Sa scolaíocht fhoirmiúil, tá an Stát ábalta cuidiú go gníomhach le cumas teanga ár ndaoine a fhorbairt. Is sprioc lárnach é mar sin go n-éireodh leis na húdaráis oideachais fócas náisiúnta níos córasaí agus níos dlúithe a bhaint amach ó thaobh fhoghlaim na Gaeilge.’

Tá tús suntasach curtha leis an obair feabhas a chur ar cháilíocht theagaisc agus fhoghlama na Gaeilge inár mbunscoileanna le Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile ina bhfuil torthaí foghlama soiléire agus acmhainní tacaíochta do mhúinteoirí forbartha ag an CNCM á chur i bhfeidhm ó Naíonáin go Rang 2. Aithnítear go bhfuil bonn dearfach curtha ag Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile faoi sealbhú na délitearthachta i ngach suíomh scoile agus gur choir tógáil ar seo.

Tugann Ar bPolasaí Gaeilge(Gaelscoileanna) suntas do thuairimí Kenner & Gregory (2003) gur féidir le páistí óga a bheith il-liteartha agus go nglactar leis mar chuid nádúrtha d’fhorbairt na litearthachta i go leor suímh go hidirnáisiúnta. Beidh buntáiste ag an bpáiste dátheangach mar go mbeidh bua na délitearthachta aige/ aici. Is é atá i gceist leis sin dáiríre ná go mbeidh ar a c(h)umas aistriú ó theanga amháin go teanga eile ar chúiseanna éagsúla. Tá tagairt ag Ó hÁiniféin (2008:18) do sainmhíniú ar an Délitearthacht “The ability to speak, read and write easily in both languages and also the ability to move fluently between languages are part of dual literacy” Glactar leis go bhfuil an traschur ó theanga go teanga intuigthe sa Churaclam Teanga ach molann COGG go bhfuil sé den riachtanas cur chuige agus treoir chinnte ó thaobh na délitearthacht a bheith sonrach san Curaclam Athfhorbartha Bunscoile mar gheall ar na buntáistí a bhaineann leis, i scoileanna ina bhfuil an Béarla mar mheán teagaisc chomh maith le scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta.

Tumoideachas

Maíonn Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile ‘Ar mhaithe le cleachtas an tumoideachais i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus lán-Ghaeilge a éascú d’fhoghlaimeoirí Gaeilge agus chun tacú d’fhorbairt chumais i dteanga an chainteora dúchais, beidh sé de rogha ag na scoileanna seo tréimhse tumoideachais iomláin a fheidhmiú go dtí deireadh rang na naíonán sinsearach, faoi réir ag faomhadh bhord bainistíochta na scoile agus tar éis dul i gcomhairle leis an bpátrún, le múinteoirí, agus le cumann na dtuismitheoirí. Ní thosófar ar mhúineadh an Bhéarla agus scileanna foirmiúla litearthachta in T2 na scoile go dtí tar éis tréimhse tumoideachais iomlán a shocraíonn an scoil’ (CNCM 2015:43)

Tá dúshláin shuntasacha roimh scoileanna i limistéir Ghaeltachta. Áitítear sa tuarascáil *Iniúchadh ar an gCumas Dátheangach: An sealbhú teanga i measc ghlúin óg na Gaeltachta* go bhfuil riachtanais oideachais ar leith ag teastáil ó chainteoirí dúchais Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht, murab ionann agus na riachtanais atá ag gnáthfhoghlaimeoirí Gaeilge sa chuid eile den tír. Leagann an tAcht Oideachais, 1998, béim ar fhreagrachtaí na scoileanna i limistéir Ghaeltachta chun cur le cothabháil na Gaeilge mar phríomhtheanga phobail.

Beidh Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 an chéad straitéis chuimsitheach riamh don oideachas sa Ghaeltacht ó bhunú an Stáit i leith. á chur i bhfeidhm sna scoileanna Gaeltachta ó Meán Fhomhair 2017 chun dul i ngleic leis na riachtanais ar leith atá ag scoileanna sna limistéir Ghaeltachta. Aithníonn an Polasaí an ról atá ag scoileanna agus suíomhanna luathbhlianta chun

oideachas ardchaighdeáin trí mheán na Gaeilge a sholáthar agus chun inniúlacht agus úsáid na Gaeilge a chothú sa phobal Gaeltachta i gcoitinne.

'Leanann úsáid an Bhéarla de bheith ag méadú i limistéir Ghaeltachta. Dá bhrí sin, is mionlach laistigh de scoileanna Gaeltachta iad leanaí a tógadh trí Ghaeilge anois. Is amhlaidh go mbíonn éilimh éagsúla ann i measc tuismitheoirí maidir leis an teanga teagaisc freisin. Mar thoradh air sin, cuirtear isteach ar an gcumas atá ag scoileanna áirithe Gaeltachta freastal go leordhóthanach ar riachtanais foghlama na leanaí atá á dtógáil trí mheán na Gaeilge '(ROS 2017: 9)

Mar chuid den Pholasaí seo beidh ar scoileanna gur mian leo bheith aitheanta ina scoil Ghaeltachta "clár lántumtha dhá bhliain trí Ghaeilge a chur i bhfeidhm sa tsraith naíonán, nach múinfear Béarla ar bith lena linn" Tá sé seo de dhíth leis an tús is láidre agus is féidir a thabhairt do na páistí ó thaobh sealbhú na teanga. Muna leantar an polasaí seo sa scoil, ní cháileoidh scoil do stádas Gaeltachta.

Fáiltíonn COGG roimh an t-aitheantas atá tugtha sna dréacht moltaí seo maidir leis na deiseanna agus na dúshlain a bhaineann leis an dá rogha atá leagtha síos ó thaobh struchtúr an churaclaim. Molann COGG tabhairt faoi Rogha 1 – an múnla trí chéim i dtaca leis an gcuraclam a chur i láthair – Réamhscoil agus ranganna naíonán, Rang 1 go Rang 4, Rang 5 go Rang 6 agus úsáid a bhaint as téamaí, réimsí curaclaim agus ábhair.Tacaíonn an múnla trí chéim le leanúnachas cur i bhfeidhm an luath-thumoideachas sa réamhscoil, sna naíonraí agus sna scoileanna lán- Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta, agus tacaíonn sé le cur i bhfeidhm an Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta.

Tá an tumoideachas iomlán aitheanta ar fud an domhain mar an córas is éifeachtaí chun an dara teanga a mhúineadh nó a shealbhú i suíomh scolaíochta (Ní Mhaoláin 2013:9)

Moltar go dtabharfaí aitheantas faoi leith don tumoideachas agus buntáistí an dátheangachais agus ilteangachais sa struchtúr nua curaclaim.

Páirt-tumadh agus Foghlaim Chomhtháite Ábhar agus Teangacha (FCÁT)

Molann an Straitéis 20 Bliain do Ghaeilge pairt –tumadh a chur i ngníomh do gach leanbh ar bhonn céimnithe. Tagann Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile leis an moladh seo agus aithnítear gur 'bealach eifeachtach í an Fhoghlaim Chomhthaite Ábhair agus Teanga le teagmháil na bpaistí leis an nGaeilge a mhéadú trí fhírchumarsáid a chruthú ina mbeidh an teanga á húsáid ag paistí' (CNCM 2015:43) D'aithin An Stráitéis chun an Literathacht agus an Uimhearthacht a Fheabhsú i measc Leanaí agus Daoine Óga 2011- 2020 na féidearthachtaí a bhaineann le hábhair eile nó gnéithe de na habhair sin a theagasc trí Ghaeilge chun dúshlain maidir le cumas na leanaí á fhorbairt i nGaeilge i scoileanna áit a bhfuil an Béarla mar phríomhtheanga teagaisc a shárú.(ROS 2011:59)

Léiríonn fianaise thaighde gur éifeachtaí a bhíonn an fhoghlaim teanga nuair a thugtar fúithi i gcomhar le hinneachar a fhoghlaim in ábhar eile seachas an teanga atá á foghlaim. Tá sé cruthaithe go gcuireann FCÁT le hoilteacht teanga na ndaltaí, gan dochar a dhéanamh dá gcéad teanga, ná don chaoi a n-éiríonn leo leis an réimse ábhair atá á mhúineadh. Cuireann FCÁT ar chumas foghlaimeoirí teacht i dteagmháil leis an teanga i gcomhthéacs agus úsáid a bhaint aisti le haghaidh fíorchumarsáide. (CNCM 2015)

Tugtar sainmhíniú ar fhoghlaim chomhtháite ábhar agus teangacha (FCÁT) mar chur chuige oideachasúil défhócasaithe ina n-úsáidtear teanga eile chun ábhar agus teanga a fhoghlaim agus a mhúineadh (Coyle, Hood, agus March, 2010:1).

Is cineál tumoideachais é oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge a bhfuil stair fhada aige i gcóras oideachais na hÉireann ó cuireadh an Stát ar bun i 1922, ina bhfoghlaimíonn foghlaimeoirí ábhar an churaclaim tríd an nGaeilge, an dara teanga dóibh.(Harris agus Ó Duibhir, 2011: 44)

'Léirigh taighde na buntáistí a bhaineann le FCÁT agus léiríonn sé níos mó is níos mó an t-ardleibhéal ratha oideachasúil a bhaineann léi. Léiríonn taighde eimpíreach faoi shealbhú an dara teanga go bhfoghlaimítear teangacha le linn dóibh bheith dá n-úsáid. Ní hamháin go bhfuil dea-thionchar ag FCÁT ar fhoghlaim, ar fhorbairt, agus ar úsáid teanga, ach tá dea-tionchar aige freisin ar fhoghlaim ábhar'. Ó Ceallaigh, T.J. & Ó Laoire, M. (eag.). (2016)

Maíonn an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge go ndéanfar FCÁT a fheidhmiú ar bhonn céimnithe ag teacht leis an dul chun cinn a dhéanfar ó thaobh inniúlachtaí múinteoirí a neartú sa réimse sin trí chlár cuimsitheach infheistíochta d'fhorbairt ghairmiúil do mhúinteoirí. Luaitear chomh maith go ndéanfar forbairt ar acmhainní agus ar ábhair do scoileanna agus go gcuirfear ar fáil iad (2010:12)

Aithnítear go bhfuil FCÁT (CLIL) molta mar chur chuige i gCuraclam Teanga na Bunscoile agus go bhfuil Ábhar Tacaíochta ar leith ullmhaithe mar chuid d'Uirlisí Úsáide Teanga na Bunscoile ag an gComhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta chun tacú le scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán an Bhéarla roinnt ábhar nó gnéithe d'ábhair a mhúineadh trí mheán na Gaeilge i gcomhthéacs an churaclaim teanga ar bhonn céimnithe.

Tá cur síos ar idirghabháil an-rathúil FCÁT maidir le hEalaín agus Eolaíocht a mhúineadh trí Ghaeilge agus ar na féidearthachtaí a bhaineann leis i dtuairisc Harris et al (2006). Aithníodh dhá riachtanas ar leith d'fhonn FCÁT a bheith ina rogha tarraingteach agus inmharthana- ábhar tacaíochta sainoiriúnaithe don ábhar agus soláthar oiliúint do mhúinteoirí.

Ceann de na buntáistí is tábhachtachaí a bhaineann le FCÁT ar ndóigh ná go bhfuil uaireanta teagmhála breise ag paistí leis an teanga gan cur isteach ar am teagmhála ábhair eile. Le ró- ualaigh curaclaim agus cúrsaí ama ag déanamh imní do mhúinteoirí molann COGG go mbeadh na deiseanna luacmhara a bhaineann leis an Ghaeilge a chomhtháthú trasna an churaclaim lárnach agus sonraithe sna moltaí a bhaineann leis an struchtúr nua curaclaim. Tá sé in ám gnímh agus den riachtanas go gcuirfí oiliúint chuí ar mhúinteoirí mar a gealladh le huailmhianta na straitéise i leith FCÁT a chur i gcrích.

Moltar chomh maith go gcuirfí treoirlínte agus áiseanna cuí ar fáil do mhúinteoirí chun ceachtanna FCÁT a éascú ar nós na 'Bain Triail As' agus 'Lean den Ealaín' a d'fhoilsigh Institiúit Teangeolaíochta na hÉireann (Harris agus Mac Giollabhuí, 1998)

An Réamhscolaíocht

Fáiltíonn COGG leis an moladh go mbeadh dhá bhliain d'oideachas réamhscoile uilíoch mar chuid de Chéim 1 d'fhonn tacú le leanúnachas eispéiris do leanaí agus le dul chun cinn ina gcuid foghlama pé acu an Rogha 2 Chéim nó 3 Chéim a roghnaítear. Aithnítear gur dlúchuid de Churaclam Teanga na Bunscoile modheolaíochtaí agus prionsabail Aistear agus go dtógtar ar phrionsabail Aistear sa Churaclam agus sa Chontanam dul Chun Cinn rud a thacaíonn le leanúnachas ón réamhscoil go dtí an bhunscoil. Trí cineálacha éagsúla súgartha, sealbhaíonn paistí teanga, scileanna cumarsáide, cruthaitheacha, fionnachtana agus fadhb réitigh i dtimpeallacht chomhbhách shábháilte. Déanann Krashen (1982) tagairt don 'foghlaim nádúrtha', é sin le rá go mbíonn an páiste ag úsáid na teanga i ngan fhios ach fós ag foghlaim.

Aontáitear go ‘dtabharfadh an chéim seo tosaíocht do theagasc agus d’fhoghlaim spraiúil ar fud an churaclaim agus bheadh an spraoi faoi threoir an linbh ina ghné thábhachtach de sin.’ (CNCM 2017:22) Thacódh sé chomh maith le nascanna laidre a chruthú idir súimhanna luath- oideachais/ naíonraí agus bunscoileanna.

Tá aitheantas tugtha ag an Polasaí Oideachas Gaeltachta do thábhacht an oideachais sna luathbhlianta ó thaobh forbairt teanga agus aistriú chuig an bhunscoil.‘ I gcás na limistéir Gaeltachta, tá sé de chumas ag soláthar oideachais d’ardchaighdeán luathbhlianta trí mheán na Gaeilge leanaí a shóisialú sa Ghaeilge, feabhas a chur ar a bhforbairt chognaíoch agus mhothachtálach agus tacú lena n-aistriú chuig an bhfoghlaim trí Ghaeilge sa bhunscoil’ (ROS 2016:42)

Luaitear sa taighde - An Traein - Ag Aistriú ón Naíonra go dtí an Bhunscoil (Forbairt Naíonraí Teo. agus Gaelscoileanna) go mbíonn tionchar fadtéarmach ag aistriú maith ón naíonra go dtí an bhunscoil ar chumas foghlama na bpáistí tríd an mbunscoil ar fad, deirtear sa taighde go gcothaíonn Aistear agus Síolta leanúnachas idir naíonraí agus bunscoileanna ach is faoi na scoileanna is na naíonraí atá sé an teagmháil agus leanúnachas a chur chun cinn ar bhonn logánta. (2011: 51) B’fhiú go mór na moltaí praiticiúla sa leabhrán taighde An Traein a bheith larnach mar thacaíocht agus an struchtúr nua curaclam á chur faoi bhráid na scoileanna.

Aithnítear na buntáistí a bhaineann le hAistear ach toisc nach bhfuil sé éigeantach, níl se i bhfeidhm i mbunscoileanna uile na tíre. Glactar leis go bhfuil forbairt ghairmiúil agus oiliúint faighte ag líon shuntasach múinteoirí in úsáid Aistear ach is ar bhonn deonach a rinne múinteoirí an cúrsa oiliúna d’Aistear ina gcuid ama féin mar nach raibh aon pholasaí ag an Roinn Oideachais maidir le hoiliúint a chur ar fáil do mhúinteoirí in úsáid Aistear. Is cúis imní é go bhfuil seo amhlaidh agus nach bhfuil na múinteoirí uile inniúil ar phrionsabail, ar théamaí ná ar chur chuige oideolaíochta Aistear. Molann COGG gur chóir an deis a thapú agus struchtúr nua curaclaim á ceapadh oiliúint agus forbairt ghairmiúil a chur ar fáil sa réimse seo.

Leithdháileadh Ama:

Luaitear sna moltaí ‘gur tharraing go leor múinteoirí aird ar a róphlódaithe ia ata an curaclam (CNCM 2005, 2008) I bhfianaise an bhrú bhreise ar am i seomraí ranga bhunscoile molann COGG go bhféadfadh cur chuige FCÁT mar atá luaite a bheith lárnach sa Churaclam Athfhorbartha Bunscoile a bheith mar chuid den réiteach ar an bhfadhb seo de bharr nach bhfuil uaireanta teagmhála breise ag paistí leis an teanga agus an t-ábhar ag teacht salach ar a chéile. Tugann an múnla trí chéim deis do scoileanna tosú ar FCÁT sna meán ranganna mar chuid de ‘Réimsí Curaclaim’ sula ndíritear ar ábhair sna hArdranganna. Molann COGG na féidearthachtaí a bhaineann le FCÁT a chur i bhfeidhm sna meán ranganna a bheith lárnach mar chuid de Chéim 2 sa Churaclam Athfhorbartha.

Ó thaobh leithdháileadh ama aontaíonn COGG gur chóir am sainiúil seachtaine a leagan amach don mhatamaitic agus do theanga (Béarla agus Gaeilge), rud a léireodh tábhacht na scileanna sin. Chinnteodh sé sin go ndéanfaí na hábhair sin a theagasc go minic. Molann COGG go mbeidh am riachtanach ar leith sonraithe do chéad agus dara teanga na scoile agus go mbeadh sé soiléir go bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar chuid lárnach den churaclam teanga sna scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán an Bhéarla agus nach mbeadh aon laghdú ó thaobh leithdháileadh ama ina leith.

Fáiltíonn COGG roimh an *am solúbhta* sa mhúnla nua um leithdháileadh ama. Ní fheictear go bhfuil aon athrú suntasach anseo áfach ó thaobh *am roghnach/am solúbhta* agus caithfear an cheist a chur ‘Cé chomh solúbtha is atá an t-am solúbhtha seo?’ Ní mór an méid ama atá i 4% breise mar atá molta. Nuair a thógtar am tionóil, rolla, sosanna agus fóillíochta san áireamh chomh maith le am do

Chlár an Phatrúin ní mór an méid é. Moltar an t-ainm ‘am solúbtha’ a athrú toisc nach bhfuil sé chomh solúbtha sin.

Ba mhaith le COGG traoslú leis an gComhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta as tús a chur leis an bpróiseas comhairliúchán i leith Struchtúr agus Leithdháileadh Ama i gCuraclam Athfhorbartha Bunscoile. Luaigh an tAire Oideachais le deanaí go bhfuil ‘an t-oideachas i gcroílár ár n-uaillmhianta go léir mar náisiún. Níl aon réimse eile de ghníomhaíocht Rialtais a bhfuil cumas níos mó aici ár dtír a athrú chun a leasa’ (Plean Gníomhaíochta don Oideachas ROS 2016-2019:6) Tá COGG ag teacht le sin agus ag súil go rachfaidh an Curaclam Athfhorbartha chun leasa ar bpáistí.

Tagairtí

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta (2007) , Language and Literacy in Irish Medium Primary Schools: Supporting School Policy and Practice

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta (2009). Aistear: Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige. Baile Átha Cliath

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta (2015). Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta (2016) An Fhoghlaim Chomhtháite Ábhar agus Teangacha (FCÁT)- Ábhar Tacaíochta www.curriculumonline.ie

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (2014) Iniúchadh ar an gCumas Dátheangach: An sealbhú teanga i measc ghlúin óg na Gaeltachta

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna (2011) An Stráitéis chun an Literathacht agus an Uimhearthacht a Fheabhsú i measc Leanaí agus Daoine Óga 2011- 2020

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna (2016) Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017- 2022

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna (2017) Plean Gníomhaíochta don Oideachas 2016-2019

Coyle, Hood & March, (2010) CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) Cambridge University Press

Forbairt Naíonraí Teo. & Gaelscoileanna Teo. (2011) An Traein: Ag Aistriú ón Naíonra go dtí an Bhunscoil

Harris, J. (2006). An Ghaeilge sna Bunscoileanna: Treochtaí Náisiúnta Fadtéarmacha in Inniúlacht, An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair.

Harris J. & Ó Duibhir P (2011) Múineadh éifeachtach teangacha: sintéis ar thaighde. Tuarascáil Taighde 13. CNCM

Hickey, T. (1999) Luathoideachas trí Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht: Údarás na Gaeltachta

Krashen S. (1982) Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition: University of Southern California

Ní Mhaoláin N. (2005) Ár bPolasaí Gaeilge. Gaelscoileanna Teo. Baile Átha Cliath

Ó hAiniféin D. (2008) An Tumoideachas in Éirinn. Conradh na Gaeilge

Ó Ceallaigh, T.J. & Ó Laoire, M. (eag.). (2016) An Tumoideachas: Bua nó Dua? An Chéad Chomhdháil Taighde Uile-oileánda ar an Tumoideachas: Imeachtaí Comhdhála. Baile Átha Cliath: An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta.

Rialtas na hÉireann (1998) an tAcht Oideachais

Rialtas na hÉireann (2010) Straitéis 20 Bliain Don Ghaeilge 2010 – 2030

Uí Ghrádaigh D. (2004). Cúnamh, Tacábhar Cúram Leanaí 0-6. Baile Átha Cliath: FNT

Home

Contributor

Anne Dolan

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

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Anne**
Surname	**Dolan**
Position (If applicable)	**Lecturer in Primary Geography**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Mary Immaculate College**
Address	**South Circular Road**
Telephone	**086 8173033**
Email	**Anne.dolan@mic.ul.ie**
Date	**24 May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [x] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I think both models are better than the system currently in place. My preference is with the three stage model as it deals with different learning levels within primary school.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

There is very little flexible time left once school breaks etc. have been taken out. I would like to see an allocation for flexible time which is specifically for classroom work and this needs to be significantly long to allow for thematic planning.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Based on Paper: Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation

Recommendation: That Geo-literacy is adopted as a core integrating theme/curricular area for the new primary curriculum. This recommendation is made as a proposal to deal with curriculum overloading, increased emphasis on literacy and maths and international requirements for 21century learners.

What is Geo-literacy?

Geo-literacy is the ability to use geographic understanding and reasoning to make decisions. Whether we are making decisions about where to live, what precautions to take for natural hazards, or understanding human and natural systems, we are all called upon to make decisions that require geo-literacy throughout our lives. In primary classrooms the ultimate goal of geo-literacy is to facilitate children's participation in decision making through the use of geographic understanding and reasoning. Geo-literacy can be used to integrate literacy and numeracy into other subject areas, to improve learning outcomes in reading, and ease time pressure on curriculum implementation. The other unique feature of a geo-literacy lesson is the element of children's participation. At least 80% of the lesson is child led and child directed.

The three Is

Three central aspects of geo-literacy are commonly referred to as the three Is: Interactions (How our world works); Interconnections (How our world is connected); Implications (How to make well-reasoned decisions). Each geo-literacy lesson is constructed around these three concepts.

Interactions: A geo-literate individual is able to reason about the ways that human and natural systems function and interact. How the world works

Interconnections: A geo-literate individual is able to reason about the ways that people and places are connected to each other across time and space. How the world is connected

Implications: A geo-literate individual is able to weigh the potential impacts of their decisions systematically. How to make well-reasoned decisions.

Making connections

One of the central aspects of integrated teaching and thematic planning is the forging of connections across subject areas. Geo-literacy is about interconnections and the active process of making connections. Making connections is one of the central features of a geo-literacy lesson. Each geo-literacy lesson begins with discussion and development of children's prior knowledge. There is a strong focus on the development of children's oral language. Children can then make connections with new material, with their reading and with the real world. Other connections which may take place during a geo-literacy lesson include the following:

Making connections with myself and my prior knowledge

Making connections with other children in the class

Making connections with literacy and numeracy

Making connections across the curriculum

Making connections with the geographical topic under exploration

Making connections with my school/and or local community

Making connections with the broader global community

Geo-literacy can be used to integrate literacy and geography into other subject areas, to improve learning outcomes in reading, and ease time pressure on curriculum implementation (Burns and Dolan, 2016). Literacy experts acknowledge the importance of literacy being taught through a range of curricular areas including geography. Geo-literacy incorporates an approach to literacy whereby children develop literacy skills through a range of local and global geographical topics and themes.

There is a strong correlation between oral language and reading comprehension. Furthermore, competent oral language and reading capabilities are important requisites for young geographers especially from 9 years of age onwards. In order to be able to read, children need comprehensive knowledge about their world. According to Hirsch, (2007:12) 'while it is true that proficient reading and critical thinking are all purpose abilities, they are not content-independent, formal skills at all but are always based on concrete, relevant knowledge and cannot be exercised apart from what psychologists call 'domain-specific' knowledge'.

Internationally, there has been an increased focus on literacy and numeracy, followed by a marginalisation of other curricular areas including geography. In response to Ireland's low performance in the PISA Survey in the period 2006-2009 (OECD, 2010), literacy was identified as a 'national priority' (Department of Education and Skills 2011, 14). Ironically, the PISA test examines the ability of 15 year olds from a selection of countries to deduce from what they have learned and apply that knowledge in unfamiliar settings both inside and outside school. This idea of applied knowledge is central to geo-literacy.

In geo-literacy lessons, text includes maps, graphs, photographs, visual images and geo-spatial representations of information. According to Roberts (2014: 205) children 'need to be able to understand, interpret, analyse and critique geographical data presented in different ways: printed text; maps; statistics, graphs; photographs and film. To make sense of geography they need to make connections of all kinds: between existing knowledge and new ideas; between different pieces of information; between different concepts.'

An innovative approach to literacy

The definition of literacy by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Among Children and Young People 2011-2020 (DES, 2011), notes that:

Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. (DES, 2011, p. 8)

While often considered to compete for time on the timetable, primary teachers can usefully develop language and literacy through primary geography in a manner which is relevant, immediate and which achieves core literacy objectives.

'Geographical education makes a critical contribution to the child's language development: the growth of the child's geographical understanding and the acquisition of language skills are

interdependent and mutually enriching. It is largely through language that children describe and interpret their experience, organise their thinking and attempt to make sense of the world around them' (NCCA\DES,1999:12).

Geography and literacy are intrinsically linked e.g. good geography teaching involves the development of core literacy and numeracy skills. Literacy skills in reading, writing, talking, listening and viewing are essential to the acquisition of geographical skills and knowledge. The potential for developing literacy through geographical teaching and through the use of geographical resources, lies in the hands of the primary school teacher.

Geo-literacy with its explicit emphasis on oral language and skill development can make an invaluable contribution to literacy in general and geographical conceptual development in particular.

Making decisions

The National Geographic Education's website states that 'Geo-literacy is the ability to use geographic understanding and geographic reasoning to make decisions' (NGE). Decision making requires us to make connections with our prior knowledge, with the specifics of each context and with appropriate geo-spatial information.

Making decisions requires a complex set of reasoning and cognitive skills. The more opportunities children have to make their own independent decisions the more confident they will become. Providing a well conceptualised rationale for their decision is also part of this process.

References

Burns. I. & Dolan, A.M. (2016) Geo-literacy: children-led decision making. Intouch INTO Primary Teachers' Magazine (June Edition) available at http://www.into.ie/NI/Publications/InTouch/Archive/www.INTO.ie

Burns. I. & Dolan, A.M. (2016a) Making connections with geo-literacy Primary Geography Sheffield: Geographical Association, (Autumn) p18-19

Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (DES/NCCA). (1999b). Primary School Curriculum. Language. English. Teacher guidelines. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Roberts, M. (2014) Powerful knowledge and geographical education. The Curriculum Journal 25 (2), 187-209

Contributor

Association for Drama in Education in Ireland(ADEI)

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

Names	Elaine Clotworthy (ADEI/ Arts Education MIE) Ciara Fagan (ADEI/St Pius X Primary School) Mary Howard (Former Chairperson of ADEI) Dr Una McCabe (ADEI/ School of Arts Education and Movement, DCU) Paula Murphy (ADEI/ School of Arts Education and Movement, DCU) Dr Annie Ó Breacháin (ADEI/ School of Arts Education and Movement, DCU) Margaret O' Keeffe (ADEI/Departments of Arts Education and Physical Education, MIC, LImerick Dr Tríona Stokes (ADEI/ Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University)
Organisation (If applicable)	ADEI – Association for Drama in Education in Ireland
Address	Paula Murphy (Chairperson of Sub-committee of ADEI) St. Patrick's Campus, School of Arts Education and Movement, DCU
Telephone	01-8842077
Email	paula.m.murphy@dcu.ie
Date	29/3/17

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

We recognise benefits and challenges to both models proposed. These are outlined in the table below. We also include some guidelines.

Model	**Two Stage**	**Three Stage**
Benefits	In the context of drama, the two stage model will be effective under certain conditions. The transition between sociodramatic play and drama, and the timing of this within the first four years of primary education (Jnr infants to 2nd) will be crucial within this model. It is important that both will be addressed in a sufficient and timely manner. Like all areas, the key elements of the subject of drama should be present at all stages of primary education.	A three stage model may encourage a clearer and more developmental path of progression within the subject . *Example*: In terms of drama this could allow a focus on sociodramatic play in the early years, drama as 'meta-praxis' (e.g. Mantle of the Expert) for integration in middle stage, and the art form of drama in the final stage. Within this example it should be noted that each of these aspects should be present at every stage. e.g. children should be engaged with the art form during all three stages but it would

		be a stronger feature of the final stage (Fifth/Sixth class).
Challenges	Within this model we have a concern that children may not engage with formal drama practice until Third Class. As identified in the 1999 curriculum, children in First and Second are ready to transition from socio-dramatic play into drama. Teachers need to be aware of how to support the children to transition effectively from socio-dramatic play to drama.	Within this model we have a concern that less well established subjects such as Science and Drama may not be sufficiently addressed during the middle stage of the three stage model (1st-4th class - Curriculum areas). As drama is the most recent arts subject to be added to the curriculum and thereby less established in the culture of many schools, it may be more vulnerable in this regard. It should be remembered that it is only nine years since teachers were first required to teach the Drama Curriculum (post inservice with PCSP in 2006/2007).

General guidelines for both models

I*ntegration:*

- Both models are dependent on a sophisticated understanding of integration on the teacher's part. We would distinguish between curriculum *linkage* and meaningful curriculum *integration* here.
- A sophisticated understanding of integration is also dependent on deep subject knowledge of all subjects on the teacher's part.

Continuing Professional Development

- All of the above has implications for teacher education, which endorses both specialist knowledge through dedicated courses and competency in how to facilitate integration.
- The 1999 curriculum exemplars present a model of curriculum integration that could be described as 'curriculum linkage' (low-level integration). More meaningful integrated teaching and learning, therefore, represents a paradigm shift in the primary education context. Long-term and sustained inservice and CPD support for teachers will be essential.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

The extent to which you agree / disagree and on curriculum state time and flexible time:

In principle, ADEI agrees with the proposal on minimum state curriculum time, with an allocation of 60% allocated curriculum time and 40% flexible time, to be used at a school's discretion. This largely mirrors current practice and allows for flexibility in school planning. However, this view is based on the 60% curriculum time reflecting the existing 11 subjects plus patron's programme. It does not account for additional subjects e.g. coding, which would need to be proportionally allocated time within a re-worked ratio of curriculum versus flexible time e.g. 65% curriculum state time/35% flexible time.

The idea of specifying time allocations for themes/curriculum areas/subjects:

Subject bandings or curriculum areas e.g. Integrated Arts, should state **a minimum time allocated to each subject area** to prevent erosion of individual subject areas within this band, and to ensure learning outcomes are achieved. It is also preferable that provision for drama would take place over a number of lessons, so that sufficient depth of engagement and learning can be achieved within a developmental process.

Should time be allocated on a weekly, monthly termly, annual basis:

A monthly, rather than weekly time allocation is preferred by ADEI for its potential for meaningful integrated learning opportunities and accessing curricular content at a deeper level. However, there is a concern that progression of drama skills and understanding may not be realised through monthly allocation where it shares its place with other arts areas.

The monthly allocation of time may suit for planning across subject groupings (e.g. in the arts), potentially providing opportunities for deeper learning and differentiated learning.

Monthly timeframes may serve teachers who plan cooperatively to prepare for and track progression drawing on assessment evidence from the monthly period.

While an integrated approach is important, for teachers to move from current practice to monthly time allocation sufficient continuing professional development would be required to equip teachers to plan for integration which leads to a deeper understanding of content.

Flexible time

In a flexi-time model, it may happen that the class 'nativity play' is documented as the sole provision for drama. Children also derive significant benefit from drama experiences in which they are each other's audience and they engage without the external pressure of a performance.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

It is essential that in a new primary curriculum, the structure remains broad and supportive of children's engagement in the Arts. There is a danger that in restructuring, a narrow definition of literacy and an excessive concentration on literacy and numeracy would result in minimal engagement with the art form of drama and the other curriculum art forms. The expectation that children can engage with the arts outside of school would be a regressive step for children.

Children's access to 'a rich range of materials that promote open-ended opportunities for play, representation and creativity' (Weston, 2000) may continue to be sacrificed to the overwhelming requirements of narrow literacy and numeracy models which lack relevance for children and adults alike.

It can be argued that language and literacy as integral components of learning in all curricular areas, will be used by learners as a matter of course. This includes oral discussion and writing through exploration of any topic. It seems, therefore, that additional time devoted to discrete literacy/language lessons may result in didactic methodologies which do not advance these skills in a meaningful manner.

Contributor

Association of Childhood Professionals

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

primary developments
foráis sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Marian**
Surname	**Quinn**
Position (If applicable)	**Chairperson**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Association of Childhood Professionals**
Address	**Suite 1, John Dunlop House, Marina Commercial Park, Centre Park Road, Cork**
Telephone	**0861984431**
Email	**info@acpireland.com**
Date	**26/05/2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [x]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

The ACP welcomes the opportunity to consult on the proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum. The focus of this submission is on structure and on early childhood as that is our field of expertise. The ACP supports the broad thrust of the NCCA proposal to move from 'a model of four arbitrary stages which share the same structure, to an incremental stage model...with a differentiated curriculum structure' (NCCA, 2016, p. 29) which emphasises the continuity of children's learning experiences.

The revision provides us with the opportunity to provide a curriculum that facilitates children to develop dispositions, attitudes, knowledge(s), skills and competencies that will support them in their lifelong learning. This has the potential to provide a more holistic educational experience that encourages children to experiment and question their surroundings and to develop a love of learning that leads to true development rather than an education for passing tests/exams.

Learning naturally occurs in an integrated manner rather than a compartmentalised fashion and the proposed change in structure has the potential to facilitate a truly integrated curriculum that meets the holistic needs of the child.

The proposed change would facilitate the full incorporation of Aistear into primary classrooms and would create a greater synthesis of the learning experiences of the child in early childhood education and care services and infant classes in primary schools. This would aid in the transition of the child from the early childhood education and care setting to the primary school and would thus create greater continuity in their holistic development.

We would, however, have concerns about the inclusion of the children from 3 years of age in the primary curriculum. Currently the Aistear framework provides an umbrella over the learning experiences that young children encounter in early childhood education and care services. This model provides great freedom to meet the care and learning needs of children from the local community and to facilitate their emerging interests. An inquiry-based model is promoted and children learn through their natural medium of play. Including this age cohort in the primary curriculum could potentially put increased restrictions on the local development of the emergent syllabus. A curriculum is significantly different to a curriculum framework and we would have concerns about the potential restrictions this could impose.

With the introduction of a curriculum for children from 3-12years of age there also comes the question of where this curriculum will be delivered and by whom. At present the majority of children from 3-5years of age avail of early learning opportunities in early childhood education and care settings under the trained eye of qualified early years educators. However, the proposed model has the potential to change this and that is a significant discussion that needs to take place in the early stages of this overall consultation.

A further concern would be the potential for this proposal to create a split-system in relation to the care and education of the child in the earliest years. The practice guides for early childhood education and care (Aistear and Síolta) encompass children from birth to 6years of age. Including children from 3years of age in the primary curriculum would create an artificial divide and would infer a higher status on the early learning experiences of the 3year old while negating the immense learning experiences of the child under 3 years of age.

The consultation documents show a distinct lack of awareness of the central role of the early childhood educator in the care and early learning experiences of the child from 3-5 years of age. While the concerns and needs of the primary school teacher have been articulated there is no corresponding exploration of the concerns and needs of the early childhood educator. This is perturbing because it demonstrates the invisible role that this educator plays at the foundation stage in the education and care continuum and does not augur well for a co-professional relationship in the future.

The ACP believes that the proposals relating to the restructuring of the primary school curriculum present an ideal opportunity to modify the current divide that exists in the professional standing of all educators/teachers working with children in the early years. This proposal must also include those working with children under 3 years of age.

At present there exists an inequality in relation to the acceptability of qualifications relating to working with children in the early years. Currently B.Ed graduates in primary education are recognised to work in early childhood education and care settings but the same courtesy is not extended to B.A. graduates in early childhood education and care or Montessori education (who are not permitted to teach in national primary schools), despite the extensive theoretical and practical learning they undergo in relation to delivering an appropriate curriculum for children aged from birth to 6 years of age.

Developing a primary curriculum that extends the age range to include the younger children would require a reconceptualising of early childhood educators to facilitate educator/teacher mobility across settings. This would translate to both B.A. ECEC/Montessori graduates and B.Ed graduates being eligible for teaching positions across the entirety of phase 1.

This equivalency in relation to professional status would require parity in terms of the pay and conditions afforded to both educators and teachers and as previously stated, this should also include those educators working with children under 3 years of age.

Contributor

Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

Name	**Marie Celine Clegg** **Dr Eilis Humphreys**
Position (If applicable)	**Chairperson and Hon. Secretary**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS)**
Address, contact person	**David Kennedy, Research Assistant, ATCS** **New House, Saint Patricks College** **Maynooth, Co. Kildare**
Telephone	**01 505 3162**
Email	**info@atcs.ie**
Date	**22/05/2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [✓]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [✓] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum, for consultation

Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) submission

The Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) was established in 2009 to support best operational practice in the exercise of Trusteeship/Patronage on behalf of the Catholic Church.

ATCS is a locus for unity and inspiration, rooted in Gospel values, affirming and enabling Catholic schools Trusts/Trustees in the provision of quality education. Through a process of consultation and accountability, the ATCS acts as a leadership body and collective voice for the Catholic School Trusts in the exercise of their role. There are sixty-four Trustee bodies affiliated to the Association.

The ATCS has considered the NCCA proposals and is making the following submission.

Structure

NCCA is proposing that there should be a movement to an incremental stage model. This would move along a continua from child led, integrated play based learning, to teacher led, subject specific learning. This reflects the NCCA's desire to link the current primary curriculum back through the principles of teaching and learning contained in Aistear and up to reform taking place through post primary education, specifically the New Junior Cycle Framework.

Currently two models are being considered: **A 3 Stage and a 2 Stage Model**

3 STAGES		
1. Pre-school and Infant Classes	**2. 1st to 4th Class**	**3. 5th and 6th Class**
3 – 6/7 years	**6 -10/11 years**	**10 – 12/13 years**
Aistear Themes	**Curriculum Areas**	**Subjects**

2 STAGES	
Pre-school to 2nd Class	**3rd to 6th Class**
3 – 8/9 years	**8 – 12/13 years**
Aistear Themes	**Subjects**

The Aistear approach is currently being used or introduced at Junior and Senior Infant level. Teachers report that it works well but requires a high level of organisational and management skills and up-skilling of teachers and does, in fact, need to be further resourced and embedded before being extended further. There are concerns about the fact that non-trained personnel are implementing Aistear at Pre-school level.

The proposed new model for timetabling in the primary school suggests two categories of time as follows:

Minimum State Curriculum Time – 60%

Including language, mathematics, social, personal and health education, Social environmental and scientific education, arts and physical education

Flexible Time – 40%

Including discretionary curriculum time, patron's programme, recreation, assembles and roll call

The principles of teaching and learning contained in the Aistear approach works when it is timetabled and structured to ensure good quality teaching and learning is taking place. The same would apply to the Curricular areas and Subjects approach proposed in the 2/3 stage approach proposed by the NCCA.

Time

The concept of "flexible time" is fluid and unstructured. The proposed inclusion of the "patron's programme" within such a framework undermines the constitutional right of any given Patron or Parent and the legal obligation of any given Board of Management to "uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school"

> Section 15(b) Education Act 1998. Moving Religious Education to "flexible time" would have an impact on a Board of Management's ability to comply with its legal obligation as outlined above and cause difficulties for a Principal to ensure same.

It should be noted that Religious Education is covered in Section 30 2(d) of the Education Act 1998 which states that the Minister shall ensure that the amount of instruction time to be allotted to subjects on the curriculum as determined by the Minister in each school day shall

be such as to allow for such reasonable instruction time, as the board with the consent of the patron determines, for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school.

"Grow in Love", based on the curriculum for Religious Education, the "Catholic Pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)", has taken on board the volume of research on children's learning and development in the primary school years. The series has been approved by the Irish Catholics Bishops' Conference for use in the twenty-six dioceses in Ireland. It is the "patron's programme" for Catholic Primary Schools. Teachers in hundreds of schools provided feedback on the design, layout and content for the programmes at the Junior end of the primary school. Its child-centred structure facilitates good quality teaching and learning and allows for evidence-based learning outcomes which are high-lighted in the Department of Education and Skills document "Looking at our School" 2016. Moving the patron's programme into Flexible time will not support children's learning into the next decade. Why should a subject that is considered eligible at Junior Cycle for state examination be considered for inclusion in Flexible time at primary level. As a programme, a right has been established for its inclusion in "State Curriculum Time" rather than its transfer into "Flexible Time" as proposed by the NCCA.

Legal Principles

It is worth reminding ourselves of the fundamental legal principles that underpin the place of Religious Education in the primary curriculum. These principles confer rights and obligations and provide the framework for a 'faith school'. They also explain the proper role that the State has in allowing a faith community carry out its mission for those parents who choose to educate their children in this way.

Core Principle No 1: The Irish Constitution

According to the Irish Constitution Article 42.1:

The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.[1]

The Constitution clearly affirms the inalienable role of parents in education. It also acknowledges the importance of Religious Education. The State guarantees to respect the rights and duties of parents to provide for the religious education of their children.

The Constitution in Article 42.2 notes that such education (including religious education) can be provided at home, in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State.[2] This is based on the principle of religious freedom.

[1] Bunreacht na hÉireann, Article 42.1.
[2] Bunreacht na hÉireann Article 42.2.

The legally recognised human right referred to as 'Freedom of Religion' can be thought of as comprising two distinct but equally important dimensions or moral rights. It is both a positive Freedom for Religion, e.g. the freedom to practice, manifest and share one's religious commitments (including the establishment of schools with a religious ethos), and a negative freedom from religious coercion, e.g. the freedom from coercion by public or private parties to assent to or deny any particular religious or philosophical proposition.[3]

Thus, it is incorrect to simply understand freedom of religion as freedom from religion. Indeed, the Constitution understands a positive right to give expression to religious belief and the State has continued to emphasise this right.

Religious groups are free to establish their own schools to cater for members of their particular faith. This religious freedom is a core element in our system at primary and secondary level.[4]

Core principle no 2: Parental Rights under the constitution.

Education is closely linked with Religious Freedom. Parents have the right to ensure that their children's education is in conformity with their religious and philosophical convictions. Parental choice in education is recognised in most democracies and enshrined in the Irish Constitution, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in United Nations and European legal instruments. It is also strongly affirmed in the teaching of the Catholic Church.

This principle clearly holds that parents have the right to educate their children in accordance with their social, political, cultural, linguistic, religious and moral convictions. This is the present system applicable in Ireland. Whilst others may disagree with these views, the parents' decisions concerning a child's education should be respected and, where practicable, should be facilitated by the State. It is imperative that governments provide real choice for parents and that they support parents/guardians in the choices they make. This demand extends to all schools and is based on three key principles:

- The right to freedom of education and freedom of religion (*Irish Constitution, Art 42.1)*
- The liberty to pursue objectives without State interference, i.e. the principle of subsidiarity where as much freedom as possible is located at individual and local level
- Distributive justice which provides the same support for all citizens and does not penalise some for choosing a particular school in accordance with their conscience. (*Irish Constitution, Art 42.3.1*)

In Ireland, Catholic schools are an integral part of educational provision and become the school of choice for parents of different faiths and denominations. As far back as 2007,

[3] Catholic Schools Partnership, *Catholic schools in a Changing Ireland: Sharing Good Practice on the Inclusion of All Pupils* (2015), 12.

[4] Government of Ireland, Ireland's Fourth Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2012), p. 168.

when Catholic Bishops reflected on the policy of provision into the future, they freely recognised that there was need for fewer Catholic schools. The actual process of divestment has proved more difficult, however, not least because parents/guardians have not always considered that such divestment would be in their interests in a particular area. ATCS accepts that there should be choice and diversity within a national education system while also believing that parents who desire schools of a particular type should, where possible, be facilitated in accessing them.

We would argue as per the High Court that in fact, in the State providing 'for' education, they should also protect and support such parental choice.[5]

If the State imposes too many conditions on faith based schools the State undermines parental choice, discriminates against those who would choose a faith school for their child and transgresses the prohibition on the State interfering with the right of a religious denomination to manage its own affairs and institutions. In short, the present proposals appear to be part of a process of encroachment on parental rights, property rights and the capacity of faith schools to provide a faith based education for those who opt for same.

Core principle No 3: Charitable Trust law, Trustee Property rights and the Characteristic Spirit of a Catholic School under the Education act 1998.

The Board of Management manages the school on behalf of the Patron, not on behalf of the Minister for Education and Skills. Clearly the Act places an obligation on the Board to uphold the *"characteristic spirit"* of the school. It is for the Patron, and through the Patron, that the Board decide what that characteristic spirit is and how it is best upheld.

The state, as per the judgment of Mc Garth v Maynooth College, should also seek to support and buttress such faith schools and parental choice. This is also detailed in the Education Act (Section 30 2(d) where it is stipulated that the Minister shall ensure that the amount of instruction time to be allotted to subjects on the curriculum as determined by the Minster in each school day shall be such as to allow for such reasonable instruction time, as the Board with the consent of the Patron determines, for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school'.[6]

Every school has its own ethos or characteristic spirit. In the Education Act 15 (2) (b) this characteristic spirit of the school is understood as being *'determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school'.*

It is clear from this that Catholic schools are not a monolithic structure with uniformity of provision. Schools with a Catholic ethos will vary depending on their history and the socio-demographic realities of the communities that they serve. Yet, from the small rural school serving a local community, to the large urban school serving a very diverse population, all are challenged to give expression to their characteristic spirit through the lens of Catholic

[5] See, Supreme Court case Mc Grath v Maynooth college 1979

[6] Section 30 2 (d) of the education act.

faith. This is best understood as an invitation to allow Catholic faith to inform the values and traditions that are lived out and nurtured on a daily basis in the school.

All Catholic schools are held under Diocesan trusts or other Ecclesiastical trusts which are set up under charitable status, with consequent obligation under the law of trusts.

In this Catholic schools are no different from other non-Catholic and secular schools who are subject to the law on trusts. The properties must be used for the founding intentions and the Trustees must use the properties for such intentions and the requests of the original benefactors. If the Trustees do not adhere to the original Articles of Trust then they are in breach of their legal obligations and are acting illegally. It is the duty of the State not to subvert Trustees in this important role but rather support the Trustees in their role.

However, if the NCCA undermines this with each passing regulation, then the Faith school will be left with little or no capacity to carry out its charitable intent as per its legal obligations under its respective Trust deeds, charitable trust law, property rights or its statutory obligations under the Education act.

Core principle no 4: State involvement in the Primary sector: The role of NCCA as per the Education Act 1998 and Ongoing State/DES Regulation in situ.

Let us be clear. The State's role under the Constitution is to '**provide for education'** as opposed to providing a 'one size fits all' system as seen in more secular societies such as Russia or China. Most commentators and lobbyists in this area miss this important point and are explicating seeking a State school system akin to more secular or socialist societies.

The purpose of this Irish pluralist system is to allow non-faith and faith groups to be accommodated in providing for the education of those in their respective communities. For this reason, we have non-denominational *Educate Together* schools and denominational Catholic schools. The State should consciously support both types of schools and refrain from undue interference and regulation. Educational law expert Dympna Glendenning in the seminal work *'Education and the Law'* refers to the fact that the State should have a 'limited role'.[7] Unfortunately, the reality in Ireland today is otherwise with the State through an unending flow of circular and regulation effectively encroaches on school autonomy.

Catholic schools, like all schools in the Republic of Ireland, are regulated by the State through the Department of Education and Skills (DES). This is a very tightly controlled system with periodic inspections and whole school evaluations mechanisms in situ to monitor and regulate the standards in any school.

- The DES strictly regulates the curriculum of schools on advice from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and through the Inspectorate's evaluation and inspection processes.
- Section 30 of the Education Act (1998) states that the Minister determines:
    a) The subjects to be offered in recognised schools;

[7] Dympna Glendenning, *Education and the Law* (Butterworths, Dublin, 1999).

b) The syllabus of each subject;

c) The amount of instruction time to be allotted to each subject;

d) The guidance and counselling provision to be offered in schools.

- Section 29 deals with Admissions Appeals.
- Schools are managed by a Board of Management but they cannot be described as 'self-governing' as most of their governance is determined by national policies.
- Section 9 of the Education Act defines in exact detail the functions of a recognised school.
- Section 13 describes at length the powers of the inspectorate.
- Section 15 demands that a Board of Management of a recognised school carry out its functions in accord with the policies determined by the minister.
- Schools must comply with extensive legislation and *the Rules for National Schools*.
- Schools must implement the multitude of circulars and guidelines which issue from the DES.
- The exact composition of Boards of Management at primary level and staff appointments is prescribed by the DES through its detailed and legally binding **Governance manual 2015-2019.**

Faith schools receive grant payments for the running of their schools. Due to austerity policies, a lot of schools are poorly funded by the State and most schools have to rely on parental donations and fundraising to make ends meet. Each year regulations and circulars are issued and imposed on schools with increased governance demands and decreased resources.

As the schools buildings are Trust properties, the insurance obligations, Occupiers' liability and Tort law, capacity to be sued, repairs and shortfall in running expenditure are all obligations for the respective Trustees and Trust. These obligations go hand in hand with the aforementioned charitable trust obligations to adhere to the original trust/benefactors intentions in bequeathing land to the Church for the setting up of the schools in most cases.

The Supreme Court has confirmed this viewpoint where it was said that, in regard to organised religions that the 'the State must on occasion recognise and buttress them'.[8]

It is clear that the State has vast powers with regard to faith schools in Ireland. The recent unilateral removal of Section 68 is an indication of the State proceeding without consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

If the State removes the capacity of 'Faith Schools' to organise themselves, it will further encroach on their religious freedom, undermine the constitutional rights of parents and prevent faith schools from fulfilling their legal obligations.

[8] See: Supreme Court Case , Mc Grath v Maynooth College 1979.

It is clear that the new proposal to reduce the 2.5 hours of the 1999 curriculum/ core subject status of Religion Education to non-core/discretionary or flexible time is a further attack on the role of religion in a Catholic school. Such a proposal clearly flies in the face of the legal principles that have been outlined.

Trustees and Patrons of Catholic schools are firmly opposed to this proposal as Religious Education is neither discretionary nor non-core, but rather fundamental to the educational mission of a catholic school.

What the NCCA is trying to do is provide a 'one size fits all' type of curriculum that is secular in outlook, reductionist in nature and is an attack on the faith schools' capacity to uphold their characteristic spirit.

Conclusion

The curricular subject 'religious education' is indispensable to a liberal education that is to be understood as holistic. This point finds much support when one considers that knowledge and understanding are integral to the development of human persons. The gravity of this point is apparent when one observes the contemporary context in which pupils find themselves.

Pupils are immersed in a world that is forever growing in complexity. They find themselves in a world where the description and explanation of a horizon of objects and persons are encapsulated within different forms of knowledge and language. Pupils need to be afforded access to said forms of knowledge and language, especially if they are to actualise the fullness of their potential as human persons who are equipped to (a) fully participate as free agents, and (b) to interact with others in a meaningful way in a democratic and pluralist society.

It is with this point in mind that 'religious education' exercises itself must fully as a core subject within a liberal and holistic curriculum. In particular, 'religious education' promotes and facilitates the personal transcendence of pupils. In this way, as a core subject in a curriculum, religious education moves not only towards the intellectual liberation of pupils, but also towards emotional, social and spiritual liberation – all of which are essential to the actualisation of our potential as human persons. This point is central to any curriculum that is to be understood as providing a liberal and holistic education.[9]

From this standpoint, it can be said that, if 'religious education' or 'the patrons programme' is moved to 'flexible time' it would be yet another expression of the influence being exerted by logical positivism (i.e. a rigid and detached mode of reasoning that is characteristic of the materialistic worldview of the scientific-industrial age), secularism (as opposed to secularisation), and ideological pluralism in our education system.

Briefly stated, freedom 'from religion' does not move towards cultivating a culture in which pupils can move beyond mere tolerance by entering into deeper relationship with others.

[9] See, Peter R. Hobson and John S. Edwards, *Religious Education in a Pluralist Society: The Key Philosophical Issues* (Woburn Press: Great Britain, 1999), 3-25.

Only when the emphasis shifts towards freedom ‘for religion’ can a society be truly recognised as a democratic and pluralist society. Therefore, if one removes ‘religious education’ from the list of core subjects and into ‘flexible time’ it will have a seriously negative impact on the manner in which our education system recognises the development of the full potential of every person as central to the core purpose of the education process. Another likely impact of the proposed change is to inhibit students’ participation in and dynamic contribution to a democratic and pluralist society.

Contributor
Brian Russel

To whom it concerns,

please take into consideration my opinion on increasing the amount of time allowable for PE in the school week. There is national recognition of a growing obesity problem among our children and adults. We see experts on health an fitness on various Tv and radio programmes refer to schools as a key weapon in the Battle against the Bulge. It is hard for schools to be anyway effective in this regard if they are only allotted 1 hour per week to engage in PE. Here are my suggestions to help

- Take 10 minutes per day off Religious education which would free up 50 minutes
- Take 10 minutes off drama.
- This would give an extra hour for PE. You could even incorporate some learning through movement.

Le meas

Brian Russell

Principal

Scoil San Treasa

Kildare

18445o

brianrussell72@gmail.com

Contributor
Bridget Heffernan

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Bridget**
Surname	**Heffernan**
Position (If applicable)	
Organisation (If applicable)	
Address	**25 Ardeevin Ave** **Lucan, Co Dublin**
Telephone	**0873111609**
Email	**bridgetmheffernan@gmail.com**
Date	**May 22nd 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [yes] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [yes] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

It would be interesting and useful if the NCCA provided a reason for the proposals to change the current structure for primary schools. What is not working with the current model and why?

I disagree with the proposed changes for a number of reasons

1. The pre-school and Infant class proposal to prioritise playful teaching and learning is a concern because:
   - Preschool children do not necessarily have a similar learning environment/experience as the children in primary school; the class sizes, the teacher qualification, the length of the day are only three glaring differences
   - Teachers in primary schools , in the main, have sought their own CPD in Aistear, there does not appear to be a standardised qualification or indeed approach to its implementation
   - Teachers teaching in primary schools earn a significantly greater salary to those who will teach in preschools, this is hardly just!
   - Classrooms will need a serious amount of funding to resource a full implementation of Aistear; will this be available and how much will schools receive? Will there be a standardised approach to upskilling ***all*** teachers in Aistear. Will the number of children in a class be reduced to facilitate the proposals?
   - Many children who experience disadvantage in the home need a form of structure in a day that can very often be chaotic outside of school. I believe that Aistear is a sound principal but would prefer to have the professional autonomy to be able adapt the model to suit the needs and experiences of the children in my class.
   - A thematic approach to learning is beneficial. Teachers have been developing a thematic approach in their planning for decades. It has been necessary to be imaginative and creative to ensure that all children access every aspect of the '99 Curriculum. Recognising and acknowledging the teachers' professional agency is most important.
   - Planning for Aistear will undoubtedly increase the amount of time teachers spend on planning, recording and assessment. Where will this time come from?
   - How will this model be practical in special schools?
2. Stage 2 in the three stage approach appears almost identical to how children in 1st-4th class are currently learning and engaging with the '99 Curriculum
3. Stage 3 appears to be extremely academic in style. With the Junior Cycle currently being revised it is difficult to imagine how the children in 5th and 6th classes will prepare for something that is currently being reviewed. I fear that the stress and anxiety that has become so prevalent over the past number of years, in many cases leading to mental health issues among students at post-primary level, may inadvertently begin at primary school for some children.
4. Neither of the models explain how the implementation of either one will reduce curriculum overload, provide practical support or indeed help us to "manage it all".

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

The inference on page 12 of the proposal is that the needs of children are not being met under the current time allocation model in primary schools. I am not convinced!
I disagree with division of the school day into two very distinctive parts. Having taught for over thirty years, I am confident to share my experience. I have taught in several schools and at all levels. I have never been aware of a time when a school day was anything other than a school day! Each day is timetabled, but many a day has not gone according to plan. Children arriving late, illness, accidents, walking in to the school to find criminal damage, educational visitors, school tours, rodents on the yard, blocked toilets……..the list is endless. A day/week or month that is divided into two "time" frames will not work in a school. For example, if a child is unwell during break-time and for health and safety reasons the class cannot go out to play at the designated time, will the teacher have to for-go the flexible part of the day, or eat into the minimum state curriculum time? Will this have to be recorded? Will the Principal need to be informed? I do not wish to appear to be facetious but a school day is just that and even with the strictest time table, when dealing with children, all possibilities cannot be predicted.

The ***minimum*** state curriculum time suggests that where schools/ parents value the academic developments of the children over, for example, their recreation time this time can be reduced. This is a worrying proposal.

The current model for time-allocation has worked very well to date. It has provided teachers with opportunities to be creative and imaginative in their planning. This has provided scope for subjects to be integrated with each other and indeed providing all children to access the curriculum according to their ability. This provides the children with a holistic education.

I am **extremely** concerned that the "patron's programme" as in Religious Education will be allocated to "flexible time". Does this imply that NCCA equate the value and relevance of RE with break time? /roll call?

The proposals appear to have a massive emphasis on academic teaching and learning. The '99 Curriculum promotes the holistic development of the child. It articulates the value of promoting *the spiritual dimension in life.* There appears to be little if any importance given to this particular element in the proposals. My concern is that if RE is segregated from the main curriculum in primary school there will be few if any opportunities to integrate the knowledge and content of the RE curriculum that promotes and fosters the *affective, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious dimensions of the child's experience and development into the other parts of the day.* The proposal to include the "Patron's Programme" in *flexible time* is in direct contention with the ethos of a Faith

school, where the ethos informs every part of the day. A statutory right in all schools. Faith schools will be affected deeply by this proposal. Section 15.2 (b) of the Education Act 1998 obliges schools to uphold the 'religious ethos' of the patron. The ethos of a faith school is informed by the teachings of that faith. Faith cannot be compartmentalised. Faith informs every aspect of school life. It informs the values, the behaviour, the moral code, the very character of the school. For parents who have chosen to raise their child in a particular faith, and consequently choose a faith school for their child, their rights are infringed upon.

Religious Education, as is currently being taught in Catholic schools, is informed by the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*. This document provides a rich source of content to not only educate Catholic children in their faith but to teach children of other faiths and other stances for living about the Catholic faith. It also includes strand units on other world religions. This RE Curriculum promotes the development of skills of empathy, tolerance and sensitivity. A curriculum subject can only be accessed by all where it is integrated into all aspects of the school day. For example, if children did not have an opportunity to greet each other with a *Dia Dhuit*, how could a school possibly promote the use of the Irish language outside its *minimum state curriculum time*? RE is an integral part of the school day in a Faith school. It informs all aspects of the day. It is not flexible, movable nor discrete. It cannot be taught in isolation. The proposal to place the patron's programme, the only "other" curricular subject from the current Curriculum in "flexible time" is an insult to Faith schools.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

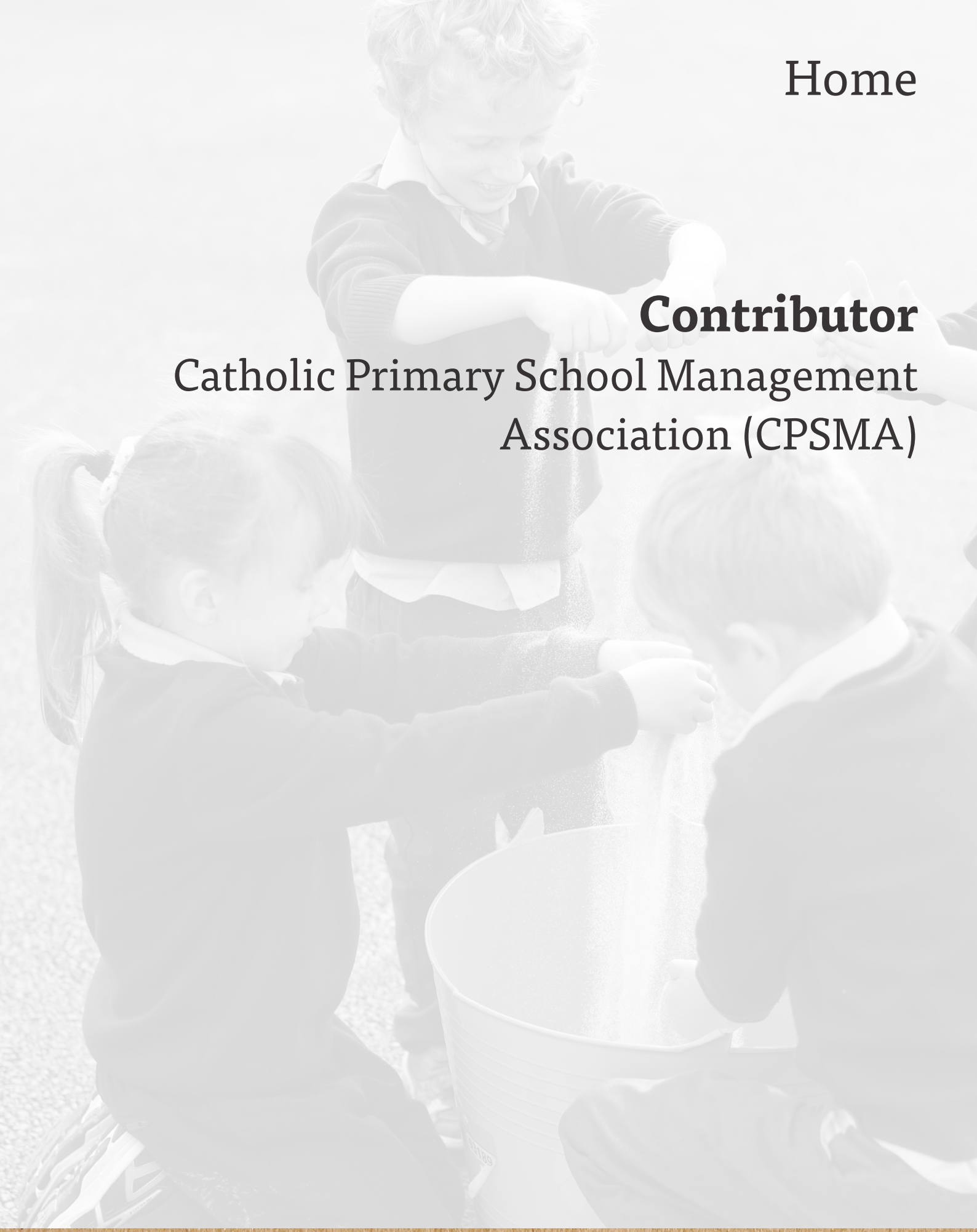
My main concern about the proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum is that the identity of primary schools will be moulded into a generic model of education. I am very proud of Irish primary schools and I am very proud of my contribution to the education of over a thousand children to date. I have had the privilege of teaching in a variety of schools and each was unique in character and spirit. The '99 Curriculum was well received and though not perfect it allowed a certain amount of flexibility, creativity and imagination in teaching and learning. The current proposals, as presented do not indicate how they will address the most common cry from teachers of "work overload". In fact I see the current proposals creating far more paperwork for teachers and management.

The division of school time into one minimum time slot and a flexible time slot is, in my opinion, an attempt to remove religious education from the primary school. Flexible time might be perceived as "non-teaching" time. Is RE perceived by NCCA as anything less than an academic subject? Is this a subtle approach to removing RE from primary schools? RE is recognised as an academic subject that may be studied at post-primary and third level. Why then would this curricular area would be ignored as a core subject at primary level?

Another concern is the use of the word flexible. What part of a school day is flexible? The roll must be called, the children must have recreation time. If the core part of the day is a ***minimum*** 60%, what guarantees will be put in place to ensure that RE is taught for the prescribed amount of time each day? Is it possible that a new initiative from the NCCA e.g. ERBE will be introduced into the

core curriculum? Who will determine if the minimum for any school would be 85% of time should be spent on core curricular areas.

My final concern is about the number of people who have been made aware of these proposals. There is a serious lack of awareness especially among professionals. Are NCCA serious about the consultation process?



Contributor

Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA)

Submission to the NCCA Consultation on Time and Structure in a Primary Curriculum

Introduction

CPSMA is pleased to make a submission to the NCCA Consultation on Time and Structure in a Primary Curriculum, we would like to acknowledge the extension of the consultation process following our meeting with the NCCA and the quality of the briefing provided to us by the NCCA in our meeting with them.

Before drafting this submission CPSMA and its local colleagues held a total of seven regional meetings which were attended by approximately 90 Principals and Chairs of Boards of Management. These meetings looked at the proposals in some detail and the outputs from these meetings form a key input to this submission.

However CPSMA would also like to note its concerns regarding the current consultation process, while acknowledging the difficulty of ensuring effective consultation with Primary Teachers who are focused on the immediate challenges of providing a high quality Education on limited resources.

It was clear from our interactions with Principals that;

- Despite the best efforts of the NCCA that many Principals had not heard of, or had very little knowledge of the consultation;
- There was a belief amongst some Teachers (a minority it must said) that the consultation was a box ticking exercise for a pre-determined policy outcome;
- Many complained that the consultation was taking place as the same time as the SEN model of allocation was being rolled out and they did not have the "bandwidth" to engage properly with both.

CPSMA would also have reservations on the effectiveness of the consultation model currently used by NCCA. For a start it was not made clear that updating and refining the current curriculum was one of the potential outcomes of the consultation process. The consultation conference held by the NCCA seemed to be focused more on selling the options rather than consulting with Principals.

In addition CPSMA would have some concern that virtually all of the media coverage of the consultation focused on reducing the time allocated to religion in the curriculum[1].

This could have led to an erroneous view that the consultation was solely on reducing the hours devoted to religion rather than on curriculum reforms which could potentially have profound implications for teaching, timetabling and educational attainment in Primary Schools. The incomplete media coverage has done a grave disservice to the consultation and CPSMA would urge the NCCA to try and put the record straight on the scope, propose and critical nature of this exercise.

Feedback from Principals

Amongst the issues raised by Principals were;

General

- There is need to engage in a communication programme with all primary schools around the proposals on structures and time allocation for the primary curriculum.
- NCCA should arrange a pilot based on these proposals around structure and time allocation in the primary curriculum to prove the concept
- A response to curriculum overload requires a reduction in content that needs to be spelt out in a much clearer fashion what is to be cut
- Curriculum overload is an issue but what is also emerging as an issue is ***initiative*** overload
- Strong feeling of "don't get rid of the 1999" curriculum among many Principals who felt with a little refinement that it was still fit for purpose
- Complaints that "This feels like a form of micro-managing"; a kind of distrust. Give the proper level of supports to engage with the 1999 curriculum first before radical change
- Existing curriculum is doing the job it set out to do – possibility of tweaking the 1999 curriculum rather than replacing it. Thematic approach is being used anyway; integrated learning isn't new.
- There's a need to reduce the paperwork such as that involved in the introduction of the oral language programme
- What space has there been to really engage parents' voices in this. If teachers are unaware of what is being proposed, then parents are definitely unaware. Ultimately we need to respect parents' voices by

[1] https://www.rte.ie/news/2017/0328/863272-school-religion/

engaging with them before any further work is done on the curriculum proposals regarding time and structure.

Aistear

- Aistear has been well received but there serious issue around the lack of training and lack of resources
- Training has been ad hoc, with doubts expressed as to the quality and duration of training and the experience of these providing training
- Concerns were expressed that Schools were claiming to do Aistear without actually fully understanding what Aistear actually was
- Teachers from Deis Schools were concerned that the Aistear methodology may not have the same applicability in Deis Schools
- Issue of inspection of preschool settings has emerged as a key concern; who is monitoring what is happening?
- Mismatch between what is happening in terms of the preschool and primary school setting will make it difficult for the kind of first stage approach suggested here. The term 'preschool' is a misnomer here. There are frequently no connections between both.

Religious Education/Patron's Programme

- Grow in Love is giving structure to the R.E. programme. This programme has been rolled out across the country as the standard patron's programme for Catholic schools.
- Patron's programme should be a core subject; what is the rational for removing it?
- Fear that taking RE out will diminish the school's capacity to create spiritually confident and religiously articulate young people
- It will make visits from the local parish extremely difficult in terms of engaging with schools; parish schools will in time cease to exist in any meaningful way with a significant loss in terms of the school's identity and connection to the local community
- Keep R.E out of flexible/discretionary time. Discretionary suggests choice. As the patron's programme is mandatory it should either be included in the Minimum State Curriculum or placed in a third category called permanent or mandatory time. Patron's programme should be at the core of the day
- Ongoing concern around ERB and Ethics; will this 'subject' replace RE?
- This will have a significant negative impact on the training of teachers; RE is more than just the Patron's Programme, it is an academic discipline deserving of respect.

- RE seeks to do what the state also desires; that is create caring, compassionate, informed and engaged citizens. These aims alone justify why it needs to be there in the core curriculum.

Flexible Time

- Remove the phrase discretionary curriculum time
- Flexible makes sense in the context of the time allocation being recorded on a) weekly, b) monthly, c) term or d) annual basis.
- Boards of Management will have to approve the approach to time allocation in individual schools
- Parents need to trust what schools do; this leaves a huge and unnecessary burden of responsibility and communication on the principal's shoulders and also on the Board of Management's.

Subjects

- Subjects should be introduced from First Class onwards
- There are other ways of introducing children to different subject areas
- Teachers are already integrating subject areas across the curriculum
- Concern that fifth and sixth classes will be overly focused on second level; that children will be put under significant pressure in terms of what needs to be covered
- What's tested gets taught; what will be tested here? What impact will that have on subject teaching and time allocation.
- How will all of this be inspected and teachers performance measured

CPSMA's Views

The NCCA's proposal for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum sees the promotion of the Aistear programme as fundamental building block in early childhood education.

Recent years have seen the benefits of play taking centre stage through the promotion of the Aistear Programme. The research that forms the basis for the development of this programme is clear on the central role of play. There is a shift in early educational settings from what children should be learning to how they should be learning. This recognises the social nature of learning along with the social construction of meaning becoming the dominant influence on pedagogy.

In 1971 the Irish Primary School Curriculum, Curaclam na Bunscoile, was introduced into Irish primary schools. It was based on a child-centred philosophy. It brought into focus early childhood education and teaching methodologies improved. Although a revised curriculum was introduced in 1999 the pedagogical principles that formed the 1971 curriculum regarding play were maintained and indeed expanded and developed. For many years now primary school teachers have used integration of subject areas successfully to fulfil the needs of their pupils and provide a well-rounded and quality education.

The Primary School Curriculum, (1999), draws attention to the importance of play in the curriculum for Infant classes. The emphasis given to the role of play is considered ideal to meet the learning needs of the young child. Nic Craith and Fay, (2007) explain the theoretical underpinnings of the 1999 curriculum and child development and growth as having its foundation in the theories of Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky. The curriculum seeks to motivate children into becoming active in their own learning and clearly outlines the importance of play in the curriculum for Infants as play is considered ideal for meeting the learning needs of young children

The benefits of a play based curriculum for junior classes within the primary school as proposed by the NCCA is therefore not contested however researchers such as Murphy (2006) and Nic Craith & Fay, (2007), draw attention to findings regarding the many inhibiting factors that prevent play opportunities actually taking place in the classroom.

Nic Craith & Fay, (2007) describe how teachers report a lack of understanding on the part of parents as to the value of play in the Infant classroom. Teachers also report other obstacles to incorporating play into the curriculum such as class size, multi-grade classes and a lack of resources and space.

It is clear the idealism of the play centred curriculum is not easily translated into the classroom. In order to fully implement the Infant curriculum that is play and activity based, as proposed with the introduction of the Aistear programme, further investment is needed.

Perhaps most worrying of all is the attitude some teachers have towards play which is in conflict with the curriculum guidelines (Murphy, 2006). Murphy's research indicates that teachers treat play as an activity as opposed to an 'all pervasive methodology.' This highlights a need for continued professional development on the part of the teacher as it is the teacher who plays a pivotal role in developing a pedagogy where the teacher is more than just an observer.

Schools need the autonomy to implement any programme of learning in accordance with the needs of the children they have responsibility for. It is

ridiculous to suggest that the proposed flexible time will provide the autonomy needed as some children need structure throughout the curriculum in order to develop the necessary skills for learning. In an overly prescriptive curriculum this autonomy is taken from schools.

Having an entitlement to a pre-school education does not guarantee a quality experience for all children involved. The research which underpins the promotion of the Aistear programme recognises the role of the adult in early education as central to the effectiveness of the Aistear programme.

The importance of well-educated practitioners is highlighted in the research into effective quality early childhood care and education. The lack of development of the educational and childcare sectors is identified as one of the key problems facing the reform and development of early education in Ireland. It recognises the limited communication between the two sectors while admitting there is a need for a significant investment in early childhood education in Ireland which involves an ongoing review of early educational opportunities for children up to six years. Pedagogical approaches in schools and preschool settings can promote, or inhibit, continuity of learning for children.

The staged approach as proposed in both models by the NCCA would imply structures existing that would group both pre-school and primary school together. Both primary schools and preschools differ in many ways, including the availability and accessibility of resources.

Bioecological theory emphasizes the importance of inter-related contexts in supporting children's development and learning. The transition to school is recognized as a focal point of children's future school engagement and educational outcomes.

As it stands the transition from primary education to secondary education is well structured. However there is no such structured communication between preschool and primary school.

It is clearly evident that as a result the NCCA cannot justify their inclusion of Pre-school as the first stage in their proposed staged models for a new primary curriculum. Surely the priority should be on resourcing and professional development for the Aistear programme while also proper structuring and resourcing of the pre-school sector

There is increasing pressure to recognize the global implications of education and to establish educational programs that guarantee the development of a highly trained workforce while also providing value for money. The CEEU

indicates its concerns around the appeal for universal provision for early childhood education and the risk that resources may be spread too thinly.

In April 2014 the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published a report which examined early childhood education in Ireland. This report highlights how 'the revision of regulations in 2006/7 gave limited attention to the issue of programme quality with staff qualifications and curriculum content left vague and undefined.'(CEEU 2014). It was also found that monitoring of the sector was provided by an inspectorate who lack the necessary pedagogical background to evaluate and assess its educational content.

As an incentive to increasing the levels of qualifications in pre-school settings a higher rate of capitation is paid to pre-school service providers where all pre-school leaders have a minimum of level 7 on the NFQ. Figures obtained through the CEEU indicate that in 2012/13 of the 65,878 children participating in the ECCE scheme only 15,286 enrolments are in receipt of the higher rate of capitation. It is of great concern that the NCCA are promoting the inclusion of the pre-school sector in the proposed restructuring of time allocation without first ensuring the quality of such education.

Primary education is severely underfunded in its current state. Schools struggle on a daily basis to deliver a quality curriculum to the children in their care. The implementation of the proposed changes would only serve to undermine the good work taking place in schools up and down the country.

The Patrons Programme

CPSMA wishes to register our deep concerns at the proposals contained in the NCCA Consultation to remove what they refer to as the Patrons Programme or religious education from the core curriculum of Primary Schools and ascribe it to the more arbitrary flexible time.

It is important to note that when the former Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, rescinded Rule 68 of the Rules for National schools in January 2016, mention was made that the Education Act protected a schools ethos and, consequently, the teaching of religion in faith schools was safeguarded by the Act. In a publication from the Department of Education and Skills, Advancing School Autonomy in the Irish School System, (December 2015) it was stated that 'in all primary and post-primary schools, the school's stated ethos, (that is the values and principles it promotes) is decided by the owner or patron/trustees of the school and not by central government'. It is clear that the current proposals by the NCCA are an attempt to undermine the Education Act, contradict the Ministers assurances to faith schools of one year ago and undermine the role of a school's patron/trustees.

Under the new proposals the NCCA are suggesting two categories of time. One is 'minimum state curricular time' (60% of the school day). In this category, the state would set the minimum amount of time required for six key curricular areas but these would not include Religious Education.

Religious Education, it is being proposed, will not be part of the new state core curriculum.

The other category is called 'flexible time' (40% of the school day). This is to include discretionary curriculum time, assembly time, roll call, breaks, and the patron's programme.

We respectfully remind the NCCA that the Primary School Curriculum (1999) was founded on the principle of integrated learning and teachers were encouraged to detect valuable connections between spiritual, moral and religious education and all the other curriculum areas.

If Religious Education becomes part of the non-core and therefore discretionary curriculum, will it eventually become, as the Forum recommended, a discrete subject? If so, it would be seriously damaging to the characteristic spirit of faith based schools.

We strongly believe;

- That it is not the role of the NCCA to make value judgements and attitudinal realignments of subjects by using the method of time allocation.
- The NCCA cannot undermine the role of a schools patron/trustees in relation to the schools ethos or characteristic spirit.
- All subjects are intellectual educational endeavours and demand equality of respect.
- That there is curricular (teaching and learning) time and then there is non-teaching time (for breaks and roll call). That is the natural demarcation of time. To put Religious Education into that non-teaching time is to make a value judgement and that is not the role of the NCCA.
- There is one curriculum in place in primary schools.
- Religious Education is one subject on that curriculum and its' curriculum is set by the Patron in accordance with a schools' Characteristic Spirit. The NCCA and ETBI have used this argument to promote the NCCA 'Goodness me, Goodness you' programme in multi-denominational primary schools under non-religious patronage. Other subjects are provided by the NCCA and are agreed in a consultative fashion (as per the Education Act 1998).

It is difficult to see the NCCA's proposals as anything other than an attempt to undermine the Patrons religious education programme and role in a school and to reduce a schools 'characteristic spirit' to a generic template that will, in short time, make patronage irrelevant.

In essence, this proposal is an undermining of the integral nature of religious education in the school curriculum and undermines the very nature of faith based schools.

It also goes to the heart of the 1998 Education Act and undermines the concept, functions and duties of a schools patron.

Conclusion

CPSMA has concerns regarding;

- The nature and effectiveness of the consultation process
- The use of Aistear as the "strategic hinge" on which the whole reform of the curriculum hangs, given that Aistear has never been properly resourced, fully implemented or properly evaluated
- Standards, high levels of variability of service, and lack of any real linkage between the pre-school and the Primary School system
- The lack of understanding of the central importance of the Patrons programme and its mandatory nature.

It is critical to note that CPSMA far from being hostile to Aistear, is in fact very supportive but believes strongly that the successful implementation of Aistear requires serious investment, a structured training programme and would benefit greatly from a full evaluation to demonstrate the value of this methodology to all of the Education Stakeholders.

To build a new curriculum on a platform which has yet to be fully or properly implemented seems a very high risk strategy for Primary Education.

Contributor

Catholic Schools Partnership

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Ferdia**
Surname	**Kelly**
Position (If applicable)	**Chief Executive Officer**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Catholic Schools Partnership**
Address	**New House, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co Kildare.**
Telephone	**087 2932133**
Email	**Ferdia.kelly@catholicschools.ie**
Date	**18th May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [x]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

The Catholic Schools Partnership (CSP) recognises the merit in developing an approach which supports the continuity of experience and progression in children's learning as they move from pre-school to primary school. In the same way, the CSP sees value in supporting children's transition from primary to post-primary school through subject specific learning.

The CSP supports the priority being placed on the principles, themes and methodologies of Aistear with an emphasis on playful teaching and learning across the curriculum with child-led play.

In examining the proposed two-stage or three-stage models, the CSP is conscious that the current four-stage model is generally accepted in the primary school system and one doesn't hear any particular complaints about the model. However, in order to provide for a smoother transition at the points of movement from pre-school to primary and primary to post-primary, the CSP sees merit in exploring the proposals around either a two-stage or three-stage model.

The two-stage model would see the themes in Aistear extend further into the primary curriculum – up to the beginning of third class, when subjects would be introduced. The three-stage model allows for a gradual transition from the Aistear themes, at the beginning of first class, to curriculum areas and then, at the beginning of fifth class, to subject areas.

In reflecting on the above models, the CSP sees more merit in moving to the three-stage model as it is more closely aligned to the current four-stage model and won't create such a major adjustment for schools in gradually transitioning to a new model.

The CSP is concerned that the overall proposals around the structure of the new primary curriculum assumes that Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum, is well embedded in the system and in particular the challenge of providing a pre-school system of education that is recognised for the uniformity of high standards has been achieved. It is vital that before work commences on developing a new primary curriculum the development, training and resourcing of the Aistear curriculum is fully implemented. Otherwise, major difficulties will arise in the new primary curriculum in attempting to transition to a model of curriculum based on the continuity and progression of children's learning. The system at both national and local levels must feel at ease with the existing systems at pre-school and primary levels before being challenged by a new curriculum which, it is proposed, will run from the beginning of pre-school right through to 6th class in primary and eventually through to post-primary level.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

The CSP is concerned at the removal of the Patron's Programme from the Minimum State Curriculum as per the 1999 curriculum. We believe that as the Patron's Programme forms a core part of a school's curriculum it should be based in the Minimum State Curriculum category, even if this title has to be adjusted.

The Minimum State Curriculum requires further elaboration as in the proposed breakdown of a time allocation in relation to each subject or curriculum area. Such a breakdown in time allocation should identify a total time allocation and in the case of some subjects specify the minimum weekly time allocation. However, it should also be recognised that the time allocation for some subjects can be utilised in a flexible manner, either through monthly or term time or through integration into other subject areas. Arts Education would seem to be a curriculum area that would lend itself to such arrangements.

The use of words such as 'flexible' or 'discretionary' has the potential to create confusion. The reality is that the areas included under 'Flexible' Time are mandatory and therefore should not be described as either 'flexible' or 'discretionary'. If the Patron's Programme cannot be returned to the area of the Minimum State Curriculum, then a third category needs to be created entitled 'Permanent Time' which will include the Patron's Programme, break time and roll call.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

The CSP believes that a pilot might be run across a number of schools for the next school year, 2017/18, rolling out samples of various approaches to the time allocation issue. In this way the feedback from the pilot will assist the NCCA in progressing the consultation process around the time allocation in any proposed new primary curriculum

Home

Contributor
Ciara Fagan

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	Ciara
Surname	Fagan
Position (If applicable)	Primary School Teacher
Organisation (If applicable)	
Address	91 Kimmage Road West Dublin 12
Telephone	0879957401
Email	faganci@tcd.ie
Date	14th April 2017

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [X] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [X] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I think that both models could work well provided that proper taecher training and support is given. I believe that learning through play is very important in early years and subject study is very beneficial in the later years of primary school.

I think my preferred model would be the 3 stage model but I would prefer 1st Class to be included in Stage 1: Stage 1 Pre-school to 1st Class focusing on Aistear's themes, Stage 2 2nd Class to 4th Class focusing on curriculum areas, and Stage 3 5th and 6th Class focusing on subjects. I believe the transition between each of these stages would be more fluid and there would be plenty of scaffolding along each of the stages.

Using the three stage model, the themes of Aistear and thematic learning (e.g. At the farm) could be used for Stage 1.

For Stage 2, curriculum areas such as SESE (Science and Engineering, Geography, History, Coding), Arts Education (Drama, Art, Music), Health & Well-Being – (PE, SPHE, Mental Health, ERB) could be integrated with Languages and Mathematics using themes to help integrate the subject areas. The use of drama as a methodology to integrate subject areas could provide for rich learning experiences.

Stage 3 could focus on specific subjects – English, Gaeilge, Mathematics, STEM, History, Geography, Drama, Art, Music, SPHE, PE, ERB. However a similar approach to integration used in Stage 1 and Stage 2 would be useful.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

Because the 60% minimum state curriculum time 40% flexible time is so similar to the current time allocation that teachers have, and that has been mentioned as an issue for teachers, I think perhaps a 50% minimum state curriculum time and a 50% flexible time would give teachers more autonomy, more opportunities to do block planning and reduce teachers' stress. At the same time the 50% minimum state curriculum time would ensure that all students in the country are receiving the same education in relation to Languages, Mathematics and whatever way the curriculum areas and subjects are decided upon in the next stage of this consultation.

I do believe that curriculum areas and subjects should have specified time allocations to ensure that all children get introduced to these themes, curriculum areas and subjects at some point in their primary education and there is some accountability.

I also think that without specified time allocations important subjects could be lost especially drama. I often use drama as a methodology to teach in different subject areas and I feel it engages children on a deeper level to the content that I am teaching. However the importance of drama as a subject in its own right cannot be underestimated. It has the power to really engage children and young people, get them thinking on a deeper level, exploring places and ideas they could never explore that far in reality. I have seen children develop great understanding by 'doing' rather than reading and writing about it.

I would prefer time to be allocated on a termly or annual basis, it would allow for greater opportunites for integration and block planning. I think the proportion of time allocated should differ depending on the curriculum stage but I believe that all curriculum areas/subjects should feature in each year of a child's live to inspire children, to introduce them to new things, to build each year on what has been learnt previously. For example science and engineering is just as important to a 6 year old than it is to a 12 year old. For those that will be interested in science their whole life, that flame would have been lit at 6 years old setting them off on a path of exploration. However the time allocation could differ greatly among the stages.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

I am in favour of the new ERB programme that is being developed at the moment. I believe it is important for children to learn about religions and ethics and this will encourage and support respect and celebration of diversity. However I do not feel that faith formation (religious education of the patron body) has a place in publicly funded, state schools in light of the recent results on religion in Census 2016 and from the experiences noted by different groups e.g. EQUATE, Education Equality, Teachers4Equality that have been set up calling for an end to religious discrimination in schools. I do not believe the state curriculum time allocation or the flexible time allocation should be used for faith formation. That time is better spent on other themes, curriculum areas and subjects for ALL students in Irish schools.

Currently, teaching faith formation takes up 2.5 hours a week, more than twice as much time spent teaching Science, Geography, History, SPHE, Music, Drama, Art, PE and just less than one hour that English, Irish and Maths is taught. With a big push for an increase in STEM skills for children, higher levels of obesity in young children in part due to lack of physical education and teachers being forced to take time from the Arts curriculum to teach literacy and numeracy, I believe the time spent teaching faith formation in schools could be more beneficial in other areas

of the curriculum. It would also mean that every child is treated equally in our public schools.

I have worked in a Catholic primary school for twelve years. Religion (Catholic faith formation) is taught for 30 minutes every day and prayer is said during school assemblies, ceremonies, lunches, masses and special events. For half an hour every day in 90% of Irish state funded schools children who are not Catholic are therefore excluded from full participation in their class' activities. They are excluded from school ceremonies, concerts, masses and events. And in 2nd class and 6th class not only are they excluded from classroom activities but also from their peer groups as they are not taking part in "the main event" that year. Because often it is very difficult for teachers to accommodate children who opt out of religion, the children stay in the class and children absorb the information given. It certainly isn't intentional religious indoctrination by the teacher but it goes against the rights of the child and the parents as laid out in our constitution. Children who are not Catholic lose approximately 91 hours of their right to a full and equal education every year in 90% of Irish state-funded primary schools, this is not right or just. In their primary school life that amounts to more than 728 hours wasted.

Faith formation should be taken out of publicly funded schools and the patron body should take control of faith formation outside of the state curriculum time allocation and the flexible time allocation so that all students get a fair and balanced education in Irish primary schools.

Contributor
Clare O'Callaghan

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Clare**
Surname	**O'Callaghan**
Position (If applicable)	**Primary School Teacher**
Organisation (If applicable)	
Address	**11 Loftus Lane, Belmont, Stepaside, Dublin 18**
Telephone	**0857203908**
Email	**clareocallaghan2012@yahoo.com**
Date	**19/04/2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [√] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [√] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I agree with the proposed change to either a three / two stage model. This would mean that learning would be more organic with greater collaboration among the teaching staff.

I believe that a **two stage model** would be preferable to a three stage model. I am teaching in a senior school (3rd – 6th class) which is run very distinctly and differently from the junior school. The three stage model would mean that the teaching process would be significantly impacted going from 2nd to 3rd class, as the children move schools and there would be the danger that fragmented learning would occur.
The two-stage model, in which 3rd – 6th class is treated as a single unit, is, in my view preferable, given the set up of our senior school.

I applaud the need to move to "subject specific learning, formal learning" in the latter stages of primary school. As a primary teacher it would be great if we knew exactly what the pupils should both know and have experienced/learnt at the end of each academic year. That would be very beneficial.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

I believe that there is **no need** to change the current model of time allocation for primary schools. I would **strongly recommend** that religion is allocated to the **core curriculum** time and is NOT included in flexible time.
As a primary school teacher myself, I have seen first hand the benefits that a discrete 30 minutes per day religion class has.
In my experience, the children benefit from religion time by becoming **calmer** and more **peaceful** after short daily prayer/meditation sessions. In religion class the children have an opportunity to engage with the 'bigger questions' about life and come to have an understanding about the

meaning of life and how precious it is, something that is very important particularly as they start to enter adolescenthood. Religion class also helps to enhance the **self-esteem** of pupils as they come to know about a God who loves them just as they are. They learn that they are intrinsically valuable and are not valued simply for their looks, talents, skills etc.
There is a real danger that putting religion in the 'flexible' time downgrades the important role that the teaching of religion has in our schools.
Parents who choose to send their children to denominational schools are constitutionally entitled to a religious and spiritual formation for their children. This responsibility is a serious one and should therefore be included in core curriculum time. The new Grow in Love programme for Catholic schools includes enough material for 30 minutes per day of teaching and is a new and dynamic programme that both teachers and pupils are enjoying.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

All my observations are included in Sections 1 and 2 above. Thank you.

Contributor
Clare Finnerty

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Clare**
Surname	**Finnerty**
Position (If applicable)	**Principal**
Organisation (If applicable)	**St.Laurence's N.S**
Address	**Brookstone Road, Baldoyle, Dublin 13**
Telephone	**018322938, 018326782**
Email	**info@stlaurencesbaldoyle.org**
Date	**25/05/17**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

x	

Personal Organisation

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?
Yes

x	

No

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.
Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.
   Please consider:

- The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
- The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
- The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
- **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I feel that the curriculum as it stands needs some work and adjustment but I don't feel there is a need to completely change the whole approach of the curriculum.
I feel the idea on basing the new curriculum as a theme based curriculum centred around Aistear is ridiculous when the VAST majority of teachers are not trained in aistear and many less well off schools do not have the resources necessary to carry this out. The department of Education would need to put a huge amount of money and training into this new curriculum despite the fact that the current curriculum with a few adjustments would be fine!
I feel the current model comprising of four two-year stages works well and why do we need to change it so drastically???????

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.
   Please consider:

- The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
- The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
- The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
- Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

I have grave concerns about the allocation of time, particularly regarding the flexible time. How can it be monitored that all subjects are being taught enough. This curriculum leaves it open to teachers to concentrate on their preferred areas which in one respect is fine but it also leads to the possibility that some subjects could be neglected. Subjects like PE could be taught in blocks as opposed to a more regular sensible approach. I also feel that

the ethos of Catholic schools could be affected as Religion is not being given the same allocation as in the past.
I am also concerned that certain subjects are only being formally introduced in 5th and 6th class. I am very afraid that the standard of our education system will drop dramatically.
I also have concerns over how, as a principal I can assess the level of work being done. How can the Department of Education ensure the same level/standard is being achieved in all schools, as this approach will be very difficult to assess as it is all theme based and will very much depend on the individual schools.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

I am very concerned that very few of my staff are trained in any way in Aistear and we are about to be presented with a theme based curriculum based around Aistear.
Funding is another big concern.

Contributor
CPSMA
Ossory Diocese

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**CPSMA Council, Ossory Diocese**
Surname	
Position (If applicable)	
Organisation (If applicable)	**CPSMA**
Address	**Kilkenny**
Telephone	
Email	
Date	**10/05/2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [no] Organisation [yes]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [yes] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

The members of the above named council are dismayed and saddened by the Proposals for Structure and Time Allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum. First and foremost these proposals have not been widely circulated. Teachers themselves are not aware of them .Since they came to our notice we have spoken to many educators and without exception the only complaint they have with the current curriculum is that of **overload** What we are hearing is STOP introducing all these changes. No sooner have they become accustomed to directives when new proposals are made. Parents who are the first and most important educators of children are totally unaware of the proposals.
Why fix that which is NOT broken?

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

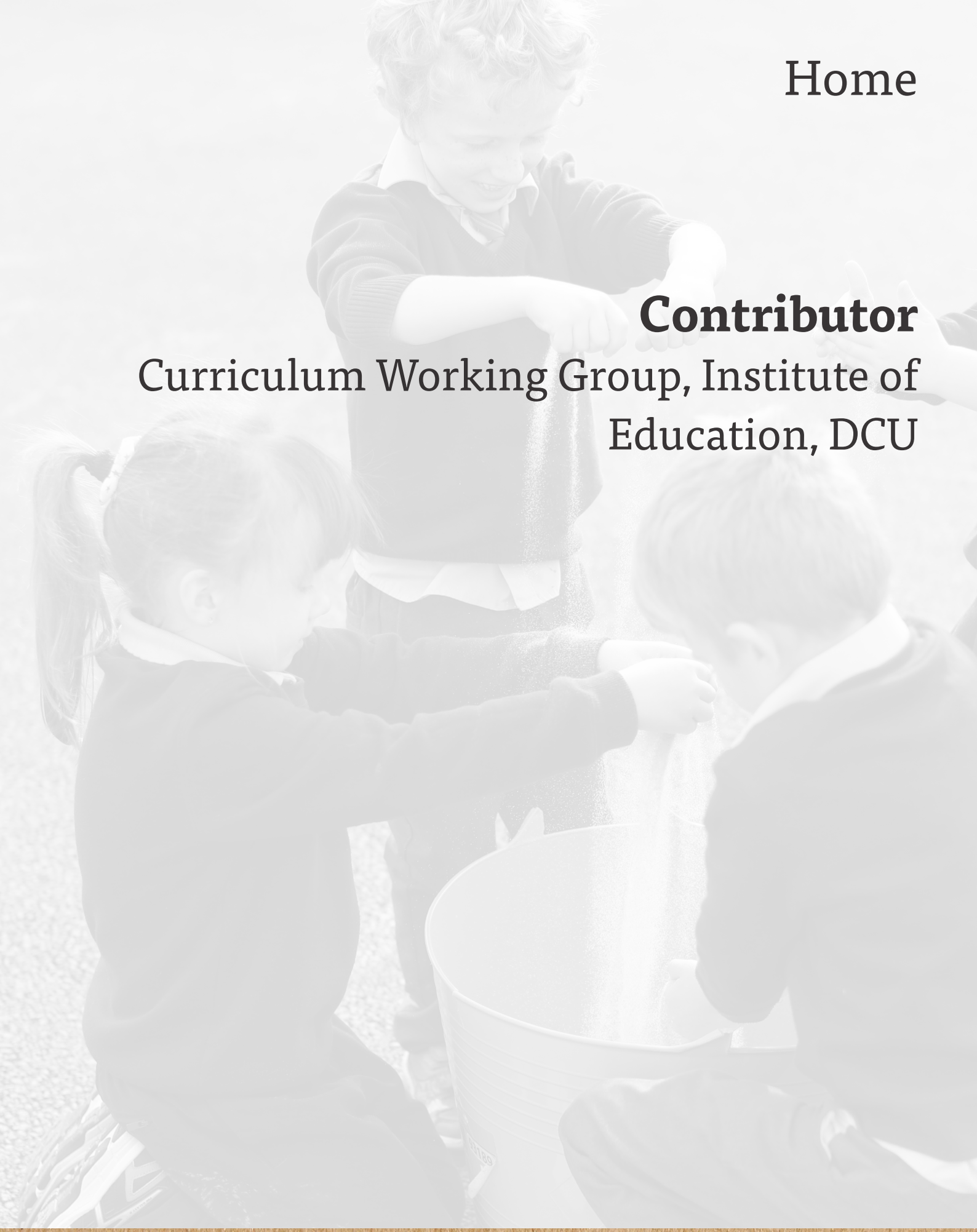
We disagree in the strongest possible terms with the Patron's Programme being undermined. R.E is enshrined in the Education Act and must be retained among the Core Curriculum subjects. It must NOT be demoted into flexible time .*The 1999 curriculum states that Religious education 'enables the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual'.* Page 58 (PSC)states *'In seeking to develop the full potential of the individual the curriculum takes into account the child's affective,*

aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious needs. The spiritual dimension is a fundamental aspect of individual experience, and its religious and cultural expression is an inextricable part of Irish culture and history' The last paragraph on this page recognises the rights of the different church authorities to 'design curricula in religious education and **to supervise their teaching and implementation**' Given that R.E. was cited as being so important to the holistic development of children in 1999 why is the NCCA seeking to put it into flexible time now? Surely what was so central to our children's lives in 1999 remains so in 2017. R.E. is not like secular subjects which are in a constant state of change depending on what is in fashion. R.E permeates all dimensions of the child's development. Tenets of our Catholic faith are constantly being attacked by the media. We see these proposals as yet another attack on our Catholic Faith Schools, indeed on all Faith schools. Why is it that R.E. is the only curriculum subject singled out to go into flexible time?

Teachers **must** call the roll, children **must** have breaks, **assembly time must** be allowed for…..amid all this The Patron's Programme will certainly be neglected as there will not be enough time found in the day to attend to it. Do we want to educate our children in a pluralist society? They deserve better. **Our final word is that The Patron's Programme be given its rightful place among the core subjects.**

.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?



Contributor

Curriculum Working Group, Institute of Education, DCU

Curriculum Working Group (Institute of Education, Drumcondra) Submission to NCCA Curriculum Consultation - May 2017

Background: The Curriculum Working Group was set up at the Institute of Education, Drumcondra, in Spring 2017 by Dr Jones Irwin, in order to develop an expertise in the study of curriculum as such. There have been several submissions from the IOE in terms of specific areas of curriculum study (for example, Early Years Education, Literacy Education etc.). This submission focuses rather on more meta-level curriculum issues in terms of the proposed vision for the evolution of the Irish Primary Curriculum by NCCA. It is hoped that the Working Group can create a more direct connection between teacher education and the NCCA curriculum development and develop research focused on the area of curriculum as such.

The following members of the IOE contributed to this submission; Dr John White, Dr Liz Dunphy, Dr Regina Murphy, Dr Zita Lysaght. Thanks also to Professors Fionnuala Waldron and Padraig O'Duibhir for advice on the consultation.

Our submission is framed in terms of open questions to the NCCA consultation and proposals which we have grouped under the following headings:

Stages of Learning in a Curriculum

Implementing Curriculum

Theoretical Vision and Framework for the Curriculum

Relation to 1999 Curriculum and to Aistear

Teacher and Student Roles and Agency

Connect to Initial Teacher Education and Research

Stages of Learning in a Curriculum

1. In what way can the various stages identified by the NCCA marry with curriculum design and delivery for the purposeful facilitation of fruitful learning experiences for all pupils?

2. How will the importance of fundamental knowledge and ways of thinking be foregrounded for all children and at all stages. What roles will be ascribed to the different disciplines in this regard?

3. Is it possible to arrive at a position with regard to curriculum structure and time without simultaneous consideration of all other related policies, values, outcomes, resources and their assessment and evaluation?

Implementing Curriculum

1. How will the interfaces between different educational settings (preschool, second-level) be connected through the primary curriculum?
2. What tensions arise for the primary curriculum in seeking to meet the imperatives of a broad and balanced education for all children, and the exigencies of official policies related to literacy and numeracy?
3. Given the OECD's observation on the 'legendary' autonomous nature of schools and teachers' work practices, to what extent might the devolution of timetabling to schools result in asymmetry and inequality between schools, especially those that are essentially below average in curricular, organisational and leadership matters?
4. Since support for implementation of the 1999 curriculum was foreshortened due to the economic downturn, how might future revisions be safeguarded from such risks?
5. What overarching economic model will underpin education in early years and primary: Dominance of provision of ITE by a single private provider? Outsourcing of several aspects of curriculum provision to private tutors/coaches (under the auspices of 'partnership') as well as publishing companies and international education agencies? Are children, teachers, parents and teacher educators expected to embrace a market-driven model as the future vision for EY and primary education?

6. Recent experience of curriculum development in NCCA, for example through the ERBE and GMGY curricula respectively (in values and religious education) have foregrounded the significance of network groups and micro-level generative curriculum vision and implementation. In the development of the whole Primary Curriculum, what balance might be struck between micro- and macro- level development groups and connection? Here, especially, Paulo Freire's conception of Participatory Action Research (PAR) for curriculum might be a significant resource.
7. What is the NCCA's understanding of implementation science?

Theoretical Vision and Framework for the Curriculum

1. What is the coherent theoretical vision for the Curriculum? Will it build on and renew, for example, constructivist epistemology? Are there specific key theorists for the curriculum as a whole? What theorists or theories will underlie the chosen approaches to pedagogies in the classroom? What is the rationale underlying such choice of epistemology and pedagogy?

2. How can key theoretical insights on learning, for example the social cultural emphases on agency, inter-subjectivity, collaboration and metacognition be embedded in curriculum documentation?

3. How can key learning dispositions be foregrounded in curriculum documentation in ways that draw attention to their centrality for all learners of all ages?
4. How are intrinsic aims such as the fostering of higher order thinking skills, creativity and problem solving to be made visible in a 21st century curriculum?
5**.** To what extent can Bruner's idea of a spiral curriculum be utilised to ensure that all children at all stages are appropriately excited, engaged and challenged by their learning experiences in the primary school?

Relation to 1999 Curriculum and to *Aistear*

1. Given the very established practices and understandings in Irish schools and teacher education of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum, how is the relationship between the 1999

Curriculum and the newly emergent Curriculum to be understood? Is this reformation or revolution? What from 1999 is to be reformed and what from 1999 is to be revolutionised, and why?

2. How will the interfaces between different educational settings (preschool, second-level) be connected through the primary curriculum?
3. What theoretically, rigorous and credible articulation of play in the curriculum can best support teachers in moving to a less formalised approach to teaching in the early years at primary school?
4. What are the strengths of the *Aistear* framework and what are its weaknesses? How can the four themes of the framework be articulated so that they provide a credible bridge for teachers in traversing from a subject led curriculum to, for example, one where areas of learning predominate?

Teacher and Child Roles and Agency

1. Will the curriculum be designed in such a way as to promote teacher agency and creativity; both in the creative delivery of the curriculum and in the facilitation of pupil creativity?

2. In what way will the curriculum be mediated to teachers in terms of training? How will they be sold on the value and pertinence of the curriculum to the pupils in front of them? As such, will this training facilitate a philosophical understanding of the curriculum which enables teachers to 'source produce locally' yet deliver the key components?

3. How can the curriculum convey the essential principle that curriculum must in all respects be responsive to children as learners, their culture, characteristics, interests, needs?

Connect to Initial Teacher Education and Research

1. Research evidence is used selectively in the NCCA document to identify areas of challenge and generate a need for change. How might a cohesive piece of research (e.g., the

Cambridge Review) contribute to our understanding of the current curriculum 'problem' in Ireland?

2. How might an incremental revision of individual subject matter that foregrounds children's learning needs, incorporate the essence of Pinar's *currere* and curriculum as a flowing stream - as opposed to a once in a lifetime damburst?

3. In the revision of any curriculum framework, what are the implications for initial teacher education (ITE), including the accreditation of courses at professional and academic levels, provision of resources and staffing, and in what timescale?

4. What are the policy and resource implications for teachers' continuing professional development? What models of change management might be employed? How might this align with the Teaching Council's *Cosán* framework?

5. Stronger and more integrated links between ITE and NCCA are to be welcomed. There is a danger of disconnect between curriculum development and ITE development and understanding. Communication across the sectors is essential here – it is proposed for example that there would be stronger links made between the Institute of Education and NCCA through the Working Group (with a proposal for an NCCA representative to sit on the Working Group).

6. At research level, the doctoral degree in education is perhaps especially suited to developing new expertise in the area of curriculum as such. It is proposed to develop a Curriculum strand in the Ed.D professional degree at the IOE which might involve closer connections between, for example, education officer roles and responsibilities in NCCA and equivalent doctoral qualifications. This would enhance research expertise in curriculum while also recognising at third level the significant curriculum development work undertaken by NCCA staff.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this submission tries to be succinct and focused most especially on the meta-level questions and dilemmas of the proposed NCCA Curriculum development. As well as this emphasis on the question of curriculum as such, the Curriculum Working Group at IOE especially stresses 1. the need for a **strong connect to ITE**

and 2. the need for **a renewed emphasis on research** into curriculum theory and practice. Here, the work of the European wide CIDREE network is especially instructive and it is to be warmly welcomed that NCCA have included CIDREE in their formal consultation.

Jones Irwin, May 2017.

Contributor
Daniel O'Connell

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Daniel**
Surname	**O'Connell**
Position (If applicable)	**Lecturer in Religious Education**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Mary Immaculate College, Limerick**
Address	**South Circular Road, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick**
Telephone	**061 204966**
Email	**Daniel.oconnell@mic.ul.ie**
Date	**24th May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal ☑ Organisation ☐

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes ☑ No ☐

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

I fundamentally disagree with the proposal to remove Religious Education as a curriculum subject from minimum state curriculum time and ask that it be put back in the curriculum.

Trajectory of Religious Education in the Curriculum

First of all, let us look at the trajectory of the relationship between the state and Religious Education in Ireland. In the *Rules for National Schools* (1965), the state believed that 'of all the parts of a school curriculum Religious Instruction is by far the most important.' It was seen as being superior to all other subjects, something essential to the good education of children. This rule has since been deleted by Minister Jan O'Sullivan.

The 1999 curriculum, situates Religious Education one subject among others. The section on Religious Education states:

> In seeking to develop the full potential of the individual, the curriculum takes into account the child's affective, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious needs…Religious Education specifically enables the child to develop spiritual and moral values and to come to a knowledge of God'
>
> (1999, p.58).

The state believed it was its responsibility to ensure that the spiritual, moral and religious needs of children were being catered for in whatever school type they attended. It even went so far as to claim that the 'spiritual dimension is a fundamental aspect of individual experience' (1999, p.58). This is in keeping with the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which explicitly affirms that children have rights to spiritual development (see articles 17, 23, 27(1), 32(1)). The state laid out the broad vision for Religious Education, it was then up to each school type to implement it in a way that was in keeping with their particular ethos.

Now in 2017, the state is proposing the removal of Religious Education from the curriculum altogether. The pendulum has swung from one extreme to the other. The state has moved from claiming that Religious instruction was the most important subject to not recognising it at all.

Spiritual, Moral and Religious Development

Further, the new proposals make no explicit reference to the spiritual, moral or religious development of the child. Is it now the case that the curriculum will not *necessarily* take cognisance of the child's spiritual, moral or religious dimension of life? Will this be left solely at the discretion of the Patron? According to the 1999 curriculum, the spiritual dimension of life was a fundamental aspect of individual experience, it ensured access to moral and religious development – what has changed that it is not so today?

The Census and Spiritualty

Some might point to the figures of the new census (although these proposals were published before the census figures emerged) and say that we are becoming a post Christian society and need to change accordingly – although this is not as straightforward as some would have us think. In the new census, we are told that Catholics now make up 78.3 percent of the population, down by 3.4 percent. The Nones (those who do not belong to any religious tradition) have risen by 73.6 percent to almost 10 percent of the population. However, we need to be careful that we do not necessarily conflate the Nones with those who do not believe in God. This 10 percent can also contain people who do not belong to any religious organisation but would consider themselves spiritual. In an RTE exit poll on the day of the last general election (2016), it noted that 14 percent of the poll put themselves in the 'no religion' group. However, unlike the census, the RTE poll included some distinction within this category. Only 1 percent of the group said they were agnostic, 4 percent said they were atheist and 9 percent said that while they were 'not religious', they did consider themselves 'spiritual.' And so, references to the spiritual in the 1999 curriculum would seem to still hold today.

Need for Religious Education

It is very difficult to understand why the state is absenting itself from requiring a basic framework for the religious literacy of its citizens. It would seem more important than ever, with the emerging proximity of diverging religious and secular worldviews that children have a chance to wonder about their own beliefs, that of their friends and the world around them in an educational environment. Children need help in finding language to name and understand what they believe, so that they can really appreciate and learn from others who inhabit different worldviews.

When we look across at England, we see there the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education. Stephen Lloyd, MP, who is chair of this group, states 'The importance of mutual respect and understanding, for faiths and belief, is crucial in a society where there are now many different religions and cultures. This is why I believe religious education is so important' (2013, p.3). This group also published research on the positive contribution of Religious Education to building good community relations (2014). It is the view of Jaco Cilliers, who has worked with the United Nations in conflict resolution in multi-religious communities: 'Engaging in inter faith dialogue is constructive only when people become firmly grounded in their own religious tradition

and through that process gain a willingness to listen to and respect the beliefs of other religions' (202, p48-9). Understanding of one's own religious identity is essential to the success of inter faith and inter cultural learning. Religious Education takes cognisance of this important dimension of the human person. It can enable 'children to gain real insights into the significance and power of religion in the lives of so many, encourages them to reflect on their own faith and be interested in the faiths of others and teaches the important lesson for our diverse society: that it is possible and enjoyable for people of different faiths to converse and cooperate with each other and that we are increased and not diminished by this encounter with difference' (Ipgrave 2015, p.137). Again, it is difficult to understand why the state is removing itself from ensuring this happens in our schools.

There is a broad consensus across Europe that Religious Education makes an important contribution to the lives of young people in schools and is an important dimension in the intercultural education of young people (Pépin 2009). Across Europe there are organisations that seek to foster and strengthen religious education, such as Coordinating Group for Religion in Education in Europe (CoGREE), European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) and European Association for World Religions in Education (EAWRE). These recognise the essential contribution that Religious Education can make to our ability to live and flourish together.

Both the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR), along with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (ODCE) understand that the teaching of religions and beliefs is very important in schools. They believe this will contribute to democratic citizenship, mutual respect, religious freedom and an appreciation of diversity within society. The vast majority of state supported schools across Europe teach Religious Education in one form or another. The point here is that it is the state, often in countries much more multi-cultural than Ireland, that have taken responsibility to ensure the provision of Religious Education for its citizens. The proposed removal of Religious Education from our curriculum suggests that religious belief, identity and practice are of no concern to the state and it is up to the patron to provide for these, if they so wish.

Religious Traditions as Sources of Wisdom

While these sources emerge out of a fear of the harm that religions can do, we need to also educate people with regard to the contribution of religion to the well-being of society and to the person. Religions generate an inordinate amount of social capital (Coleman 1999, p.12), they build and sustain relationships, while generating trust among different people throughout society. It is worth noting that someone like Jürgen Habermas who felt that religion ought to be kept out of the public sphere, has changed his mind. He believes that the liberal state

> has an interest in unleashing religious voices in the political public sphere, and in the political participation of religious organizations as well. It must not discourage religious persons and communities from also expressing themselves politically as such, for it cannot know where secular society would not otherwise cut itself off from key resources for the creation of meaning and identity'
>
> (Habermas 2006, p.5).

He believes that those with a religious belief ought not be confined to the private and personal sphere of life. If this were the case, then there would be a diminishment of public discourse.

Religion in Public

Miroslav Volf has argued more recently that 'a vision of flourishing found in the quarrelling family of world religions is essential to individual thriving and global common good' (Volf 2015, p.2). There are many in the state who wish for the confinement of faith-communities and religious

discourse to the personal and private spheres of life, sometimes out of a sense of respect for others. They believe that the bringing of values rooted in religious and moral traditions into public discussion in a pluralistic society will only lead to conflict and disagreement, and the respectful thing to do is to avoid what will fracture and harm relationships. Accordingly, politics, policy and the law ought not to be mixed up with religious and moral arguments. This is a legitimate concern. However, this concern, motivated out of respect, often just leads to avoidance. It is an avoidance of the deeper moral and value issues behind policy and legislation. For the idea of a neutral state is really just a chimera. It is a fiction. Behind laws and underneath policy there are implicit views, often unarticulated, about the good life – what it means to live well. If these deeper questions are removed from public debate, there is a loss to our discourse. The evacuation of the public debate of the values and religious dimension can also lead to resentment and a backlash from excluded communities and voices. Respect in this instance can also mean leaving the moral intuitions of our interlocutors undisturbed and unexplored. But is this really respectful? I suggest not. Avoidance is not respectful, even if done for the best of reasons. Michael Sandel suggests that:

> A more robust public engagement with our moral disagreements could provide a stronger, not a weaker, basis for mutual respect. Rather than avoid the moral and religious convictions that our fellow citizens bring to public life, we should attend to them more directly—sometimes by challenging and contesting them, sometimes by listening to and learning from them...A politics of moral engagement is not only a more inspiring ideal than a politics of avoidance. It is also a more promising basis for a just society (2009, p.268-269).

Such a view has serious implications for our education system and what is on the curriculum - what is valued enough to be on the curriculum. The removal of Religious Education suggests that religious belief, identity and practice is not of concern to the state.

Voice of Children

While arguments can be made about the importance of Religious Education from an academic point of view – it is also important to listen to the voice of children. There has been little research into this area but what little there is, indicates that children enjoy Religious Education. In one case study, they said they enjoyed the classes because they liked the content (especially the 'stories'), they were interactive and allowed them to express their own opinions. Interestingly, in this case study, the children did not mind having to take classes in Religious Education and that they would still take the classes 'if they did not 'have to' and many children suggested that they would like to see more time devoted to this subject' (Smyth et al. 2013, p. 118). In another piece of research, children were found to 'value the opportunities they experienced for spiritual expression and development' (O'Farrell 2016, p.140). They were interested in talking about their beliefs in God, death and good and evil. They valued the time given to this dimension of their lives and were able to engage with questions of purpose and meaning in a significance manner. If Religious Education is dropped from the curriculum, will the patron's programme necessarily hold onto the value children place on Religious Education? I think not.

Curriculum out of Step

Further, this proposal will put the new primary curriculum at odds with the curriculum at preschool and the Junior Cycle. In the preschool curriculum, *Aistear*, spirituality, morality and religious beliefs are named as an important elements towards a holistic development. Then in second level, the *Framework for the Junior Cycle* (2015), students explore spiritualty, morality and religious and secular beliefs. Why is it that the state is concerned with the spiritual, moral and religious beliefs of students at preschool and second level schools but now is withdrawing its

interest at primary level? There is no explanation given in the document and as a consequence, the curriculum at primary school will be out of step with the curricula.

One might argue that the new proposals do not in effect require a change in what schools are doing at the moment and that Religious Education can be taught as part of the patron's programme. However, the removal of Religious Education as a distinct subject from the curriculum and the insertion of the 'patron's programme' surely sends a very clear message from the state as to the value of this subject area. It constitutes a steady undermining of the structural recognition given to Religious Education by the state. It is not difficult to see that in the everyday life of schools, the time given to the patron's programme will come under pressure. Its location in Flexible time, *in reality*, will mean that it will have to compete for space on the timetable.

Making Religious Education/patron's programme into a discrete subject

I suspect that part of the reason that the patron's programme has been placed in flexible time, away from all the other subjects is in an attempt to make it into a discrete subject. This was a recommendation from the *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* (2012): 'Primary Curriculum should be revised to ensure that, while the general curriculum remains integrated, provision is made for denominational Religious Education/faith formation to be taught as a discrete subject' (p.81). The Forum had a fear that that children who specifically opted out of Religious Education would be religiously educated, by stealth, through the other subjects. However, this is not the purpose of integration. That said, it is a complex issue, especially when you take into account the ethos of a school and how that should shape how children grow and learn together. However, the placing of the patron's programme as separate from the other subjects does appear to move in the direction of making it a discrete subject. This is problematic, is it the case that what happens in the patron's programme with regard to beliefs, spirituality, values, ethics, and particular issues—for instance, our responsibility to refugees, the environment, one another, those who are marginalised—is to be done in isolation from science, geography, history, etc.? Surely best practice ought to have subjects talk to and learn from each other?

The introduction of Education about Religions, Belief and Ethics (ERB & Ethics) by stealth

A glaring contradiction at the heart of this consultation process relates to another consultation by the NCCA on the possible inclusion of Education about Religions, Beliefs & Ethics (ERB & Ethics) into the curriculum in primary schools. ERB & Ethics emerged as another recommendation from the *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* (2012). The authors were rightly concerned about the satisfactory implementation of the opt-out arrangements from Religious Education classes in denominational schools and concluded that the human rights of children were not being properly appreciated or addressed. They were also concerned that children who opted out of Religious Education, were being deprived of learning about religions and ethics in an educational environment. They recommended to the NCCA that they develop a curriculum in ERB & Ethics for all those opting out of Religious Education in denominational schools. But they also saw this curriculum as a standard against which current Religious Education programmes would be measured. These programmes would have to satisfy the State Inspectorate as to how they fulfil the principles contained in ERB & Ethics. The Forum did not see ERB & Ethics as supplanting faith formation education in denominational schools.

Through the NCCA, the state sought to include ERB & Ethics in primary schools. It said

> It is widely accepted that knowledge of religions and beliefs is an important part of a quality education and that it can foster democratic citizenship and mutual respect, enhance religious freedom and promote an understanding of diversity. It has been highlighted by a number of scholars, and in light of the resurgence of religious conflict,

that the need to learn 'from' religion is a key aspect of Religious Education (NCCA 2015, p.9).

So, the state sees no difficulty in trying to include ERB & Ethics on the curriculum while at the same time it is planning to remove Religious Education *from* the curriculum. This hardly makes sense, unless, the real aim and long term goal is to create a space on the curriculum for ERB & Ethics at the expense of Religious Education. It is not clear why the NCCA disregarded the recommendation of the Forum Report. The Report did not recommend *all* children do ERB & Ethics, only those who had opted out of Religious Education. The NCCA has tried to argue that ERB & Ethics would make an important contribution to the primary school curriculum. But it does not seem to realise that Religious Education *already* makes this important contribution to the primary school curriculum in different types of schools across the state. Schools give children access to religious beliefs and learn from ethics according to their own characteristic spirit and by way of their own programmes.

ERB & Ethics is not the solution

ERB & Ethics is a solution that doesn't fit the problem. The legitimate concern on the part of the Forum and shared by many, is the experience of children who opt out of denominational Religious Education. The fear is that this accentuates differences, singling out children with various beliefs from others and depriving them of education where they can learn *about* and *from* religious traditions, worldviews and ethics. The solution proposed is a common programme for all, ERB & Ethics – no one excluded and all learning together. However, Atheist Ireland have requested that the NCCA to ensure their members will be entitled to an exception from this programme as they did not think it would respect their philosophical convictions. Therefore, if ERB & Ethics was present in schools, some of the children who already opt out of Religious Education, and for whom ERB & Ethics was intended by the Forum, might also opt out of ERB & Ethics as well. And if they opt out of ERB & Ethics, we are back to the problem that the Forum identified in the first place – the singling out of children and depriving them of an education about religions and ethics.

There are other consequences to the plan to insert ERB & Ethics into the curriculum for all children. In an attempt to respond to the needs of a minority of children, the vast majority of children will end up doing more Religious Education than is taking place at the moment. At the moment, children are required to do 2.5 hours of Religious Education and then if there is ERB & Ethics that will require more time on top of that time. It wouldn't be long before parents (and not unreasonably) would be expressing concern about the amount of time given to the patron's programme and to ERB & Ethics. And since the patron's programme is in Flexible time and ERB & Ethics is required by the state – it would be the patron's programme that will lose out.

Conclusion

I have argued that Religious Education has swung from being the most important subject on the curriculum to a proposal to remove it from the curriculum. The proposed removal is without explanation, evidence of good practice or research from elsewhere. Such a move flies in the face of research from across Europe about the value of Religious Education and the contribution it can play in the life of children.

The presumption (if this is the case) that the patron's programme will cater for the religious, spiritual and ethical needs of the pupils is without evidence. If a subject is placed in 'flexible time' on a par with roll call and assemblies, then it necessarily loses ground in relation to the other subjects on the curriculum – it makes a clear statement about the value and importance of the patron's programme and is necessarily part of the hidden curriculum. It seems that Religious Education is to become the 'patron's programme'. In so doing, the message goes out, loud and clear, this patron's programme is not as important as any of the other subjects. This comes at a

time in our globalised world that we need more than ever, to understand and appreciate religious identity, our own and that of others.

There is also the danger of uncoupling the patron's programme from the rest of the curriculum, again, not stated but seems to be the intention.

There is no question but there are difficulties and tensions in the provision of Religious Education for some children across the state. However, the removal of Religious Education from the curriculum will not do away with this. It will simply remove the state from the issue, until it seeks to insert ERB & Ethics onto the curriculum.

I request the NCCA to reconsider the proposed removal of Religious Education from the curriculum. I believe that the state ought to have a stake in the provision of Religious Education for its citizens, to work with the different patron bodies to ensure that the best possible form of Religious Education is provided for children across the country. As Conroy puts it, 'As religious and secular diversity increases, students need to be able to articulate their own beliefs, and engage with those of others, as never before. Respect and social harmony depend on it' (Conroy 2012, p.3).

Bibliography

All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education (2013). *RE The Truth Unmasked: The Supply of and Support for Religious Education Teachers* [online] available: http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/APPG_RE_-_The_Truth_Unmasked.pdf [accessed 30th March 2017].

All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education (2014) *RE and Good Community Relations* [online] available: http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/APPG_report_RE_and_good_community_re.pdf [accessed 30th March 2017].

Behaviour & Attitudes (2016) 'RTE/Behaviour & Attitudes 2016 General Election Exit Poll'. Dublin: Behaviour & Attitudes.

Cilliers. J. (2002) 'Building Bridges for Inter Faith Dialogue', *Inter Faith Dialogue and Peace-building,* D.R. Smock (ed.), Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 47-60.

Coleman, J. (1999) 'Compassion, Solidarity and Empowerment: The Ethical Contribution of Religion to Society,' *Journal of Religion in the Social Services*, 19, no. 2, p.12.

Habermas, J. (2006) 'Religion and the Public Sphere' *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14(1), 5.

Ipgrave, J. (2015) 'Interfaith Dialogue in the Classroom' in Elton-Chalcraft, S., (ed) *Teaching Religious Education Creatively,* London: Routledge, 123-138.

NCCA (1999) *Primary School Curriculum, Introduction*. Dublin: Government Publications.

O'Farrell, C. (2016) 'An Exploration of Children's Experiences of a Process which Provides Opportunities for Spiritual Expression and Development' EdD Thesis DCU.

Pépin, L. (2009) *Teaching About Religions in European School Systems: Policy issues and trends*—Network of Education Foundations Initiative on Religion and Democracy in Europe. London: Alliance Publishing Trust.

Sandel, M. (2009) *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Secular Schools Ireland, Inclusion and Respect [online], available: http://secularschoolsireland.com/?page_id=2 [accessed May 20th 2017].

Smyth, E. et al. (2013) 'Children's Agency and Religious Identity in Irish Primary Schools' in Smyth et al. (eds.) *Religious Education in a Multicultural Europe: Children, Parents and Schools*, 101-131.

Volf, Miroslav (2015) *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Home

Contributor
Dermot Lane

NCCA CONSULTATION ON STRUCTURE AND TIME

Respondent's details

First name	**Dermot**
Surname	**Lane**
Position (If applicable)	**Parish Priest**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Patron's representative for 2 schools**
Address	**162, Sandyford Road, Dublin 16**
Telephone	**01 295 6165 or 087 238 2859**
Email	**dalane@eircom.net**
Date	**25 May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [X] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [yes] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE NCCA PROPOSALS CONCERNING THE STRUCTURE AND TIME ALLOCATION IN A REDEVELOPED PRIMARY CURRICULUM

Dr. Dermot A. Lane, PP

1. At a time when more and more people are calling for dialogue between religion and the secular world, because of the mutual benefits from such a dialogue (See J.Habermas et al, *An Awareness of what is missing*: *Faith and reason in a post-secular age*, Cambridge: polity press 2010), the NCCA seem intent on sidelining and isolating religion from engagement with education. The NCCA proposal to remove religion from the core curriculum is a retrograde step from an educational, spiritual and religious point of view.

2. This proposal goes against a number of educational developments in Europe and the UK.

   In Europe, it ignores the following developments:

   - The Toledo Guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools (2007).
   - The proposals put forward by 47 foreign ministers of the Council of Europe in 2008 known as “Recommendations”
   - *Signposts* (2014)

   In the UK, it neglects the publication and the findings of:

   - *Children, their World, their Education: Final Report and Recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*.(2010)

     That report points out:

     “On the question of religious education, we take the view that religion is so fundamental to this country’s history, culture and language, as well as to the daily lives of many of its inhabitants that it must remain within the curriculum”(268)

   - The Review of RE in schools in the UK announced in 2016

   In referring to the Toledo Principles, the “Recommendations” of the Foreign ministers and Signposts it needs to be noted that these developments concerning “teaching about religion” are more a point of departure than arrival and as such have their own intrinsic limitations. Many of these limitations have been pointed out in submissions to the NCCA on ERB and ethics. More and more educators agreed that “teaching about religion” must be

accompanied by “teaching from religion” *and* “teaching into a particular religion”.

For example, Martine Abdallah-Pretceille, a French educator, suggest that religious stereotypes and prejudices cannot be overcome simply “by disseminating more information, more knowledge, by legislating or even moralising” because “it is now generally agreed that knowledge in itself does not suffice to change attitudes”.

She goes on to say that “reductionism in interpreting cultural and religious facts can only lead to dogmatism and extremism, which are always dangerous (“A Religious Dimension of Intercultural education: Challenges and Realities”, *The Religious Dimension of intercultural education*, Council of Europe publishing, 2004, pp. 55 and 53 respectively).

Similarly, John Keast, editor of *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education*, published by the Council of Europe, points out that “learning about religion is insufficient in itself to produce the kind of respectful attitudes that community and social cohesion requires in a multi-faith society”(John Keast, “Use of ‘distancing’ and ’simulation’”, *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: A Reference Book for Schools*, Council of Europe publishing, 2007,p. 62).

There is near agreement among seasoned practitioners of interreligious dialogue that appreciation of difference and of another religious tradition succeeds best when there is already in place a teaching and learning into a particular religion (See Scriptural Reasoning Project, Cambridge).

3. The one lesson arising out of the many analyses and reflections on the 9/11 attacks on the US, and subsequent attacks in Paris, Brussels and London, is that the isolation of religion from education, the separation of religion from society, is not good for religion and is not good for education or society.

   Similarly with the flow of migrants and refugees across Europe, the call from political leaders (in the UK, Austria, and Germany) for the integration and not isolation, for the critical engagement and not separation, for an open dialogue on religion and not a privatisation of religion indicates how far removed from developments in Europe the NCCA proposals are for primary education in Ireland.

   This consistent call by European governments is not about the absorption of other religions but an attempt to promote mutual understanding, respect and tolerance within the emerging diversity of religious identities. There is general agreement that the isolation of religion from society and from education can give rise to forms of fundamentalism which, in turn, can become a breeding ground for the radicalisation of young people.

4. By excluding the Patron's Programme from the core curriculum, the NCCA is short-changing the core curriculum of a resource that has the potential to enrich the curriculum. The following examples come to mind:

    - the relationship between religion and environmental studies, recognised by the United Nations in Paris (2015) and promoted by Pope Francis in his encyclical *On the Care of our common home* (2015) which was well received in the secular world as well as among other religions
    - the link between religion and culture
    - the rapport between ethics and religion
    - the contribution that religion can make to literacy

5. It is difficult to know where this proposal of removing religious education from the core curriculum is coming from, what motivates it, and what evidence-based research was used in drawing up this suggestion .

    The removal of religious education from the core curriculum will have the following consequences, unintended or otherwise:

    - The reduction of religious education to the same level as a roll-call or an assembly or recreation time
    - The privatisation of faith, with all the negative consequences that flow from this privatisation
    - The removal of the prophetic dimensions of the Judaeo-Christian tradition from the core curriculum
    - The neglect of an important resource for integrated, intercultural, and interdisciplinary learning within the curriculum

6. The isolation of religious education from the rest of the curriculum underestimates the ethical contribution that religious education can make to the promotion of:

    - the dignity of the individual,
    - the development of personal identity in a way that also highlights the spiritual and social dimension of human identity
    - the promotion of human rights and responsibilities,
    - the importance of human relationships
    - the development of social justice and climate justice.
    - the preferential option for the poor and the cry of the earth
    - the provision of a foundation for social cohesion and solidarity.
    - the care of the environment.

7. The NCCA Proposal shows no awareness or appreciation of religious education as a legitimate curriculum subject in itself and the centrality of religious education within Catholic schooling. There is no engagement with any of the basic documents emanating from the Catholic bishops of Ireland such as:

    - Irish Episcopal conference, *Vision'08: A Vision for Catholic education in Ireland*, Dublin: Veritas 2008.

    - Documents issued by Catholic Schools Partnership, especially *Catholic primary schools in a changing Ireland: Sharing Good Practice on the Inclusion of all pupils,* Dublin: Veritas, 2015

    - Irish Episcopal conference, *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland,* Dublin: Veritas, 2015

    Equally disquieting is the absence of any reference to the academic literature on Catholic Religious Education, such as:

    - Byrne, Gareth and Kieran, Patricia, editors, *Toward Mutual Ground : Pluralism, Religious Education and Diversity in Irish schools,* Dublin: the Columba Press 2013.

    - Mary Shanahan, editor, *Does Religious Education Matter* ? London: Routledge, 2017

    - Sean Whittle, editor, *Vatican II and New thinking about Catholic Education: the Importance and legacy of Gravissimus Educationis* , London: Routledge, 2017.

    - Dermot Lane, *Religion and Education: Reimagining the Relationship*, Dublin: Veritas 2013

8. The removal of the Patron's Programme from the core curriculum will have the following effects:

    - It ignores the findings of the recent IPPN survey of teachers which found that 40% had no difficulty with the present arrangements for the teaching of religion.

    - It conflicts with the success of the NCCA's post primary religious education syllabus for Junior certificate and Leaving certificate.

    - It bypasses the results of the recent consultation by the NCCA on the ERB and ethics

9. The concept of ‘flexitime’ is odd. The idea of removing the Patron’s programme to ‘flexitime’ rides roughshod over the work of different patrons of primary school in relation to religious education. In addition, it shows little regard for the difficulties it will create for the Principals of primary schools and Boards of Management in finding time within flexitime for religious education.

10. One of the most serious omissions in the NCCA consultative document is the relative neglect of the spiritual life of the child. All education is charged with the responsibility of opening the windows of wonder in the life of the child. The NCCA appears to be strangely silent on this link between education and spirituality.

11. In spite of these reservations, it must be pointed out that there are positive dimensions to the NCCA proposals concerning the structure and time allocation. These include:

- The importance of initiating a process of integrated learning in the early stages of a child’s education is to be warmly welcomed.

  BUT, given this important educational principle, it is all the more puzzling that the patrons programme should be excluded from the core curriculum.
  :
- The location of environmental education within the core curriculum is a positive development.

  BUT, by excluding the Patron’s programme from the core curriculum, an important resource for ecological education is removed from the core curriculum, namely religion which has been recognised as a resource by the United Nations and was also seen as a resource by the 2015 Paris Conference on climate change.

- The emphasis given to social, personal and health education within the core curriculum is an important development.

  BUT, without religious education in the core curriculum, what will become of ethical and spiritual education. What about the holistic development of pupils. Is this to be seen as something external to the core curriculum?

- The centrality given to language and literacy is most important.

  BUT, surely religious education has an important contribution to make to religious literacy. Religion expands and enriches language. In

addition, many hold that a lack of religious literacy may be a source, and possibly a cause, of racism today.

--23 May 2017--

Contributor
DICE Project

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

primar developments
foráis sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	Siobhán
Surname	Sleeman
Position (If applicable)	Project Coordinator
Organisation (If applicable)	DICE Project (DCU, MU, MIE, MIC)
Address	DICE Project, DCU St Patrick's Campus, Drumcondra, Dublin 9
Telephone	01 8842290
Email	siobhan.sleeman@dcu.ie
Date	25th May, 2017

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [X]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [X] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

The DICE Project is a national education initiative, funded by Irish Aid, implemented by four higher education institutions offering Initial Teacher Education (ITE) at primary level, namely: Dublin City University, Marino Institute of Education; Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; St Patrick's College, Drumcondra; and the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University. DICE works to support teacher educators and student teachers of the four partner institutions to integrate global and intercultural perspectives and themes into their teaching practice. By targeting the skills, knowledge and values of people involved in education, DICE seeks to promote global solidarity, human rights and sustainable development, and support people to recognise and challenge discrimination and inequality, locally and globally.

DICE acknowledges the work that has been carried out to date towards a revised Primary School Curriculum. It is hoped that DICE will be able to contribute positively to this consultation process and we welcome the opportunity to highlight areas of interest.

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages. Please consider:

    - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
    - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
    - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
    - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

Comments on Structure

The NCCA has outlined the case for a two or three stage model, drawing on research linked to children's cognitive development (Morgan, M, 2014). This research acknowledges that commonality exists among children across stages and equally that some principles relating to teaching and learning are common across stages. The research suggests incremental changes in children's capacity over time, but cautions against adopting a rigid stage view.

DICE is concerned that a full and detailed rationale for moving from the current model to a new model based on stages, has not been provided. A full evaluation of the implementation of the 1999 PSC has not been undertaken, to inform the proposed changes. The NCCA's proposal does not problematise a stages approach, and other approaches, such as that explored by Nussbaum and Sen linked to creating capabilities and agency have not been referenced, or considered as alternatives.

DICE is concerned about the big ideas, values and approaches that underpin the curriculum. There are many positive facets of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum, which we would like to maintain and enhance and these are elaborated on further under Q3. The core principle of children as active agents in their own learning, with a natural curiosity and sense of wonder, is at the heart of the curriculum and informs pedagogies employed across the curriculum. It is critical that this principle is retained.

This submission will not discuss the relative merits of a two or three stage model, as it is not our primary focus, and in respect of the different perspectives on this within DICE. Some key areas of interest are detailed below.

Benefits

- DICE welcomes the proposal to include Aistear themes, principles and methodologies within Stage 1. A thematic and integrated approach is particularly relevant and appropriate for children. As noted in the current curriculum (1999, p. 41) "for the young child, the distinctions between subjects are not relevant: what is more important is that he or she experiences a coherent learning process that accommodates a variety of elements" (Ireland, Introduction, 1999, p.16).

- A thematic approach is particularly appropriate for DICE's work, as it enables global and intercultural topics and themes to be explored from multiple perspectives and disciplines. For example, a topic such as climate change may be examined in (current) curricular areas including SESE from historical, geographic, scientific, social and environmental perspectives, in Religion/Ethical education from a climate justice perspective and in SPHE from the perspective of taking action locally and globally. This thematic approach can support learners to better understand the connections between issues, at a local and global level. Through this type of learning, children can also be supported to develop higher order skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving and cooperation, that are critical for learners in the 21st century.

- A thematic approach has a positive impact on curriculum overload, as it allows numerous curriculum areas to be covered simultaneously. Literacy underpins all aspects of the curriculum, for example.

- DICE welcomes the emphasis on playful teaching and learning within Aistear and within the school day. All children have a Right to Play. Play allows children to engage in real world experiences and to lead their own learning. Rich and Drummond (2006) highlight the positive benefits of first hand learning experiences on children's imagination and motivation for learning. This type of learning occurs in everyday contexts when children engage in activities which matter to them.

- DICE believes that playful learning should not stop in second class and can be extended and adapted throughout the primary school experience. Wood (2004, p.21) makes a strong case for this, indicating that children engaging in play demonstrate improved verbal communication, high levels of social and interaction skills, creative use of play materials, imaginative and divergent thinking skills and problem-solving capacities. Lego education is an example of an innovative approach to supporting children to explore real world problems in the STEM subjects, while engaging in hands-on playful learning experiences. While all children benefit, teachers have anecdotally reported that EAL learners find that a playful approach is very helpful to their language learning. Playful teaching and learning can also provide rich opportunities to engage with the local community and business, inviting them to contribute to learning experiences in the classroom, e.g. through role play scenarios such as Bafabafa, which explores cultural awareness and diversity or the Trade Game, which explores global trade relations.

- While DICE welcomes greater emphasis on playful teaching and learning, other signature pedagogies, for example, inquiry based learning in science and engaging with and critiquing primary and secondary texts in history are also of great value to children's learning and must be maintained. Children should have opportunities to engage with historical and scientific thinking from an early age - children have a natural sense of wonder about the world around them and this should be supported by the curriculum throughout the primary school experience.

Challenges and concerns:

- Both of the proposals for a two or three stage model advocate including the two years of ECCE provision as part of Stage 1. While this may be the end goal, we would caution about progressing this without significant new resources for early childhood providers and the development of deeper structural links between ECCE providers and primary schools. Many children do not complete two full years of ECCE provision (linked to school starting age/birth month) and not all ECCE providers are implementing the Aistear programme. It would be of great concern if some children starting school were already at a disadvantage, because they had not benefited in full from these two years of learning.
- While DICE is conscious of the value and importance of retaining signature pedagogies of particular subjects, this should not lead to a situation whereby senior primary school years become entirely focused on preparing for the Junior Cycle through a subject based lens. The curriculum must retain its internal integrity and enable learners to thrive in a dynamic and rapidly changing world, through a broad based integrated curriculum.
- Adopting a thematic and integrated approach to the curriculum will require teachers and schools a move away from an over-reliance on textbooks. Access to ongoing and comprehensive professional development for teachers will be essential to support this.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools. Please consider:
    - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
    - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
    - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
    - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

Comments on Time allocations

- DICE recognises that time allocations reflect the priorities set within the curriculum. We also recognise that there are multiple demands for increased time in certain areas, such as SPHE, and for new areas to be introduced e.g. Coding. Hurried, pressured classrooms do not create positive learning environments for children and so we are conscious that a balance must be achieved across the curriculum. An integrated approach can help to achieve this is and ensure that multiple learning outcomes can be reached across the curriculum.
- The increase in flexible time is welcome - indeed it could go further, to enable teachers to respond to the needs of the learners in their classrooms and to respect and reflect teachers' professional judgement and expertise. Increasing flexible time may also enable teachers to better respond to learner interests, supporting them to become active, competent and confident learners. DICE recognises that there must be clear accountability mechanisms in place in line with this approach, to ensure that learners are supported to reach the curriculum learning outcomes and that a broad curriculum and educational experience is maintained in all primary classrooms.
- Monthly/Termly time allocations are also welcome - this could open up opportunities for

co-teaching across the school, enabling teachers to offer their expertise and talents to different classes and/or to model co-teaching. It would also allow for more project based work, portfolio assessment, and in depth learning in different curriculum areas.

- We would question including recreation, assembly time etc within "flexible time", as these are requirements and therefore not flexible. Perhaps a third time category should be introduced?

- Teachers will need ongoing professional development and support to enable them to successfully adopt a thematic and integrated approach to the curriculum and to reach all learning outcomes, within a new time allocation model.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Aims of the Primary School Curriculum

Comments on 1999 PSC

- While DICE welcomes this review of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum (PSC), it is important to acknowledge and build on the strengths of the existing PSC. The vision of education, as one that recognises the uniqueness of the child, and the relationship of the child to society remains valid and the acknowledgement of the need for the PSC to take account of the constantly changing local and global context in which the education system is operating and to remain flexible and adaptable to future needs is of great importance.

- The general aims and principles of the 1999 PSC also remain relevant and reflect some of the values and skills that underpin the curriculum. The general aim "to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and cooperating with others and so contribute to the good of society" is of particular relevance to DICE's work and recognises the value of supporting children to become active global citizens and to develop the skills and attitudes to enable them to flourish in an increasingly diverse local and global context. The Irish Government is committed, having ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to direct education towards the development of respect for human rights, the environment, peace, tolerance, equality and friendship among all peoples (Article 29 (1)). The Education Act (1998) similarly aims to ensure that all students experience an education that "*respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership*". DICE believes it to be of great importance that this commitment to Human Rights and diversity is stated and given priority within a revised PSC.

- The principle of children as active agents in their own learning, with a natural curiosity and sense of wonder should continue to be fully supported and extended within a revised curriculum.

- DICE's approach is in line with the principle that "learning is most effective when it is integrated" and forms the basis for many of our comments in this submission.

- The 1999 PSC creates some designated spaces for the exploration of human rights and global themes within particular curriculum areas. DICE believes it is vital that key global themes are named within the PSC e.g. sustainability, climate change, equality, so that

spaces to explore these are further opened and strengthened within a revised curriculum and not watered down or lost.

Comments on 2012 NCCA Survey on Primary Priorities

- DICE acknowledges the findings of the survey on key priorities for the Primary School Curriculum.
- We believe that the priorities listed need to be further teased out e.g. What life skills? Communication, literacy and numeracy skills also fall under life skills, but are separately listed.
- DICE acknowledges that children's social and emotional well-being has a significant impact on children's learning and experience of school, reflected in the priority "Help children to be well". As earlier noted, children and schools do not operate in isolation from the broader family, community, national and international contexts, with multiple factors impacting on children's well-being, inside and outside of schools. Children are increasingly being exposed to news reports from around the world, and to issues such as climate change. The PSC should support children to develop the skills to think critically about issues of local and global importance, to co-operate with others, to deal with uncertainty, to question, and to develop resilience in the context of an increasingly diverse Irish society and rapidly changing world.
- The priority to "Help children to develop a sense of identity and belonging" should be further elaborated and extended to supporting children to become active global citizens.

Implications of a revised PSC for Teacher Education

Changes to the PSC will have a significant impact on teacher education and resource requirements:

- Changes to the PSC may require revisions to the content/format of the new Bachelor of Education and Professional Master of Education programmes. Professional development will be required for teacher educators to respond to any changes appropriately within programmes and in their own teaching practice.
- There will be significant demands for professional development for practicing teachers - this should be all encompassing and go beyond once-off seminars to include mentoring and support in schools.
- A revised curriculum will also have significant implications for the professional development of School Placement Supervisors and School Inspectors - Inspectors will need to be fully appraised of changes to the curriculum and be upskilled to provide a constructive and supportive role to teachers and schools in implementing the changes.

Whole of government approach

- The structure, time allocations and content of the curriculum reflect national priorities and context. It will be of vital importance in the revision of this curriculum to ensure that other government departments are involved in contributing to this to ensure policy complementarity and alignment e.g. DCYA, DFAT, Department of the Taoiseach, DoJ etc. It is also important to be mindful of international commitments made by the Irish Govt, including ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as earlier noted, and the government's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, with goal 4 on Education being of particular relevance here.

Contributor

Diocese of Elphin

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Justin**
Surname	**Harkin**
Position (If applicable)	**Education Secretariat Representative**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Diocese of Elphin**
Address	**Pastoral & Faith Development Services Rooms 2-4, St. Coman's Club, Abbey St., Roscommon.**
Telephone	**087 6171526**
Email	**justin@elphindiocese.ie**
Date	**24th May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [x]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

Preamble

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this consultation.

The Elphin Diocesan Education Secretariat supports one hundred and fourteen Catholic Primary School communities and four Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools in counties Sligo, Roscommon, Leitrim and East Galway. Each of these schools is established under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Elphin.

On learning of the NCCA's Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum the Education Secretariat hosted three exploratory meetings for interested principals, teachers, Board of Management members, Parent Association members and other interested parents. We also invited comment via email etc. by those who could not attend.

The exploratory meetings took place as follows:
(i) Monday 15th May 2017: Sligo Park Hotel
(ii) Tuesday 16th May 16th 2017: Shamrock Lodge Hotel, Athlone
(iii)Wednesday 17th May 2017: Gleeson's Townhouse, Market Square, Roscommon

The exploratory meetings were attended by fourteen principals, two deputy principals, six other teachers, eight parents, all of whom were Board of Management members, four school chaplains, ten chairpersons of Boards of Management and three other Board members, and four members of the Elphin Diocesan Education Secretariat, three of whom serve as Diocesan Advisors for Religious Education and the fourth, a person who exercises a part-time remit in support of ongoing reflection on the characteristic spirit of each of our schools. Three principals also presented submissions via email.

Mindful too that our diocese:

1. supports the right of Catholic parents to choose Catholic education for their children
2. desires that schools under our bishop's patronage continue to be environments at the service of the holistic education of our children in a manner that is appreciative of a faith-based outlook on life,
3. has no particular desire to own schools or to manage them, and that we do so only to assist parents in providing an education for their children which is inspired by the Gospel (Bishop Kevin Doran, *A Future Full of Hope* Pastoral Letter, 2015)

4. is committed to remaining involved in the life of a school only in so far as the parents themselves are committed to the Catholic ethos of the school and to being active partners in handing on the faith, and
5. in keeping with the principles of religious freedom, through all our schools, remains committed to respecting the faith and culture of all pupils, especially where parents do not have a choice of school (see Catholic Schools Partnership *Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland: Sharing Good Practice on Inclusion of all Pupils*, 2016)

we opted to engage in this consultation with special regard to:

(i) the impact curricular developments can have on the characteristic spirit of every school, e.g. the negative impact of curriculum overload today,

(ii) the centrality of Religious Education to Catholic Education, not just in Ireland but universally,

(iii) staff well-being, and

(iv) holistic development of pupils.

We also acknowledge that this consultation has given rise to calls for consultation with parents in a small minority of parishes as to the extent to which they wish their children to receive a Catholic Education … but in each instance comments also indicated that parents appear to be very happy with the schools' provision and inclusivity.

Finally, we request that due regard be given to the submissions of two bodies with which we are affiliated, i.e. The Catholic Schools Partnership and The Commission for Education and Formation of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference.

1. **The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.**

   Please consider:

   - **The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a three-/two-stage model**
   - **The benefits / challenges of the two-stage model**

- **The benefits / challenges of the three-stage model**
- **Your preferred model and reasons for this preference.**

Everyone involved in our consultation favours continuity of experience and progression in children's learning and are welcoming of the principles, themes and methodologies of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum. That stated, we have concerns linked to the implementation of Aistear. It is at a very early stage, requires evaluation and it's full impact has yet to become known. Locally, and possibly nationally, Aistear is not as bedded in as this consultation document suggests. In this context concern was expressed that the NCCA is proposing to move away too quickly from the current four-stage model, which continues to enjoy credence in our primary schools.

Secondly a number of principals reported that a certain amount of unlearning can sometimes be required in Junior Infants, i.e. with pupils who have come from Pre-schools that are following the Aistear Curriculum. It also emerged through participants with experience in the Pre-school sector that staff training etc. is quite limited relative to the training received by qualified Primary School Teachers. Some principals also noted a rise in recent years in anxiety among some Junior and Senior Infants with consequences for both pupil and teacher well-being. Coupled with comments pertaining to today's overloaded curriculum, this gave rise to calls for further research in relation to the impact and roll out of Aistear (to which no one was or is opposed) on pupils and teachers and the possibility of piloting proposed changes with a small number of schools, ideally in a mix of socio-economic settings, and ideally spanning time periods of two to three years.

The meetings also proposed advancement with caution in terms of supporting new innovations re: children's transition from primary to post-primary school through subject specific learning. The meetings recognised that the Framework for Junior Cycle is also in its infancy and that future evaluations are likely to offer insights relevant to the NCCA's objectives.

Thirdly, we found it difficult to engage with the proposed 3 Stage Model in so far as we had little insight as to what "curriculum areas" will amount to in real terms and were also somewhat surprised to encounter reference to Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics here. The reference suggests that concerns communicated by Ireland's Catholic Education sector through last year's consultation have not influenced this consultation. If

that's the case, it is a worrying development for us and our sector's future relationship with the NCCA. There were also calls for further insight as to how teachers would promote numeracy and literacy during the 'Curriculum Area' stage and what expectations would be generated around the recording of each pupil's progression. This last point carried a related concern for some that accountability processes would ultimately detract from teaching.

Fourthly, the following diagram gave rise to an interesting discussion, especially on the part of parents.

While all parent participants were very favourably disposed to the question at the heart of this consultation, i.e. 'How can the Curriculum be improved to support children's learning into the next decade?' some queried the extent to which developments in Developmental Psychology and International Policy and Research informing these proposals are based on longitudinal evidence- based studies and to what extent the riches of Catholic Education and the lived experience of Ireland's current teachers has been mined? The image of a classroom of twenty seven year olds happily and autonomously engaging in playful learning and creative problem-solving with the support of a highly intuitive, skilled, knowledgeable and energised teacher is certainly appealing but parents know too how quickly one off-form child can change the dynamic of even the most harmonious of households. One only has to consider how highly prized good discipline is among parents, i.e. in the service of the human, intellectual, physical and spiritual development of their children and in the service of wellbeing, to get a glimpse of the need for further dialogue with parents and teachers on this point, and this is another area where our Education Secretariat would welcome NCCA assistance.

Fifthly, and owing to time constraints we limited our engagement to discussion concerning the potential benefits and challenges of the 3 Stage Model. We found the NCCA's consultation document very helpful and informative here and appreciate the NCCA's grasp of what adoption would necessitate in terms of teacher identity, teacher-training, in-service, introduction of new pedagogical practices, challenges for small schools at a

systems level, especially where a teacher finds themselves obligated to work with two different curriculum structures.

2. **The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.**

   Please consider:

   - **The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on minimum state curriculum time**
   - **The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on flexible time**
   - **The idea of specifying time allocations for themes/curriculum areas/subjects**
   - **Your views on whether time should be allocated on a weekly, monthly termly, annual basis.**

The possibility of the Patron's Programme being separated from the Minimum State Curriculum as per the 1999 Curriculum is our source of greatest concern. In our sector (Catholic Education) the Patron's Programme not only informs a core part of every school's curriculum but is also a pillar of each school's characteristic spirit. Central to the characteristic spirit of each of our Catholic Schools is the idea that faith is an integral part of our lives. Against the background of an integrated school curriculum, it would be most unsatisfactory from our point of view to be setting faith education apart. We would like to see the Patron's Programme recognised in the Minimum State Curriculum category.

The proposal concerning flexible time mirrors current practice in a number of schools, i.e. where, for example, two or more consecutive days in a school year are devoted to Arts Education and there is no further provision for a number of weeks or months. In relation to Arts Education this seems to be working well.

Through the meetings it was also brought to our attention that flexible time had been adopted by some teachers in relation to Religious Education, primarily as a response to the overloaded curriculum. Though research and

further evaluation are required, pupils in the care of teachers who engage in this practice, appear to be receiving an impoverished Religious Education relative to pupils in classes where Religious Education receives a half-hour period daily. Such pupils can also be further impoverished in so far as teachers do not follow through on their intention to make Religious Education available at another time.

3. **Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?**

There is much about the NCCA's current proposals that are good and wholesome but we would like to see the NCCA, in partnership with Patron bodies, undertake some related pilot studies over the school years 2017 / 2018, 2018 / 2019 and 2019 / 2020.

We would also like to see more engagement with parents, Boards of Management, teachers, Patron bodies and Training Colleges, not only around the proposed 2 and 3 Stage Models but also around the interconnectivity between curriculum and characteristic spirit going forward. For example, might the NCCA / Dept. of Education and Skills and Patron representative bodies consider co-hosting a national conference on this topic that would include insight from a Catholic Education perspective?

We reiterate our thanks for the opportunity to participate in this consultation process.

Contributor

Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin

Submission to the NCCA on the proposed Re-developed Primary Curriculum

This submission is being made by Bishop Denis Nulty in my capacity as Patron of one hundred and sixty-four Catholic faith schools in the diocese of Kildare & Leighlin.

In this brief submission I would like to respond to the consultation under the headings offered by the NCCA in terms of the proposed changes to the structure and time allocation of a redeveloped primary curriculum. I begin by acknowledging the work of the NCCA in curriculum reform and their commitment to constantly reviewing and revising the approach to teaching and learning in our schools in light of current educational best practice. In my informal conversations with teachers and principals as I journey around the diocese I get the sense that they are already under a significant amount of pressure as they endeavour to implement the curriculum in its present form. They speak of time constraints, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources and a curriculum that is already totally overloaded. I am aware that over the past academic year staff in schools across the diocese have been engaging with in-service to introduce a new language curriculum and it is this implementation that is their primary concern as this year comes to a close. The consultation about a redeveloped curriculum seems to have gained very little traction in our schools. I wonder whether the time frame offered by the NCCA for this consultation, even with the extension, is realistic given the reality of the the variety of expectations on teachers at this particular time.

STRUCTURE

From my conversations with teachers, members of the Diocesan Education Council and staff in the diocesan education office it is clear that the two models proposed each pose a challenge for the teaching of religious education in a faith school. This challenge is compounded by the use of what appears to be a new curriculum categorisation in Irish education, '*minimum state curriculum time*' from which religious education is excluded. This is a significant departure from the 1999 Primary Curriculum when religious education was recognised as one of the seven curriculum areas. From the Patron's perspective I believe I must also raise a concern about the movement from the language of religious or ethical education (1999 curriculum) to that of the Patron's Programme. This change in language can be perceived as an attempt to diminish the importance and centrality of religious education in our faith schools. Furthermore, the proposed positioning of religious education in what is now termed '*flexible time*' adds to this sense that the curriculum area for which the Patron is responsible and which is central to the lived characteristic spirit of the Catholic school is of little or no importance. It seems to me that this change of language and of placement of the Patron's programme must pose problems for all schools regardless of ethos. The Patron's programme whether religious or ethical is essential in enabling children to make sense of the value system, the religious identity and the kind of community that the school which they inhabit seeks to offer to them. The absence of any reference to the spiritual dimension of the child's development is also of concern in a school with a Catholic ethos in particular but, again, must be problematic for all who believe in the holistic approach to the education of a child. Surely, spiritual development in its broadest sense is about equipping children to cope with the ultimate questions and is not dependent on adherence to a religious tradition. In a faith school acknowledging the importance of this aspect of a child's development is even more important as we seek to offer to every child the

tools to face the many challenges that living in today's turbulent world brings. The omission of recognising and including the spiritual dimension of the child's development is yet another new departure for the NCCA. The 1999 Primary Curriculum clearly both acknowledged and more importantly valued the need to nourish and nurture the spiritual dimension of the child. '*The curriculum takes cognisance of the affective, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious dimensions of the child's experience and development. For most people in Ireland, the totality of the human condition cannot be understood or explained merely in terms of physical and social experience (NCCA 1999, p.27). '*
As patron of faith schools it seems inconceivable that a curriculum without reference to this key dimension of a child's development could now be introduced into the Irish school system.

TIME ALLOCATION PROPOSALS

I have already mentioned my concerns about the terminology of '*minimum state curriculum time*' and '*flexible time.*' These terms seem be unhelpful and have the potential to create unnatural and unmanageable divisions in a faith school context. It is clear that these constructs will pose difficulties for leadership and for board of management members as they strive to find ways to ensure that 'religious education' is taught as a core subject in a state curriculum that does not seem to recognise or value its status and importance in the faith school. I have heard from both leaders in our schools and members of boards of management that there is little, if anything, about the elements outlined as belonging in '*flexible time*' that are in reality flexible. They point out that most of its constituents, roll call, break time, *etc* are actually mandatory. From my perspective the Patron's Programme is also mandatory and the 1998 Education Act allows that the time necessary for teaching '*subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school' (30: 2d)* will be allocated. The placing of religious education, in '*flexible time*' implies that it is a subject that has very little status and that there is an element of choice on behalf of the teacher or school as to whether or not it should be taught. I appreciate that the NCCA may want to distinguish between the curriculum areas for which it, on behalf of the State, is responsible and those of the individual patrons. However, it must be possible to find a more inclusive solution that allows for the recognition of the centrality of religious education in the faith school and indeed, the importance of the Patron's Programme in other school communities.

IN CONCLUSION

I wish the NCCA well in its deliberations and thank you for the opportunity to engage in this most important conversation about how teaching and learning in the primary school will be framed in the future. The excellent document produced by the NCCA to support this consultation; 'Proposals for Structure and Time Allocation in a Redeveloped Primary Curriculum, '*states that 'the allocation of time across the curriculum can be seen to place a value on what is important for children in the formative years of their educational experience.*' I conclude by agreeing wholeheartedly with this statement and by offering a sincere request that those charged with the important task of designing the structure and designating the time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum acknowledge the value of religious education in our faith schools. These schools have served the educational needs of the children of the State exceptionally well in the past and seek only to continue to do so to the very best of their ability into the future.

Contributor

Diocese of Killaloe

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Gerard**
Surname	**Kenny**
Position (If applicable)	**Board of Management Member, Diocesan Education Secretary**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Killaloe Diocese**
Address	**Circular Road, Kilkee, Co. Clare**
Telephone	**0659056580**
Email	**office@kilkeeparish.com**
Date	**22nd May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [yes] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [yes] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I don't have difficulty with the proposal to move to a two-stage model. However, I think that the Patron of the school should be allowed greater flexibility in overseeing the programme on how the moral, spiritual and developmental education of the child are catered for.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

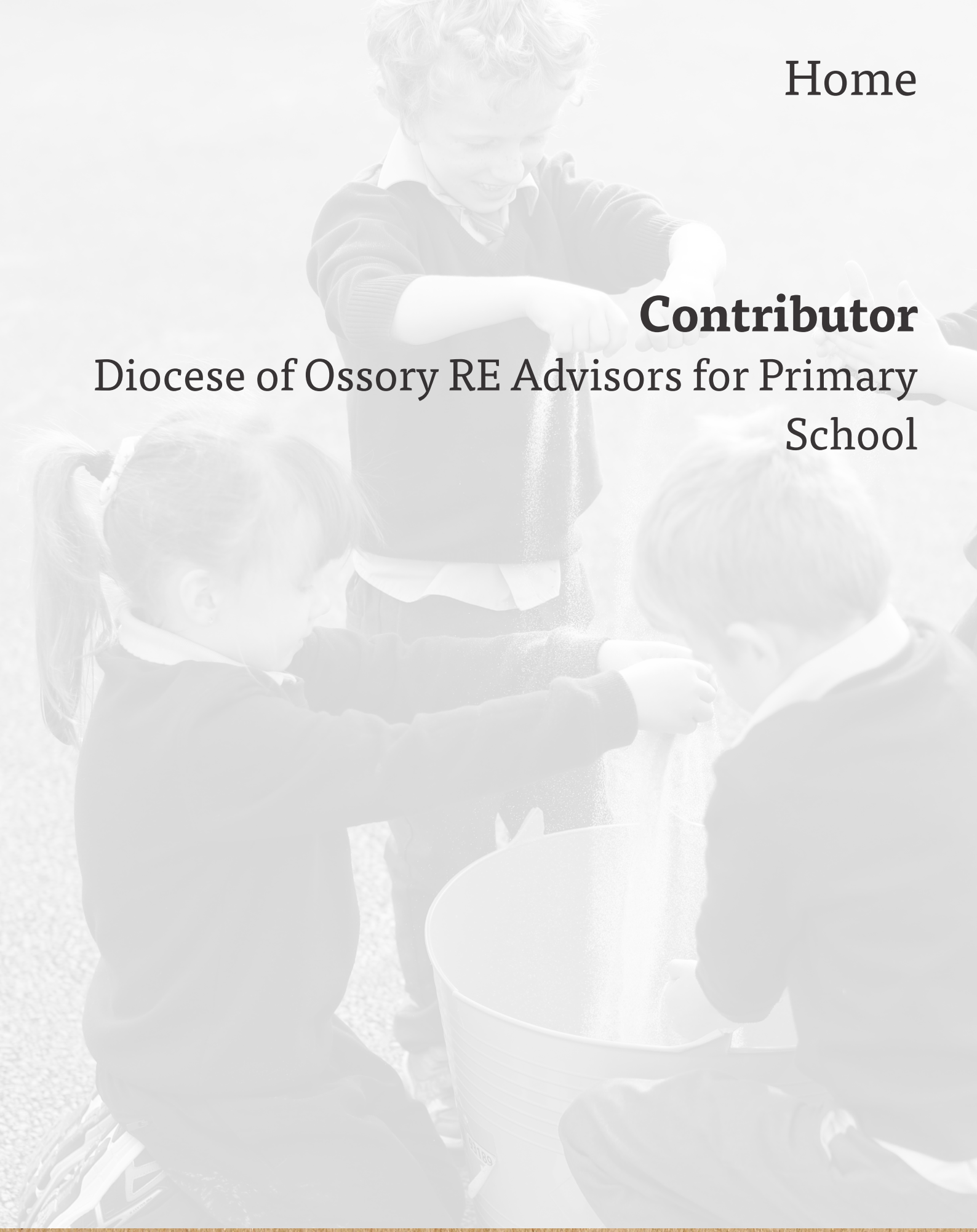
   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

In schools very often the social, personal and health education part of the curriculum and the religious education of the child go hand in hand.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

The introduction of any new programme on ethics and religions into the primary school curriculum should be incorporated into the Religion Curriculum / Patron's Programme of the school. This would allow the various Patrons to work in conjunction with the DES on the development of such a curriculum which takes account of the ethos of each Patron body. The allocation of such a programme within the time frame of the school day would suggest that it may need to receive a greater time allocation than the 40% proposed.



Contributor

Diocese of Ossory RE Advisors for Primary School

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Maria**
Surname	**Comerford**
Position (If applicable)	**Coordinator**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Diocese of Ossory Re Advisors for Primary Schools**
Address	**Ossory Diocesan Office, James St, Kilkenny**
Telephone	**0872350719**
Email	**mgcomerford@ossory.ie**
Date	**13/05/2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal ☐ Organisation ☐ **Organisation**

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes ☐ No ☐ **Yes**

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

As Diocesan Advisors visiting schools we are aware that many teachers, parents and Boards of Management are unaware of the NCCA proposal to remove Religious Education from the Core Subjects and place it in flexible time. In the Curriculum for Primary Schools (1999) great emphasis was placed on the teaching of the Patrons' programme. One of the specific aims of that Curriculum was to enable children to develop spiritual, moral and religious values. Why has this changed?

Currently, teachers are experiencing an overloaded curriculum. We foresee that if RE is taken out of the 60% Core Syllabus time its importance within the school day will be greatly diminished.

Religious Education is the only subject area that has been removed from the Core Subject section so RE is now being placed on a par with assembly time, roll call and play time.

From our visits to schools we see that teachers are very happy with the Religious Education Curriculum (2015). There is a strong emphasis on integration with other subjects in the curriculum and it addresses inter-religious awareness and respect for the cultures of people of other faiths and none.

Children have a right to be educated in their faith; without this dimension their education is seriously lacking.

Finally, we exhort the NCCA to bring this consultation into the public arena so that everybody has an opportunity to engage in the process.

Contributor

Dorothy Morrissey

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Dorothy**
Surname	**Morrissey**
Position (If applicable)	**Lecturer in Education**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Mary Immaculate College**
Address	**South Circular Road, Limerick**
Telephone	**061-204521**
Email	**dorothy.morrissey@mic.ul.ie**
Date	**18 April 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal ☐ Organisation ☐

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I agree, in principle, with the proposed change to a staged curriculum model. I favour the three-stage model; I see it as supporting progression from early years' settings to primary schools and from primary schools to secondary schools. I also see it as supporting incremental progression within the primary school itself; enabling children, as they mature, to progress from the exploration of broadly based themes (stage one) to curriculum areas (stage two) to a more focussed exploration of subjects in greater depth (stage three).

The Consultation Paper identifies concerns about teachers' abilities to teach through the medium of play in the early years. This is a concern which will need to be addressed with regard to either of the proposed models; more difficult, however, to address with regard to a two-stage model. It will not be enough to provide some initial training (on the introduction of the curriculum) to teachers; teachers will need access to sustained (and, at times, intensive) support if they are to be persuaded to move from more tried and tested approaches to the play-based approaches advocated in the first stage of the three-stage model. (They will also need access to ongoing support in relation to the move from subjects to curriculum areas in the second stage of that model). Furthermore, a 'child led' approach to play/learning will require a reduction in class size at infant level. It is unrealistic to expect teachers with large numbers of small children in their classes to adopt an approach that is entirely, or even predominantly, 'child led'.

While teachers have identified curriculum overload as one of the barriers to implementing the 1999 curriculum, teachers' own lack of confidence and expertise in areas such as science. PE, and the arts have also been barriers to successful implementation. These latter barriers might have been addressed with the provision of sustained specialist expertise and support in these areas (I'm not advocating for specialist teachers but for a sustained support structure led by teachers with specialist expertise and with far greater capacity and reach than the current system of support provided by PDST). It is imperative that curriculum change be supported not just in the initial stages on a one-off or sporadic basis but on a sustained basis over the longer term. Indeed, the key to successful curriculum change lies in the provision of extensive and sustained support for schools and teachers at local level. Without a commitment to the provision of such support, any proposed changes will have limited impact. This is borne out in relation the 1999 curriculum: in the widespread non-implementation of the drama curriculum (though the drama curriculum itself with its focus on exploring feelings, knowledge and ideas may be a contributing factor here), in the lack of priority given to science in many schools and in the non-implementation of some of the strands of the PE curriculum. (This list is not intended to be exhaustive!). It is interesting to note, however, that these particular subjects/curriculum strands (e.g. dance) have been identified as ones in which teachers also lack confidence and/or expertise.

I am broadly in agreement with the benefits and challenges of the three-stage model as outlined in the Consultation Paper. I am particularly concerned about the issues identified in relation to career

progression and these need to be carefully addressed to ensure that all teachers have equal access to progression. Within both models too, there are challenges for initial teacher education. Over the years, lecturers in initial teacher education have become increasingly specialised. This has led to the prevailing differentiated (subject) approach to curriculum in ITE. This approach needs to be reassessed, and reformulated, in light of the more integrated approach to curriculum proposed in the Consultation Paper. However, this reassessment/reformulation should not occur at the expense of ITE's crucial role in enabling students to critique and interrogate curriculum and the broader social, cultural and historical contexts in which it is located. It is imperative that this latter role is not subordinated to that of enabling students to become effective curriculum mediators. Closer co-operation between ITE and schools, particularly in the area of school placement, could enable such tensions to be negotiated. Greater involvement of practising teachers in ITE (on a part-time or short-term secondment basis) could also enable students to develop a greater understanding of curriculum as 'lived', while simultaneously opening (more) spaces for both students and teachers to interrogate and critique it.

The Consultation Paper makes the point that 'purposeful teaching and learning occurs when teachers' subject knowledge contributes to appropriate pedagogical strategies and meaningful learning experiences for children'. It thus underlines the importance to children's learning of teachers' subject knowledge. It is interesting to note that the subjects currently constituted as core (English, Irish and Maths) are those subjects in which teachers have served a long apprenticeship as primary and secondary school students themselves; subjects in which it could thus be expected that they have confidence and expertise. These are also the subjects on which teachers spend (and are exhorted to spend) most time in schools. If other subjects (such as those identified above) are to be valued and taught effectively, the issue of teacher confidence and expertise needs to be prioritised. I have suggested (above) that this might be achieved through the provision of a sustained system of local support, which (as I argue above) requires the sourcing, education and ongoing deployment of support teachers with particular subject expertise. In addition, the issue of teacher confidence and expertise in all curriculum subjects needs to be accorded priority in ITE and/or early professional development. The effective teaching of curriculum areas in the proposed second stage of the three-stage model demands that teachers possess the breadth and depth of subject knowledge required to develop 'pedagogical strategies and meaningful learning experiences for children.' Without this knowledge, the potential offered by a truly integrated curriculum to enhance children's learning will remain underdeveloped. There is perhaps an argument here for reconstituting current BEd programmes as double honours programmes; to include education and another subject (the latter predicated, in very broad terms, on the primary school curriculum. For example, English might include modules on children's literature as well as modules on twentieth century literature etc.). Furthermore, postgraduate entry to ITE might be limited to those with undergraduate degrees in specific subjects.

The Consultation Paper outlines an incremental shift in both models from 'child led' to 'teacher led' learning. I think these terms need further unpacking/clarification. For, as also noted in the Consultation Paper, if young children are to acquire knowledge that will take them beyond their existing experiences, it is incumbent on the teacher – albeit cognisant of young children's existing knowledge, experience, interests and curiosity – to lead the children to new understandings. While the Consultation paper clarifies (in small print) that teacher-led is 'not synonymous with a transmission model of teaching and learning' (p.15), the need for the maturing child to take increased responsibility for what and how s/he learns needs to be underlined. Surely, the teacher's primary role should be – by the third stage of the three-stage model – to facilitate children to be both independent and collaborative learners, as well as to provide direct instruction in specific subject domains as appropriate and as demanded by curriculum.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

I am broadly in agreement with the idea that there should be a minimum state curriculum time of 60% and flexible time of 40%. I am, moreover, in favour of weekly minimum time allocations for English and Maths. However, I think it may be time – given the ever-declining standard of the Irish language among teachers (there are, of course, many exceptions) – to consider removing Irish as a core subject from the curriculum; the implications for the new language curriculum notwithstanding. The Irish language, as a non-core subject, might be located within a learning domain such as 'culture, heritage and the arts'. (Schools could also have the opportunity to retain the Irish language as core, if they wished.) The removal of Irish as a core subject would go some way towards addressing the question posed in the Consultation Paper: *what should come out?* I will, however, leave it to others, more expert than I am, to debate the merits and demerits attached to including a second language in the curriculum.

I would suggest that – given Ireland's rising levels of obesity and the concomitant health implications – PE should be included as a core subject on the curriculum. The resultant increase in time for PE would enable children to develop habits of physical activity from an early age. It would also enable them to develop a broad range of physical skills; facilitating them to participate in, and choose from, an array of physical activities. PE, however, is one of the subjects in which many teachers lack confidence and expertise. These are issues that would need to be addressed as a matter of priority if PE was to be afforded core curriculum status (see previous section). I note, with some concern, what appears to me to be a move to include PE within the broader learning domain of 'well-being'. I fear that such a move could lead to a reduction, rather than an increase, in the importance attributed to (and time spent on) physical activity in schools.

As suggested in the Consultation Paper, I think it would be useful to state the minimum curriculum time for core subjects (to include PE) on a weekly basis so as to ensure 'frequent teaching of these subjects' (p.44). It might, however, be more useful to specify minimum time allocations for other themes/curriculum areas/subjects on a termly basis. Specifying them on a monthly basis (as proposed in the Consultation Paper) could prove restrictive for schools and teachers, some of whom may find 'planning in blocks of time over an extended period' (DES, 1999) to be the most effective and efficient way of mediating the curriculum. In addition – as stated in the Consultation Paper – I see the incorporation of 'flexible time into the curriculum … [as going] some way to responding the call to support teacher professional judgement and provide flexibility for schools in how they negotiate the curriculum at local level' (pp.45-46).

The proposed inclusion of coding on the curriculum raises two important issues: 1) the lack of sufficient empirical research to support its inclusion 2) teachers' (there are exceptions) lack of expertise in relation to same. This lack of expertise also raises the issue of the financial outlay necessary to provide teachers with the skills (and supports) required to teach coding effectively. For, as we have learnt from the implementation of the 1999 curriculum, the inclusion of

subjects/curriculum strands on the curriculum does not mean that they will be taught. Or, as it is put in the Consultation Paper, the '*intended* allocation of time' and the '*actual* use of time' (p.39) do not necessarily converge. In addition, I think it is important to acknowledge here that – as stated in the Consultation Paper – 'while guidance on time allocation may be significant for teachers and schools, inevitably it is the learning experiences provided for children that contribute most significantly to a child's development' (p.41).

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

I note in figure 8, Curriculum areas in other jurisdictions (p.45), in only 3 – Ireland, Northern Ireland and Canada – of the 10 jurisdictions referred to, is drama named as a component of arts education. However, as I have outlined above, the inclusion of drama on the curriculum has not necessarily meant that it has been taught in schools. So when it comes to the issue of what to leave out of any new curriculum, drama is often mentioned. I would argue, however, that drama should be retained within the broader curriculum area of 'arts, heritage and cultural education' in stage two and as a subject *option* in stage 3. The single strand of the 1999 drama curriculum, 'drama to explore knowledge, feelings and ideas leading to understanding', identifies drama as a learning medium rather than as an art form. As an art form, drama, like creative writing, is concerned with shaping and sharing stories. The tools used to shape stories in drama include bodies, space, sounds (including music and words) and objects. Since drama requires content, it makes sense that drama's content should come from other curricular areas, thereby enabling children to deepen their understanding of those areas. However, I would argue that children's learning in these other areas should not be at the expense of their learning in drama. Drama, like music, visual art, dance, film and the language arts, is primarily an art form; it is not just a teaching methodology (though it can be used as one as well). The issue of drama's lack of alignment, in the current curriculum, with the other arts areas needs to be addressed in any new curriculum. The focus needs to shift from drama for understanding (though understanding may occur) to the processes of creating, performing and appreciating/responding to drama as per the curriculum in the other arts areas: visual arts (making and looking and responding), music (composing, performing, listening and responding) and dance (exploring, creating, performing, understanding and appreciating) (DES, 1999). A similar process-based approach to poetry (reading, writing and responding) and film (making and looking and responding), as named components of a new arts education curriculum, could also be included. The equivalent of the current 3 hour allocation per week for arts education might be maintained (though on a termly basis) and schools could decide on the arts areas they wish to, or have the expertise to, prioritise in any given term (or part thereof). The issue of a sustained support structure led by teachers with specialist expertise in the arts is particularly pertinent here. And, in order to ensure that the required arts expertise exists in schools into the future, student teachers could be required to take at least 'one intensive elective' (Benson, 1979) in an arts area. In the current modular system operating in initial teacher education, 'one intensive elective' might be constituted as a 6 or 9 credit module. In addition, colleges, as per the Benson report (1979), might 'investigate the possibility of developing some integrated arts courses rather than maintaining strict distinctions between the arts subjects' (Benson, 1979, p.145). They might also – as recommended in the Benson report – develop more postgraduate and CPD opportunities in the arts. Incentives may, however, need to be provided to ensure that teachers avail of these opportunities. (Many of the suggestions made here in relation to the arts could also be applied to PE, science and technology.)

In the 1999 curriculum, dance is acknowledged as an art form. It is, nevertheless, located within the PE curriculum. Indeed, Canada is the only country, of the 10 referred to in the Consultation Paper, in which dance is named as a component of the arts education curriculum. However, the 'dance as art' model (after Brinson, 1991 and Smith-Autard, 1994), on which the dance strand of Ireland's current PE curriculum is based, places dance firmly within the context of arts education. Consistent with the 'dance as art' model, the dance strand focusses on engaging children in the processes of creating, performing and responding to/appreciating dance. When children engage in these processes (in dance and in the other arts) with reference to broader artistic, aesthetic and cultural practices and traditions, their cultural education is enhanced. So, as Brinson (1991) writes, 'dance contributes to the physical education of pupils, but to define it solely in these terms is to severely limit its potential in education' (p. 165). Crucial to the realisation of this potential is the already much touted issue of teacher confidence and expertise. Dance's location in any new curriculum (within arts education or within PE or even straddling both) is of secondary importance.

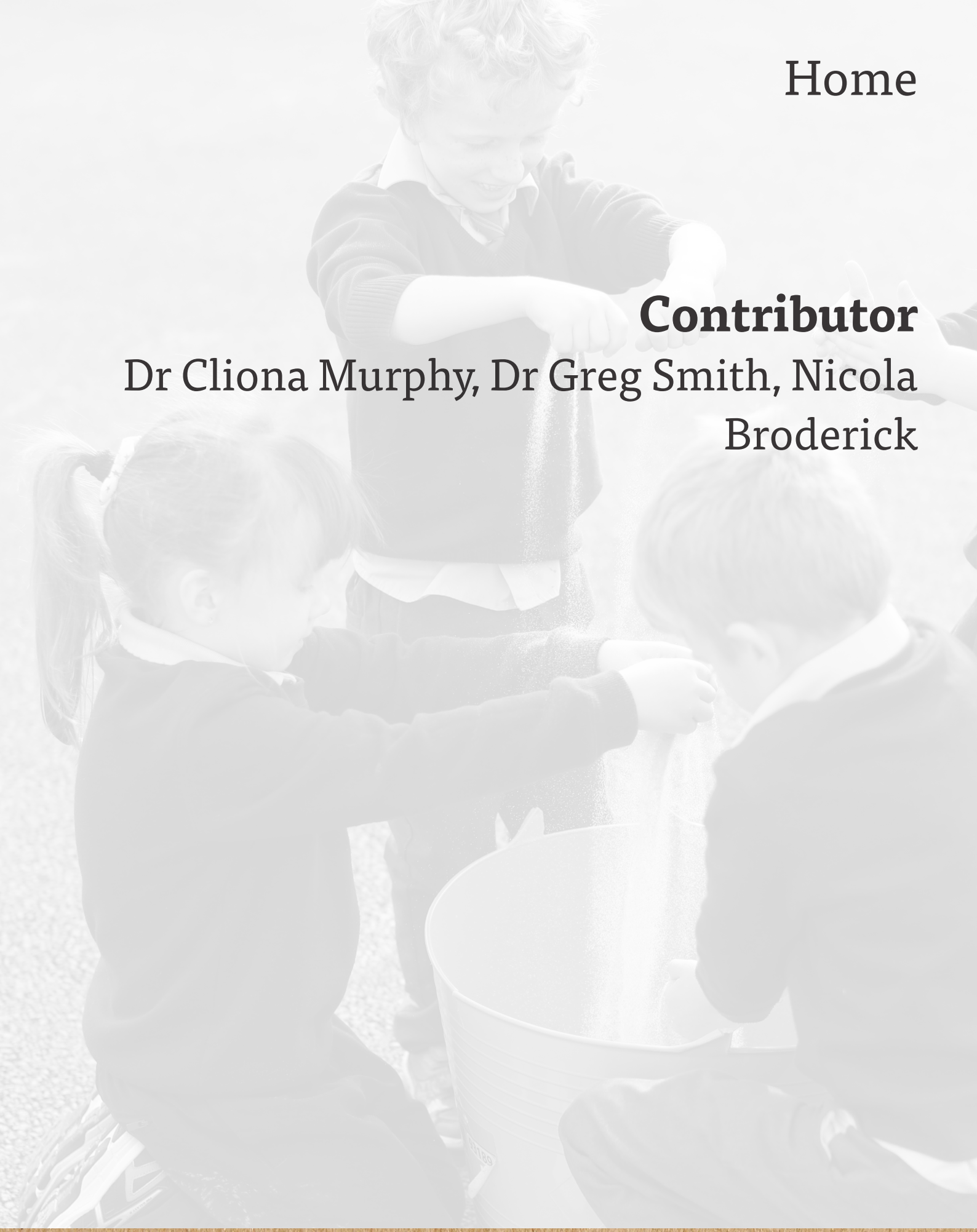
References

Benson, C. (1979) *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education.* Dublin: The Arts Council of Ireland. (This report is more commonly known as the Benson Report.)

Brinson, P. (1991) *Dance as Education: Towards a National Dance Culture.* London: RoutledgeFalmer.

DES (1999) *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction, Physical Education, Drama, Music, Visual Arts.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

Smith-Autard, J. (2013) *The Art of Dance in Education 2nd ed.* London: Bloomsbury (2002, 1994).



Contributor

Dr Cliona Murphy, Dr Greg Smith, Nicola Broderick

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

primary developments
foráis sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondents' details

Person 1	*Dr Cliona Murphy*
Person 2	*Dr Greg Smith*
Person 3	*Ms Nicola Broderick*
Position (If applicable)	*Lecturers in Science Education*
Organisation (If applicable)	*DCU Institute of Education*
Address	*St Patrick's Campus, Drumcondra, Dublin 9*
Telephone	*01 884 2153*
Email	*cliona.murphy@dcu.ie*
Date	*3rd July 2017*

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes

As educators in Science Education we would like to respond to the proposed restructuring and new model of time allocation for the primary curriculum

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

We disagree with the proposal for a two or three stage model for the reasons outlined in section 3 below.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

We are concerned with the new model of time allocation for primary schools for the reasons outlined in section 3 below

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

From our perspective as science educators we believe that the content, methodologies and structure of the current primary curriculum (DES, 1999a) are appropriate for supporting the development of children's scientific literacy. International and national research asserts that the adoption of social constructivist / inquiry-based pedagogy in school science supports the development of children's scientific knowledge and skills; leads to increased interest and motivation in science; facilitates collaboration in school science; promotes critical thinking and problem solving skills; and increases children's scientific literacy and attitudes to science (Artigue et al, 2012; Harlen, 2010; Murphy et al., 2011; Rocard et al., 2007; Smith, 2012). The current Primary Science Curriculum (PSC) (DES, 1999) is in keeping with the most up to date research on best practices in science pedagogy, as social constructivist approaches to teaching and learning underpin the science curriculum and the importance of developing children's scientific content knowledge and skills is emphasised throughout. However, we do have concerns regarding: the amount of science content in the strand units of PSC; the extent to which teachers appear to be adopting inquiry- based approaches to primary science; the time that Irish primary teachers are *actually* allocating to science.

Although the PSC supports the use of social constructivist / inquiry-based methodologies, the research highlights concerns regarding, the extent to which, and frequency with which inquiry-based approaches are being adopted in Irish primary science classrooms (Varley *et al.*, 2008; Murphy & Smith, 2012; Smith, 2012). Concerns regarding the extent to which teachers are affording children sufficient opportunities to develop their scientific skills are also apparent (DES, 2012). National research indicates that while Irish children in primary schools are engaging with hands-on science to some extent, there still appears to be an over emphasis on the use of more teacher-directed didactic approaches to science and where "child–led, autonomous investigations appear to be used relatively rarely as a hands-on strategy" (Varley et al. 2008, p.192).

The current allocation of time for science within the overall structure of the primary curriculum is 45 mins – 1 hour per week, depending on the age group. This allocation is extremely low in comparison to our international counterparts. As reported by Lewis and Archer (2013) the four percent of instruction time currently devoted to primary science in Ireland is far lower than the norm in most countries. Indeed with the exception of Austria, no other country that participated in TIMSS 2011 allocated less time to science than Ireland (Murphy, 2013). To make matters worse, it is apparent that high percentages of Irish primary teachers are not even teaching the weekly requirement of 45 mins – 1 hour of science.

Over the last three decades scientific literacy has become an internationally accepted educational goal. In Ireland, the recent "*STEM Education in the Irish School System Report"* (MacCraith et al 2016) highlights the need to ensure "that young people gain the skills and aspirations to participate in an increasingly scientific and technological society, and, as citizens, to contribute to a society that is informed about the pivotal role of science and technology in the well-being of society in general" (MacCraith 2016, p.43).

We feel that the proposed restructuring of the primary curriculum to the two or three stage

model would be detrimental to the teaching of science in Ireland and would further diminish the amount of time teachers are currently allocating to science.

We would therefore propose the following 2 stage model:

Stage 1 (Pre-school and infant classes) based on the principles, themes and methodologies of Aistear, as is in the proposed three stage model.

Stage 2 (1st class to 6th class) A subject based curriculum structure in two year cycles.

Stage 1: We welcome the integration of pre-school with infant classes. At present the Aistear themes, principles and methodologies underpin early years' primary science modules on the Bachelor of Education degree in the Institute of Education, DCU. Unstructured and structured play, story, dialogue, sustained shared thinking are some of the teaching methodologies with which our student teachers engage during their science education modules. It is anticipated that engaging with such methodologies will provide our student teachers with the requisite pedagogical skills to support young children in exploring scientific content knowledge and in developing their scientific inquiry skills. The importance of child-centred approaches to learning science and the importance of fostering and developing children's natural curiosity about the world around them are also emphasised throughout the science education modules.

Stage 2: We feel that a subject based curriculum should remain from 1st to 6th class. Specifically relating to science, children need to be provided with opportunities to explicitly develop their scientific content knowledge and inquiry skills and we strongly maintain that the integrated thematic approach currently proposed would not afford Irish children pupils sufficient opportunities to do this. Irish and indeed international research has revealed that primary school teachers tend to lack confidence and competence to teaching science as they feel they do not have the necessary Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Appleton & Kindt, 1999, Jarvis et al 2004, Smith 2012, Murphy et al 2015). Science is a subject that many Irish primary teachers do

not feel confident teaching and a subject from which many teachers shy away. We strongly believe that the proposed thematic / integrated structures would result in even less engagement with science than is currently the norm in many primary schools, and that Irish primary school children would be provided with even fewer opportunities to develop their scientific knowledge and skills .

However, we fully acknowledge the time constraints currently facing Irish primary teachers to cover all the subjects in the curriculum and recognise their concerns regarding the teaching of science. We therefore propose the following recommendations to promote effective teaching and learning in primary science in Ireland:

- Long term CPD is provided for all primary teachers to support them in: enhancing their confidence and competence in teaching science; developing their PCK in adopting more inquiry-based approaches to teaching science; and developing positive attitudes towards science.
- Annual ring-fenced funding is made available to all primary schools for the purchasing of science resources that are essential for teaching science effectively.
- More time is allocated to the teaching of primary science to bring Ireland in line with the international norm and to address the recommendations of the STEM Education Review Report (Mac Craith et al, 2016).
- While the content of the current PSC is mostly appropriate for primary school children we feel that a considerable reduction in the number of content objectives at each class level is required. A reduced number of content objectives that would clearly reflect progression in scientific understanding as children progress through primary school is required.
- A greater emphasis is placed on the development of children's scientific inquiry skills as they progress from infants to sixth class. Clear exemplars of how children's inquiry skills

should develop as they progress through each class level should be provided.

- We acknowledge the numerous benefits of integrated approaches to teaching and learning. While we would support a non-integrated structure we propose that a ' space' in the curriculum is set aside where teachers can adopt integrated / thematic approaches to teaching. We propose that a percentage of time is taken from every curriculum subject each month to explore a particular theme in this 'space'.

References

Artique, M., Harlen, W., Lena, P., Baptist, P., Dillon, J., & Jasmin, D. (2012). *The legacy of the Fibonacci Project to science and mathematics education*. Retrieved from: http://www.fondation-lamap.org/sites/default/files/upload/media/Fibonacci_Book.pdf

Department of Education and Science (1999a) *Primary school curriculum – Introduction*, Dublin: The Stationery Office

Department of Education and Science (1999b) *Primary school curriculum: Science,* Dublin: The Stationery Office

Department of Education and Skills. (2012). *Science in the primary school 2008: Inspectorate evaluation studies.* Dublin*:* Government Publications.

Harlen, W. (2010). *Principles and big ideas of science education.* Hatfield: ASE.

Jarvis, T., & Pell (2004) , A. Primary teachers' changing attitudes and cognition during a two year science in-service programme and their effects on pupil. *International Journal of Science Education, 26* (14), 1787-1811. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0950069042000243763

Lewis and Archer (2013). Feagures of policy and provision. In E.Eivers & A. Clerkin (Eds.), *National Schools, international contexts: Beyond the PIRLS and TIMSS test results*. Dublin: Education Research Centre. http://www.erc.ie/documents/pt2011_context_report.pdf

MacCraith, B., Dooley, T., Kearney. B., MacCormaic. S., O' Donoghue, J., O Murchu. P., Walshe, A. (2016). STEM Education in the Irish School System. Government of Ireland

Murphy, C (2013). Science Items: Context and curriculum. In E.Eivers & A. Clerkin (Eds.), *National Schools, international contexts: Beyond the PIRLS and TIMSS test results*. Dublin: Education Research Centre. http://www.erc.ie/documents/pt2011_context_report.pdf

Murphy, C. Murphy, C. & Kilfeather K. (2011) Children making sense of science. *Research*

in Science Education. 41(2): 283 – 298

Murphy C., and Smith, G. (2012). The impact of a curriculum course on pre-service primary teachers' science content knowledge and attitudes towards teaching science. *Irish Educational Studies,* 31, 77-95.

Rocard, M., Csermely, P., Jorde, D., Lenzen, D., Walberg-Henriksson, H., & Hemmo, V. (2007) *Science education now: A renewed pedagogy for the future of Europe.* Luxemburg: Office for Official Publications of the European Commission. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/report-rocard-on-science-education_en.pdf

Smith, G. (2012). *The Western Seaboard Science Project: An innovative model of professional development to enhance the teaching and learning of primary science* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland.

Varley, J., Murphy, C., & Veale Ó. (2008). *Science in primary schools: Phase 1 final report.* Retrieved from http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/primary/Binder1.pdf

Contributor

Dr Susan Pike, Joe Usher

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

primary developments
foráis sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

Person 1	*Dr Susan Pike*
Person 2	*Mr Joe Usher*
Position (If applicable)	*Lecturers in Geography Education*
Organisation (If applicable)	*DCU Institute of Education*
Address	*St Patrick's Campus*
Telephone	*01 884 2235*
Email	*Susan.Pike@dcu.ie*
Date	*May 26th 2017*

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?
Organisation

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?
Yes

As Teacher Educators working with teachers in education, including Geography Education we would like to respond to the above document, hereafter referred to as 'the NCCA proposals'.

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

We disagree with the proposal for a two or three stage model for the reasons listed in 3, below.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

We have mixed views on the proposed time allocations, we believe teacher professionalism and experience should allow flexibility in choices about time as outlined in 3, below.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Geography

The study of Geography deepens children's knowledge of the world and understanding of the earth as the home of humankind. It is an essential component of a liberal, open education. Geography is particularly important through the primary school as this is a time when children develop conceptual understanding across the curriculum. There is evidence that where Geography is taught well children are very positive about the subject and its value to them (Pike, 2016). Furthermore, where Geography follows the curriculum through creative, enquiry based activity, with fieldwork parents are very positive about the subject (Smyth, 2010; Lynchehan, 2017).

The power of Geography in children's education

Geography is a subject in which children experience powerful thinking in our primary schools (Maude, 2016). Geography helps children understand complex concepts, such as location, decision making, change, from their earliest school experiences (Smyth, 2010). The current curriculum with its spiral approaches allows these ideas to develop and expand as children work through their school years. Geography contributes hugely to such development of children's learning, whether considering where a tree could be planted, investigating changes in shopping in their own area or discovering characteristics of a distant place. Geography is a subject where children think beyond their own experience and consider possible futures (Young, 2009). We are concerned that if such conceptual understanding becomes part of a thematic curriculum there will be no context or

content for children to understand these ideas. Geography and the other SESE subjects provide opportunities for children to think beyond their own experiences (Young, 2007; 2009) especially as our current curriculum outlines such provision.

Geography in the primary years provides learning opportunities that children may not experience elsewhere in the curriculum. For example, the children learn key concepts such as space, place, change and movement in their Geography lessons. In doing this they also learn geographical language, which enhances their literacy skills, their ability to describe, explain and argue. It is not surprising that, when children do not study Geography in the early years there is a marked reduction in the range of their vocabulary. Luckily, in many of our primary schools, teachers use Geography to provide a subject base, reason and interest for children to use Literacy, Numeracy and ICT (O'Neill, 2010; McDonald, 2012). Geography is a living subject and discipline which is continuously changing, providing opportunities for, and involving, children in the changes that are taking place.

The capacity for children to think in many ways is evident in Geography lessons. Where children are actively involved and engaged; they are remarkably positive about the subject. The challenge of geographical thinking is part of the 1999 curriculum and it is always welcomed by children (Pike, 2016). We are concerned the changes recommended in the NCCA proposals could result in bland topic-based work, with a focus on content to the detriment of developing key geographical skills. For example, if children explore a topic such as the trade without Geography, it can become a series of lessons of facts, rather than an essentially geographical topic that introduced children to such concepts as production, trade of products and sustainability. Through other subjects, children can explore additional meaningful aspects of such a topic such as looking at the real cost of clothes or Ireland's trade figures in mathematics, while other key areas such as human rights can also be explored in the context of people and places, rather than in a vacuum.

We are concerned about assumptions made in the NCCA proposals that subject focused teaching cannot be pupil centered (p5). This is simply not true, in fact the current curriculum allows children to be active agents in their own learning through enquiry methodologies (Catling, 2003; Pike, 2016). Children, supported by teachers can make decisions about the questions they would like to answer, how they would like to learn as well as what they do with their learning. For example, in learning about possible futures in their locality children can map past, present and possible future changes, interact with others and think about their own ideas. They can also act on their learning and make recommendations to local decision makers.

There are references in the NCCA proposals to curriculum overload. We appreciate this view and agree that additional curriculum subjects could add to these issues. However, on closer investigation this overload is often due to an over-reliance on, and the use of, fixed programmes from textbooks and workbooks (Varley, et al., 2008; Waldron et al, 2009; Cummins, 2010). When supported by professional development and resources, choices can be made to ensure good quality learning in subjects, with quality integration. There are many examples of how subjects can be integrated in ways to enhance learning across the curriculum. The current curriculum, with its many choices enhances opportunities for this type of experience for children.

Geography in the primary curriculum – current positions and practices

The principles of the 1999 curriculum remain as relevant today as in the 90s. Geography contributes hugely to these and where Geography is taught in line with these principles high quality geographical experiences occur (Catling, 2003). The principles provide the framework for teachers to draw on children's lives and ideas for Geography lessons, always framed by the expertise of the teacher. Children are engaged and excited by their Geography lessons and their learning in it (Pike, 2016).

Unfortunately, this of any other type of classroom practice has not been investigated by the NCCA. Whilst detailed reviews of the curriculum have taken place for subjects such as Science and Mathematics there has been no such investigations for Geography. Therefore, decisions about the Geography curriculum are being taken with no NCCA research being carried out in relation to Geography and little reference to research that has taken place here in DCU or elsewhere. It is a great pity that teachers as reflective practitioners have not been able to contribute to any review for Geography. Furthermore, the NCCA website contains very limited support for Primary Geography. The levels of support for teachers in Geography as so low as to be ineffective (Desimone, 2009). We recognize the support given to teachers from the NCCA, but we would have concerns that some post-1999 guidelines (e.g. the Intercultural Education Guidelines) were not accompanied by any CPD, and were considered additions to the curriculum rather than practices to permeate school ethos and practices (Smyth, et al., 2009; Banks, 2011).

Despite the lack of national level support for Geography, there is great interest in primary Geography in social and professional media. There are now 4000 teachers on the Facebook page 'Primary Geography Ireland', 1500 followers on Twitter and over 500 teachers on the 'Primary Geography Champions Ireland' page. These figures show teachers are interested in primary Geography, its role in children's learning and innovate Geography education at all levels. Research

carried out across Ireland as well as elsewhere show the potential for innovative learning, in a range of ways in Geography (Pike, 2016; Kelly, 2017). Research by teachers shows the enormous contribution Geography can make, when taught alone and when geographical learning is used as the context for other areas of learning (McNally, 2012; McDonald, 2012).

Geography in the primary curriculum – proposed changes

We welcome some of the statements in the NCCA proposals. For example, the importance of drawing on children and their lives in learning (p1). We also strongly appreciate the importance of the relationships between children and teachers as key in children's experiences of school. In fact, the very highest quality teaching in geography occurs when such relationships are mutually respective, allowing for innovation and creative learning experiences. For all subjects the suggestion that 'further practical support in using different teaching resources, organisational settings, strategies for differentiation, and ways to promote higher-order thinking skills' (p1) are to be praised. However, we have two major reservations in relation to the assumptions made in the proposals, and in turn we propose minimal changes to the place of Geography in the primary school curriculum.

Firstly, we question the assumptions made about children and their learning in the document. For example, within the lists of skills there is an assumption that the current curriculum is lacking. In fact, the curriculum was produced with great care and attention to key educational theory and research evidence. The aims and principles of the Geography curriculum hold true today as does much of the approaches and content of it. The curriculum, when taught true to these principles provides opportunities for children to think deeply. We are concerned that the document makes assumptions around primary education being preparation for secondary education. Whilst this can be the case it should not be the sole rationale for curriculum requirements in primary schools. In fact, the current 1999 curriculum, with moderations, is a sound basis for learning in Geography at the new Junior Certificate level, in terms of enquiry and key concepts underpinned by sustainability. A revised Geography curriculum at primary level could provide opportunities for children to build their geographical learning over time, with an emphasis on conceptual development as a sound basis for later learning.

Secondly, we are concerned that the proposed changes assume the curriculum is better 'elsewhere'. Conversely, our experiences in the international arena of primary education strongly suggest otherwise. Teachers and schools are the main factor in good teaching and learning in Geography. In fact, the current 1999 curriculum for Geography is highly regarded by all those we

interact with, our students, teachers and Geography teacher educators. The curriculum is particularly highly regarded by those abroad, with the focus on children, their lives, learning and capabilities, as well as specific characteristics of the curriculum such as enquiry approaches and the high degree of choice in relation to content. With so many other curricular focused on adult agendas, it is not surprising that our innovative 1999 Geography curriculum is so widely respected.

Recommendations for Geography in the primary curriculum

We believe the best way to support teachers in making choices about curriculum is to provide support for teachers to learn about, create and share innovative geographical practices that reflect the progressive nature of the 1999 curriculum. This could be achieved by:

- *Retaining the subject basis of the curriculum, allowing school and teachers the opportunity to choose how they teach, through a combination of subjects and/or themes throughout all years of the primary school (Pike, 2016).*
- *Presenting the curriculum in a form that clearly delineates content and approaches, including what is mandatory and optional (Pike, 2015). Further support for schools in relation to creative ways to resource Geography beyond textbooks and workbooks will have a positive impact on children's learning in all subjects and areas.*
- *Ensuring programmes 'beyond' the curriculum that schools take part in are linked explicitly to curriculum content and approaches, for example, Green Schools can contribute to enormously to Geography as well as SPHE and literacy but this needs to be clarified for teachers (Noronha, 2010).*

In conclusion, we could see a situation if Geography becomes optional for most children in Irish schools from early years to Leaving Certificate, a substantial proportion of our young people will not be educated in Geography, which provide access to powerful knowledge about themselves in the world, then our society is running risks for the future.

References

Banks, J. A. (2011). Human rights, diversity and citizenship education. In F. Waldron, & B. Ruane (Eds.), Human Rights Education: Reflections on Theory and Practice (pp. 43-66). Dublin: The Liffey Press.

Catling, S. (2003). Curriculum contested: Primary Geography and social justice. Geography, 88(3), 164-210.

Cummins, M. (2010). Eleven years on: A case study of Geography practices and perspectives within an Irish primary school. Unpublished M.Ed thesis. St Patrick's College, Dublin.

Desimone, L.M. (2009). Improving impact studies of Teachers' Professional Development: Toward better Conceptualizations and Measures. Educational Researcher, 38(3), 181–199.

Kelly, A. (2017). Enhancing Children's Learning in the Early Years through Geographical Experiences. Unpublished M.Ed thesis, St Patrick's College, Dublin.

Lynchehan, A. (2017) "Can they go outside?": Parents' Attitudes and Perceptions of Geography in a Junior Infant designated Disadvantaged Classroom. Unpublished M.Ed thesis, St Patrick's College, Dublin.

Maude, A.M. (2016). What Might Powerful Geographical Knowledge look like? Geography, 101(2), 70-76.

McDonald, E. (2012). Integrating a Geography and literacy programme: Children's and teachers' perspectives. Unpublished M.Ed thesis. St Patrick's College, Dublin.

McNally, J. (2012). Going Places: The Successful Implementation of the Primary School Curriculum - Geography. Unpublished M.Ed thesis, St Patrick's College, Dublin.

Noronha, Y. (2012). Beyond the Green Flag: Children's Views of Climate Change, Unpublished M.Ed thesis. St Patrick's College, Dublin.

O'Neill, C. (2010). Young Children's Spatial Abilities and the Development of their Spatial Cognition. Unpublished M.Ed thesis. St Patrick's College, Dublin

Pike, S. (2015) 'Primary Geography in the Republic of Ireland: Practices, Issues and Possible Futures', Review of International Geographical Education Online, 5(2), 185-198.

Pike, S. (2016) Learning Primary Geography: Ideas and Inspirations from Classrooms. Abingdon: Routledge.

Smyth, E. (2010). An Investigation into Parents' and Children's Attitudes to Geography and a locality based Geography experience. Unpublished M.Ed thesis. St Patrick's College, Dublin.

Smyth, E., Darmody, M., McGinnity, F., & Byrne, D. (2009). Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students. Dublin: ESRI.

Varley, J., Murphy, C. and Veale, O. (2008) Science in Primary Schools Phase 1. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

Waldron, F., Pike, S., Greenwood, R., Murphy, C., O'Connor, G. Dolan, A. and Kerr, K. (2009) Becoming a Teacher: Primary Student Teachers as Learners and Teachers of History, Geography and Science- An All-Ireland Study. Armagh: SCoTENS.

Young, M. (2007) Bringing Knowledge Back In: From Social Constructivism to Social Realism in the Sociology of Education. Abingdon: Routledge.

Young, M. (2009) 'Education, Globalisation and the "Voice of Knowledge', Journal of Education and Work, 22, 193–204.

Contributor

Early Childhood Education Group

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Liz**
Surname	**Dunphy**
Position (If applicable)	**Senior Lecturer Early childhood Education**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Institute of Education DCU**
Address	**Drumcondra**
Telephone	**8842057**
Email	**Elizabeth.dunphy@dcu.ie**
Date	

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ECE Group respons] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [Yes] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

We welcome:

- the inclusion of the provision for 3-5 year olds in the discussion of stages in the curriculum for children aged 3-12.
- the description (p. 10) of 2 year bands to describe the continuum (3-12 years) and clear explication of the roles of the early childhood practice frameworks that provide the structure on which the bands sit.
- the fact the consultation document recognises that there may be an issue related to teachers' ability to teach curriculum subjects through the medium of play (p. 13).
- the articulation of what is understood in the consultation document by playful learning (p. 15), though we find Figure 4 Approaches to Teaching and Learning to be unhelpful since it is suggestive of a dichotomy rather than a continuum of approaches.
- the statements on p. 18 suggesting the need for a greater balance between teacher-led and child-led activities.
- the suggestion that a further development of Aistear thematic structure might provide a good basis on which to support teachers of children in JI and SI.
- the clear articulation of different models/ conceptualizations of the PC with the benefits and challenges outlined.

We see inconsistencies in:

- the fact that the description of the early childhood years is at times from 0-6, but this is not consistent with the international perspective that ECE covers the span 0-8 years (p.13). The issue of recognition of the early learning continuum is further compromised with the presentation of the curriculum using a 3 stage model. For this reason we favour the two stage model over that of the 3 stage model as this is more in line with the concept of early childhood education as spanning the years 0-8.
- the comment in relation to abstract thinking (p. 18). This should acknowledge that young children are very capable of abstract thinking .The paragraph needs to position younger children's capabilities in a more positive manner (p.18). Bruner's notion of the spiral curriculum was very evident in the 1999 curriculum, as was the idea that even the youngest children at school can work with quite complex ideas as long as they are presented in appropriate ways.
- the rationale for the adoption of the term Stage in the redeveloped curriculum given its close association with developmental theories of learning and all that they can imply for teachers. We think it is important to ensure that recent theoretical perspectives, for example social and cultural perspectives, are also visible in the descriptions of how the curriculum is structured.
- the comment about a new transition challenge for teachers moving between stages (p.24). Should this focus on the children's transition?
- the ways in which literacy and numeracy are treated in the document. For instance, there is no mention of these in the key emphases tables.

- the ways in which the content knowledge and conceptual development (a key emphasis at all stages) is addressed in Tables 3 and 4.
- the articulation of key emphases in Tables 3 and 4. For instance, the ways in which the key emphases are articulated does not capture issues related to the importance of teachers' awareness of curriculum and content areas across the continuum (p. 25 and p.28).

We would urge more clarity on:

- the range of appropriate pedagogical strategies, besides play, that may be implemented by teachers (p.20). Such a discussion must recognise the tension that arises between the argument for a more integrated approach to teaching particular subjects (p. 18), and the imperative that teachers provide optimum learning experiences, that develop in a systematic and structured way, the critical foundations for learning and development in all curriculum areas, including literacy and numeracy (p. 17/8). Table 3 and 4 fails to capture the key point that play and playful experiences are not alternatives to integrated learning experiences but instances of integrated learning. Children at all stages need, should be offered and benefit from, a range of integrated learning experiences.
- the reasoning behind the foregrounding of child led play (p. 22), particularly in Tables 3 and 4. We consider this to be too narrow a conceptualisation of play that could constrain teachers, depending on how the term is defined, understood and actualised in classrooms. Child led play (or child directed?) should be located within a wider perception of play that acknowledges the importance of collaborative play (with teacher) and teacher directed play. These conceptualisations are all important depending on the aspects learning being targeted.
- the elements of Tables 3 and 4. These tables are critical as tools for displaying the key emphases suggested in the models presented. Whichever organisational model is selected, the tables need to be constructed to ensure that they are respectful of children's capabilities at all stages. For instance, is it really intended to state in Table 3 that building content knowledge and conceptual development through integrated learning experiences would not be a key emphases in the early years of primary school?
- the statement using the environment as the third teacher (Tables 3 and 4). How will this be understood by teachers, given that this phrase is tied to one cultural context, philosophy and enactment of ECE i.e. the preschools of Reggio Emilia, in Italy.

Recommendations:

- The two stage model for a new primary curriculum is preferable to the three stage model proposed.
- Curriculum areas would seem to be a useful way to describe the areas of learning that should apply to infant classes. They should appear in the model of Stage 1 emphases. Curriculum areas should be used to structure the curriculum in the early years of primary thus supporting a natural flow towards subject areas in later years
- The tables (p.25, 28) relating to key emphases need to be much more strongly articulated across each stage.
- The appropriate organisational and resource supports for a move to an incremental stage model would include extensive high quality inservice support to help teachers enact a play-based pedagogy in infant classes. Prior to this there needs to be a strong articulation of what is meant in the curriculum by play-based learning, how play is defined, the different ways of conceptualising the child role and the teacher role in play, the affordances of different types of play for particular curriculum areas. Similarly, there needs to be a strong articulation of what integration is and what integrated learning looks like at different stages.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

We welcome:

- the discussion of the effects on the curriculum of increased time on literacy and numeracy and the acknowledgement that in some cases this has quite possibly led to a narrowing of the curriculum offered to children, as has been the experience in the UK.
- the implicit acknowledgement that teachers have struggled with the concept of integrating language, mathematics and play with curriculum subjects.
- the recognition that teacher variable is an important element in determining the kind of curriculum a child experiences.
- the proposed model of time allocation for schools.

We would urge more clarity on:

- How is it envisaged that the model might work in schools on a day to day basis. For instance, how might schools/teachers be encouraged to balance the curriculum areas across the day with both state curriculum time and flexible time receiving due regard. In our experiences many teachers have prioritized some areas and opted to teach only the 'core' areas in the morning leaving the remainder of the curriculum for the afternoon. There is a danger too that teachers' will have difficulty in balancing their planning and provision for core subjects on a weekly basis and the remainder of the curriculum on a monthly basis.
- How the proposed model of time allocation i.e. 60 curriculum time and 40 flexible time offers teacher's any increased discretionary time over and above that allocated in the 1999 curriculum.

Recommendations

- That the difficulty of teaching and learning many aspects of, for example mathematics, through an integrated approach must be acknowledged in the curriculum and that adequate provision made to accommodate targeted teaching of mathematics at all stages.
- Providing time allocations for curriculum areas (annual allocations) recognises teachers' autonomy and supports responsible, localised decision making about temporal variations across the school year. It also provides for the possibility that teachers can plan the kinds of extended learning experiences that support deep level learning. Topics, investigations, projects and other long term units can be planned and implemented over appropriate and variable periods of time.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

This response was prepared by Lecturers in Early Childhood Education, DCU Institute of Education, St Patricks Campus. Contact: Elizabeth.dunphy@dcu.ie

Contributor

Early Childhood Ireland

Early Childhood Ireland

Response to NCCA Consultation on Primary Curriculum

Context

The NCCA consultation on the primary school curriculum is a welcome incentive to Early Childhood Ireland and its members to take time to think about, evaluate and consider what we do and how we can do it better – in the pursuit of creating new opportunities for childhood, for human potential and social justice. We are grateful not just for this opportunity to contribute our voice but for the opportunity to explore, interrogate and articulate what we as a membership organisation advocate for the children, families and communities with whom we work.

The NCCA wishes to introduce change in the primary school curriculum. They wish to do it in a phased way so that the change is manageable for teachers, parents and children – hence the focus on time and structure in the first phase of consultation. The stated aim is to review the primary school curriculum, in response to a number of changes in educational provision and understanding. The introduction of the Aistear curriculum framework and the two years of 'free' preschool provision are cited as two of the changes that drive the question 'What type of curriculum do we want for our children in primary schools into the next decade?'

The underpinning paper by Morgan (2014) presents a rationale for change, outlining an evidence base for a shift from a Piagetian to an 'incremental' concept of stages. This incremental approach suggests a restructuring of the primary school curriculum to include two or three incremental stages over the course of primary schooling and accompanying changes in curriculum structure, time allocation and teaching methods.

Implications for the early childhood sector

The changes have two major implications for the early childhood sector which we want to discuss in this submission.

Firstly, the proposed changes in time and structure will locate the Aistear framework (NCCA 2009) as the 'curriculum structure' for children in primary school up to either senior infants or 2nd class – to be followed by a traditional subject or integrated subject approach. We welcome the possibility of further embedding the Aistear framework in primary schools because we believe it benefits children in terms of the transition to school and the learning experience. We have deep concerns about the re-interpretation, in the NCCA (2016) consultation document, of the Aistear framework as a 'curriculum structure' and the Themes of Aistear as the 'content of learning'. In the early childhood sector, we view Aistear as a framework that allows for multiple structures, including family settings, daycare, indoor and outdoor settings etc. For us, Aistear supports the idea of encounter and emergence, the curriculum that emerges from children's encounters with the world of people, social discourses and materials, the emergent experiences and learning and the emergent personhood of children-in-community. We see the themes of Aistear as experiences that are part of every encounter, not content. We understand that the re-interpretation speaks to the needs and language of the primary school system but we also think it speaks to the important differences between the early childhood and primary sectors.

Secondly, the NCCA propose including the 3-5 year olds, who are participants in the ECCE funded preschool scheme, in this first phase of the primary curriculum. The rationale for including the early childhood sector as part of the primary curriculum is not addressed by Morgan (2014). The NCCA (2016: 10) consultation document suggests that the preschool sector is already considered a stage of

schooling because the two years of funded preschool *'has, in essence, created a further 'band' with state provision for early childhood and primary education now comprising five two--year bands.'* It is important to remember that the preschool sector crosses many sectors, including daycare, health intervention programmes, education and family support. It is more than a 'band' of primary schooling and it needs to and wants to hold on to its complex remit.

From the beginning, we are perturbed by the lack of consideration given to the question of including the preschool years in the primary curriculum. We question the rationale for this when the trend across Europe is to delay engagement with the school curriculum. We recognise and welcome the fact that we share a curriculum framework with the early years of primary school. That does not make the early childhood curriculum into a first stage of the primary curriculum. The advantage of a framework is that it allows for different interpretations, methodologies and structures while supporting a shared philosophy and principles.

Early Childhood Care and Education Services

The proposed changes have significant consequences for the early childhood sector, both intended and unintended. Despite a shared framework, and in some ways made visible through its implementation to date, the early childhood and primary sector are very, very different in their view of early learning and development, in structure, in purpose and in how they are understood and located in the context of Irish education. In the case of early childhood, in particular, we have seen major shifts in the level of attention it receives and consequently in our understanding of early human learning and development. These shifts are powered by extensive research across a wide range of disciplines including philosophy, psychology (critical and developmental), cognitive science, technology, sociology, philosophy and the growing field of neuroscience. Any philosophy or evidence base for early childhood education must take cognisance of these multiple perspectives. We have learned from them that human development is extremely complex and we must engage with that complexity. That is the challenge for education – a field that has traditionally tried to simplify and see learning as age and stage based, as linear and incremental, as a series of 'small quantitative changes that ultimately lead to significant qualitative change' (Morgan 2014).

In response to Morgan (2014) and NCCA (2016), we wish to make three points in particular. Firstly, early childhood services are not school – they are a family support service – working closely with children's experiences in the home and community. They belong in the world of family education. Secondly, they do not foreground cognitive development. They see the child as an integrated whole and equally recognise and value the agency of the body, the senses and the emotions, not just for their impact on cognition, but on the child's holistic sense of wellbeing and identity and belonging. Thirdly, we see early childhood as a time of encounter and exploration open to possibilities (Fortunati 2016) – not as a part of an incremental or progress trajectory. We would like to expand on these points.

Early childhood services are primarily a support to family and child rearing. We support the family in expanding the child's opportunities for new encounters. We are the alloparents described by Gopnik (2016) who with parents, extended family and community serve to create a supportive environment around the child. We learn from the most important people in the child's life and we follow the participatory, play-based, situated learning strategies that are so effective in the home. It is with family that children first encounter the world, exploring, thinking about and sharing their experiences. It is with family that children first develop their sense of well-being, identity and belonging. Learning with family is a process of guided participation that works both ways (Rogoff 1990), of changing identity as children become part of these communities (Lave and Wenger 1991), a process of being and becoming with the world of people, culture, places and things (Te Whariki

1996; Bruner 1996). This learning is driven by every human's drive to be well, to identify and belong with the important people in their lives, to be the best that they can be (Rogers 1951) and exemplified by the 2-year-old who learns '*without any instruction, unfathomable amounts of skills and information. They learn to talk, run, jump and climb. They learn to understand and speak the language of the culture into which they are born, and with that they learn to assert their will, argue, amuse, annoy, befriend, and ask questions.*' (Grey 2013:10). As we bring children, at a younger age, into centre based institutions we must keep this 2-year-old in mind.

Early education does not foreground cognitive development. It views learning as complex, integrated and cultural. Our work is informed by many theoretical perspectives. The work of Stern (2010), Trevarthen (2015,17), Reddy (2008), Aarts (2008) and others, building on Vygotsky (1978), has brought us into the world of first relationships and the 'vitality dynamics' (Stern 2010) of early meaning making. The work of Gopnik and Meltzoff (2009) and Schultz (2015) finds the baby in the crib to be already a scientist, a philosopher and a student of mathematics, including complex theories of probability. Godard Blythe (2004) finds that children work to achieve attention, balance and coordination- part of the body's drive to be and become well (Lester and Russel 2014) – with major implications for their sense of being at home in the world. According to Corsaro (1985) young children are not following a trajectory of learning designed by adults but rather are playing their way into creating a peer culture - a becoming at home among their peers. Together these theorists remind us that there is no separation or hierarchy between the body and mind in early childhood. Rather children are active agents in complex processes of being and becoming with each other and the world around them (James and Prout, 1997).

Again, disputing the progress trajectory from infancy to adulthood, Kieran Egan (1997) reminds us that human beings are designed with particular facilities for transformative leaps in learning in the early years. Imagination and creativity, he says, are at their most active in the early years because that's when they're most needed. Imagination actually declines as we get older and consequently early childhood is the time when humans are most open to possibilities, driven by tireless energy and imagination – untethered by facts and the burden of getting it right. Bruner (1996) tells that the construction of self is ultimately an act of the imagination. Gopnik (2011) agrees. Our ability to imagine other worlds is what distinguishes us as humans, she tells us. Children, she says, are the research department. That's the role of childhood in the human life cycle. It is an extremely important and valuable phase in its own right. We need to give it time.

We are with Elkind (1981) and his warnings about the hurried child. In the early childhood sector we question the view of learning as incremental and on a pre-defined trajectory of progress. We are troubling the hierarchies that are so embedded in the school system – the hierarchy of thinking over doing, of mind over body, of maturity over childhood. The process of registering self in the world, of encountering the other, of being and becoming well, of exploring and communicating are not processes that can be hurried or taught or necessarily develop along a predictable trajectory. They are profoundly complex processes that are mind-body experiences, self-other experiences, nature-culture experiences, real-imaginary experiences, multiple language experiences. This turn in our understanding changes the question from 'what do children need to become more like adults?' to 'what are the competencies, dispositions and drives that make young children such powerful learners and how can we sustain their energy, enthusiasm and skills?' This is why we value the concepts of enquiry, exploring, feeling, listening and communicating. This is why play and the arts are so important in early childhood settings. With Vygotsky (1933), we see them not as teaching tools but as 'leading activities' that children engage in because they want to develop the skills that they generate – the skills of playfulness, coordination, self-registration, intersubjectivity and meaning making – the skills of participation in community.

These theorists bring us to both the concept of the competent agentive child and the conclusion that in early childhood children are endowed with particular gifts that are not present to the same extent in the mature adult. The role of parents and educators therefore is to trust these drives, to create opportunities for children to exercise them and to give children the time they need to exercise them fully (Fortunati 2016). This is how we see children and learning in early childhood.

As we institutionalise childhood we need to remember this. We do not do a better job than family – but in responding to a changing world we have the capacity to complement and enhance the work of family. And that is where early childhood care and education services are located. We are far closer to family and its informal participatory learning methods than to the school system. Including us as part of the primary school curriculum, for the present at least, sends out messages to families, early childhood educators, teachers and children that early childhood settings are part of the school based learning and development trajectory. They are not. We have always welcomed Aistear because in our interpretation is promotes the idea of education in early childhood as process rather than outcomes focussed. Its themes speak to the processes of children's real and play-based encounters with the world and the feelings, sense of self, mastery and interests that emerge from that encounter. It speaks to an emergent, enquiry driven, process based curriculum – not a teaching curriculum. In every way, it sits better with the informal family experience than with the formal school experience. Again, we refer to Shaeffer's (2006: 7) question and answer, quoted in the NCCA (2016) document: *'To ease the transition do we formalise the informal...or de-formalise what is usually considered formal? Unfortunately, the former seems to be the trend'.*

Points arising

Coming from this position, we find no rationale for including the 3-5 year olds as part of the primary school curriculum. We do not see why the need for restructuring the primary curriculum necessitates including the preschool years. We find no rationale for this in any of the research evidence presented. We find the view of education articulated by Morgan (2014) as very different to our view of early childhood care and education. We find ourselves at odds with the aims of the primary curriculum (1999) when they include as an aim of education *'to prepare the child for a continuum of learning'*. We share a curriculum framework and we see possibilities for alignment that can help children in the transition to school – but we see the two sectors are being very separate.

We firmly believe that education starts pre-birth and is inextricably bound with care and family relationships. We believe these to be the most important years in the life cycle – for the work that children do in these years. We reject any division of the sector between the under 3s and the 3- 5 year olds. We insist that children need at least the first 5 years and longer to do the work of first encountering the world and registering their personhood in community. The research of our theoretical friends, referred to above, and strongly supported by neuroscience, finds no case for starting the school learning trajectory earlier. We believe, in the best interest of children and childhood that it is critically important to separate school and ECCE – because of both the intended and unintended consequences. We can clearly see in the NCCA proposal that there is a desire to introduce a play-based pedagogy in the early years of primary school – but we believe the logical conclusion is to extend the years of engagement with the early childhood (preschool) sector.

The trend across Europe is towards delaying the start of school and by implication, the school curriculum. We see this as one of the positive outcomes of the 2nd ECCE year. Children in Ireland are now more likely to be 5 years old starting school. In the Nordic countries, much quoted as setting the gold standard in education, children are 6 and 7 years old starting school – so that they have time to play – outdoors as much as possible. The message from research, which we need to share

with parents, is that childhood needs time for play, exploring, building relationships and creating community. These are processes that we neglect at our peril.

Early childhood settings have the potential to become hubs of support in the community for families. They needs further investment – so that they can be the support that families want – a 'go-to' place for advice, help and resources. We see this modelled by the Sure Start centres in England and in the provision of San Miniato, Italy where children, from birth, are considered to have a right to centre-based care and education that complements care and education within family in a way that is mutually enhancing. This, we believe, is a more appropriate way to respond to societal change and research evidence than engaging children in school curricula at an earlier age. This is the vision we have for the early childhood sector.

Finally, our recommendation for the restructuring of the primary school curriculum is to be as flexible and responsive to children's interests and encounters as possible. Following our view of learning as integrated and complex, we think the longer we can delay a subject based approach to education the better. Consequently, given a choice, we would opt for the 3-stage model described. In terms of time allowances, in recognition of the contextual base of learning and the professionalism of teachers, we recommend giving as much time management as possible within the school week to children and teachers. We have to trust the child's drive to learn what is important to them in their lives and the teacher's professionalism and commitment to do well by the children and families they serve.

References

Aarts M., (2008) *Marte Meo. Basic Manual*. Aarts Productions, The Netherlands.

Bruner J. S. (1996). The Culture of Education. Cambridge, A.: Harvard University Press.

Corsaro W. (1985). Friendship and peer culture in the early years. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.

Kieran Egan (2002) *Getting it Wrong from the Beginning: Our Progressivist Inheritance from Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget*. Yale University Press, New Haven.

Elkind D. (1981). *The hurried child: Growing up too fast too soon*. Reading, Mass. Addison-Wesley.

Fortunati A. (Ed) (2016) Towards A Curriculum open to Possibilities: Children's protagonism and education: thoughts, action, tools. La Bottega di Geppetto. Italy

Gopnik A., Meltzoff, A. Patricia K. Kuhl, P. (2009). *The Scientist In The Crib: Minds, Brains, And How Children Learn***.** New York. Harper Collins**.**

Gopnik A. (2011) On the Imagination: Philosophy Bites podcast. Accessed 21st May 2017 http://hwcdn.libsyn.com/p/8/1/8/818f71e8cf4c6c91/Alison_Gopnik_on_the_Imagination.mp3?c_id=3331500&expiration=1495370701&hwt=f8b2347684983c7988943965b596fb9b

Gopnik A. (1998) *The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York

Gopnik A. (2016) *The Gardener and the Carpenter: What the New Science of Child Development Tells Us About the Relationship Between Parents and Children*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York

Gray P. (2013) *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life.* Basic Books. New York

James *A.,* Prout A. (1997) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*: *Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. London. Psychology Press.

Ministry of Education (1996) Te Whāriki: Early childhood curriculum. Wellington: Learning Media

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2009). Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Dublin: NCCA. Retrieved from www.ncca.ie/earlylearning

NCCA (2016) Proposals for structure and time allocation in primary curriculum: For consultation http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary-Education/Primary_Developments/Structure-and-Time-Allocation/Consultation-document_Proposals_StructureandTime_ncca.pdf

Goddard Blythe, S. (2004). The *Well Balanced Child*: *Movement and Early Learning.* Hawthorn Press, Gloucestershire.

Lester S., Russell W. (2014) The child's right to play. In *Sage Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood*. L. Brooker, M. Blaise and S. Edwards (Eds). London. Sage Publications.

Malloch S. and Trevarthen C. (2010). (Eds.) *Communicative Musicality: Exploring the basis of Human Companionship.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Murray L., and Trevarthen C. (1985). Emotional regulation of interactions between two-month-olds and their mothers. In T. M. Field and N. A. Fox (Eds.), Social Perception in Infants, (pp. 177-197). Norwood, N J: Ablex.

Reddy V. (2008). How Infants Know Minds. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

Stern D. N. (2010). *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy and Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rogoff B. (2003). *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Oxford: OUP.

Schulz L. (2015) Ted Talk: The surprisingly logical minds of babies. https://www.ted.com/talks/laura_schulz_the_surprisingly_logical_minds_of_babies

Shaeffer S. (2006). Formalise the Informal or 'informalise' the formal: The Transition from ECCE setting to primary. International Institute for Educational Planning Newsletter, Vol 24, No.1, Paris, UNESCO, International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)

Trevarthen C. (2015). Infant semiosis: The psycho-biology of action and shared experience from birth. Cognitive Development, 36C, 130-41.

Trevarthen C. (2017). Play with infants: The impulse for human story-telling, In, Tina Bruce, Pentti Hakkarainen and Milda Bredikyte (Eds.) *The Routledge International Handbook of Play in Early Childhood*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis/Routledge, Chapter 15

Vygotsky L. S. (1933/67) Play and its role in the mental development of the child. Soviet Psychology, 5(3), 6-18. Republished in, Bruner, J. S., Jolly, A. and Sylva, K. (eds) (1985). *Play --Its Role in Development and Evolution.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Vygotsky L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. M.Cole, V. Steiner, S. Scribner and E. Souberman (Eds). Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Contributor
Elizabeth Mee

Respondent's details
First name: Elizabeth

Surname: Mee

Position (If applicable): 1st and 2nd Class Teacher

Organisation (If applicable): Carrigboy National School, Durrus, Bantry, Co. Cork.

Address: 3 Chapel Street, Dunmanway, Co. Cork.

Telephone: 087-972-1945

Email: emee88@hotmail.com

Date: 26 April 2017

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation? Personal

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation? Yes

This year, we as teachers have the opportunity to contribute to a discussion about how our curriculum is structured for the first time in almost 20 years. Two proposals are on the table, both of which would see a major overhaul in content and in how time in the classroom is structured, and we are being asked by the NCCA to have our say. The results of this process could lead to exciting changes and a much-needed departure from a traditional, subject-based syllabus in the early years, bringing our curriculum more closely into alignment with the primary feature of childhood: play.

A spotlight was cast on the centrality of play by the 2009 introduction of the Aistear curriculum, which is now widely implemented in infant classrooms. As a teacher of first and second classes, I strongly support the extension of an Aistear-style, thematic approach from Junior Infants through Second Class in place of our current 12 subject curriculum, as described in Option 2 of the NCCA consultative document regarding redevelopment of the primary curriculum.

We have all heard, perhaps a little too often, about highly successful systems of education such as those in Finland and Sweden in which formal schooling does not begin until age 7 or later. This approach concurs with those of time-honoured pioneers in education, including Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner, who believed that children are not optimally receptive to formal instruction until at least age 6 or 7. A growing body of contemporary research

appears to be validating their observations, indicating that for many children, early reading instruction may actually be causing learning difficulties. Parents and teachers alike, in spite of the best of intentions, prescribe too much of what children do and learn, especially in the early years.

Countless volumes and endless reports have been published describing the value and benefits of play, but simply put, I believe that self-directed play is the best method through which individuals may develop all 6 of their higher mental faculties, which are **reason**, **memory**, **will**, **imagination**, **perception** and **intuition**. These are the 6 qualities I most wish to nurture in my students, and free play is by far the most natural, enjoyable and time economical way of doing so.

Reason is the ability to apply logic. In adulthood, reasoning is an invisible process of manipulating abstract ideas in the mind. Yet according to constructivist theories of cognitive development, such as those of Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner, young children can only acquire the capacity to reason by first manipulating objects in the real world. They learn by doing. Building blocks, marla, sand and water tables, climbing frames, painting and drawing, throwing and catching – so many instinctive childhood activities enable them to internalize cause and effect, action and reaction, relationships between phenomena. The roots of understanding come from physical play, fine and gross motor practice and enhancement of coordination.

As teachers, it is customary for us to send pupils home with things to memorize. Spellings, tables, verses, facts and dates may all need to be learned, but as the old-fashioned saying goes, true and lasting learning must be achieved "by heart." Cutting-edge research tells us that **memory** is as much about the heart as it is about the brain. Attention and motivation are significantly enhanced through positive emotional states. According to a 2014 report published by UNESCO's International Bureau of Education entitled *Emotions and Learning*, "Activating positive emotions help to employ flexible, creative and deep learning strategies. Examples are the elaboration of learning material (i.e. relating the material to previously learned material or material from other subjects); organization of learning material; and critical thinking." Play is perhaps the ideal activity to promote connection and co-operation among children, thus inspiring positive emotions and facilitating the integration of knowledge and skills even without the child's being aware of it.

Will can be described as focus, persistence and even determination. Culturally, we often assume that young children are inherently unable to concentrate, yet anyone who has observed a toddler endlessly fascinated by a favourite toy or game, or the preschooler who wants to play "Shopkeeper" for longer than we can endure, knows that this is untrue. In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim explains that an academic approach to the nurturing of will is misguided. He tells us, "Play teaches the child, without his being aware of it, the habits most needed for intellectual growth, such as stick-to-itiveness, which is so important in all learning. Perseverance is easily acquired around enjoyable activities such as chosen play. But if it has not become a habit through what is enjoyable, it is not likely to become one through an endeavour like schoolwork."

Imagination is the ability to see in the mind's eye, and to experience, with all the senses, something that is not physically present. It is the precursor of creativity and free-thinking. It is perhaps the most highly prized of all the mental faculties during the childhood years, yet it is endangered by our contemporary lifestyles. Children are bombarded by images on television, cinema and computer screens, smartphone apps and tablets, which substitute the product of someone else's imagination for their own. By permitting children to play freely outdoors among nature's treasures and with open-ended toys, such as simple wooden blocks, cloth dolls, and even everyday household items like clothes pegs, their imaginations are engaged, and whole worlds are created. Moreover, by taking on the roles of others through dramatic play and dress-up, they sow the seeds of empathy and meaningful interpersonal relationships.

Just a decade ago, words like *perception* and *intuition* might have been considered too New Age for many of our school environments, but today they are of abundant interest to teachers as well as students. The increasing inclusion in our schools of meditative prayer, reflective music, mindfulness practices and mental well-being programmes indicates a budding interest in our perceptive and intuitive faculties and a more realistic reflection of the fundamental role they play in our lives.

Perception is how we interpret the world and the information gleaned from our five physical senses. We all understand life events through the lens of a complex belief system, or paradigm, which is unique to each of us. Ordinarily, we construct this paradigm during our childhoods. In the simplest terms, our belief systems lead either to a glass-half-full or glass-half-empty orientation, and our attention may be positively or negatively focused. Without being aware of it, we tend to expect future events to be essentially similar to past events. When children are permitted to play freely with self-selected toys, they feel that they are capable of acting on objects and events in their world. They are the agents of movement, change and decision-making, not by-standers passively affected by circumstances, the choices of others and the assignments of the teacher. They take part in creating and relish the fruits of their labour. All of this contributes to self-esteem, a feeling of self-efficacy and an "I can" attitude towards life.

Contrary to its often-comedic representation in popular culture, **intuition** has little to do with tea leaves or crystal balls. Our "in-tuition," rather, does exactly what it says on the tin. It is the inner teacher, the inner guidance upon which we rely in order to discern between what feels right and wrong to us. Whether we are pondering professional or interpersonal matters, we all experience that silent nudge from within which can direct us towards a sense of ease, purpose and fulfillment or warn us of danger and deceit. Intuition is a non-linear process of inner knowing, often in the absence of objective empirical evidence. It relies heavily on impressions, internalized patterns and prior experience rather than on facts and concrete proof. Therefore, if we do not give our children ample time to exercise their intuition, it is unlikely to develop fully. Children who engage in free play are learning to trust themselves, how to detect what feels safe and unsafe, and how to tune into the feelings of others. They also make contact with their essential selves, discovering what they love, value and desire.

Replacing conventional subjects with a play-based curriculum requires an enormous investment of teacher planning time and capital, as any Aistear practitioner can tell us. It also

requires a cultural shift in how we define teaching and learning. Parents as well as teachers will need to be made aware that a structured, play-based curriculum is an evidence-based model which provides developmentally appropriate learning experiences. We need to foster a respect for play and its role as "the work of childhood," in the words of Fred Rogers.

By creating an environment that supports the higher mental faculties and encourages self-directed play, and by releasing ourselves from unnecessary adherence to rigidly defined content areas, we can enable our students' natural brilliance to unfold and set the stage for higher academic achievement in the senior classes and beyond. As Rudolf Steiner stated, "The urge to play, the particular way in which a child plays, disappears and sinks below the surface of life. Then it resurfaces, but as something different, as the skill to adapt to life."

I know that many teachers feel as strongly about play as I do, and this is our chance to speak up. By completing the online questionnaire at www.ncca.ie/timeandstructure , attending a focus group at a local Education Centre or attending the consultative conference in Dublin Castle on 28 March, we can all share our experiences, opinions and concerns to ensure that education in the new millennium will be more fun, relevant and dynamic than ever before.

Contributor

European Physical Education Association (EUPEA)

EUPEA
EUROPEAN PHYSICAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Landstrasse 62 - 8750 Glarus - Switzerland
info@eupea.com - www.eupea.com

Support to the Position Statement on *NCCA consultation in relation to redeveloped primary curriculum* from the Irish Primary Physical Education Association

We are writing to you on behalf of the European Physical Education Association (EUPEA) which is a professional body representing the professional Physical Education Associations of more than 30 countries in Europe. We are informed from the Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA) about the ongoing consultation in relation to a redeveloped primary curriculum in Ireland.

Physical Education has a unique role to play in the educational process since it offers a very different set of learning opportunities for young people which cannot be provided elsewhere. It provides a foundation for so many opportunities later in life. At a time when most of Europe is strenuously attempting to encourage young people to adopt healthy lifestyles, to acquire the basic motor skills and knowledge to engage in lifelong physical activity and to adopt a positive attitude towards being active, it is critical that we protect the place of the subject in schools. Just as importantly, there are few other subjects that offer children and young people the opportunity to use their own bodies as a learning medium in a way Physical Education does.

This said, we insist that Physical Education must be a core element in any primary curriculum in Europe with mandatory weekly time allocations. As stated in EUPEA's declaration from Madrid from 1991, and according to the *Recommendations to encourage physical education in schools, including motor skills in early childhood, and to create valuable interactions with the sport sector, local authorities and the private sector* of the Expert Group on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity from the European Commission in 2015, we recommend daily Physical Education lessons in primary education settings.

By this letter, we would like express our support and that of our more than 30 members all over Europe to the well-argued position statement of the IPPEA, which stresses the unique place of Physical Education in Primary Education.

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the European Physical Education Association

Claude Scheuer

President EUPEA

Ruedi Schmid

General Secretary EUPEA

Home

Contributor

Equate

EQUATE

Submission to NCCA Consultation on Structure and Time in the Primary Curriculum

May 2017

Copyright © EQUATE, 2017

E-mail: info@equateireland.ie

Web: www.equateireland.ie

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of EQUATE.

EQUATE welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National Council on Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) consultation on the proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum.

We are very appreciative of the time that the NCCA gave us when we met to discuss the consultation as part of their bi-lateral meetings with stakeholders.

We welcomed the opportunity to attend and participate in the consultative conference that took place in Dublin Castle on March 28th on the proposals.

About EQUATE

EQUATE is a children's and family organisation working for a school system that reflects the reality of the diversity of parents, children, young people and communities in Ireland today.

We want all children to experience equality in their local school so that no child is isolated because of their identity, family background, religion or non-religion. We believe that our education system should reflect the diversity of twenty first century Ireland.

EQUATE believes that education is a fundamental cornerstone of our society and that schools must operate in the best interests of all children.

Overview

It is important to acknowledge that the Irish education system is unusual with religious groups managing nearly 96% of publicly funded schools at primary level and over 50% at secondary level. In five counties in Ireland there are no non-religious publicly funded primary schools. Parents in these counties have no choice but to send their children to publicly funded religious schools, even when this is at odds with their own deeply held beliefs and identity.

Our submission to this consultation on curriculum redevelopment is framed through the principle of children's rights and the importance for the State, in this case through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, in safeguarding and developing those rights for all children in every school.

Religion and School: Parents' Voices

EQUATE recently published a national survey *Religion and School: Parents' Voices*[1]. The intention of this research, commissioned by EQUATE, was to allow parents to voice their own opinions and in so doing to inform and contribute to this ongoing dialogue. We believe the findings, set out in greater detail below, help to inform the debate on religion and schools and are particularly relevant during a consultation process on school admissions.

Results include:

- 71% agree that the National Council on Curriculum and Assessment should introduce a subject about all religions and ethics in our schools.

- 71% agree that the time has come for Church Bodies to have less influence over our local schools.

- 80% agree that the Department of Education and Skills should have more influence over how our schools are run

These survey results show a clear desire among parents of children of school going age for an inclusive school curriculum for all children regardless of their religion or non-religion. It also shows that parents want the State to take a more active role in ensuring that every child receives an inclusive education in their local school.

[1] In December 2016 EQUATE commissioned research of a nationally representative sample of parents of children of school going age from 3-15 years old, conducted online by Research Now. Quotas were set on gender, age, social class and region to correctly reflect the known demographics of parents in the ROI. Research Now is a global online research company that conducts research in the UK, Europe and America.

Religion and School: Parents' Voices Research

The research was carried out across three areas: admission, curriculum and patronage.

Key results on curriculum include:

- 69% of parents agree that an alternative should be put in place for non-Catholic children during sacramental preparation time in 2nd and 6th class, ie during Communion and Confirmation preparation time.
- 63% of parents agree that children should be given the option to take sacramental preparation outside of school hours.
- 81% of parents agree that they should be given the opportunity for their child or children to opt out of faith formation.
- 82% of parents agree that the NCCA should have oversight over all other subjects taught in our schools including religious education.
- 71% of parents agree that the NCCA should introduce a subject about all religions and ethics in our schools.
- 57% of parents agree that this subject about all religions and ethics should be compulsory and separate from the faith formation subjects currently in schools.
- 80% of parents agree that more time should be spent in schools on P.E. than the 1hr a week currently allocated.

As part of the research parents were asked open ended questions at points in the survey to give them an opportunity to give more depth to their answers.

The following are some quotes from these parents:

- *"It's up to the parent & children to what faith they choose to worship."*
- *"It's up to the parents in my opinion if they want their children to listen to someone else's faith being discussed in front of them."*
- *"I disagree that it is the schools' responsibility to provide faith formation. I think education of the different religions should be enough. Faith should be taught at home."*
- *"Schools are a centre for education. Anything faith based is not the responsibility of a teacher who may not even hold the same faith. This is a deeply personal issue to be dealt with in the family's own time."*

The full research can be found here.

1. Structure of a primary curriculum proposal

NCCA Question: The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

Please consider:

- The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a three-/two-stage model
- The benefits / challenges of the two-stage model
- The benefits / challenges of the three-stage model
- Your preferred model and reasons for this preference.

The consultation document sets out 2 different options as part of the structural changes to the primary school day. These are:

- A two-stage model
- A three-stage model

Of the two options set out EQUATE favours the two-stage model.

We would agree with the NCCA that:

"… having two distinct stages would provide opportunities to prioritise and support the use of particular pedagogical practices highlighted in research as being particularly effective and important for children's learning."[2]

We also agree that:

[2] Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation, NCCA 2016, p27

"An additional benefit of the two-stage model would be fewer transition points in terms of curriculum structure for teachers and children."[3]

We concur with the consultation document statement that:

"The two-stage model would potentially be more suitable for small schools compared to the three-stage model."[4]

Any changes to the curriculum needs to be consistent with the ability of school management and teachers to be able to implement the changes regardless of the number of teachers or pupils in a given school.

As the below table[5] from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) shows there are 847 schools around the country with 1 – 4 teachers teaching over 35,000 pupils each day.

National Schools and Pupils by Teacher Size of School by Teacher Size of School, Statistical Indicator and Year

	2016
1 teacher	
National Schools (Number)	24
Pupils in National Schools (Number)	233
1.5 teachers	
National Schools (Number)	3
Pupils in National Schools (Number)	26
2 teachers	
National Schools (Number)	352
Pupils in National Schools (Number)	10,953
2.5 teachers	
National Schools (Number)	43
Pupils in National Schools (Number)	1,434
3 teachers	
National Schools (Number)	195
Pupils in National Schools (Number)	8,360
3.5 teachers	
National Schools (Number)	33
Pupils in National Schools (Number)	1,829
4 teachers	
National Schools (Number)	197
Pupils in National Schools (Number)	12,439

It is important that the new proposals take these schools into consideration implementation of the new reforms is beginning.

A comprehensive programme of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for all current teachers as well as changes to the teacher training programmes currently on offer for trainee teachers would also need to be considered and developed. These

[3] *ibid*
[4] *ibid*
[5] http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/saveselections.asp

programmes and changes should be developed in conjunction with the overall reform of the curriculum so that there are no gaps between teachers training and the roll out of the revised curriculum to all schools that could lead to confusion or delayed implementation.

2. Proposed model of time allocation

NCCA Question: The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

Please consider:

- The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on minimum state curriculum time
- The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on flexible time
- The idea of specifying time allocations for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
- Your views on whether time should be allocated on a weekly, monthly termly, annual basis.

EQUATE welcomes that an aim of the suggested time framework's proposals is:

"… to be used in the most flexible way and examples of planning in blocks of time over extended periods are presented as appropriate means through which children are provided with meaningful learning opportunities."[6]

Another stated aim is to enable "… teachers to be flexible in meeting the needs of children and the differing circumstances of the school."[7]

This shows the intention of the reform to place the child and their needs at the centre of the school day and learning experience. It is important that this intention is followed through for all children in our publicly funded state schools.

[6] Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation, NCCA 2016, p 34
[7] ibid

Indeed, this aim is reflected in our Parents' Views research who has shown that:

- 87% of parents agree that the needs of our children should be more important than the needs of school management when decisions are being made in our schools.[8]

Meeting the needs of the child is also central to findings from our 2015 national survey on the views of adults on education in Ireland[9].

The results included:

- 84% think the Irish education system should be reformed so that no child is excluded because of their religion or non-religion.

- 82% of people think Ireland should do all it can to honour its international human rights obligations to ensure equality in our education system.

The full survey results are available here.

There is a clear shift in our polling among the public and parents towards a truly child centred approach to curriculum development and implementation which should not differ depending on the religion or non-religion of the child.

3. General Comment

NCCA Question: Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

[8] Religion and School: Parents' Voices - EQUATE Research 2017, p37
[9] In October 2015 Behaviour and Attitudes carried out a detailed survey on behalf of EQUATE. 1,006 people in 63 different locations were asked select questions about equality in education in face to face interviews.

Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics

EQUATE is disappointed that there is not a specific mention of an Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics as part of the core curriculum time. There is an opportunity as part of this curriculum redevelopment to create and make a subject which celebrates the growing diversity in Ireland while also sowing the seeds of cultural respect within our classrooms.

In our submission to the NCCA consultation on an Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics we pointed towards our international obligations to provide such a subject:

"The introduction of an Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics curriculum that supports and celebrates diversity in our society and schools is welcomed. EQUATE agree with the NCCA that an Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics curriculum could "contribute to and support the development of inclusive school communities."[10]

Our constitutional and international human rights obligations should guide the development of this new curriculum. They are an opportunity to ensure that children are seen as rights holders and every effort made to keep the curriculum material as inclusive as possible.

To do this the curriculum needs to honour our international human rights obligations and constitutional rights of our citizens.

It will have to adhere to the principles of an objective, critical and pluralistic curriculum as set out in Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention of Human Rights to be fully inclusive of all children in our classrooms.[11]

---

[10] Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper, NCCA, November 2015, p7

[11] Kjeldsen, Busk Madsen and Pedersen v Denmark, December 7, 1976, http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-57509 (para 53); Folgerø v Norway, June 29, 2007, http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-81356 (para. 84).

The State is also obliged to adhere and comply with the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which, as it stands, has not been fully incorporated into our laws and the Education Act 1998 in particular.

As stated by the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) in their April 2015 report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the status of Irish children "as individual rights-holders and as active agents in shaping their own education is not reflected in Irish law at present."[12]

The Children's Rights Alliance furthers this point when it draws attention to the state's constitutional as well international obligations to provide an inclusive curriculum for all children.[13]

Ireland was reviewed under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child in 2016. In their concluding observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child made reference to the denominational nature of our school system. Religious freedom in education was referenced twice and the importance of adequate alternatives to doctrinal religious instruction was emphasised."[14]

We also pointed to the commitment made in the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism to create such a curriculum:

One of the key recommendations from the Forum, following its consultation with education stakeholders, was for the creation of a state curriculum on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics.

"The Advisory Group requests that the NCCA, with the assistance from the partners and mindful of existing programmes, should develop curriculum and teacher

[12] Report of the Ombudsman for Children to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the occasion of the examination of Ireland's consolidated Third and Fourth Report to the Committee, April 2015 p.38 section 9.1.1.

[13] 2016 Children's Rights Alliance Government Report Card, March 2016, p43

[14] Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Ireland, February 2016, p8 section 36, p14 section 64

guidelines for ERB and Ethics, in line with the Toledo Principles, the RedCo and the Cambridge Review."[15]

EQUATE still urges the NCCA to develop an ERB&E curriculum which will honour the guidelines and include an international human rights perspective in our curriculum.

This curriculum should include the Toledo Guiding Principles, RedCo project and Cambridge Review in keeping with the commitment set out in the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism.

By placing this subject within core curriculum time it will show how important it is for our publicly funded state schools to have a curriculum that deals with all religions and none and nurtures a resect for all children in our schools and people in our communities.

This call for a separate subject about all religions and ethics has been echoed by parents which was shown in the Parents' Voices research above:

- 71% of parents agree that the NCCA should introduce a subject about all religions and ethics in our schools[16]

To make time for the ERB curriculum within the core curriculum, EQUATE proposes an increase in the proportion of time allocated to the core and a reduction in the amount of flexible time.

Again, we would point to the possible legislative impediments which could potentially block schools being able to use a State developed curriculum about all religions and beliefs and ethics.

This is an excerpt from our submission on the ERB&E consultation:

[15] Report of Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, April 2012, p111
[16] Religion and School: Parents' Voices - EQUATE Research 2017, p20

We are concerned that the consultation document makes reference to but does not suggest a solution to the legislative impediments that the Education Act 1998 creates to the introduction of an Education about Religions and Beliefs & Ethics curriculum.

While the consultation document makes reference to section 30 (2) (d) of the Education Act which requires that a 'reasonable amount' of time is set aside in each school day for "subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school"17 it does not deal with the practical consequences of this.

The consultation document also does not deal with section 9 (d)18 or Section 15 (2) (c)19 of the Education Act which give school patrons and Boards of Management explicit rights over what is taught in their schools along with a set amount of time that is given to patron's own programmes.

This concern was echoed in the NCCA's own report on the consultation on an Education about Religions and Ethics and Beliefs which said:

"This challenge arises not from the patron bodies which have a legislative right to teach the primary curriculum in accordance with the ethos of their schools, but rather by the structure of the primary school system which is predominantly faith-based. The provision of Sections 9(d), 15(2)(b) and 30(2)(b), among others, are potential barriers to the type of 'objective, critical and pluralist' approaches advocated in the proposals for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics."[17]

Next year the Education Act will be 20 years old and it would be an opportune time to review the impact it is having on state bodies, such as the NCCA, from being able to fully carry out their duties to provide the best curricula material for children and teachers.

[17] Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics: Final Report, NCCA 2017, p57

Religious instruction as part of flexible time

It is currently predicted that the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 will pass the Oireachtas before the next summer term ends. This bill contains a requirement that schools will need to have a published opt-out policy for those pupils who do not want to do religious instruction during the school day.[18]

As our Parents' View research referenced earlier in our submission noted:

- 81% of parents agree that they should be given the opportunity for their child or children to opt out of faith formation

There is an opportunity for the NCCA to help school management and teachers facilitate this constitutional right to opt-out[19] by including a set time of the school day for all schools to have religious instruction, including sacramental preparations timing. This would give schools clarity on how they can provide the opt out while also providing parents a real choice and option to opt their children out of religious instruction if that is their wish.

Conclusion

EQUATE welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this debate on curriculum reform.

We believe the NCCA has an opportunity to follow through on the sentiment it expresses in the introduction to the document where it says:

"… this period has also seen increasing demands being made of the curriculum by a changed and changing society and its expectation so the education system."[20]

There is clear public and parental support for a curriculum that truly puts the needs of the child at the centre as evidence by EQUATE surveys referenced above. There

[18] https://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=33318&&CatID=59
[19] http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html#article42
[20] Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation, NCCA 2016, p1

would be public support for the reforms that put the needs of child front and centre above all other considerations.

The opportunity to introduce a state curriculum on ERB&E is not gone and we would hope that as this consultation moves forward into the next stage a discussion on ERB&E can begin again.

EQUATE looks forward to working closely with the NCCA and the other education stakeholders as this consultation process moves into the next stage.

Key recommendations

1. Two stage structural model in order that it can be implemented in all school types.
2. Include and develop a curriculum on Education about Religions and beliefs and ethics as part of the core curriculum time.
3. To make time for this additional curriculum EQUATE proposes an increase in the proportion of time allocated to the core and a reduction in the amount of flexible time.
4. Pinpoint the legislative impediments that stop curriculum development within the Education Act and call for their review.
5. Include a set time during the school day for religious instruction to enable children to opt out if they wish.

Contributor

Fr Michael O'Meara

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am emailing you in relation to the proposal of significant changes being made to religious education in our primary schools and the proposed reduction of teaching time allocation as well as maintaining its status as a subject within our curriculum.
I strongly object to any proposal to downgrade the Catholic Religious Education Programme that is currently in place in our Primary Schools. It has been part of our education system for over 180 years and has surely served us well and continues to benefit the Children, their families and society in general as both a spiritual enrichment and a moral compass throughout life. Why change it now?
I feel as a Priest in today's Ireland that, within their school day our Primary School Children deserve the time to learn of the wonders of God in the Catholic tradition which still represents 78% of the population of the state. It will be a rich resource to enable them on their path through life and to strengthen their ability to deal with the challenges and difficulties they may encounter on their journey through life.
I write the above argument on behalf of the community as Parish Priest of Kinnitty and the Patron's representative on the Board of Management of both Kinnitty and Roscomroe Primary Schools.

Yours Sincerely,

Fr. Michael O'Meara

Fr. Michael O'Meara P.P
Parocial House,
Castletown,
Kinnitty,
Co. Offaly
087 7735977

Contributor

Feale Biodiversity

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Anneke**
Surname	**Vrieling**
Position (If applicable)	**Mother , Ecologist**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Feale Biodiversity**
Address	**42 Cedarville Abbeyfeale Limerick**
Telephone	**0894460570**
Email	**annekeire@gmail.com**
Date	**21/5/17**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal V

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes V

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

No opinion on this matter

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

More time to be allocated to learning about local biodiversity. This can easily be integrated into other subjects and should not be optional (Green Flag) but for every school

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Catholic / religious 'education' (indoctrination?!) should be left out of school curriculum altogether and replaced by philosophy / informing in a neutral manner about ALL world religions. Priests should not be patrons of state schools. Catholic religious education can only be allowed back in curriculum once every parent all over the country has the option between Catholic or Educate Together. Until that day all schools should treat everyone equal and not teach any particular religion as 'the right and only one'. Preparing for communion and confirmation should be done in the church only, not in schools

Home

Contributor

Francis Nolan

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name FRANCIS	
Surname NOLAN	
Position (If applicable) MEMBER OF BOM	
Organisation (If applicable)	
Address	
Telephone 087 2100273	
Email francis.nolan@ymail.com	
Date 26 MAY 2017	

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal ☐ Organisation ☐

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I believe the status quo should prevail – religious education should be part of every day without exception as it has always been and teachers are generally happy with this . I am on the BOM OF THREE Catholic schools and feel that this is especially important in a Catholic School – what is the reason for change and as a CHURCH we are providing an excellent curriculum in the GROW IN LOVE – SO I wouild say HANDS OFF and let the schools continue in the formation process- WHO IS ASKING FOR THIS ? It is not the teachers and members of BOMS but you the legislators – I am a priest IN TRALEE in a large parish with seven primary schools and before this was DIOCESAN ADVISOR for 14 years and find teachers are very happy with the present arrangement – WHY CHANGE FOR THE SAKE OF CHANGE - THERE IS ALSO GREAT ANGER ABOUT THIS IN THE COMMUNITY AND I FIND NO THIRST OR INTEREST IN SUCH CHANGES

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

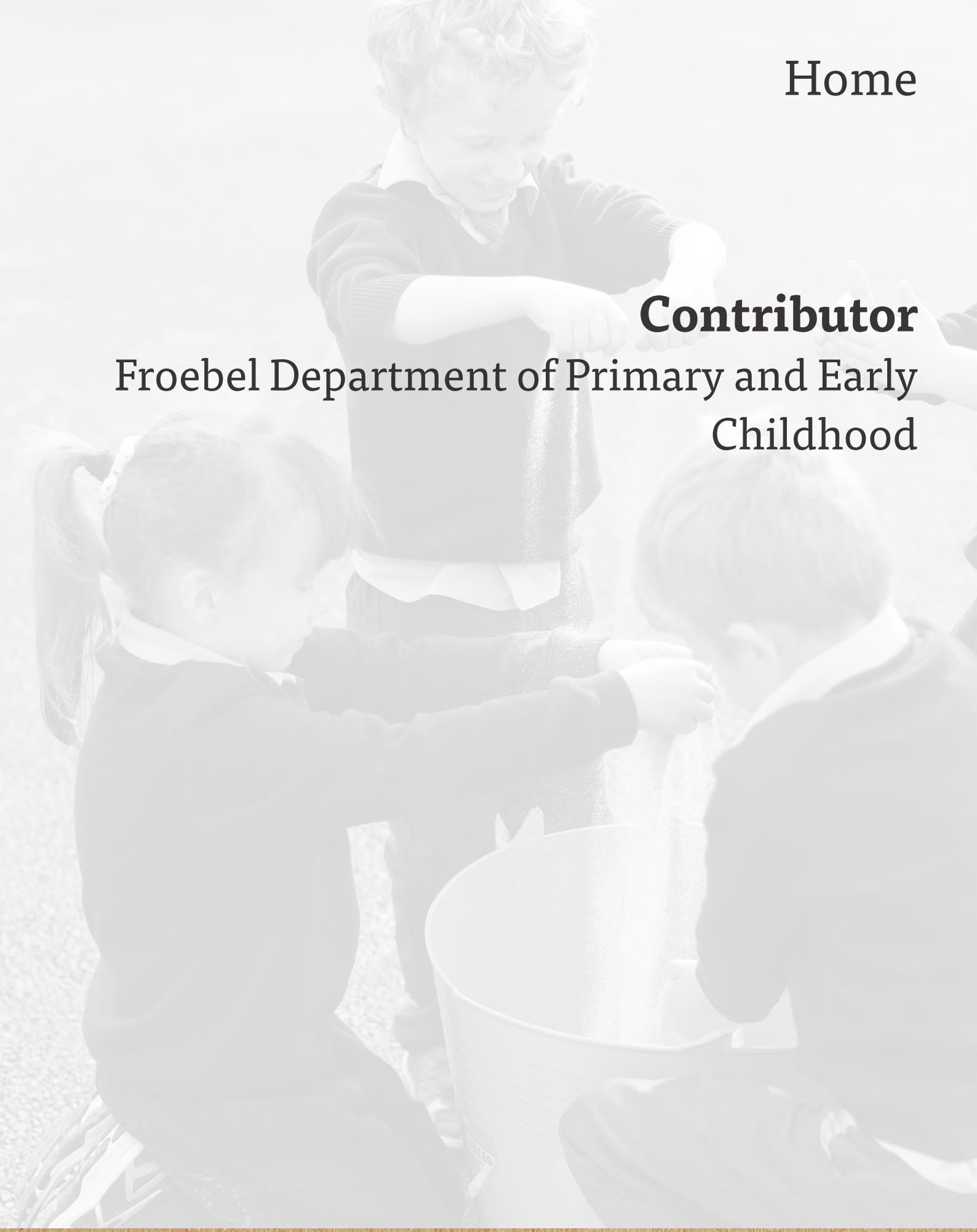
   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SHOULD BE DAILY AND WEEKLY AND PART OF EVERY SCHOOL DAY – IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL THIIS IS FOUNDATIONAL ANDS AS CURRICULUM MAKERS YOU HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO HONOUR THIS -

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS LAID OUT IN GROW IN LOVE COVERS THE HUMAN INTELLECTUAL AND SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD - IT IS NOT JUST RELIGION PER SE – IT IS AN EXCEELLENT PROGRAMME WHICH ALSO COVERS THE RSE CURRICULUM – SO WHY INTERFERE WITH THIS TIME SLOT – THIS IS INTEGRTAIVE HOLISTIC EDUCATION SO I AGAIN SAY HANDS OFF – LE THE TEACHERS DO WHAT THEY ARE DOING SO WELL AND LET OUR CATHOI]LIC SCHOOLS HOLS THEIR ETHOS – THIS WILL ALSO COST THE STATE A HUGE AMOUNT OF MONEY WHICH WE DO NOT HAVE AT THIS TIME – SO WHY FIX WHAT IS NOT BROKEN



Contributor

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Therese Hegarty** **Katherine Lally** **Patsy Stafford** **Tríona Stokes** **Tony Sweeney** **Bernadette Wrynn** **Marie Mc Loughlin**
Surname	
Position (If applicable)	**Lecturer in SPHE** **Lecturer in Visual Art** **Lecturer in Maths and Early Childhood** **Lecturer in Drama Education** **Lecturer in Physical Education** **Lecturer in SESE** **Head of Department**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood**
Address	**School of Education** **Maynooth University**
Telephone	**01 4747400**
Email	**froebel.department@nuim.ie**
Date	**23 March**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [YES]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [YES] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

A move towards a different model of curriculum structure reflects the developmental stages of children's learning.

2 stage model benefits:

- The two-stage model protects the unique nature of primary education and the integrated learning that exists across disciplines. For teacher planning purposes, there is the potential in the two-stage model for greater cohesion from junior to senior classes and more in-depth understanding of each teacher's work.
- A two-stage model has the potential to maintain greater cohesion. Whilst also respecting the unique nature of both stages, there are interconnections that exist

through developmental learning and vertical forms of cognitive development as in the spiral model of curriculum conceived by Bruner (1960). In the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) such cohesion is evident from teachers' planning, the integration of approaches to learning and the development in children across the age ranges (Wrynn, 2015).

- On the basis of the research outlined in the consultation paper, it may be worth considering the two-stage model as it would enable teachers to extend the Aistear themes into the two infant classes.

Three-stage model challenges:

- In contrast, the three-stage model may fragment curricular structure and clarity of teaching and learning.
- Teachers could potentially become compartmentalised (Wrynn, 2015) if a specific curricular model is planned for senior classes.
- It is feared that over time, a gulf of knowledge may arise between junior and senior classes.
- In the last number of years, a wide range of supports have been put in place to support transition from primary to post primary. However, a three-stage model of curriculum, incorporating a programme specifically for 5th/6th classes, may fuel the already contentious issue of competition in school performance. This may also reinforce the reproduction of inequalities from public to fee paying schools in certain jurisdictions (Bourdieu, 1980; Wrynn, 2015); Such a development may have repercussions for subject-specific testing and standardised models of learning in subject areas, which can already be seen in secondary schools.
- The erosion of integrated learning through play and holistic experiences that are the preserve of primary schools is also a concern; A curriculum model specifically focussed on senior classes may mean that such learning experiences become less prevalent in 3rd/4th classes in preparation for stage three.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**

- The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
- Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

There was a mixed response to the recommendation to allow greater autonomy to accommodate different schools.

- On the one hand, it was acknowledged that a greater level of autonomy (Maton, 2005) is necessary for teachers. Contextually, it is necessary and appropriate.
- Minimum state time is important and accountable to other agencies and flexible time allows schools to develop their own context-specific strengths, needs and interests.
- The weekly counting of hours restricts school autonomy and prevents schools from making an informed response to contextual issues.

However, there were some suggestions and concerns:

- Guide times for subject groupings, integrated options and subject-specific time should be offered as possible arrangements.
- Time should be allocated in a seamless fashion in agreement with all stakeholders involved in school management and evaluation. The monthly allocation of time may be a better option for planning across subject groupings (e.g. in the arts), deeper learning through Project work, and may provide greater opportunities to challenge more-able pupils. Monthly timeframes are also more favourable for teachers who plan cooperatively to design and track progression based on evidence from assessment over a monthly period.
- Time allocations should take into account the current practice of a twin-timetable approach. The Curriculum currently presents recommendations for the shorter and longer day, in keeping with the school timetable that applies nationally.
- The suggested minimum time for curriculum areas and subjects could be outlined consistently from 1st to 6th Class. However, the consideration of minimum curriculum times and flexible time allocation may need further development to examine in detail the prescribed hours available for specific curriculum areas or subjects.
- While the value of flexible time in promoting integrated or thematic learning is recognised, the suggestion of 60% allocation to minimum time may not allow sufficient time to cover a broad and balanced curricular experience.

- The identified challenge of delivering curricular breadth following the publication of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) could arise if a variety of curricular areas are factored into that time allocation. Furthermore, it can be argued that Language and Literacy are inherent components of learning in any curricular discipline. A child who is engaged in a scientific experiment, an evaluation of artwork or a dramatic improvisation will, as a matter of necessity, use subject-specific language and engage in discussion and writing through exploration of the content at hand. It seems, therefore, that additional time devoted to discrete literacy/language lessons may result in didactic methodologies which do not advance these skills in a meaningful manner. Children's access to "a rich range of materials that promote open-ended opportunities for play, representation and creativity" (Weston, 2002) may continue to be sacrificed to the overwhelming requirements of narrow literacy and numeracy models which lack relevance for children and adults alike.
- Greater autonomy may result in very narrow, rote-based learning systems.
- Additionally, teachers already face very significant challenges with regard to:
  (a) accommodating subjects requiring a range of materials and time for set-up/clean-up, thus leading to more marginalised periods for art, activity centres and practical learning and
  (b) availing of adequate up-skilling and professional development so that teachers can provide worthwhile engagement in these disciplines. A recurring outcome in both urban and rural schools is a marginalisation of the more hands-on and creative aspects of the curriculum.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

- The review of Aistear by Gray and Ryan (2015) reiterates 'reported concerns about teachers' ability to teach curriculum subjects through the medium of play and noted the primary curriculum as a barrier to successful implementation of Aistear'. Schaefer (2006) is also quoted. This is critical to the curriculum-play divide which has been detected since the publication of Aistear (2009).
- Allocating an hour to play every day in the early years is essential, preferably up to and including 2nd Class.

- It is important that in the allocation of time and in the restructuring of the curriculum, that different disciplines do not get overlooked (e.g. Irish or Drama - as happens in some classrooms already).
- The Consultation Paper correctly acknowledges the calls for increased time to be allocated for SPHE and Physical Education. The Wellbeing strand should not be dominated by quick-fix health promotion initiatives, which are often a short-term reactive response to societal and media concerns.
- It is essential that increased international awareness of the significance of mental health and the necessity for physical literacy will be reflected in this review in a meaningful way.
- International research has focussed on the value of physical activity in enhancing the child's physical, social, cognitive and psychological health (Cohen *et al,* 2014; Jansen & Le Blanc, 2010 and *Get Active! Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport for Children and Young People: A Guiding Framework* (DES, 2012)) recognised the necessity for primary schools to promote active healthy lifestyles and provide opportunities for pupils to enhance their experience and development.
- Clearly, the practice of other countries has been well researched to set a context for this curricular review, and the evidence that Ireland (at 4% of school time) has currently the lowest primary school time allocation for physical education of any country in Europe (European Commission, 2013) must surely be reflected in such investigation. As the primary school years are the key window for the development of fundamental movement skill proficiency, (Barnett *et al,* 2008, Lubans *et al*,2010, Le Gear *et al*, 2012) the provision of a quality, focussed physical education and movement curriculum must surely now be specifically addressed through Wellbeing and Physical Education and physical activity promotion throughout the school day. To ignore this deficit would ensure the physical and mental health of Irish children would continue to be neglected.
- In general, a cross-curricular emphasis should be encouraged. Therefore, time for cross-curricular teaching should be allocated rather than simply just subject allocations. E.g. Objectives in the Language Curriculum may be covered when having a discussion for children to justify their reasoning in Maths or when writing a step-by-step procedure in Science. Similarly, when teaching time zones in Geography, Maths Objectives are met;
- SPHE currently is allocated a half hour per week. However, the range of issues including - health, safety, emotional awareness, communication, conflict resolution, sexuality, citizenship, media education - all of which need a depth of engagement

is very diverse. Whatever way the subject disciplines are to be integrated, SPHE deserves status as a subject in its own right. That said, the potential for the integration of SPHE with other subjects may be encouraged. In this regard, language development should always be central. Drama methodologies are very often useful. The Wider World strand links with SESE and the health aspects integrate with PE. Therefore, it is not a standalone subject if taught comprehensively.

- Another approach to the allocation of time may be to suggest that teachers plan their time according to teaching methodology rather than subject-specific time: e.g. Time for hands-on, active learning, discussion, project work, writing. These approaches could address the curriculum overload issue in addition to emphasising good teaching methodologies.

Contributor

Gaelic Athletic Association(GAA)

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	Pat
Surname	Daly
Position (If applicable)	Director of Games Development and Research
Organisation (If applicable)	G.A.A.
Address	Croke Park, Jones Road, Dublin 3
Telephone	(01) 865 8600
Email	pat.daly@gaa.ie pat.cuhane@gaa.ie
Date	May 25th, 2018

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal ☐ Organisation ✓

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes ✓ No ☐

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

The progression stage 1 to 2 model in two-stage model could be less challenging for both teachers and pupils. However, the use of three stages could address a variety of children's learning priorities. The three-stage model highlights that the transition between stages of learning and development are more challenging than those outlines in the two-stage model, such as the transition between pre-school and infant classes. Similarly, the personal & professional development of a teachers could be more challenging with a two-stage model, moving from theme-based teaching to subject-based. The preference would be to adopt the three-stage model. It is possible that teachers that who do not have a preference for sport/PE, may not prioritise this in the theme-based approach in the stage-two model.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

There would be a preference that time allocation for sport/PE would not be specified on a monthly basis, under "other themes/curriculum areas/subjects". This would not be in keeping with the need to address declining levels of physical activity among Irish children and the related health effects.

Research has revealed that more than 50% of children and young people are not getting the recommended amount of daily physical activity. Furthermore, only 35% of primary and 10% of post primary pupils are receiving the recommended one to two hours a week of PE at school. In addition to this, the current and projected levels of obesity provide a source for real concern. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) Modelling Obesity Project presented a bleak picture of the future of children and young adults when it predicted that, by 2030, 89% of men and 85% of women in the Republic of Ireland will be overweight or obese. So far, statistics have failed to capture the irreparable damage that will be done to the civic and social fabric of this country as a result of the decline in sport participation as sport – particularly team sport – is a crucial source of social and

cultural capital as well as being a major source of individual, team, institutional and societal well-being.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) welcomes the opportunity to input into the consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum. The GAA is Ireland's pre-eminent sporting organisation with 539,264 registered members, 367,082 registered players and 2,036 Affiliated Clubs. However, the Association is far more than a sporting organisation - the GAA is and always has been underpinned by values including promoting community identity; ensuring pride of place; and engendering a sense of belonging. The GAA is proud to have a strong link with primary schools across almost every community in Ireland and is committed to contributing to the social capital, cultural capital and health of Ireland.

The Association is committed to maximising participation in sport. The GAA firmly believes that, in the past decade, it has made significant inroads in increasing participation at Child level through both the Go Games Model and the Cúl Camps respectively. The introduction of the Go Games model in 2004, underpinned by the ethos that 'Every Child gets a Go', has led to a phenomenal increase in the number of children playing Gaelic games. As a result of the Go Games programme, the number of children aged 10 – 12, registered as members of the GAA has increased from 39,778 in 2010 to 59,716 in 2016.

The success of the Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps is widely acknowledged. In 2016 the Association provided games and skill development opportunities to 127,473 boys and girls nationwide. There has been a 57% increase in participation in four years and the Cúl Camps now cater for 18% of the Primary school-going population in Ireland. Success does not happen by chance and the ever-increasing popularity of the Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps is a testament to the quality of and activity provided.

Development – in a primary school, club or community setting - will require a multitude of actions all of which must crucially be underpinned by a new learning paradigm integrating Well-being & Lifelong Learning (WeLL). WeLL provides flexibility and permeability across the 4 CORE - Civic, Occupational, Recreational & Educational - domains. It does so on foot of an underpinning construct that shapes - and is shaped by - the 3 fundamental pillars of wisdom: conceptual clarity (know What), operational impact (learn How) and effective reflection (understand Why). Furthermore, it provides for key aspects of holistic growth and development - as reflected in bio-psycho-social and spiritual well-being. Having WeLL as a core construct of the primary curriculum will serve to engender an understanding of why it is necessary to become an active society and why people will derive real meaning – and health enhancement – of foot of contributing to a higher order.

Key elements deriving from WeLL and that would be necessary in the primary curriculum include:

- Introducing 'Well-being & Lifelong Learning' (WeLL) as a core subject at primary level which traverses the Arts, P.E., S.P.H.E. and Religious (Ethical) education.

- Enhancing the delivery of Physical Education through the revision of the curriculum and an increased focus on Well-Being and Lifelong Learning (WeLL) in the Colleges of Education.

The GAA would like to continue contributing to this consultation process and would welcome the opportunity to do so in due course.

Home

Contributor
Gerard Nash

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Gerard**
Surname	**Nash**
Position (If applicable)	**Director of Pastoral Development**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Diocese of Killaloe**
Address	**46 Garden View, Creggaunahilla, Clarecastle, Co. Clare**
Telephone	**0868576153**
Email	**g.nash@killaloediocese.ie**
Date	**May 26th 2016**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [X] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [X] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

Many of our schools in this Diocese of Killaloe (148 in total) are multi class room schools. I would favour which ever model would fit those type of schools best.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

I think it is a good idea to review the amount of time spent on various elements of the school day and to examine how schools are expected to deal with an ever increasing burden of responsibility in relation to societal issues.
I am strongly against the idea that religion as a subject in a Catholic School should be removed from the curriculum time and to be placed in the flexible time allocation. This will not allow teachers to afford the agreed time of 2.5 hours per week as this flexible time will be eroded further during the coming years. In a Catholic School, religion should have the status of being a subject on the curriculum.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

I would be very much in favour of allocating religion to the end of the school day so that non religious children could avoid these classes if this was their wish.

Contributor

Grainne Kavanagh

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Grainne**
Surname	**Kavanagh**
Position (If applicable)	
Organisation (If applicable)	
Address	**Church Street, Ardfert, Co kerry**
Telephone	**066 7134321**
Email	**Grainnekavanagh49@ymail.com**
Date	**26.5.17**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [X] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [X] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I confess that I haven't familiarised myself with the full content of the consultation paper but I have read and familiarised myself with AISTEAR THEMES.
I am rather puzzled though and forgive me for thinking but I thought that going to school amongst others was 1. To socialise one. I would have thought the **wellbeing of the child** which incorporates **respecting** their uniqueness (which includes different learning styles),their **identity** (where they come from including parenting)) instructing them **in a positive way** in how to behaviour in an acceptable & respectful way, both towards, themselves and the people around them, **was** at the forefront of any schooling and the objective/philosophy of all state schools. When did, the state start realising that at primary level this wasn't been done and now it has been decided to make "it" always like a subject based exercise to setting objectives, selecting learning experiences, organising instruction and evaluating progress? Is it for the wellbeing of the child as a respected citizen in the state or is it for the economy i.e. integrating the national objectives with the "student need" to fulfil this objective? i.e. changing face of work in the 21st century
Hence It isn't a matter of whether I agree or disagree with the three or two stage model but do I agree or disagree with the curricula educational objective WHICH IS..? Surely whatever model is chosen the curriculum will always have the "wellbeing of the child" as its guiding principle.
However, this exercise askes for an opinion:

1. **two stage model**

Benefits: A teachers focus on the Childs "Wellbeing" for longer
Challenges:
Teachers' commitment to professional development: when will it take place and where? i.e. during school time (time allocation) or in their own time.
Encouraging parent involvement: this proposed change will certainly involve parent participation What if the parent is not interested and believes it is solely the school responsibility to "educate the children"
Class size & diversity: As a teacher, it is easier to monitor, plan and assess 20 than 32-34. As a student, your ideas are more likely to be heard and adhered to in a class of 10 than 32-34.

2. **three stage model**

Benefits: more preparation for post primary
Challenges: Teachers knowledge and appreciation of a Childs learning and development process and to plan accordingly.

My preferred model would be the 3 stage model

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

I always liked the idea of structure. Most specially when one of its benefits (in general) is to provide clarity for one, as to what is to be done how it is to be done and when i.e. allocation of time. Hence in considering 3 above I agree with the idea of specifying time allocation for themes/curriculum areas/subjects however before I could agree or disagree on the others I would want more clarity on the meaning as is written in the revised set of proposals. "The allocation of time across the curriculum reflects **values** — what is <u>important</u> for children as they progress through their primary education"

Proposed 60% on minimum state curriculum time

Proposed 40% on flexible time

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

My concern is how the Department defines "values" and how is "important" determined. I agree with the 60% and the 40% but I would very much like to elevate the % value of religious education within that flexible time.

After all, both the Aistear themes and the SPHE curriculum "objectives" (both in the proposed 60% on minimum state curriculum time) are incorporated in most religions and none more than in the Christian tradition. In fact, on reading them one would be forgiven for thinking that" the teams" who developed both programmes in a **secular context** were not of a "religious persuasion" themselves.

Elevating religious education and instructing it in a <u>sincere</u> and <u>truthful</u> manner can only enhance and compliment the other 2 as it explains <u>their true basis</u> i.e. who one is and from where one comes from

Please do not fall folly to anti church rhetoric remember **All that is deemed good has its basis in theology and <u>children get it.</u>** Please do not deny them <u>from being introduced to God because in the present climate if they don't get it at school they may not get it anywhere else</u>

Contributor

HSE Health and Wellbeing Division

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Orla**
Surname	**McGowan**
Position (If applicable)	**Education Officer**
Organisation (If applicable)	**HSE Health and Wellbeing Division**
Address	**89-94 Capel Street** **Dublin 1**
Telephone	**01-8146292**
Email	**omcgowan@hse.ie**
Date	**27th April 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [x]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

The HSE has no preference for the two-stage model or the three-stage model

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

Proposals on Minimum State Curriculum Time

A minimum state curriculum time is important and it allows for a level of standardisation in relation to core subjects while freeing up time for students and teachers to engage in curricular and extra-curricular activities of interest to them. If the NCCA proceeds with minimum time allocations for core subjects, such as languages and maths, a similar amount of minimum state curricular time should also be allocated to well-being. It is the view of the HSE that, similar to the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (2017), Well-being at Primary Level (including SPHE and PE) should have an equal status and potentially greater time allocation, than English, Irish and Maths.

This position is based on the international focus on wellbeing as a resource for life and is echoed several national policy positions including Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing, The National Children's Strategy and, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020.

Specifying time allocation for Well-being

A time allocation that increased the status of Wellbeing (including SPHE and PE and potentially other modules that would be appropriate for primary schools) would be a significant policy change. It would mean that the State would officially consider that the social and emotional development of children to be of equal importance to their academic ability and achievement at Primary Level. This change would most likely have a positive effect on literacy and numeracy, as research indicates that children who are supported to develop social and emotional competency from an early age are more likely to do well academically and socially.

Furthermore, if Well-being was allocated a significant amount of Minimum State Curriculum Time, it would have a significant knock-on impact on initial teacher education and training, on CPD provided to teachers, on inspections, on how parents view schools and most importantly how schools and teachers view themselves. A specified time allocation for Well-being would also ensure that key health messages in relation to healthy eating, physical activity, relationships, sexuality and social and emotional wellbeing are consistently provided in schools. It is well known that health behaviours early in life have a significant influence on how they will behave in the future, so it is important that children receive the right messages and are encouraged to take responsibility for their own health from an early age.

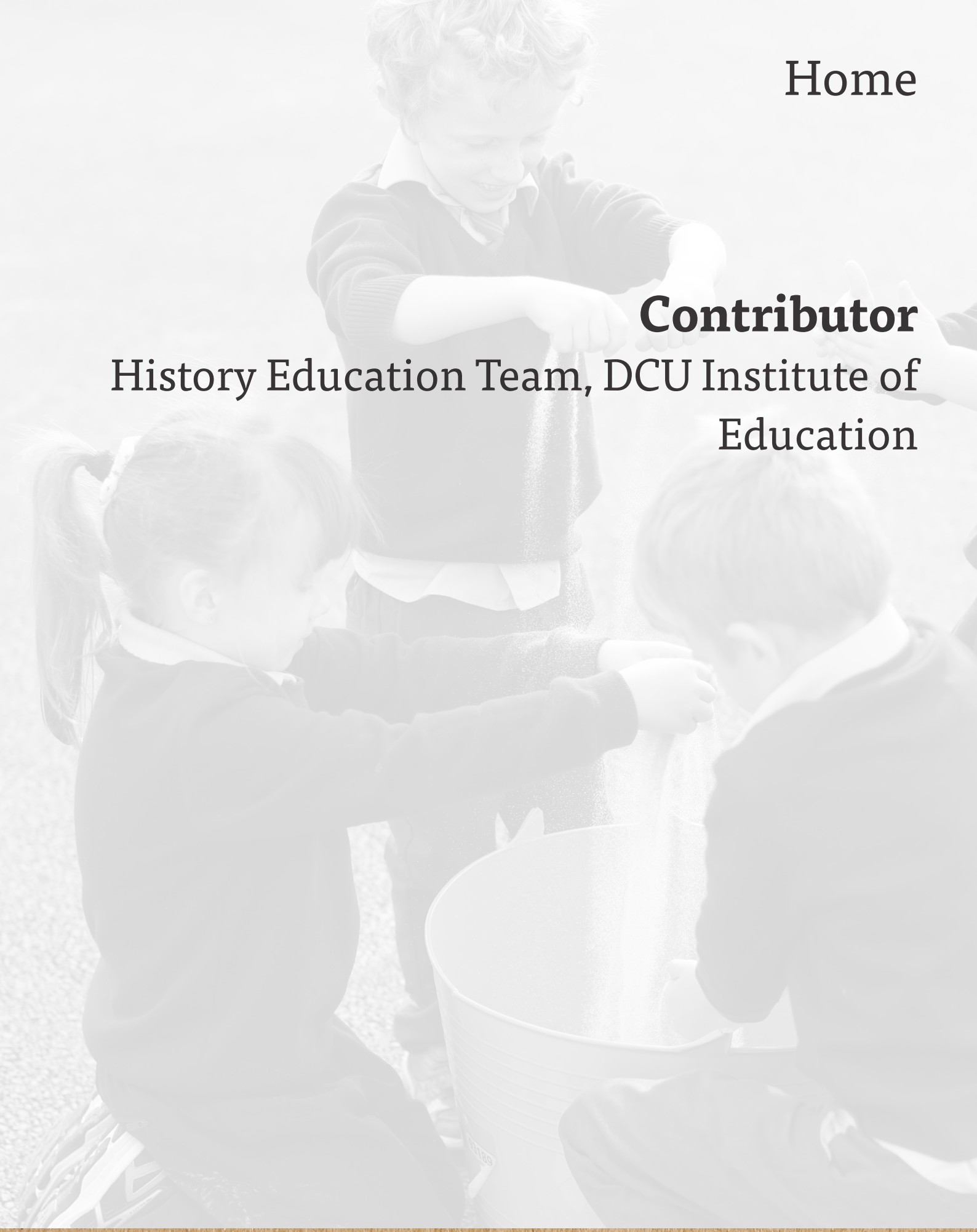
Views on Weekly, Monthly, Termly, Annual Time
The current allocation of weekly time is potentially too rigid. It would be preferable for teachers to have more flexibility in teaching the curriculum.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Whole School Approach To Well-being
While it is important that children engage with a Well-being curriculum, a whole-school approach to Well-being is considered to be a more effective than a curriculum only approach and this approach is currently supported by the work of the HSE Health Promoting Schools Programme and the Well-being Guidelines for Primary Schools, developed by NEPS.

A Well-Being Programme/Curriculum
Children develop skills and competencies that enhance their well-being at primary school age, they will be less likely to develop serious problems in childhood, adolescence and even adult life when they are confronted with the inevitable occurrence of stressful situations. Numerous studies have indicated that having a repertoire of such skills and competencies at a young age can 'buffer' or moderate the effects of negative life stress on the development of distress and mental health difficulties. A new Wellbeing programme/curriculum could be an opportunity to reflect an evidence-based approach to social and emotional well-being in young children, by focusing content on developing childrens' personal and social skills within the five key areas of social and emotional learning: i) self-awareness, ii) self-management, iii) social awareness, iv) relationship management and v) responsible decision making, as identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2015). The HSE could support the NCCA in the development of a Wellbeing Curriculum if required.

Extension of Aistear
The proposed extension of Aistear's themes and approaches into the primary school curriculum will afford teachers and students the space to engage even more creatively with teaching and learning . It is further hoped that it will mitigate against some of the difficulties students experience in negotiating the transition from the informal pre-school setting to the demands of formal education. Although some might be positively challenged by the demands of the more formal system, many may find the new rigidity difficult to manage and there is a danger that children who are not ready for such structured learning may disengage with all the possible long term implications of this in relation to all aspects of life, including health.



Contributor

History Education Team, DCU Institute of Education

RESPONSE TO CURRICULUM PROPOSAL

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum and we hope that our comments will assist in the important task of that redevelopment. Although the main thrust of the document relates to structure and time allocation, it is inextricably linked with the more significant issues of underpinning philosophies, pedagogies and conceptualisations of children. There are some aspects of the consultation document that we support without reservation:

- The idea that quality relationships are at the centre of teaching and learning
- The importance of listening to children's voices and responding to their experiences
- The competing demands for time and the need to accommodate emerging areas such as ERB
- The need to develop documents that are accessible and useful for teachers

However, there are a number of assumptions made in this document that are problematic and have not obvious evidential basis. Furthermore, there are theoretical choices implicit in the structures proposed that are inherently flawed. This response begins by considering the overarching issues that the document presents before going on to consider the case for history.

As a general comment, while the document takes for granted the idea that the curriculum needs significant reconceptualisation, and argues in its introduction that the research underpinning the 1999 curriculum is no longer relevant (p. 1), we see this assumption as fundamentally flawed. The key theorists that underpin social constructivism and enquiry-based learning - Vygotsky, Bruner and Dewey - remain as relevant today as they were in 1971 and in 1999 and in fact still inform current and innovative thinking on children's learning internationally (see, for example, Bennison, 2015; Hedges and Cullen, 2012; Stephen, 2010; Robbins, 2007; Kang and Lee, 2014).

The focus on marginal issues such as the number of curriculum books and the whether there should be two or three stages in the absence of a more fundamental discussion relating to the purpose of primary education and the relationship between children and learning is of concern to us. Focusing on the number of books in the 1999 curriculum without addressing the underlying framework for learning and values which inform the content of those books is not a fair assessment of their value. Neither is it a good representation of the curriculum to describe it as 'content-laden'. This is a common misconception which fuels the feeling of overload amongst teachers. As a menu curriculum with a significant focus on the development of skills and concepts, and on children as constructors of knowledge about the world, it presents teachers and schools with opportunities to be selective and to create a curriculum that suits the needs of their local context. While the issue of overload is keenly felt by teachers and needs to be addressed, there are other factors at play which a new curriculum will not address and may, in some cases, exacerbate, namely the role accorded to textbooks and workbooks in the determination of what counts as curriculum and the way in which homework is conceptualised (Varley, Murphy and Veale, 2008; Waldron et al, 2009; Cummins, 2010).

One of our most serious concerns relates to the absence of a strong value system, a coherent philosophy and sense of purpose, and a conceptualisation of children which sees

them as agentic in their engagement with the world. We would argue that the priorities identified in Table 2 (p. 6) are reductionist, confused, and opaque, operating at different levels of specificity and removing the child from the world. It is not evident what is meant by life skills, or how being a good communicator, developing literacy and numeracy are not included in that concept. Apart from communication, there is no concept of the child as actor or as constructor of knowledge and understanding evident in the list of priorities, and therefore no conceptualisation of children's relationship with learning. There is no articulation of the relationship between children and the world or of the child as a social being. Given what we know about how learning best occurs, and the importance of collaborative learning environments, this is a worrying development.

While motivation and engagement are important factors in children's learning, there is no hint of what kind of learning that motivation and engagement is directed towards. There is no acknowledgement here of children's rights of voice and participation, which the State and all state actors have a duty to uphold, or of education as a site of children's citizenship. Concepts such as identity and belonging are meaningless in the absence of context and are an insufficient representation of children's relationships with their communities, with society and with the wider world. This list presents a weak and instrumental view of education which fails to identify any underpinning values. Using these priorities as a starting point for a reconceptualised curriculum will serve to embed these deficits in any ensuing curriculum. An example of this instrumentalism is the idea, further in the document, that the final two years of primary would be defined by preparation for second level We would strongly recommend that these priorities be revisited. This proposal subverts the real purpose of education to the requirements of second level and represents a weak response to transition issues. Structure should follow a deep interrogation of vision, purpose, values and philosophy, not determine them.

The document and the consultation process itself are built on the premise that there is something inherently wrong in the current structure of the curriculum which pairs adjacent class levels together. It offers choice between a two stage and three stage approach. Whether there are two, three or four stages is irrelevant; what is important is the idea expressed in the document that these stages are premised in some way on ways of thinking. The idea that children's thinking can be mapped in a linear developmentalist way has long been challenged (Donaldson, 1979; Bruner, 1960; Vygotsky, 1986) and replaced in key areas of learning and social theory by conceptualisations of children as demonstrating emergent capacities to think in complex, critical and abstract ways about the world from an early age (Waldron and Oberman, 2016; Lee and Vagel, 2010; Ruane et al. 2010; Fleer, 2005; Mayall, 2000; Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 1999; Bruner, 1960; Vygotsky, 1986). Stage theory sets artificial limits on children's capacities to think critically about the world and fails to recognise teachers' responsibilities to scaffold emergent thinking. The UNCRC charges all duty bearers and adults to engage with children's evolving capacities rather than see children as not ready to participate in decision-making or to have their voices respected. Curricula that confine children to what are seen to be characteristic modes of thinking that are age dependent ignore recent developments in this regard. The Brunerian model of spiralled learning, allied with sociocultural theories of learning, facilitate the development of children's emerging capacities in age appropriate ways. These conceptualisations of children and learning are critical to the success of education for democratic citizenship and human rights. They enable children to act as citizens in the present rather than citizens in the

making and they provide a context in which to challenge the early emergence of stereotypes, bias and racism (see in an Irish context, Ruane et al. 2010; Connolly, 2009; Connolly et al. 2006; Connolly, 2002).

Additionally, while there is a value in looking at different ways of conceptualising areas of learning, conflating that with a thematic or topic based curriculum risks losing what is most valuable in the current curriculum i.e. the way in which it enables children to bring different lens to bear on how they understand the world. Enabling children to develop their emerging capacities to think historically, geographically, scientifically, mathematically etc. about the world provides children with both rich experiences of learning and diverse ways of understanding the world. Allied with the concern for skills and concept development, the current focus and with the enquiry-based pedagogies that are enabled if not embedded within the current curriculum, the curriculum supports children to engage effectively with their learning and with the wider world.There are two issues here: firstly, while play pedagogy is wholly appropriate in the context of early childhood and, indeed, throughout primary, it is not the only way in which children can and should learn from early years onward; secondly, there is a real danger that in a topic-based approach, classroom practice will devolve into superficial content-oriented teaching with little skills and conceptual development.

We are concerned also with the suggestion that child-initiated learning decreases with increased focus on disciplinary learning. In the context of enquiry based learning which characterise many of the subject in the primary curriculum this makes no sense. Whether or not the curriculum emerges as topic-based or subject-based, this should have no impact on the prevalence of child-initiated learning. In fact, child-initiated learning is best scaffolded through enquiry approaches.

History education:

As indicated earlier, while this proposal seeks to develop a new paradigm beyond the primary curriculum 1999, one laudable aspect of the current curriculum is the attention given to its aims and purposes. Much emphasis is focused on the holistic development of the child as a learner in their own right, but also as an active member of their local communities and wider society. In arguing for the need for education to contribute to a critical and active citizenship and to the capacity to navigate diverse local, national, European and global identities, the aims outlined in the history curriculum are as reflective of the current social context as they were on publication in 1999. The societal factors to which the creators of the of the primary history curriculum 1999 responded still remain acutely relevant. There are significant concerns globally that in the context of multicultural and diverse societies, democracy needs to be safeguarded and cannot be taken for granted. In the case of Ireland, emerging as it is from a period of conflict, this concern is particularly acute.

Laville and Martineau (1998) argue, historical consciousness uniquely contributes to a range of civic competencies for democracy which are not addressed in other disciplines. These include the development of multiple perspectives, a sense of historical empathy and the capacity to understand the historical roots of present problems, all of which are essential to the growth of the democratically minded citizen. As argued earlier, Important developments in

research on children's learning have provided educators with a more robust understanding of the cognitive capacities of children and the last few decades have witnessed a revolution in the teaching of history. Internationally, curricula have been reshaped to reflect the idea of history as constructed and the importance of the historical process of enquiry (Von Heyking, 2004; Seixas, 1993). In this context, much of the research into children's thinking in history has cast further doubts over some of the key premises of stage theory, particularly those that propose that thinking is age dependent and that there are definable stages which all students must pass through. Some researchers (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) challenge these premises in general, while others (e.g., Levstik, 1986; Lee & Shemilt, 2003, 2004; Maggioni, VanSledright & Alexander, 2009; Maggioni, VanSledright & Reddy, 2009; Shemilt, 1983; VanSledright, 2002, 2009, 2011) focus specifically on aspects of children's thinking on history.

History education can expose children to a different way of thinking about historical accounts and provide an alternative to the partisan/sectarian histories encountered outside of school. Engaging children in historical enquiry can contribute to greater "mutual understanding in society" (Smith, 2005). Studies by history educators such as Barton (2001; 2005; 2012), Barton and Levstik (2015; 2007) and Vansledright (2002, 2009, 2011) among others demonstrate children's capacities to engage with historical sources and the emergence from a young age of historical consciousness.

The two proposals that are offered in this consultation document have serious implications for the development of children's capacities to think historically about the world. In Option 1, history would not feature until the third year of schooling and then as a combined curriculum area. Only in the final two years of schooling would history as a discrete subject be introduced. In Option 2, history is a discrete subject for four years but is absent from the junior years programme. Both of these approaches follow a similar pattern to the design of a number of European primary curricula.

The proposal places a high value on what has developed elsewhere in relation to curriculum but does not take into account that those developments are not necessarily supported as positive by the evidence. A Eurydice report (NFER, 2010) on the design of primary history syllabuses throughout the European Union, for example, gives us some evidence of where Ireland stands in this context and suggests our current curriculum has important strengths and compares well with others. The report illustrates a move towards integrated areas of study across Europe. Of the 22 countries reviewed, 7 delivered history as a discrete subject in the primary years and 15 included it as part of a multi-disciplinary programme with many of these countries making the subject a discrete one only in the senior primary and post-primary sectors. The report, however, is critical of the impact of curriculum on the development of historical skills and found an inconsistent approach to skills development. Ireland was one of only four of the countries surveyed where the curriculum emphasised the centrality of historical skills and concepts.

The current History Curriculum is not perfect and has a number of flaws (e.g. absence of focus on historical questions) which need to be addressed. In addition it has never been reviewed and we have very little information on its implementation. The ongoing research which indicates either the continued dominance of textbooks or their replacement with information driven teacher generated factfiles suggests a weak implementation. In addition, little attention has been paid to teachers' professional development in this area. However, the curriculum is considered by theorists in the field of history education to be forward-thinking, to promote understanding and respect for different cultures and traditions, to support understanding of multiple perspectives and the development of historical thinking (McCully and Waldron, 2013; Faas and Ross, 2012; Walsh, 2012; Waldron, 2004).

Debates regarding subject-specific or integrated curricula have been ongoing for many years. Some contend that the flexible nature of integrated approaches is a better reflection of student experiences of learning (Laurie, 2011) and that it supports the learning of transferable skills (Hayes, 2010). Others, however, maintain that it denies "access to some of the most powerful tools for making sense of the world which human beings have ever devised' (Alexander, Rose & Woodhead, 1992, p. 21). There is a evidence that integration itself is poorly defined and has taken on multiple meanings and is conceptually fuzzy (McKeon, 2013; Badley, 2009). Planning time, teacher subject knowledge and challenges to progression and skills development have all been identified as problems (McKeon, 2013). While these, in themselves, are not definitive arguments against integration, they highlight the need for conceptual clarity, teacher knowledge and the importance of planning and suggest that integration cannot be seen as a solution to overload and may exacerbate it. Integration has many benefits in terms of learning but as Rennie et al. (2012) argue, there is a need for 'multiple lenses' - integrated and disciplinary. One could argue that the issue is not so much an argument between integration and subjects; rather it is between the need to provide children with a historical lens and the dangers of prioritising content over historical thinking. Regardless of the model chosen, it *must* include systematic and explicit opportunities from early years for children to develop their capacities to think historically about the world.

A look at the Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum (2007), however, indicates the implications for subject integration in SESE. The Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum, previously a content-heavy, highly prescribed curriculum in which history was a discrete subject, now links history, geography and science under one curricular area of learning known as "The World Around Us" (WAU) (Johnson, 2013). McCully and Waldron (2013) have questioned the impact of a cross curricular approach and its capacity to undermine the development of historical thinking skills deemed to be of critical importance in post-conflict society. These fears would appear to be warranted. Johnson's small scale study on the teaching of science in WAU found that 90% of the teachers interviewed were spending less time teaching science specific skills and Greenwood's study on geography expressed concern that cross-curricular planning emphasised content over skills (Greenwood, 2013).

Part of the human condition is to orient ourselves in time (Rusen, 1993; Collingwood, 1946) and schools are only one context in which children engage in historical thinking, judgement, conversation and activity. The NCCA consultation is taking place in the context of significant public engagement with the past. The Irish state and others have identified the importance of acknowledging and commemorating our collective past. The public response through the Decade of Centenaries, in particular the response to the 1916 Rising Centenary, indicates that there is a strong public interest in history. The sensitivities involved in acknowledging our contested past where our citizens require the ability to understand history not as a fixed past or heritage but as a way of understanding our modern world, is as relevant today as it was in 1999. In this context, school history is increasingly necessary in order to respond to the more dominant and emotive historical narratives experienced by young people in their communities and through the media. For all of these reasons, history education requires teachers who understand the complexities of teaching about the past and also possess a strong sense of purpose in their teaching of history. This purpose should be made explicit both in public policy and any new re-articulation of the aims and objectives of the primary curriculum.

Professor Fionnuala Waldron, Brian Ruane, Peter Whelan, Caitríona Ní Cassaithe, History Education team, School of STEM Education, Innovation and Global Studies, DCU Institute of Education, St Patrick's Campus, Dublin City University.

Contributor

Institute of Public Health in Ireland

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Helen**
Surname	**McAvoy**
Position (If applicable)	**Director of Policy**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Institute of Public Health in Ireland**
Address	**5th Floor Bishop's Square Redmond's Hill Dublin 2**
Telephone	**01-4786300**
Email	**Helen.mcavoy@publichealth.ie**
Date	**26/5/2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [X]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [X] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) welcomes the opportunity to submit our views on *the NCCA Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum.*

In particular we welcome that the structure and time allocation for a redeveloped primary curriculum is based on national and international evidence as set out in the consultation document. It is clear that both the content and the implementation of the curriculum must be evidence-based and catered around the learning and support needs of children to equip them to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

IPH welcomes the proposed changes within the pre-school and primary curriculum from the current five-stage to a new model and in particular the closer alignment proposed between pre-school and infant primary schools.

While recognising the benefits and challenges of both models proposed, the option preferred by IPH is the three stage model. We consider that this model better reflects stages of childhood development than the two stage option.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

A. Understanding of the position of PE within curriculum implementation

IPH considers that both SPHE and PE are critical components of a child's learning experience. We recommend that schools commitment to protected PE time is recognised not as an optional or stand-alone 'health' activity, but rather as a broad investment in child wellbeing and development.

Unlike most other subjects, PE can directly contribute to both health and educational outcomes. Participation in PE has the capacity to release a dividend in terms of the 'enhanced learning/social outcomes' featured on page 25 of the consultation document – for example building confidence, relationships, learning through playful experiences, sense of self-esteem, resilience and grit.

B. Contribution of PE to physical activity levels and policy goals

The National Physical Activity Plan (Department of Health, 2016) is a flagship programme under the Healthy Ireland Framework (Dept of an Taoiseach, 2013). The Healthy Ireland Framework recognises that the creation of health within the population relies on the integration of a 'health in all policies' approach where all opportunities for health promotion are realised in a variety of settings including schools.

The National Physical Activity Plan recommends that

"All children and young people should be active at a moderate to vigorous level for at least 60 minutes a day, including muscle strengthening, flexibility, and bone strengthening exercises three times a week"

The National Physical Activity Plan has also set a target to increase by 1% per annum, the proportion of children undertaking at least one hour of exercise a day, and decrease by 0.5% per annum, the proportion of children who do not undertake any weekly physical activity.

The Physical Education Curriculum (Department of Education, 1999) recommended that a minimum of one hour per week be allocated to physical education in primary schools. We infer that there is no commitment to change the current time allocation from previous practice. This time allocation is insufficient. It means that PE is unlikely to make any real contribution to increasing physical activity levels of our children, as is stated in the government policy goals above.

The commitment of one hour a week is far below the recommendation of the EU Expert Group on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity (European Commission, 2015). This Group recommends a minimum of five lessons a week of PE during compulsory education time. In addition, it is worth noting that the time spent teaching physical education in Irish primary schools remained constant between 2006/07 and 2011/12 at 37 hours per year. This is in stark contrast to the highest country on the list, France, where primary schools teach 108 hours of physical education per year. Additionally, Ireland is lowest ranked in the European Union for time allocated to physical education as a proportion of total taught time, at just 4% (European Commission, 2013).

A recent global analysis of physical activity among children included data from Ireland on PE participation. This Physical Activity Report Card awarded a D- to Ireland on the measure of PE in

schools (Harrington, 2016).

C. Assets and barriers to implementation of PE in primary schools

The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study concluded that 35% of primary school pupils received the Department of Education minimum guidelines of one hour of PE every week (Woods, 2010). However, an analysis of the Growing Up in Ireland Survey (McCoy, 2012) and the Lifeskills Survey (Department of Education and Skills, 2014) found a more positive picture of PE implementation. There were particularly good results in Gaelscoileanna and in schools where there was a more even gender balance in the teaching staff.

Although there is some positive news in the more recent survey data, there remain considerable 'unknowns' on many aspects of PE implementation and data has not been updated since 2014 (Harrington, 2016). We recommend that this should be monitored on an ongoing basis through a blend of teacher/pupil self-report as well as through external observation and integration into existing systems of school inspection procedures. Building this into school monitoring and reporting processes is recommended rather than a reliance on once-off surveys. There is considerable variation in survey data in the way that participation in PE is measured and agreeing a standard measure is recommended (Harrington et al, 2016).

The consultation document highlights evidence relating to the challenges faced by school to deliver fully across a broad curriculum. Time is frequently cited as the main factor inhibiting teachers and school management to deliver across the full range of learning themes and topics, including SPHE and PE. The feasibility of successfully implementing PE in primary schools may have been hindered by Circular 0056/2011 which requested primary teachers increase the amount of weekly class time spent on literacy and numeracy. Indeed, it can be argued that although the minimum physical education guidelines remain at one hour a week, implementation of this guideline will be severely limited due to allocation of hours to other elements of learning. Trade-offs amongst different subjects are inevitable and PE may be less protected (McCoy, 2012).

We recommend that the implementation of PE time should be supported by investment in appropriate facilities. It has been estimated that 81% of primary schools do not have access to an indoor multi-purpose hall for the purpose of PE (Woods, 2010). The enthusiasm and enjoyment of PE will be enhanced by the availability of suitable facilities.

We recommend that school rules be adapted to facilitate students to engage in PE such as encouragement to wear their tracksuit to school on more days of the week. This will remove any concerns on the time spent changing in and out of uniforms, allow for greater flexibility in the allocation of PE hours and other opportunities for physical activity across the day as well as sending an important message about the importance the school places on participation in PE.

In addition, we recommend that the Department of Education enhance investment and support for the Active School Flag initiative currently operating in around 627 primary schools nationally. This initiative has the capacity to support the implementation of PE in terms of both quantity and quality over time. In addition, the programme can help teachers who are under pressure to deliver across a broad curriculum by bringing in additional resources, supports and innovation from the community through the participation of students, parents and local sports clubs.

D. Quantity and quality in PE implementation

The aim of PE should be clearly understood by school management, teachers, pupils and their parents. We recommend that the purpose of physical education in primary school is to provide children with an opportunity to enhance their physical literacy skills and engage in activity that is enjoyable, health enhancing and lays the groundwork for a sustainable habit of physical activity. We would encourage the education sector to afford the greatest value to getting the most sedentary children to participate, to learn fundamental movement skills and to grow their confidence in at least one form of physical activity that is sustainable and enjoyable for them. The Department of Education/NCCA should clarify the role of school-based physical activity, including PE, for those pupils with obesity who are engaged in weight management programmes.

We consider that PE is not an appropriate forum to focus on enhancing the competitive performance of either individuals or school-teams. Adopting a competitive focus to PE may widen existing inequalities in physical activity and foster disengagement by children and be contrary to the wellbeing agenda. IPH also recommends that physical activity should be encouraged and facilitated throughout the school day and that emphasis on taught physical education is only one component of a student opportunity for physical activity. Opportunity for physical activity should be welcomed in all curricular activities and ideally a 'whole school' approach should be employed to enhance the impact of a suite of interventions, as clearly demonstrated through the Active School Flag initiative.

We propose that any changes to the PE curriculum should be one component of an integrated

physical activity approach that encompasses active travel, standing time, play and extracurricular activities, in line with the approach set out in the National Physical Activity Plan.

References

Active Schools Flag (2017) *"Our Progress"*. Available: http://activeschoolflag.ie/index.php/active-schools/ [Accessed: 25th May 2017]

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (2016) *"State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2016"*. (Dublin: Government Publications)

Department of Education (1999) *"Primary School Curriculum: Physical Education"*. (Dublin: The Stationery Office)

Department of Education and Skills (2014) *"Results of the Department of Education and Skills "Lifeskills" Survey, 2012"*. Available: http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Results-of-the-Department-of-Education-and-Skills-Lifeskills-Survey-2012.pdf [Accessed: 25th May 2017]

Department of Health (2016) *"Get Ireland Active! National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland"*. (Dublin: Department of Health)

European Commission (2013) *"Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe, Eurydice Report"*. (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union)

European Commission (2014) *"Expert Group on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity: Recommendations to encourage physical education in schools, including motor skills in early childhood, and to create valuable interactions with the sport sector, local authorities, and the private sector"*. Available:http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetailDoc&id=19860&no=1 [Accessed: 25th May 2017]

Harrigton, D. et al 2016 Ireland North and South Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Available at:http://www.thehealthwell.info/sites/default/files/documents/TreetopStudio_Child_Advocacy_Document_FINAL.pdf

Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) (2007) *"Physical Education in the Primary School: Proceedings of Consultative Conference on Education"*. (Dublin: INTO)

McCoy, S., Smyth, E., and Banks, J. (2012) *"The Primary Classroom: Insights from the Growing Up*

in Ireland Study". (Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute)

Woods, C., Moyna, N., Quinlan, A., Tannehill, D., and Walsh, J. (2010) *"The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA)"*. (Dublin: School of Health and Human Performance Dublin City University, and the Irish Sports Council)

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

N/A.

Contributor
INTO

Submission to

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Submission on Curriculum Structure and Time Allocation

On behalf of the INTO

May 2017

Introduction

The INTO welcomes the opportunity to engage with the NCCA consultation on Curriculum Structure and Time Allocation. To inform its position the INTO organised consultation sessions with teachers. Meetings were held in 13 INTO Districts between March and April 2017, facilitated by teachers and members of the INTO Education Committee. The INTO also held a Saturday seminar in Galway. In total, approximately 400 teachers attended the various consultations. In addition, five written submissions were received from individual teachers. The proposals were also discussed by the INTO Education Committee and the Executive Committee.

In light of the significance of the teacher's voice in policy, the INTO supports the partnership approach to curriculum involving the education partners. Teachers also welcomed the consultation process and the opportunity to share their views and concerns regarding the proposals.

The rationale for changing the curriculum structure and for re-organising time is not clear to teachers. These developments, therefore, are perceived as unnecessary change. Teachers were critical of the sequence of recent curriculum developments. There was a strong view that proposals around restructuring the curriculum and revising time allocations should have preceded the development of the revised language and mathematics curricula.

Teachers' responses to further proposals concerning curriculum must be seen in the light of the plethora of developments and initiatives that have been introduced to schools over the last number of years. Teachers will need to be convinced that there are benefits associated with change before they are willing to embrace new developments.

The proposed models for curriculum structure

There was a view that by presenting two options for curriculum restructuring the exploration of alternatives was restricted. Teachers also found it challenging to be definitive in the absence of proposed content such as themes, curricular areas and subjects.

While there was some debate as to whether a two- or three-stage model would best suit the Irish context, there was general agreement that an incremental model, using a differentiated curriculum structure, could potentially provide more flexibility at the junior end of the school and in moving from the junior classes to the senior classes. It was acknowledged that the differentiated approach is particularly suitable for multi-grade classrooms. An incremental model could also promote more inclusion for children with SEN and EAL.

The suitability of the proposed models depends on the context of the school. The two-stage model is deemed particularly appropriate for two-teacher schools and junior/senior schools.

However, there is concern that the two-staged model is too broad with insufficient structure that could result in dilution of the current curriculum in the junior classes. Teachers acknowledge that the three-stage model would allow for natural and incremental progression of learning across the stages.

There is also support for the current four-band model, with some adjustments to the content and structure of the curriculum in the infant classes.

The 1999 curriculum

In general, teachers hold positive views in relation to the 1999 Primary School Curriculum although curriculum overload and increased paperwork are cited as the key barrier to effective implementation. Teachers are of the view that the current curriculum has the right balance of structure and flexibility to allow teachers to use their professional autonomy and judgement. The 1999 curriculum is also celebrated for the attention it devotes to the Arts. The INTO recommends that any restructuring should not compromise the broad and holistic nature of the current curriculum.

Practices of integration, thematic and play-based teaching are already happening within the parameters of the current curriculum and teachers are not convinced that there is a need to restructure the entire curriculum. The primary school curriculum has never been fully resourced to allow for its full and effective implementation. Consideration could be given to the retention of the current four-band model with emphasis on a thematic approach in infants progressing to a subject-based approach. Professional development opportunities in integrative, play-based and thematic teaching would greatly enhance the 1999 curriculum and minimize the challenges of curriculum overload that currently exist.

Early Childhood

Teachers were generally supportive of the need for more linkage between pre-schools and primary schools to ensure continuity of learning and experience. Teachers would welcome more opportunities to share information with the pre-school sector in relation to transitions although they cautioned that it must not put an unreasonable administrative or time burden on teachers and schools. In general, teachers welcomed the idea of the pre-school stage being included as part of stage 1. However, teachers commented on the lack of consistency across pre-schools and the variations in quality and qualifications. In order to maximise the continuity of learning the pupil teacher ratio in infant classes must be significantly reduced.

There is also a concern about the potential impact of the extension of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme on the primary school. In light of the voluntary nature of the ECCE scheme, there will be variations in the ages and experiences of children entering school. The INTO proposes that consideration should be given to the provision of the second year of the ECCE scheme in the primary school with fully qualified teachers to ensure that continuity be better facilitated. A three-year infant cycle would support children in terms of

their social, self-regulatory and motor skill development, particularly for those children who opt for one year of free preschool.

Aistear

The majority of teachers are not familiar with Aistear, as it was never formally introduced to primary schools. Although many teachers already employ a play-based, thematic and integrative approach to learning in the early years, there has been no comprehensive professional development programme to support teachers in using Aistear and those who are familiar with the framework engaged in professional development at their own expense and in their own time. The INTO is strongly of the view that any proposal for a curriculum structure that is underpinned by Aistear can only be considered when accompanied with a comprehensive professional development programme for teachers and resourcing of materials. Teachers are currently attending professional development in Aistear on a voluntary basis and such an approach cannot be sustained. Those teachers using Aistear within the current curriculum structure face many challenges with time management and content overload.

Curricular areas

Not all teachers are familiar with the concept of curricular areas. They do not think of the current curriculum as structured around curricular areas. Nevertheless, some teachers identify with the current content areas, such as Arts and SESE, and agree that the areas are suitably broad to enable teachers to exercise professional judgement and autonomy. However, there is concern that the more 'marginalized' subjects will be diluted or displaced through a curricular area approach. Teachers outlined that inconsistencies might emerge as schools chose to focus varying degrees of emphasis on different subjects and/or curricular areas.

Subjects

There was strong agreement that subjects have legitimacy in the senior classes as children develop a clearer sense of the integrity of separate subjects and they facilitate a smooth transition to post-primary school. However, there was general consensus that language and mathematics should be core aspects of the curriculum from junior infants onwards.

There was no one definitive view on the best time to introduce a subject-structure. There is some support for continuing a play-based approach in first class with the gradual introduction of subjects between second and fourth class. The stage at which subjects are introduced would depend on the content of any future curriculum. The introduction of subjects could remain flexible based on the school context and may vary depending on the subject. For example, if a school is a senior school, perhaps, the introduction of subjects

would coincide with the first year in the senior school. The topic of subject specialisms in the senior classes arose in the consultations.

Organisational and resource supports

Large classes are a key barrier to successful implementation of any curriculum structure. A reduced pupil teacher ratio is a pre-requisite to any play-based, thematic approach to curriculum The INTO has had a longstanding campaign for smaller class sizes[1]. Consideration should also be given to the provision of classroom assistants in infant classes to facilitate a more active and play-based approach to teaching and learning. In addition, the inclusion of more support teachers would facilitate collaborative teaching and active learning opportunities. At present the learning support/resource teacher occasionally supports the infant teacher in terms of team teaching, station teaching and the implementation of Aistear.

Teachers acknowledge that the CPD provision for the 1999 curriculum was comprehensive. The provision of a comprehensive professional development programme must be a fundamental aspect of any restructuring of the curriculum. Pre-service, in-service and follow up support must accompany any restructuring of the curriculum if it is to be effective. Time for planning and guidelines around a play-based pedagogy and thematic approaches to teaching are essential if any revisions to curriculum are to make a difference in classrooms.

The Department of Education and Skills must provide the appropriate school facilities, including teaching materials and physical space allowing for both indoor and outdoor play. Many Irish classrooms were not originally designed to accommodate a thematic, play-based approach to teaching and many schools would struggle to facilitate such an approach. Many classrooms are over-crowded and are not conducive to play stations as recommended in Aistear. In addition, many classrooms require sufficient storage for resources in the interest of health and safety. Adjusting the curriculum is pointless unless there is a corresponding investment in teachers, school buildings and teaching materials.

Current DES policy on standardised testing in primary schools should be revised in the context of curriculum developments. A thematic, play based approach does not lend itself to the current practice of standardised testing, particularly in second class.

Parents of children in primary schools need to be reassured about what a play-based pedagogy means in primary classrooms. Many parents associate play-based approaches with pre- schools only. Addressing parental expectations will require improved communication and increased information to ensure their co-operation with this approach. In addition, a restructured model will require information to be communicated to pupils already in the system and familiar with the current structure.

[1] INTO (2014) *Room To Bloom*
INTO (2015) *Stand Up For Primary*

New learning

It was acknowledged that the current curriculum does not reflect the needs of the 21st century, such as, mental health and digital literacy skills. There are mixed views among teachers around the promotion of technology as overuse in very young children is impacting on children's communication skills. The INTO proposes that the curriculum should consider the inclusion of wellbeing. There is support among teachers for broader access to programmes, such as Friends for Life, Incredible Years and PAX. However, it is regrettable that substitute cover is not available at present to enable teachers to engage in professional development opportunities for these supports.

In order to create space in the curriculum, it was suggested at several consultations that aquatics should be removed from the PE curriculum considering few schools have access to facilities nearby, thus, imposing a significant time pressure on class timetables. The inclusion of aquatics not only poses a timing issue but also a financial imposition. It was suggested that SESE should be moved to the senior classes and a more thematic approach should be employed in the junior classes. A view emerging from several consultations was that the Arts subjects must be safeguarded in any restructuring to a more thematic basis. There is also support among teachers for retaining the patron's programme in schools.

Flexible Time

In general, teachers were satisfied with the proposed allocation of a minimum of 60% of time for the State curriculum. The allocation of flexible time was widely welcomed. However, the term 'flexible time' doesn't accurately reflect the use of the time, for example, recreation and patron's programme are fixed periods of time with specific time allocations in many schools. Furthermore, assembly time is at the discretion of the principal teacher at local level.

It is anticipated that flexible time would allow more autonomy for the teacher and it would alleviate the pressure of being bound and restricted by weekly timetables. A specific allocation of flexible time would also facilitate engagement with extra-curricular activities and project work in the senior classes. In addition, the flexibility would allow the teacher to encourage agency and child-led learning.

Teachers require flexibility, discretion and autonomy at local level, such as, in the event of a class requiring an intensive period of literacy and numeracy teaching. Teachers felt strongly that they, as professionals, are best placed to determine the time allocation based on their individual class needs and school structure. Any reconsideration of time allocation should

take account of time for teacher planning in light of increasing demands for paperwork. Moreover, any flexible time should not be accompanied with a requirement to document, further increasing the burden of paperwork.

Time allocation

There was support among teachers that mathematics and language should retain the dedicated weekly time allocation and that this time should not be compromised as literacy and numeracy skills underpin all other aspects of the curriculum. Teachers supported the idea that all other subjects should have a monthly allocation of time. Such an allocation was considered most ideal as a shorter period may be too prescriptive while a longer period may be ineffective. However, it was also proposed that the Arts subjects need to be ring fenced as there is concern that they would be the most likely casualty in any review of time allocation. Moreover, teachers resent unilateral decisions to change time allocations without consultation and without a broader consideration of the holistic nature of the primary school curriculum

Consideration could be given to general time allocations banded in areas similar to SESE allowing for more specific time allocations as children progress through the school. The teacher should have discretion to determine the exact time allocation based on local needs and considerations. There was support for more time in mathematics, particularly in the senior classes. It was also suggested that the junior classes require more language and mathematics time and perhaps less SESE time.

Guidance

Teachers' views differed in relation to the need for guidance on the use of flexible time. Some teachers were concerned that guidance could erode autonomy and discretion while others acknowledged the need for non-prescriptive guidelines to support the use of flexible time. Without recommended guidelines, there was a concern that some subjects would miss out. Suggestions for guidelines included examples of time allocations for a month for each class level and planning time at a whole school level. In addition, teachers would require clarification in conveying the use of time in timetables and planning notes.

Conclusion

The INTO favourably considers proposals that seek to address the issue of curriculum overload and paperwork for teachers. The INTO will not support any curriculum changes that result in increased paperwork and planning. The objective must be to reduce the current demands for paperwork and to address current curriculum overload.

The INTO supports a play-based, thematic and integrative approach to teaching and learning, however, there are a number of pre-requisites that underpin the successful

implementation of such an approach. A substantial reduction in class sizes is essential to ensure the effective implementation of either of these proposed models.

The INTO insists that a comprehensive programme of professional development be available through pre-service, in-service and follow up support to facilitate any changes to the current curriculum.

Consideration must also be given to the fact that infrastructure and physical resources in many primary school does not currently support a play-based, active approach to teaching and learning.

The INTO recommends that the curriculum in the infant classes should be adjusted to reflect the thinking and philosophy and approaches in Aistear, removing the structure of 12 individual subjects, but not losing the richness of the current curriculum or strong focus on early literacy and mathematics. The move towards discrete subjects should occur incrementally and gradually from first or second class, with clear guidelines for schools around flexibility to address the needs of multi-grade classes.

While teachers welcome the flexible and monthly element within the proposals for time allocation, the INTO reiterates that any accompanying guidance should reflect teacher autonomy, trust and professional judgement.

The INTO welcomes the opportunity to engage in further consultation, particularly in relation to curriculum content.

Contributor

Irish Primary Physical Education Association

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	Liam
Surname	Clohessy
Position (If applicable)	Chairperson
Organisation (If applicable)	Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA)
Address	25 Birr Road, Shinrone, Co.Offaly
Telephone	0877646320
Email	ippeachairperson@gmail.com
Date	02/05/17

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [✓]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [✓] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

Please consider:

- The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
- The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
- The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
- **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

The IPPEA supports moves towards a three stage model for the curriculum provided that teachers are supported through professional development. It would allow for a more gradual progression across levels and provide more clarity to teachers as to learning objectives across levels. This clarity may facilitate planning at a whole school level and allow for effective curriculum mapping. More clarity and detail is required, however, on the differences between themes/curricular areas/subjects.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**

The IPPEA strongly supports the use of minimum state curriculum time We are encouraged to see that Physical Education has been included within this category in the consultation document. It is of upmost importance that Physical Education is considered as a core element of minimum state curriculum time both in policy and practice.

The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**

Whilst the IPPEA welcomes the principle of teacher professional autonomy through the provision of additional flexible time, we question the impact this may specifically have on the delivery of physical education. Research has shown that the current mandated allocation of 60 minutes of PE curricular time is not being delivered in a proportion of schools across Ireland (Woods *et al.* 2010, Department OF Education and Skills 2016, Research Work Group for Ireland's Report Card on Physical Activity in Children and Youth 2016). The IPPEA are concerned that additional flexibility in terms of curricular time could further worsen these figures.

A significant increase in flexible time could have a detrimental effect on the holistic development of some children, as particular schools may choose to assign all their flexible time across the year to one particular subject area to the detriment of others. This may lead to schools identifying themselves as a 'music school' etc.

We believe that a balanced approach to flexible time which promotes holistic development without undue emphasis on specific subject areas, or a negative influence on the delivery of minimum state curriculum time could be beneficial.

The idea of **specifying time allocations**

The IPPEA strongly believes that specific time allocations should be provided for themes/curriculum areas/subjects, in particular Physical Education. The available evidence suggests that Physical Education in a child's formative years can be an important influence on their physical, social and affective learning and their future physical activity patterns (Bailey *et al.* 2009). It is key to the development of lifelong physical activity and should be prioritised (Griggs 2007, Green 2012). Physical Education is an educational subject with discrete learning goals and achieving the positive outcomes of a quality Physical Education programme (Irish Primary Physical Education Association 2010, McLennan and Thompson 2015) requires time to learn. Unfortunately Irish figures would suggest that children receive on average only 46 minutes of Physical Education each week (Woods *et al.* 2010). This figure pales in comparison to the global averages of 103 minutes weekly (UNESCO 2014) and European average of 112 minutes physical education per week (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013). To put these figures in perspective, Irish primary schools currently spend only 4% of prescribed available teaching time on Physical Education, the lowest of any European county (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013). In an effort to make progress toward time in Physical Education that has the potential to result in student learning, we request that the time allocated to physical education be increased as a matter of urgency.

In order to achieve the content of physical education and develop physical literacy some (SHAPE, 2010) recommend that children should participate in an instructional physical education program for a minimum of 150 minutes each week across the school year. Others such as the European Commission Expert Group on Health-enhancing physical activity recommends, for example, that pupils engage in PE on daily basis for approximately 1 hour (European Commision for Sport 2015). The IPPEA 2017 conference survey indicated that participants would support significant increases in the allocation of time to physical education in primary schools. The IPPEA believes that 150 minutes of physical education should be provided on a weekly basis to all children in Irish primary schools in order to achieve the benefits of a quality physical education programme.

The issues surrounding **themes/curriculum areas/subjects** (health and wellbeing)

A health and wellbeing agenda has become evident in the early childhood and second level educational frameworks in Ireland and is a national priority for the Department of Education. Although wellbeing is one of the central themes of the Aistear programme, research indicates that the implementation of the PE curriculum is in general weaker at the lower end of the primary school (Department OF Education and Skills 2016). Our experiences as an executive

committee would also indicate that physical wellbeing is not a topic commonly explored by teachers as part of the Aistear framework.

The IPPEA 2017 conference survey suggests that teachers are uncertain as to whether Physical Education remain as a standalone subject or if it should it be integrated within a new Wellbeing theme/curricular area/subject. If the development of a wellbeing theme/curriculum/area/subject is advanced, the IPPEA would suggest the recent experiences of other countries (e.g. Scotland, Denmark) in educating for wellbeing should be considered (Thorburn *et al.* 2011, Thorburn 2014, Smedegaard 2016). Our connections with Scottish PE Associations (SATPE) would also anecdotally suggest that a combined time allocation for health and wellbeing subject can, for example, place PE on the periphery with some teachers choosing to spend more time on other areas of wellbeing. Physical Education lead teachers within schools could help ensure the subject is not left on the periphery in new structures on the redeveloped curriculum (Irish Primary Physical Education Association 2012).

The IPPEA believe that an integrated approach to health and wellbeing could be beneficial for students, provided that support is provided to teachers and a specific time allocation for physical education within wellbeing is protected and mandated for all teachers.

The issues surrounding **themes/curriculum areas/subjects** (Physical Activity)

In addition to formal physical education curriculum time, the IPPEA believes there could be an opportunity within a redeveloped curriculum to provide time for daily physical activity breaks. In line with other countries such as Denmark who have adopted a multi layered approach to developing wellbeing, schools could be required to provide children with minimum amounts of physical activity breaks on a daily basis (Smedegaard 2016). These physical activity breaks could total 10 minutes daily, for example, and would be primarily classroom based (perhaps integrated with other themes/subject areas and used in transitions) leading to the accumulation of an additional 50 minutes of activity per week. The physical activity accumulated with transitional breaks combined with physical activity promotional practices at formal school small break and lunch breaks (Marron & Murphy, 2009) could contribute significantly to childrens daily physical activity accumulation. These positive practices along with regular quality Physical Education lessons taught by the class teacher where children learn cognitively, socially and affectively all contribute to children's health and well-being.

We emphasise in the strongest possible fashion, however, that physical activity is neither equivalent to nor a substitute for Physical Education.

Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

Within the NCCA curriculum consultation document time for physical education is allocated on a monthly basis. The IPPEA 2017 conference survey indicated, strong support for the allocation of physical education time on a weekly basis. Whilst the allocation of time on a monthly basis may be beneficial in a number of other areas, the IPPEA strongly believes that physical education should be allocated on a weekly basis for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the IPPEA believes that the 'blocking' of PE (i.e. teaching a monthly allocation of PE over 1 or 2 weeks instead of 4) would be a pedagogically ineffective practice. Physical education is a subject which in part seeks to develop motor skills. The development of these motor and fundamental movement skills require consistent levels of developmentally appropriate practice for pupils to develop muscle memory and competence. Accordingly pupils need the consistent opportunities and development provided by weekly allocation of physical education.

Secondly, the IPPEA also believes that the 'blocking of PE' would have a detrimental effect on the development of active behaviours and habits amongst pupils. The importance of daily physical activity for children is widely accepted with recommendations suggesting that children should receive 60 minutes physical activity daily (Department of Health and Children Health Service Executive 2009). While school based PE is unable to solely achieve these targets, regular physical education classes can contribute to a child's physical activity levels.

Thirdly, a weekly allocation of PE time allocation makes it apparent to pupils and parents alike that regular physical activity is important. This message can help develop positive behaviours and habits amongst pupils as they come to realise the benefits of leading a physically active lifestyle. A monthly allocation implies that being active is not something we need to consider in our everyday lives.

Although allocating PE on a monthly basis would not prevent teachers from providing PE on a weekly basis, the IPPEA fears that monthly events such as 'sports days' or 'active day' could be introduced by schools to satisfy their curricular requirements within one/two days of the month. These days may be used in place of regular developmentally appropriate physical education classes.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Two of the priorities of primary education identified by the NCCA are to 'Help children to be well' and to 'Help children develop a sense of identity and belonging'. Physical Education is one such subject which can significantly contribute to achieving these aims and should be prioritised accordingly in any redeveloped curriculum.

References

Bailey, R., Armour, K. M., Kirk, D., Jess, M., Pickup, I., Sandford, R. and BERA Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy Special Interest Group (2009) 'The educational benefits claimed for physical education and school sport: an academic review', *Research Papers in Education*, 24(1), 1-27.

Department OF Education and Skills (2016) *Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles in Primary Schools: Circular 0013/2016*.

Department of Health and Children Health Service Executive (2009) *The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland*

European Commision for Sport (2015) *Expert Group on Health-enhancing physical activity: Recommendations to encourage physical education in schools, including motor skills in early childhood, and to create valuable interactions with the sport sector, local authorities and the private sector*.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2013) *Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe Eurydice Report*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Green, K. (2012) 'Mission impossible? Reflecting upon the relationship between physical education, youth sport and lifelong participation', *Sport, Education and Society*, 19(4), 357-375.

Griggs, G. (2007) 'Physical Education: primary matters, secondary importance', *Education 3-13*, 35(1), 59-69.

Irish Primary Physical Education Association (2010) *Quality Physical Education in Ireland*, http://www.irishprimarype.com/policy-documents/: Irish Primary PE Association.

Irish Primary Physical Education Association (2012) *The Irish Primary Physical Education Association's vision for Physical Education in primary schools in 2020*, www.irishprimarype.com: Irish Primary Physical Education Associatio.

Marron S., & Murphy N. (2009). Does break time in Irish primary schools encourage children to engage in physical activity? In Proceedings of the Third PE PAYS Forum. Engaging Young People in Physical Activity and Youth Sport (pp. 76-84).

McLennan, N. and Thompson, J. (2015) *Quality Physical Education: Guidelines for Policy-Makers*, Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Research Work Group for Ireland's Report Card on Physical Activity in Children and Youth (2016) *The 2016 Ireland North and South Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth* http://www.thehealthwell.info/ireland-north-south-physical-activity-report-card-2016 [accessed 01/04/2017].

Smedegaard, S. (2016) 'Move for well-being in schools: Implementing physical activity in Danish public schools', *Active & Healthy Magazine, The Australian Council for Health and Physical Recreation*, 23(4), 30-35.

Thorburn, M. (2014) 'Educating for well-being in Scotland: policy and philosophy, pitfalls and possibilities', *Oxford Review of Education*, 40(2), 206-222.

Thorburn, M., Jess, M. and Atencio, M. (2011) 'Thinking differently about curriculum: analysing the potential contribution of physical education as part of 'health and wellbeing' during a time of revised curriculum ambitions in Scotland', *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 16(4), 383-398.

UNESCO (2014) *World Wide Survey of School Physical Education*, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Woods, C. B., Tannehill, D., Quinlan, A., Moyna, N. and Walsh, J. (2010) *The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA). Research Report No 1.*, School of Health and Human Performance, Dublin City University and The Irish Sports Council, Dublin, Ireland.

Contributor
Joseph McMahon

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Joseph**
Surname	**McMahon**
Position (If applicable)	
Organisation (If applicable)	
Address	**Fossabeg, Scariff, Co. Clare**
Telephone	**085 1431043**
Email	**joemcm@iol.ie**
Date	**25 May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [x] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

My preference would be for a three stage model. The benefit of this would be continuity from early schooling. The three stage model would preserve the integrity of subject areas, while giving a gradual introduction to these. It would enhance the feeling of progress and achievement for the child. A two stage model would have the disadvantage of retaining children in a group setting or mind set that might not be age appropriate. I fear it would lead to frustration at lack of measurable progress and that discipline problems might emerge.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

I agree with the proposals on minimum curriculum time and broadly speaking with the flexible time concept. I would have very strong objections to relegating Religious Education to the 'flexible time' slot alongside roll call while physical and social education are accorded a higher status. This proposal would appear to reflect a political bias against Religious Education and would certainly detract from its recognised status as a legitimate and important subject area. It would also leave the previous allocation of 2.5 hours at the discretion of the individual teacher or school to implement. It is very likely that, where another language is being taught as an option within 'flexible time', the time allotted to Religious Education would be reduced or eliminated.
On the other hand, there should be no difficulty in amending the proposal so that Religious Education is restored to its place in the main curriculum and Flexible Time is amended.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

I am disappointed that an important document has been vitiated by what appears to be an unaccountable but overt bias against the teaching of religious beliefs in Primary Schools and by what appears to be the beginning of an attempt to lever Religious Education out of the Primary School Curriculum

Contributor

Kinnitty National School

To whom it may concern, 26th May 2017

I write to you regarding the proposal to make changes to the current manner in which the Catholic ethos is upheld in our and other schools in Ireland. The Board of Management in Kinnitty National School would be vehemently opposed to any changes. It may come as some surprise to the proposer/s that we have been happy with this system for over 150 years and we look forward to maintaining same for the next 150 years.
Suffice to say, the Board of Management of Kinnitty National school will be keeping ourselves informed on proceedings and we will do all in our power to maintain the status quo.
We have many " old sayings " derived from many years of deliberations from the people of our wonderful nation built on tradition, respect and unity and two relevant " old sayings " spring to mind as I " Deliberate " over this issue (i) It takes a village to raise a child.
(ii) If it's not broke, don't fix it.
Please be mindful of the importance of our religion to us, it may for reasons best known to your entity be of lesser importance to yourselves but to this particular entity it retains a pivotal role within our daily lives.

Regards,
Robert O' Donoghue. (Chairperson, Kinnitty National School. Kinnitty, Birr. Co. Offaly.)

Contributor

Knocknagree National School

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Junior**
Surname	**Goulding**
Position (If applicable)	**Chairperson**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Board of management**
Address	**Knocknagree Mallow**
Telephone	**0647756237**
Email	**Knocknagree.ias@eircom.net**
Date	**8/5/2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal ☐ Organisation ■

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes ■ No ☐

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

We as a board of management wholeheartily disagree with the proposal to change the minimum state curriculum time.Religous Education has a positive impact on a childs life.It is all encompassing and is deserving of minimum curriculumtime.Within that context we would of course and do acknowledge the needs of children who are of another denomination and none in the school community and we identify and attend to their needs also.Children can be and are accommodated within the present structure.We feel any change would have a detrimental impact on the children.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Contributor

Knocknagree National School

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**DJ**
Surname	**Golden**
Position (If applicable)	**Principal**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Knocknagree NS**
Address	**Knocknagree mallow Co Cork**
Telephone	**0647756237**
Email	**Knocknagree.ias@eircom.net**
Date	**10/5/2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [x]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

We as a staff wholeheartily disagree with the proposed changes to an either2/3 staged model neither appear workable in a small school setting.Why change something that is not broken?and change for the sake of change.We feel that including infants with pre-school and using only a thematic curriculum will have a negative impact on educational standardsonce they reach the upper classes.We don't have a preferred model as both don't seem workable in a multi-class situation.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

Removing RE from curriculum time to discretionary time is in our opinion a backward step.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

All this appears to be change for the sake of change.We as a staff recently are inundated with new initatives-a new oral language programme which we can't get our heads around and have been poorly assisted by the department in terms of supports,this oral language initive originated in the US and was subsequently removed because it wasn't successful.2/3 stage models don't appear workable putting teachers closer to breaking point.

Contributor
Lenore Mulvihill

Written Submission received in the post and retyped

Lenore Mulvihill

Granny

Junhill, Killorglln, Co. Kerry

Telephone: 066 9761173

Can be published online

I absolutely disagree with any alteration in time allotted to Religious Education in our Catholic Schools. -

Totally disagree, our grandchildren need the basics in Religion as given by our dedicated teachers – who else will help.

When will our country stop bending over backwards to suit the masses.

Contributor

Lifeways Ireland CLG

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Pearse**
Surname	**O Shiel**
Position (If applicable)	**Chairman**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Lifeways Ireland CLG.**
Address	**Mulhare House, Mountshannon, Co.Clare**
Telephone	**087 6745486**
Email	**pboshiel@gmail.com**
Date	**6/4/2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal Organisation

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes No

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

Please consider:

- The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
- The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
- The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
- **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

We support the proposed change to a model based on differentiated stages of child development. While the consultation document refers to the stages as incremental it is our view that, in addition to incremental changes, phases of development are qualitatively differentiated and that the implications of this qualitative change are profound in terms of how the world is experienced by children in the different phases of their development.

The three stage model takes age 6/7 as its first point of transition and this aligns with the first transition point in Lifeways (Steiner) pedagogy and with practice in a number of high performing school systems perhaps, most notably, that of Finland.

However, any understanding of stages of child development must take account of time spent prior to entry into any formal school/childcare setting. Thus, in terms of child development, this first phase is of c. 7 years duration from *birth* to 6/7 years. The three stage model outlined in the consultation document, focussed as it is on school, takes no account of the first three years as part of the developmental stage or phase.

The second transition should be determined on the basis of the developmental process in which the duration of each stage is consistent thus giving a second transition at age 12/13 or at the point of entry into second level. This would have the effect of establishing two stages in primary education with a transition at age 6/7 and there are important pedagogical arguments to be made for this structure some of which are provided in the consultation document itself.

It is clear from this that our preference is for a two stage model with a transition at 6/7 years of age. The advantage of this model is that it is based on an understanding of child development and is echoed in other high performing education systems. On the other hand the disadvantage of two stage model as proposed in the consultation document is that it appears to identify a transition point somewhere close to the mid-point of the pre-school/primary school cycle with little pedagogical rationale for the choice. If we take birth (acknowledging naturally that considerable development takes place before birth) as the point of departure in terms of child development then 6/7 years is the obvious extent of a developmental phase aligning with the obvious change at puberty (12 -14 yrs.) as a second developmental threshold.

1. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

Please consider:

- The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
- The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**

- The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
- Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

In our view the extent to which a focus on curricular content can be replaced by focus on pedagogy should be expanded. The reference to "delving deeper and lingering longer" points away from quantification in term of time or material covered towards a strategy of differentiated engagement. Children experience the world as integrated not as comprising discrete 'subjects' and a pedagogy understood as the negotiation of the space between the experience of the learner and that of the teacher would require of us to integrate curricular material and to present it as experience to be lived through rather than as material to be remembered. We would, therefore, support any proposal to reduce time spent on isolated 'subjects' and to increase opportunities for flexibility within school time.

The practice in Lifeways (Steiner) pedagogy is to take a theme within which all the elements are woven - information, language, music, colour, movement etc. – and to remain with that theme for 3 or 4 weeks. It is our experience and that of Steiner schools internationally that this time period enables the depth and variety in the treatment of content that meets the needs of the individual children and of the class as a whole.

1. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

It is remarkable the extent to which, in Ireland, we address educational questions with an overriding concern for curriculum and with little focus on pedagogy. Perhaps we subsume all pedagogical matters, including a concern for the understandings of child development, under the heading of curriculum.

We would emphasise the point that a concern for pedagogy might create the space beyond issues related to curriculum that would inform the kind of discussions we need to engage in to effect the necessary change.

Pedagogy is a contested term but if we can understand it as a negotiation of the space between the experience of the teacher and that of the learner our concern will be how to maintain that space as one filled with life, colour, tone, knowledge and care. What emerges is the pedagogical task that takes us beyond curriculum with its concern for content and the measurement of time to the phenomenon that is 'child' with all the attendant complexity and the challenge to concern ourselves with the child's way of knowing.

The implication for teacher training of this change of focus from curriculum to pedagogy is significant and will challenge us to move from content to process.

Contributor

Máire Ní Mhaitiú

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Máire**
Surname	**Ní Mhaitiú**
Position (If applicable)	**Teacher**
Organisation (If applicable)	**N/A**
Address	**Templeogue, Dublin 6W**
Telephone	**0879848422**
Email	**mrn_matthews@yahoo.co.uk**
Date	**25.05.2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [Personal] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [Yes] No [ ]

ATTACHED PLEASE FIND MY SUBMISSION ON THE PROPOSED STRUCTURE AND TIME ALLOCATION IN A REDEVELOPED PRIMARY CURRICULUM

SUBMISSION TO THE NCCA CONSULTATION ON STRUCTURE AND TIME ALLOCATION IN A REDEVELOPED PRIMARY CURRICULUM

I disagree with the proposed change to either a three stage or a two stage model as I believe the Primary School Curriculum (DES 1999) has provided a strong foundation for teaching and learning in Primary Schools. The 1999 model has many strengths and I am confident that any challenges identified with it could be addressed within the current structure.

Children, and particularly those children whose home lives are chaotic, learn best in a structured, ordered environment and setting. So, I am asking "Why change for the sake of change?" Good teaching and learning is already happening in our schools and OECD reports indicate that the standard of education reached by pupils in the present system is high. Many wise teachers and practitioners within the education field would also question the wisdom of changing from the 1999 model.

While there are benefits to Aistear in the Infant classes, the four main issues associated with Aistear include a lack of training, resources, money and time. Resources are an issue as a vast amount are required, which are expensive to purchase and teachers often find themselves funding it themselves. Resources also take quite some time to prepare and it can be difficult to locate sufficient storage. It is difficult to dedicate one hour per day to Aistear whilst also covering all other curricular areas. A floating teacher would be needed to ensure that Aistear is being rolled out as intended and it is not possible for one teacher to explore it in its entirety on their own with a class. Senior infant classes are too advanced for some of it. The volume of planning and paper work involved is unrealistic and it is difficult to plan for it because the children lead it.

I am mainly concerned with how the proposed redevelopment will impact on the teaching and positioning of Religious Education as a core subject in a Faith School. I would like to see Religious Education remain as a core subject. Placing Religious Education (the Patron's Programme) in "Flexible Time" means that the holistic approach of the 1999 Curriculum which states *'The curriculum takes cognisance of the affective, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious dimensions of the child's experience and development'* is being ignored and it is not giving Religious Education the position and respect which it deserves in terms of the child's spiritual and religious development.

Placing the Patron's Programme, which is Religious Education in most schools, within "Flexible Time" is a serious issue for the Faith School. The first question that arises relates to the nature of *'flexible time'*. The proposal, as it stands, has very little, if anything, that is flexible contained in this time as teachers must call the roll, children are legally entitled to their breaks and the Patron's Programme is allocated 2 hours and 30 minutes per week under current legislation. This unnecessary division in the primary school day seems designed to ensure that Religious Education is side-lined and undermined.

Both models suggested in the Consultation document pose significant challenges for the teaching of Religious Education. The current framing of both models completely ignores the importance of the spiritual and religious development of the child in a faith

school where every dimension of the child's development and experience is acknowledged and deemed worthy to be nourished and nurtured. I find that this is particularly concerning. Every child has a spiritual dimension and has the right for this to be recognised, acknowledged and deepened in a way that is appropriate for their context. For the Catholic child in a Faith School the spiritual dimension will be rooted in a religious faith tradition and this deserves to be supported by the teaching of Religious Education as an integral and integrated part of the school curriculum and the school day. The removal of this option for Faith Schools impacts directly on the right of parents to choose the type of education they desire for their child.

At a time in Ireland when there is great concern for the mental health and well being of students, I find it hard to believe that Religious Education / the Patron's Programme would no longer be considered a core subject. The vast majority of research in healthy populations suggests that religious beliefs and practices are associated with greater well-being, better mental health, and more successful coping, especially during situations of high stress. People often do turn to their faith as a source of solace and support in their most stressful moments.

The continuing references to the introduction of "ERB and Ethics" are both puzzling and alarming, because it seems that the overwhelming response to the NCCA Consultation on "ERB and Ethics" is being blatantly ignored. This is an issue of great concern to the Faith School. There is no acknowledgement that the *"Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland"* makes provision for teaching children in Catholic Schools about other faith traditions. In a "Faith School" there is an understanding of, and a respectful attitude towards children of all faiths and none.

There is the key question of the integrated curriculum and how Religious Education can continue to be integrated across the curriculum when it is placed in this nebulous space that is *'flexible time.'* This is a massive shift from the vision of the 1999 Curriculum for integrated teaching and learning, where the spiritual and religious dimensions were acknowledged as important elements. Teachers were encouraged to make connections between what they were teaching in Religious Education and other areas of the curriculum. This type of integration is at the heart of the Faith School and is encouraged in the thematic, cross curricular nature of the Grow in Love Religious Education Programme currently being introduced in Catholic Schools. The nature of Catholic Education is that it strives to create a learning environment where the light of faith illuminates everything we do. A curriculum framework that does not include the option of Religious Education as a core subject makes the mission of Catholic Education very difficult, if not impossible.

Home

Contributor

Margaret Buckley

To Members of the NCCA Consultation on Reforms in Primary School

I read with interest on line your documentation in relation to proposed changes in Curriculum for the Primary Section. I am intrigued by your proposals how Religious Education is to be dealt with and my guess is that you are integrating ERBE by other means despite the many submissions you received earlier from parents, teacher's managers and patrons that religion be left as a core subject.

I am concerned by your statements on **flexible time for RE and out of Core Curriculum Time.** If RE is no longer a Core subject it can easily be removed from the Curriculum. The ethos of Christian schools is gravely affected by such a change. The history and culture of Ireland is Christian based and this fact influences who we are as a nation. Moving RE from the Core Curriculum undermines the ethos of schools and goes against the wishes of many families who have helped to build and support the enterprises of Primary Schools. Pupils will be led to believe that RE is irrelevant and can be dispensed of. The holistic vision of the child's understanding of education will be greatly affected as their spiritual dimension will not be nourished. The mission and vision of the Christian School will be undermined and Parents rights are not reflected or respected in removing RE from the Core Curriculum. Christian schools by their very nature are inclusive.

There is a risk that in introducing ERB and Ethics over time would become the main form of engagement with RE in schools, the Christian ethos would both be diluted and eventually disappear and ERB becomes a one fits all programme and the spirit of schools is built on shifting foundations. This in effect will create havoc for teachers and confuse parents and pupils. It would appear from the suggested reforms that Patrons rights are diminished and yet the Education Acts recognise these very rights. The underpinning reason of all these changes suggests that the real objective is a secular society where Christian values are negated and our Christian heritage is eroded.

I appreciate the work being done by the NCCA and the resources that are being provided for teachers Yet, I am also aware that teachers find the overload of curriculum documentation raises huge concerns about the feasibility of managing it all. There is too much change coming down the line all at once and it is frightening for many who are involved. The creativity of teachers and students is being inhibited by the abundance of regulations and some feel their comments go unheard.

Thank you for the opportunity this consultation gives me to voice my concerns. I respectively request that real thought be given to the place of RE in Primary Schools in Ireland .and that our heritage be treasured rather than destroyed in the name of secularism.

Margaret Buckley

Contributor
Martin O'Brien

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Martin**
Surname	**O'Brien**
Position (If applicable)	
Organisation (If applicable)	
Address	**New Line, Tulla, Co. Clare**
Telephone	**087 2504075**
Email	**Mt.brien@hotmail.com**
Date	**25 May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [x] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

I would not be at all in favour of transferring Religious Education to the Flexible Timetable. This seems to betray a bias against religious education and would not accord it appropriate status as a core subject which, in my experience, is regarded as such by parents. Leaving the time allocation to the discretion of individual schools and teachers does not give adequate recognition to the in importance of this subject. I feel strongly that Religious Education should be restored to its place in the core curriculum.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

None

Contributor

Mary Regan

24th May 2017

Mrs Mary Regan, Nager Lodge, Coolbane, Killorglin, Co Kerry (087) 1495266

NCCA Survey on Religious Education in Primary Schools

Dear Sir / Madam,

In relation to the above, I wish to make it known that although the above does not currently effect me personally it may effect future family generations. For this reason I am not happy and in no way support the proposals of Religious Education not being a subject in state recognised primary schools curriculum under the NCCA proposal. This is my feeling as it is with up to 11 other family memberss

Kindly note same.

Many thanks

M Regan

Home

Contributor

Maurice Hurley

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Maurice**
Surname	**Hurley**
Position (If applicable)	**Private citizen (Also former Primary School Principal and Visiting Teacher 4 Travellers)**
Organisation (If applicable)	**National Coordinator Global Citizenship School**
Address	**c/o Global Citizenship School, INTO, 35 Parnell Sq.W. Dublin 1.**
Telephone	**087-0564741**
Email	**maurice@schooltoschool.ie**
Date	**22nd May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [yes] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [yes] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

The 1999 Primary School Curriculum is excellent. The aims, principles and key issues in primary education, highlighted in chapters 1 to 4 are exemplary. However I would respectfully suggest that the "Guide to the Structure of the Curriculum" on page 40 (Chapter 5 of the Introduction) would be amended as follows to allow for an improved structure which would then facilitate a more logical, inclusive and responsive framework to incorporate all content that is deemed appropriate for this most important curriculum – a world leader in primary education.

1999 PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM **2017 REVISED STRUCTURE PROPOSALS**

LANGUAGE Gaeilge English	**LANGUAGE** Gaeilge English
MATHEMATICS Maths	**S.T.E.M.** {Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths}
S.E.S.S.E. {Social, Environmental & Scientific Education} History Geography Science	**CIVIC EDUCATION** {Citizenship, Politics, ERB & Ethics, History & the Wider World, Geography, Social & Environmental, Edn., Human Rights Education (HRE), etc}
ARTS EDUCATION Visual arts Music Drama	**ARTS EDUCATION** Visual arts Music Drama
PHYSICAL EDUCATION P.E.	
S.P.H.E. {Social, Personal & Health Education}	**Mind & Body Education** {P.E., Personal Development, Personal Safety, Health Education, Philosophy and Wellbeing etc.}
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (or Ethical Education) = Patron's Time.	**Patron's Time** (Religious Education or Ethical Education) *Separate from the 'State Curriculum' above.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Contributor

Mary Immaculate College

Response of Mary Immaculate College to Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum.

_____

We welcome the opportunity to respond to proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum. The College's response is rooted in a firm commitment to preparing student teachers to implement a broad and balanced curriculum with the needs of the individual child at the centre of that commitment.

_____

1. ***The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.***

    - In revising the primary curriculum, we believe a focus on providing developmentally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy for children in the primary years should be maintained. Within any model, greater alignment between early years programmes and the infant curriculum is necessary. Findings from the recent Evaluation of Concepts of School Readiness among Parents and Educators in Ireland (Ring, E. et al, 2016) suggest there is greater need for curriculum continuity between pre-primary and the early years of primary school. A shift towards a broad thematic approach and the introduction of child led play activities in keeping with Aistear in the infant classes is appropriate. The principles of playful learning, which are features of education in other countries such as Finland should be embedded in the curriculum review and the role of play and a playful approach to learning embedded in a revised curriculum (Whitebread, D. and O'Sullivan, L. 2012).

    - The pre-school experience should be recognised as an essential and integral part of a child's education and the value of play as a learning methodology should be foregrounded. For example, the child has developed many habits, attitudes and values before he/she commences primary school. This is particularly significant in the area of Well-being. Therefore, any model that is adopted should be cognisant of this. Our preferred model is one where curricular areas and/or subjects are given the appropriate amount of time so that all children's talents and aptitudes can be nurtured appropriately.

2. ***The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.***

    - We are conscious of the need to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to primary school children. There is a risk that a hierarchy of subjects could evolve with Literacy and Numeracy receiving more focus once the child reaches first class.

It is recognised in the consultation document that a number of areas require additional time for meaningful engagement: these areas include SPHE, PE and SESE – all areas which relate specifically to personal and societal Well-being. For example, in PE, Ireland currently ranks lowest in Europe for time dedicated to physical education (European Commission, 2013). Therefore, the time allocation in a redeveloped curriculum should be increased significantly from the current 60 minutes per week allocation. In addition, physically active learning opportunities should take place in the context of an integrated thematic curriculum if adopted. The consensus and coherence associated with the development of the 1999 curriculum appears to have been fractured in recent years as the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) prioritised certain subjects for redevelopment ahead of others. One could argue that the development of curricula in English/Gaeilge (3rd- 6th class) and mathematics (Junior Infants - 2nd class) is premature in the context of the time and structure curriculum review.

- The Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2015) like its predecessor (NCCA, 1999) emphasises the importance of language development across the curriculum. However, in both documents, this is stated as an aim, with little specification of how or where this integration might happen. Curricula internationally have moved to make explicit how connections between language and literacy curriculum specifications can be linked with other subject areas. Future cross-curricular developments should more clearly illustrate this integration.

- The Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2015) emphasises the efficacy of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as an approach to bolstering development in children's second language (Gaeilge). Integrating teaching under the umbrella of themes or subject areas may prove particularly difficult if carried out through the teacher and children's second language. There is a real risk that changed curriculum structures would impede the implementation of CLIL in classrooms.

- Given the breadth of the curriculum at present and the increasing demands placed on schools at both state and local level, flexible time would be appropriate and would recognise the professional responsibility of each school to provide for the education of pupils attending that school. However, we believe it is essential that a specific weekly time allocation is set for all stages/class levels. A weekly time allocation is preferred to preserve the opportunities for students to engage in curricular areas on a frequent basis.

- Religious Education has been removed from the curriculum in this proposal without any rationale, explanation or evidential basis for such a significant change. This is problematic for a number of reasons: the state has removed itself from an interest in ensuring that the religious, spiritual and moral dimension of the child is nurtured and developed; the holistic development of the child is no longer guaranteed by the state; while Religious Education has been removed from the curriculum, the patron's

programme has been introduced into *flexible time* and is now on a par with roll call and time for assembly; this will lead to the patron's programme becoming a discrete subject, not integrated across the curriculum, along with all the other subjects; the removal of Religious Education from the curriculum is very much at odds with the NCCA's efforts to have Education about Religions, Beliefs and Ethics (ERB & Ethics) included on the curriculum – the removal of Religious Education appears contradictory, unless it is an effort to remove one form of Religious Education while replacing it with ERB & Ethics. The absence of any rationale is troubling.

3. ***Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?***

- Primary schools are currently undergoing significant curriculum change as implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum begins nationally. The development of the new Mathematics curriculum is also underway. There is a danger that current development work will be superseded by the eventual conclusion of the structure and time consultation/redevelopment. This makes clear the need for an overall plan for primary education developed at DES level. The implications of curriculum reform of this nature extend beyond just the remit of the curriculum per se (e.g. ITE programme structure, implications for staff allocation, resourcing allocations). Consideration must be given to how any model will be implemented and therefore a professional development programme of preparation should be considered. Furthermore, appropriate resources in terms of materials and adaptations to school-buildings should be provided.

- A number of citations made in support of curriculum change draw on sources that might not be deemed to be research-informed. There is most certainly a place for creative and broader thinking in reviewing curriculum, but the basis for some of the arguments does not appear to have a particularly strong research-footing.

Reference List:

Department of Education and Skills (2011). *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*. Dublin: DES.

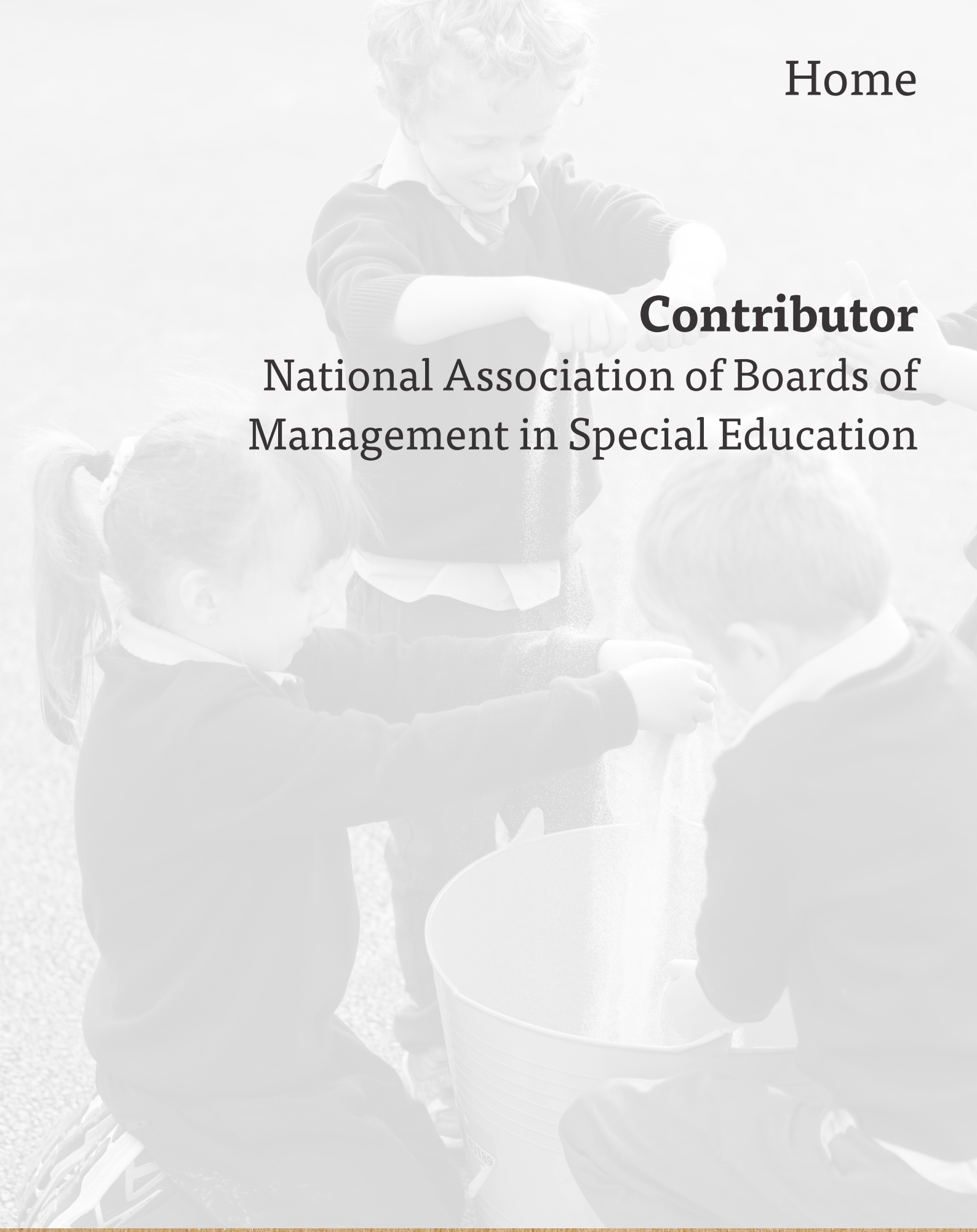
European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2013). *Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2016). *Primary Language Curriculum*. Dublin: NCCA.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (1999). *Primary Curriculum*. Dublin: NCCA.

Ring, E., Mhic Mhathúna, M., Moloney, M., Hayes, N., Breathnach, D., Stafford, P., Carswell, D., Keegan, S., Kelleher, C., McCafferty, D., O'Keeffe, A., Leavy, A., Madden, R. and Ozonyia, M. (2016) *An examination of concepts of school readiness among parents and educators in Ireland*. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Whitebread, D. & O'Sullivan, L. (2012). Preschool children's social pretend play: supporting the development of metacommunication, metacognition and self-regulation. *International Journal of Play,* 1(2), 197-213.



Contributor

National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	Breda
Surname	Corr
Position (If applicable)	General Secretary
Organisation (If applicable)	National Association of Boards Of Management in Special Education
Address	Kildare Education Centre, Friary Road, Kildare, Co. Kildare
Telephone	045 533753
Email	info@nabmse.org
Date	26th May 2017

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [X]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [X] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

Our preferred model is the three stage model as this gives recognition to pupils who need a topic based approach to teaching and learning. This approach is followed by many special education settings and we feel that this could be replicated by others. A topic based approach lays out all the subject areas and learning processes. It also allows for a collaborative approach among teachers and topic areas would be chosen as part of the yearly plan to encourage pupils to learn.
Topics could include:

- Me and my community
- Culture
- History
- SPHE and RSE
- Music

In teaching topics, the challenge is the way that teachers approach differentiation in teaching and learning, ensuring spiral development in different subject areas. For students over 12 in special education settings the topic based approach is supported by the JCSP Programme. However, there is also a need to develop a similar accredited programme for students at senior cycle to allow for a pathway of Life Long Learning.

Benefits of the three step approach:

- Building on the good practice developed by teachers in special education settings

Challenges of the three step approach:

Teaching resources:

- Text books – Can be limiting. In an era of increased technology, there are much more resources available for use by teachers.
- Teachers in many settings becoming accustomed to not following text books and using other resources.
- Designing topic based programmes/texts.
- There is a challenge in the area of SPHE,RSE and Wellbeing – where teachers who are subject based and may be accustomed to using the text books.

Teacher to teacher collaboration is key to the successful rollout of any new approach

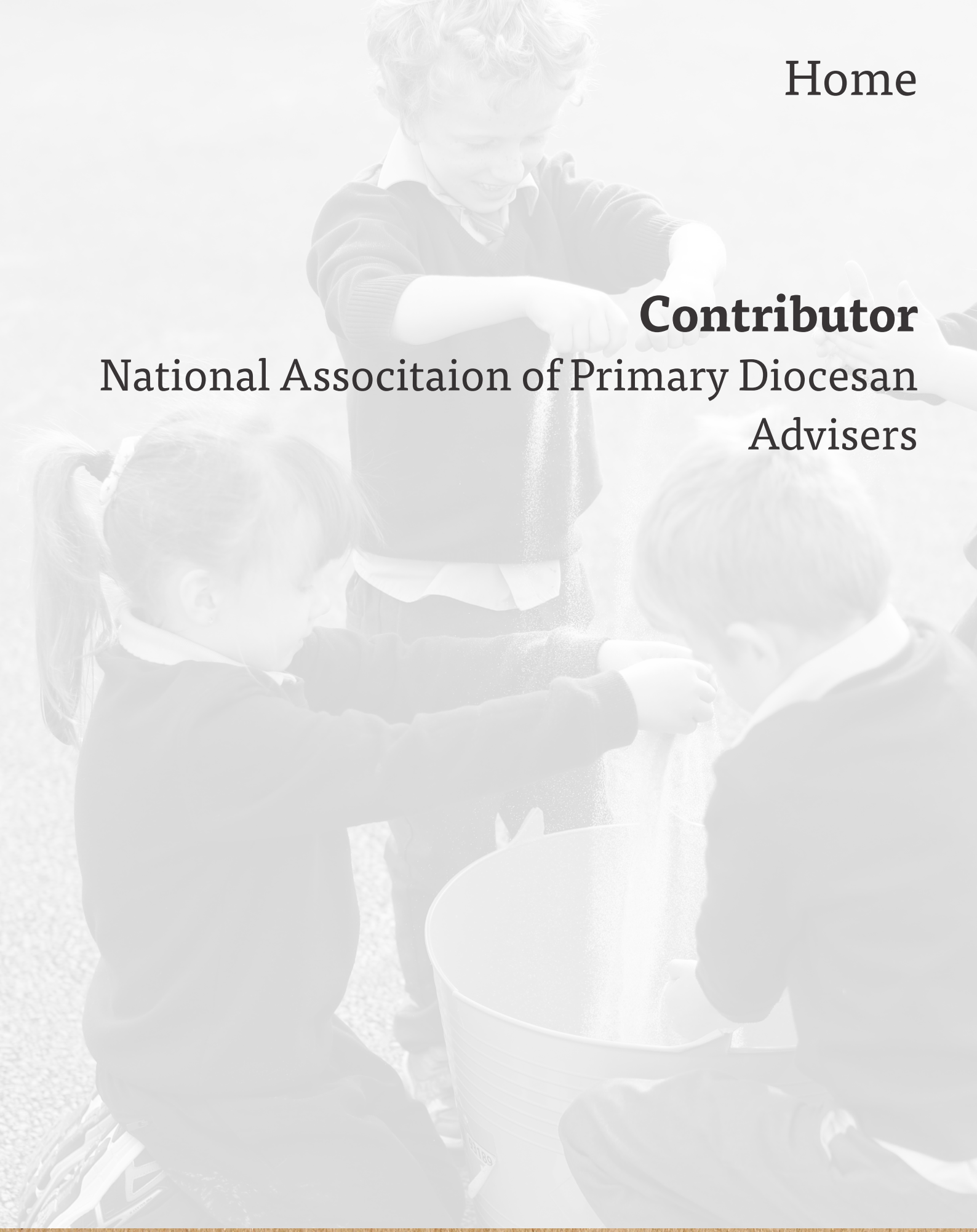
2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

There are areas included in the proposal for flexible time which are already taught in special schools as subject areas and do not fit into flexible time. Examples include lunch time, play time circle time etc. Time allocations should be reviewed and grouped in such a way that teachers can manage discrete teaching in all subject areas. We would strongly recommend that lunchtime and playtime be included as special time to learn. Minimum statutory curriculum time should remain but playtime and eating times should be included in this minimum time. Time should be allocated on a **monthly** basis as this gives more time to allow teachers to collaborate and group curriculum areas.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?



Contributor

National Associtaion of Primary Diocesan Advisers

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**David**
Surname	**Gavin**
Position (If applicable)	**Chairperson**
Organisation (If applicable)	**National Association of Primary Diocesan Advisers**
Address	**24 Bellview Heights, Mullingar, Co Westmeath**
Telephone	**0876793523**
Email	**davidgavin10@gmail.com**
Date	**24th May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [yes]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [yes] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

NAPDA Submission to the NCCA Consultation on

Structure and Time Allocation in a Redeveloped Primary Curriculum

Who we are

The National Association of Primary Diocesan Advisors (NAPDA) has a membership of 78 representing the 23 Patrons of Catholic Primary Schools in the Republic of Ireland. Its associate members come from the third level Colleges responsible for initial teacher education, CPSMA and the Education and Catechetical Councils of the Irish Episcopal Conference. 83% of our membership have a background in primary education, many of them recently retired principals and teachers.

What we do

The Diocesan Advisor is appointed by the local Patron to support, advise and resource Catholic primary schools in each diocese in the Republic. In practice this means that Diocesan Advisors visit schools regularly to offer support and advice to the classroom teacher in their delivery of the primary Religious Education programme. They also provide ongoing CPD in both the recently published *Catholic Pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* and *Grow in Love*, the Primary Religious Education Programme approved for use in Catholic Primary Schools. This is done using Haddington Rd Hours and Summer Courses. Many Diocesan Advisors also engage with schools as they seek to explore and strengthen their Characteristic Spirit or ethos.

Our Submission

Background

In responding to these proposals, it is worth noting, initially, that our members have been visiting schools and delivering in-service over the last few months and have been struck by the lack of awareness of our teachers that a consultation was taking place. When it was brought to their attention many expressed surprise that the NCCA were engaging in such a consultation at the same time as rolling out a new Language Curriculum , piloting a new programme on ethics and preparing to offer a new Maths Curriculum. It is also worth registering that the teachers we meet daily rarely, if ever, mention the need for a new or redeveloped curriculum but, rather, how overloaded the curriculum is and how little time they have to effectively teach the current requirements. This is reality is reflected in the NCCA's own consultation document.

The comments that follow are framed in terms of concerns about the way in which the proposed redevelopment will impact on the teaching and positioning of Religious Education as a core subject in a Faith School.

Structure:

Both models suggested in the Consultation document pose significant challenges for the teaching of Religious Education. However, taking Religious Education out of, what is now termed the *Minimum State Curriculum Time* or what might be more accurately termed the *Core Curriculum*, and placing it in *Flexible Time* is much more problematic for the Faith School. The current framing of both models completely ignores the importance of the spiritual and religious development of the child in a faith school. Moreover, the movement away from the much more holistic approach of the 1999 Curriculum, *'The curriculum takes cognisance of the affective, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious dimensions of the child's experience and development',* where every dimension of the child's development and experience was acknowledged and deemed worthy to be nourished and nurtured is particularly concerning. Every child has a spiritual dimension and has the right for this to be

recognised, acknowledged and deepened in a way that is appropriate for their context. For the Catholic child in a Faith School the spiritual dimension will be rooted in a religious faith tradition and this deserves to be supported by the teaching of Religious Education as an integral and integrated part of the school curriculum and the school day. The removal of this option for Faith Schools impacts directly on the right of parents to choose the type of education they desire for their child and will result in the creation of a secular homogenous education system offering little if any choice for parents in the future. It is difficult to see, particularly in light of the 2016 Census statistics, how this represents the wishes of majority of citizens of the State.

The continuing references to the introduction of ERBE, despite the response to the NCCA Consultation, is also an issue of concern to the Faith School. There is no acknowledgement that the *Catholic Pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* makes provision for teaching children in Catholic Schools about other faith traditions and that our Characteristic Spirit ensures respectful and meaningful engagement with the children of all faiths and different stances for living who are already present in our schools.

TIME ALLOCATION

The positioning of the Patron's Programme, which is Religious Education in most schools, within *Flexible Time* is equally problematic for the Faith School. The first question that arises is as to the nature of *'flexible time'.* As it is currently proposed there is little, if anything, that is flexible contained in this time. Teachers must call the roll, children are entitled to their breaks and the Patron's Programme is allocated 2 hours and 30 minutes per week under current legislation. This seems to be an unnecessary division in the primary school day, one designed, to ensure that Religious Education is side-lined and undermined. The burden that it will place on already overstretched leadership in our schools to ensure that Religious Education is given its designated time within an already overloaded curriculum will be intolerable. It will also potentially place principals and Boards of Management in the impossible position that they have to continuously justify the time spent in the teaching of Religious Education to parents who do not wish their children to participate in such learning and on the other hand ensure that the rights of parents who have chosen a Catholic school for their child in the belief that they will learn about and be formed in their faith are protected.

Secondly there is the key question of the integrated curriculum and how Religious Education can continue to be integrated across the curriculum when it is placed in this nebulous space that is *'flexible time.'* Once again we are seeing a massive shift from the vision of the 1999 Curriculum for integrated teaching and learning where the spiritual and religious dimensions were acknowledged as important elements and teachers were encouraged to make connections between what they were teaching in Religious Education and other areas of the curriculum. This type of integration is at the heart of the Faith School and is encouraged in the thematic, cross curricular nature of *Grow in Love* Religious Education Programme currently being introduced in Catholic Schools. The nature of Catholic Education is that it strives to create a learning environment where the light of faith illuminates everything we do; the holistic development of the whole human person, the curriculum and how it is experienced by the teacher and the student and the everyday lived experience of the school community. A curriculum framework that does not include the option to make Religious Education a core subject makes the mission of Catholic Education very difficult if not impossible.

IN CONCLUSION

We hope that our response to this Consultation will be useful to the NCCA as they continue their deliberations on structure and time in a redeveloped primary curriculum. The role of the Diocesan Advisor is unique and in our privileged access to schools we believe that not only are we very well placed to comment on the curricular reality that exists in classrooms all over the country, but, that we also have a responsibility to advocate on behalf of the faith schools in our dioceses.

Home

Contributor

Paula Kelly

Written Submission on the proposed changes related to Time and Structure of the Primary Curriculum (A Personal Perspective)

Submitted by: Paula Kelly
Date: 19.04.2017
Address: Lackanash, Trim, Co. Meath
Contact: **email:** paulamk@hotmail.com (086-2410363)
Role: Primary School Teacher
Experience: 12 years working in primary schools in Ireland
14 years teaching in International Schools

I read with interest the proposals for a redeveloped Primary Curriculum and attended the first Consultative Conference in Dublin Castle on 28th March 2017. I felt the proposed changes in 'time and structure' reflected my first-hand experiences teaching within the philosophy of the International Baccalaureate Programme. It is for this reason that I am submitting a personal reflection to share my knowledge and experiences of teaching within an integrated, inquiry-based curriculum in many international schools. I am in the fortunate position of being back in the classroom in Ireland (since 2011) and can reflect and contrast methodologies and curriculum structures.

Personal Opinion on Proposed Changes:

It is very positive to see the current initiatives to bring change to the Primary Curriculum. As a country we have seen profound changes over the past decade or more in Irish society. The demographics of the population have changed with many diverse cultures, languages, beliefs represented in our primary schools. In the classroom there is also huge diversity in the learning needs of our students. Advances also in technology have changed the way in which we communicate and transact our affairs and business.

As educators we have to be cognisant of the future needs both nationally and globally and it is important that our curriculum and how we educate our children reflect the changes in our classrooms and in society. There is an ever increasing need that we should adopt a global perspective and approach to teaching and learning and ensure that beyond academic achievement our children have *transferrable life skills and become critical/compassionate thinkers and lifelong learners.*

My Experiences as a facilitator of the Primary Years Programme in an IB School:

Teaching in a PYP (Primary Years Programme) classroom (in Switzerland and Barbados) was dynamic, engaging, holisitc and inclusive. The curriculum emphasised the *active construction of meaning* as the cornerstone of learning and focused on *relevance and quality* instead of quantity and coverage of content. It was non-subject based. We worked with 'Units of Inquiry' which were concept-driven and where there was *seamless integration* of all disciplines across a central idea. It ensured *in-depth*

learning took place and encouraged students to 'think', 'engage' 'investigate' and 'search for meaning'. Units of Inquiry were created from six main transdisciplinary themes which in effect aligned with the subject and disciplines of a curriculum.

Learning was not confined to knowledge or facts, rather building skills of research, thinking, communication which then could be transferred to other areas of learning. Emphasis was placed on students finding and building connections between the different disciplines – being able to apply their learning to different contexts and situations. In the classroom, active learning was the norm with interactions between students that were driven by a spirit of inquiry and a clear sense of purpose. There was a holistic, multisensory approach to learning at all times. The structure of individual units of inquiry facilitated this process. Students were constantly reflecting on their learning through peer and self-assessment which ultimately made them independent and responsible learners.

Planning for the programmes of learning always took place *collaboratively* between teachers with one co-ordinator overseeing and guiding best practice. Curriculum co-ordinators ensured there was continuity of teaching and learning across all grade levels and a balanced inclusion of all subject areas within the Units of Inquiry.

Perspectives on the Irish Primary Curriculum:

I returned to Ireland in 2011, after fourteen years overseas teaching in many international schools. I had previously taught in Ireland from 1985-1997. There were many obvious changes such as the make-up of the school population which was diverse in needs, culture, language and beliefs. New methodologies in practice were evident in team-teaching or co-teaching models to support literacy and numeracy. There was a drive towards a more inclusive model and approach to teaching and learning. I saw there were huge initiatives by the various supporting bodies within education, particularly by the PDST who were developing this 'inquiry-approach' to the teaching of literacy and numeracy and highlighting the importance of the process rather than the outcome.

Having worked within the area of Special Education since my return, I see great supports in place for SEN students. The new model being introduced will bring fresh initiatives into schools to introduce and pilot different ways of using our special education teachers to build a more inclusive model within the classroom.

However, we are still working too much within the confines of textbooks and standardised testing which through my own experiences highlight coverage and content (particularly with Mathematics) and means the teacher is often compromised in their teaching methodology and classroom practice. The focus on raising Literacy and Numeracy standards means that time allocation is unbalanced, often compromising other disciplines of learning.

Classroom sizes are major factor in effecting change within curriculum. Lower pupil-teaching ratio, from my experiences on-the-ground always pave the way for a more active, engaging practice where learning can be effectively monitored and a holistic, multi-sensory approach can be applied.

We currently have a very '*over-loaded curriculum'* which is compromising 'in-depth' learning and the development of essential life skills in our student population. The phrase 'less in more' can be applied to this.

In Summary:

In deciding the structure and content of our curriculum we need to be very clear about what we want to achieve.....what is the *profile of the student* when their education in both secondary and primary is complete ?

In the international curriculum the traits of the 'learner profile' were central to the teaching and learner process across all levels. Students were *Inquirers, Thinkers, Communicators, Risk-Takers, Knowledgeable, Principled, Caring, Open-minded, Well-Balanced and Reflective.* These traits were are the very core of all teaching and learning in the classroom.

The above represent my thoughts and reflections but mostly I wanted to communicate the direct experiences I have had teaching a curriculum without the confines of subjects and time. I think even a move towards 'thematic teaching' across all levels in the Irish context would be extremely positive.

I welcome the changes being proposed in 'Structure' and 'Time' of the Primary Curriculum and would be happy to share and elaborate on my experiences.

Paula Kelly

Contributor

Physical Education, Physical Activity, Youth Sports (PEPAYS Ireland)

Physical **E**ducation, **P**hysical **A**ctivity, **Y**outh **S**port [1]

www.pepaysireland.com

PEPAYS Ireland submission to the NCCA

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Prepared by Dr Elaine Murtagh (MIC) and Ms Suzy Macken (MIE)

On behalf of PEPAYS Ireland

[1] The mission of PEPAYS Ireland is to use high quality, multi-disciplinary research to share, influence and inform policy and practice relating to advancing the health and well-being of populations in the areas of physical education, sport, physical activity and health.

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

(Please see next page for full list of contributors)

First name	Elaine	Suzy
Surname	Murtagh	Macken
Position (If applicable)	Co-Director	Lecturer
Organisation (If applicable)	PEPAYS Ireland	Marino Institute of Education
Address	Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick	Griffith Avenue Dublin 9
Telephone	061 204569	01 8535140
Email	elaine.murtagh@mic.ul.ie	suzy.macken@mie.ie
Date	28th April 2017	

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal ☐ Organisation ✓ (PEPAYS Ireland)

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes ✓ No ☐

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

Contributors to this submission

Dr Sarahjane Belton	Lecturer in Physical Education	Dublin City University
Dr Richard Bowles	Lecturer in Physical Education	MIC
Dr Tara Coppinger	Lecturer	Cork Institute of Technology
Mr Paul Friel	National Coordinator	Be Active After School Activity Programme
Mr Paul Keogh	Football Development officer	FAI/Fingal CC
Ms Suzy Macken	Lecturer	Marino Institute of Education
Dr Elaine Murtagh	Lecturer in Physical Education	MIC
Dr Déirdre Ní Chróinín	Lecturer in Primary Physical Education	MIC
Dr Wesley O'Brien	Lecturer in Physical Education	University College Cork
Dr Melissa Parker	Lecturer	University of Limerick
Prof Catherine Woods	Chair of Physical Activity & Health	University of Limerick

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

Overall, the **three-stage model** may be suitable as it provides a more developmentally appropriate structure and would appear to be better able to cater for the broad range of needs of children in the primary school. The three-stage model may also facilitate greater differentiation between stages and focusing on a wide array of curricular areas from 1st to 4th class has the potential to allow children to become more autonomous. Then moving towards a subject specific pedagogy that aligns with subjects encountered in the post primary setting is more developmentally appropriate, and of age-relevance to 5th and 6th class children.

The **two-stage model** may allow opportunities to explore elements of the PE curriculum through themes and more opportunities for integration within the early years in primary school. However, progressing directly from Aistear-based themes to subjects is a big jump and needs to be introduced incrementally in a manner that is beneficial to both teaching and learning. The use of curricular areas provides a bridge and foundation that better prepares students for engaging with subject areas. With specific reference to physical education, a major concern is that PE may be "lost" within the broad Aistear themes in a two-stage model. There may be a danger that if PE is not formally listed as a 'subject' in the earlier two stages, there is no obligation for schools to timetable movement or physical literacy in the child's programme. Without a specific outline of the themes or key reference to the areas within the outlined themes, the status of PE may be affected and there could be greater opportunities for an opt-out by teachers. Therefore, within the new curriculum structure Physical Education needs to be named within any themes/curricular areas.

Physical education needs to be included as a discrete subject at all levels (see response to question 2). There is clear data showing that Irish children are far below where they should be in terms of fundamental movement skills [1, 2] , which has huge consequences on their health and wellbeing both in childhood but also into their adult life.

With both models, physical activity could be embedded more holistically and be integrated throughout the school day. Movement can contribute to the holistic development of the child as part of an integrated approach, <u>in addition</u> to core PE time.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

Specifying time for physical education

It is essential that a weekly time allocation is specified for physical education in the redeveloped curriculum. Physical education needs to be timetabled weekly for ALL children across all class groupings. A mandatory time for physical education is essential to successfully educate children and develop them as physically literate individuals who follow a path of lifelong involvement in physical activity/sport/exercise. Physical Education provides children with opportunities to develop social, motor and cognitive skills, and the attitudes needed so that they can translate their learning to activity beyond the classroom. For some children participation in PE lessons is the only time they are involved in organised activity so clear routines where PE is taught on a regular basis each week is imperative. Physical Education is proven to benefit children both physically and academically [3] and enables children to build important motor skills that will benefit them throughout their adult life. It can also positively contribute to the recommended 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity that is essential for good health [4].

To protect time for physical education it must be placed on the weekly timetable, hence mandatory. A compulsory minimum time commitment and curriculum to deliver will ensure that:
1) Pre-service education of teachers is protected in terms of time and breath of content, and
2) The place of PE is not marginalised within the school setting.

There is a concern that meeting monthly/termly/annual requirements could be achieved through multi-activity days/ afternoons that would not meet the aspirations of quality physical education. If there is not a specified mandatory weekly teaching time physical education runs the risk of being ignored. Daily/ weekly/ monthly physical activity opportunities are not a substitute for physical education focused on children's learning.

Minimum weekly time allocation for physical education

The time allocation for physical education should be increased to a minimum of *120 minutes per week*. Ireland currently has the lowest time allocation for physical education in Europe [5]. Across Europe the average taught time based on the recommended minimum per notional year varies between 37 hours in Ireland and 108 in France. An increased time allocation for physical education is essential to ensure that a broad and balanced curriculum is successfully delivered for all children.

In addition, given the prevalence of physical inactivity in Ireland with only 25% of children meeting guidelines for good health [6] and the fact that that Ireland is predicted to have the highest rate of

obesity in Europe by 2030 [7], it is crucial that sufficient physical education is taught to equip student with the skills and attitudes necessary to foster an active lifestyle in the long term.

External personnel teaching physical education

It has become common practice for sporting organisations to provide coaching programmes in primary schools for some of the school year, and in some cases these external coaches may replace, rather than support, the classroom teacher in the delivery of sport during physical education time [8]. While these external providers may have varied coaching qualifications they are usually not qualified teachers [9] and are not necessarily delivering on the learning objectives of the primary school curriculum. The Department of Education and Skills has examined best practice from other subject areas for how external personnel should work in partnership with teachers if contributing to teaching a curriculum area [10]. Under such a partnership model schools could access external expertise for the delivery of a specific strand of the PE curriculum, aligned with the aims and objectives of the curriculum. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure the curriculum requirements for physical education are met.

These external providers offer valuable opportunities for children to sample different sports and provide links to local clubs, but should be in addition to the core physical education programme, not in place of a broad PE curriculum.

Additional opportunities for engagement in physical activity

It is important to avoid confusion between time allocation for PE and time allocation for physical activity. These terms are not interchangeable. Quality physical education can be supplemented by other opportunities to be physically active throughout each day. Activity breaks [11], integrating movement into the teaching of classroom subjects [12], lunch time activities [13], training for sports teams, and overall increased activity [14] can all provide children with opportunities to be active in addition to timetabled physical education. The extra-curricular hours (i.e. before, at lunch-time or after school) could also be made available to appropriately trained sports coaches for adding additional voluntary opportunities for children.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Within the current curriculum, not all primary school children receive the recommended minimum time for physical education [6, 15]. Considerable investment of time in continuous professional development and initial teacher education is required to equip teachers with the competence and confidence to deliver quality physical education. Dedicated time and space is needed to facilitate meaningful physical education experiences for children in primary schools. Children are more likely to seek to replicate experiences that are challenging, provide opportunities for motor learning, fun and involve social interaction with peers and when they are facilitated to make choices about their participation [16]. Teacher expertise is needed to facilitate such experiences and deliver on the aspirations of the physical education curriculum. Current issues with the quality and quantity of physical education delivered in primary schools indicates the need to change current practices. Delivery of quality physical education by appropriately

skilled teachers is more essential than ever for Irish children who are struggling to build physical activity into their everyday lives.

Within some of the reconfigured Bachelor of Education programmes there is the opportunity for pre-services teachers to undertake a specialism in physical education. Whether in quota or ex-quota, these teachers could act as sources of expertise to support other teachers [17] and act as 'leaders' for physical education within their school or cluster of schools.

It would be interesting to see how the redeveloped curriculum links to existing post-primary school curricular changes; in terms of physical education, what is the progressive educational link from 6th class to 1st year post-primary school?

References

1. Belton, S., et al., *Youth-Physical Activity Towards Health: evidence and background to the development of the Y-PATH physical activity intervention for adolescents.* BMC public health, 2014. 14(1): p. 122.
2. O'Brien, W., S. Belton, and J. Issartel, *Fundamental movement skill proficiency amongst adolescent youth.* Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, 2015: p. 1-15.
3. Smith, N.J. and M. Lounsbery, *Promoting physical education: The link to academic achievement.* Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance, 2009. 80(1): p. 39-43.
4. World Health Organization, *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health*. 2010, Switzerland: WHO.
5. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe. Eurydice Report*. 2013, Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg.
6. Harrington, D.M., et al., *Results From Ireland North and South's 2016 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth.* Journal of physical activity and health, 2016. 13(11 Suppl 2): p. S183-S188.
7. Webber, L., et al., *The future burden of obesity-related diseases in the 53 WHO European-Region countries and the impact of effective interventions: a modelling study.* BMJ Open, 2014. 4(7).
8. Bowles, R., *From Policy to Practice: A Sociological Study of Gaelic Games in Irish Primary Schools*, in *Physical Education and Sport Science*. 2014, University of Limerick.
9. Research Work Group for Ireland's Report Card on Physical Activity in Children and Youth, *The 2016 Ireland North and South Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth [Online]*. 2016.
10. Kenny, A. and D. Morrissey, *Exploring Teacher-Artist Partnership as a Model of CPD for Supporting & Enhancing Arts Education in Ireland*. 2017, Government of Ireland: Dublin.
11. Murtagh, E., M. Mulvihill, and O. Markey, *Bizzy Break! The effect of a classroom-based activity break on in-school physical activity levels of primary school children.* Pediatric Exercise Science, 2013. 25(2): p. 300-307.

12. Martin, R. and E.M. Murtagh, *Preliminary findings of Active Classrooms: An intervention to increase physical activity levels of primary school children during class time.* Teaching and Teacher Education, 2015. 52: p. 113-127.

13. Hegarty, D., *Moving in school: physical activity promotion in primary school setting*. 2016, Mary Immaculate College.

14. Coppinger, T., et al., *'Project Spraoi': A randomized control trial to improve nutrition and physical activity in school children.* Contemporary Clinical Trials Communications, 2016. 3: p. 94-101.

15. Woods, C., et al., *The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA) Research Report No 1.* 2010: Dublin.

16. Beni, S., T. Fletcher, and D. Ní Chróinín, *Meaningful Experiences in Physical Education and Youth Sport: A Review of the Literature.* Quest, 2016: p. 1-22.

17. Ní Chróinín, D. and E. Murtagh, *Primary teachers with expertise in PE: A win win for all? .* InTouch, 2009. 106 (Oct): p. 49-51.

Contributor

Physical Education Unit, Institute of Education, Dublin City University

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Physical Education Unit (Dr Frances Murphy; Dr Maura Coulter; Dr Bronagh McGrane; Ms Susan Marron**
Surname	
Position (If applicable)	**Lecturers in Physical Education, School of Arts Education and Movement**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Institute of Education, Dublin City University**
Address	**St Patrick's Campus, Drumcondra, Dublin 9**
Telephone	**018842073**
Email	**Frances.murphy@dcu.ie**
Date	**April 27th 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [X]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

Our preferred model is the **Three-stage model**. Outlined below are the key reasons for our preference.

Pedagogical reasons:

- the three-stage model will facilitate a greater level of clarity for the generalist primary teacher teaching Physical Education (PE) (see examples below) ;

- more specific learning outcomes can be drawn by the teacher at each level as the level descriptors should provide more specific guidance to support the teacher in this work;

- the development of the understanding of the teacher can be supported where the emphasis is on the *balance* between the *three* domains of learning: affective, cognitive and physical and the child's learning in each domain through PE is significant. Expanding briefly on one of these domains of learning (the physical domain) the three-stage model might 'look like' this:

  Stage 1: practising and developing fundamental movement skills focus between ***3-6/7years***
  Stage 2: consolidating and beginning to apply fundamental movement skills…moving towards proficiency ***6-10/11 years***
  Stage 3: Application of fundamental movement skills to broader movement ***context 10-12/13 years*** e.g. playing modified games, running a relay with baton, throwing a foam javelin, creating group dance performances and gymnastics sequences underpinned by the principles of movement, undertaking photo orienteering, playing buoyancy games in water

- In terms of pedagogical approaches the three-stage model might be described as:
  i. Stage 1 emphasis: instinctive movement and play
  ii. Stage 2 emphasis: motor processing pedagogies and developing fundamental movement skills
  iii. Stage 3 emphasis: teachers' work might be informed by adaptations of the curriculum models that form part of the second-level PE curriculum

General background rationale

- Given the poor status of PE (Woods, 2010; Eurydice, 2013; Murphy, 2016) and the need to highlight its importance to meet the developmental needs of the child including contributing to the child's physical activity levels…it is best that there is an early understanding of PE in its own right *as a subject* offering a unique learning experience for

children. Moving from the first stage i.e. a general 'theme', **it will be critical that the subject is clearly identified, timetabled and taught by the class teacher within a subject-based curriculum from stage 2 onwards.** There will be a clear link outwards to the community/club for extra-curricular links beginning at stage 2 and becoming very significant at stage 3 (DES, 2012: Get Active! Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport for Children and Young People).

- We are concerned that key messages for provision of quality programmes of PE will become 'lost' within a structure that is underpinned by 'curriculum areas'. There appears already to be some considerable confusion between the understanding of PE and PA (physical activity). The subject status of PE needs to be highlighted explicitly to ensure that real learning within PE is a focus. Where this learning contributes to increased PA it is to be welcomed; however, this should not be the key focus of PE for young children. Instead PA through PE should be seen as a positive outcome acknowledging however that PA is accumulated throughout the day in various contexts other than the school and the PE class.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

Minimum state curriculum time provides clear messages to schools and a constant reminder to teach PE on a regular basis. Flexibility will be required where schools share facilities for teaching PE or where schools don't have adequate indoor facilities and hence are dependent on the weather. Acknowledging these points we support the idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects: this proposal with reference to physical education (PE). Given the time allocation reported in the latest research on the issue of time for PE in Irish primary schools (Woods 2010; Eurydice, 2013; 2014, Ireland's North and South Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, 2016) it is imperative that increased time for PE is **specified weekly for the subject**. Our proposal is that PE should be allocated one half hour daily for Stage 1 (150 minutes per week) and two hours (120 minutes) per week Stage 2 and 3. **Blocking time** over a monthly period could be detrimental to child development in relation to PE. For example fundamental movement skill development requires practice on a daily basis to achieve the targets recommended (Ericsson et al., 2014). Secondly, PE lessons contribute to higher physical activity accumulation (Moore et al., 2016). Thirdly, lesson duration is a very important consideration as well as frequency (Moore et al., 2016). We believe that regular quality PE lessons are best taught where the lesson duration is 30 minutes daily for stage 1 and 40 minutes three times per week for stage 2 and 3. As suggested above the blocking of time however may be necessary for some schools who do not have access to an indoor area for PE.

Physical Activity Promotion across the school day

The allocation of time to PE should be *supported by* active lesson transitions and active break times (Wilson et al., 2016) where the emphasis is on *physical activity* accumulation (2009: National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland). This provision should not be confused with the time allocated to teaching of PE.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

It is important that PE should be at the *centre* of the child's learning in school and *quality* PE should be a key focus for the teacher (Hills et al., 2015).
As outlined in 1 above we believe that physical education (PE) should be recognised as a *subject* at stage 2 building on the thematic approach from stage 1. Where the approach is theme based…it appears that the 'physical' dimension of PE could be lost and the learning through being physically active could be seriously compromised.
For example, it appears that the current implementation of Aistear in schools does not include PE. Indeed it is difficult to identify PE within the current Aistear Framework. For example, the language of the Aistear Framework refers to 'exercise'…this is not compatible with current thinking on the importance of cognitive and social dimensions of learning related to PE. While the Aistear Síolta guide (Nurturing young children's physical well-being through Fundamental Movement Skills (3-6 years)) is welcomed there are other aspects of development that merit treatment. The place of learning through movement related to the three domains of learning needs explicit treatment in any revised Framework.
As indicated in (2) above a quality PE programme with clearly defined learning outcomes that offers children a range of experiences within a broad and balanced programme could be extended by planning activities during break times and after school (Jago et al., 2015) as supported by the Active Flag (DES) and including the Be Active Programme supported by parents (www.beactiveasap.ie/) Within curriculum time the PE programme should be planned and taught by the primary teacher and may be *supported* at stage 2 and 3 more typically by external providers e.g. coaches (cf IPPEA guidelines)

FINAL COMMENT: We believe that the importance of physical education (PE) for the development of the child must become a key priority in **policy** and in **practice** underpinned by a redeveloped primary curriculum. This can only happen when the DES and NCCA consult extensively with the key stakeholders in the formation of the redeveloped curriculum leading towards a curriculum that builds on the strengths of the Primary Curriculum 1999 and addresses the challenges of implementation. This work would be enhanced and informed by examining some examples of best practice related to teaching PE in primary schools today.

We will forward a complete list of references to be attached to this submission and apologise that it is not possible to attach them to this document.

References (to be completed).

http://www.irishprimarype.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/RoleExternalProvider_Jan2011.pdf;
https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Arts-In-Education-Charter.pdf

Contributor

PLÉ Ireland

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Mary**
Surname	**Moloney**
Position (If applicable)	**Chairperson**
Organisation (If applicable)	**PLÉ Ireland**
Address	
Telephone	**086 3849175**
Email	**Mary.moloney@mic.ul.ie**
Date	**22nd Mary, 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [√]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [√] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

PLÉ welcomes the opportunity to consult on the proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum. The focus of this submission is on structure and on early childhood as that is our field of expertise. In this regard, PLÉ supports the broad thrust of the NCCA proposal to move from 'a model of four arbitrary stages which share the same structure, to an incremental stage model...with a differentiated curriculum structure' (NCCA, 2016, p. 29) which emphasises the continuity of children's learning experiences. In this respect, the proposed changes to the structure of a redeveloped primary school curriculum recognise the funds of knowledge (Hedges, 2015) that children bring to primary school, and in turn, acknowledge the contribution of, and the connectedness of pre-school education and primary school. We are heartened by Morgan's (2014) assertion that the use of stages in a redeveloped curriculum represents a shift away from the Piagetian concept that there are qualitative differences in learning capacity at different stages, and that different forms of learning are required at each stage. We therefore welcome the proposed emphasis upon the incremental nature of change in children's capacity rather than major qualitative changes. As Morgan (2014, p.6) rightly states 'learning experiences should match the distinctive features of children's ways of understanding and relating with the world'. **PLÉ therefore suggest, that it may be useful to consider the use of '*phases*' rather than stages, to further consolidate this perspective.**

It is encouraging to note that the proposals are directed towards addressing the issue of curriculum overload (NCCA, 2012; McCoy, Smith and Banks, 2012), and with ensuring that children's experiences are relevant and meaningful across the education continuum from early childhood through to entry to post-primary education. This is particularly important with regards to children's learning dispositions, for, in the words of Da Ros-Voseles and Fowler-Haughey (2007) when programmes "focus primarily on knowledge and skills acquisition, important dispositions are often ignored" (p.3). Consequently, drawing upon Bruce's (2011) stance that areas of learning involving the humanities, arts and sciences cannot be separated; young children learn in an integrated way and not in neat tidy compartments, **PLÉ endorses the importance of a thematic approach to learning in the early years as being effective.** Consequently, the intention to embed a thematic approach based upon Aistear (NCCA, 2009), and to focus upon integrated learning in a redeveloped primary school curriculum, is, in our view particularly timely, and appropriate for the early years of primary education.

The resulting curriculum alignment between education at pre-primary and primary school, would be a very beneficial development for the young child, specifically in relation to the transition from one educational environment to another. In fact, it is thought that a positive experience during this transition is a predictor of children's future success in terms of social, emotional and educational outcomes (O'Kane and Murphy, 2016).

According to Morgan (2014) 'a strong case can be made for conceptualising the... [ECCE scheme] and the initial years in primary school as one continuous phase/stage....' (p. 4). As part of the rationale for 'reconceptualising education' in this way, the NCCA (2016) refer to the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2016) as being part of 'State Provision'. **While PLÉ welcomes the inclusion of children outside the primary school sector in a redeveloped Phase 1 of education, in our view, the ECCE scheme cannot be classified as 'State Provision'** for the following reasons:

a) It provides a 'State Subsidy' to ECEC providers (the majority of whom are within the private sector),
b) Early Years Educators are not employed by the State. Rather, individual settings are contracted by the State to provide the ECCE scheme
c) Children's attendance is not mandatory

A further anomaly relates to the exclusion of children aged birth to three years from the current proposals. Internationally, the period of early childhood education is normally defined as between birth and eight years (Morgan, 2014). In the Irish context, it is important to note that while state provision begins at three years, the two early childhood practice frameworks—Síolta (CECDE, 2006) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009)—support children's learning and development from birth" (NCCA, 2016, p.10). Moreover, it could be argued that 'state provision' as defined by the NCCA, equally applies to children from birth, given the various funding schemes available within the ECEC sector including, CCS, CCS-P, CETS, CE Childcare, and the forthcoming Single Affordable Childcare scheme. Ultimately, the ACS which will replace all existing funding schemes, will provide subsidies for children from six months old, while also providing a strong basis for supporting the following higher level objectives:

- Promoting positive child outcomes
- Narrowing the gap in attainment between more and less advantaged children by
- enabling all children to access high quality, affordable childcare
- Driving quality across the sector in Ireland (DCYA, 2016).

With this in mind, 'State Provision' i.e., the ACS will afford an even greater continuity of experience for children and an acknowledgment of the significant learning that takes place form birth.

PLÉ is concerned that under the NCCA proposals, children under three years of age are not considered part of the education system. This is a worrying development, and indicative of a deeply entrenched 'care - education' divide (Moloney, 2015b). A staggering amount of development occurs between birth and three years, all of which is influenced by a child's relationships, experiences and environment. During this period, relationships with adults and other children promotes healthy brain development, builds social and emotional skills, and supports emerging language, literacy and numeracy (www.zerotothree.org); all characteristic of lifelong learning. However, the current proposals risk denigrating work in this area of early childhood to that of care provision only.

Ultimately, those working with children in the early childhood period (three to eight years) will be aligned with the education sector, and enjoy an elevated status within the education system, and within society generally. Meanwhile, younger children (birth to three years) will continue to be disadvantaged in terms of investment, qualified staff, and a holistic approach to their early care and education (Moloney, 2015b). In turn, early childhood educators working with younger children, irrespective of qualification levels, and experience, will be associated solely with care, for which there appears to be little regard within the education system.

Summary:

PLÉ welcomes the broad thrust of the proposal to move towards an incremental stage model, and favours the three staged model as set out within the consultative documentation. In our view, the proposals overall, recognise the many benefits that may result from such a model including the following:

- Emphasis upon the incremental nature of change in children's capacity rather than major qualitative changes
- Recognition of the funds of learning that children bring to primary school
- Acknowledgement of the contribution of, and the connectedness of pre-school education and primary school
- Potential to redress curriculum overload in junior and senior infant classes, focussing instead upon aligning the redeveloped primary school curriculum with the principles and methodologies of Aistear
- Awareness of the benefits of play-based, and integrated learning
- Focus on benefits/outcomes of child-led, emergent curriculum (curiosity, exploration) at 'Phase 1'.
- Possibility for 'Phase 1' to support metacognition and social interactions
- Potential to standardise the implementation of Aistear within pre-school and primary school
- Potential to create curriculum alignment between pre-primary and primary school, helping to create a seamless transition between education settings, as well as a reduction in the number of abrupt transitions associated with arbitrary stages and

subject based curriculum. This is a particular strength of the three stage model which is premised upon bridging the thematic and integrated approach in Phase 1 with curriculum areas in Phase 2 and a subject-based curriculum in Phase 3, thus representing smoother transitions between phases

- Possibility for complementary collaboration between early childhood educators and primary school teachers

Challenges

There is no doubt that the proposed alignment of a curricular approach across the pre-primary and primary sectors represents major reform of the education system in Ireland. While welcome, such reform may result in considerable challenge at multiple levels. Although the proposals explicitly state that Phase 1 of the two models being put forward, encompass the two years of the EEC scheme (NCCA, 2016), PLÉ is concerned, that the consultative document, does not give any consideration to how this may impact upon the early years sector. Rather, the challenges discussed within the document are focussed solely upon how the proposed reforms may impact upon primary school teachers in terms of the following:

a) Impact of the move to an integrated curriculum structure and use of a playful pedagogy in Phase 1 upon teachers
b) How initial teacher preparation could best support and enable teachers to work across the phases of a redeveloped curriculum
c) How continuing professional development could further support teachers in building their professional expertise to work across phases
d) Challenges to teacher identity, recruitment and career progression (NCCA, 2016, p. 24).

While PLÉ acknowledges the inherent challenges for teachers as outlined, **we are troubled by the absence of any discussion relating to the challenges and risks for those working with children aged 3 to 5 years as part of the ECCE scheme which, it is proposed will be part of Phase 1.** This is disquieting on a number of levels, not least of which is associated with the ideological stance espoused by the NCCA (2016) that...

> the continuity of learning experience provided by a common curriculum structure in pre-school settings and early primary would support children's development and transition between the two settings(p. 26)

In the absence of joint/shared training for both early childhood educators and primary school teachers, this particular objective cannot be realised, and may result in the antithesis of an incremental staged model. While the implementation of teaching approaches such as 'playful structure' (Walsh, 2011) may benefit children at primary level, cognisance must be taken of Fallon's (2015) research about play and the role of the teacher in primary school. Fallon concludes that because play renders teaching invisible, and is inconsistent with the systems of accountability inherent in primary schools, that teachers perceive it as a risk to their professional reputations. Likewise, teachers who have participated in Aistear workshops and summer courses as part of the Aistear Tutor Initiative (2010) (www.ateci.ie), have also

highlighted challenges in using a play-based pedagogy within the current subject-based curriculum (NCCA, 2016). The NCCA (2012) notes that Aistear is primarily implemented through the 'Aistear hour' which falls short of what is envisaged in Aistear which is premised upon a thematic and integrated approach to learning. With this in mind, PLÉ is fearful that such practices will continue, leading to the possible formalisation of academic learning for children in pre-primary settings (Ring, Mhic Mhathúna, Moloney, Hayes et al., 2015; Katz, 2015; PACEY, 2013). **PLÉ strongly resists the "schoolification" of early childhood education and feel that children must not be identified as 'underperforming' or stigmatised re: 'school' readiness. PLÉ calls instead for a 'playification' of schooling, with careful consideration being given to differentiation across Phase 1.**

Additionally, while some 18,000 teachers have participated in Aistear workshops as outlined above through the Aistear Tutor Initiative, there has been no national, coordinated Continual Professional Development programme to support early childhood educators in using Aistear. The exception here is the 'Aistear in Action Initiative (ECI/NCCA, 2013) which involved seven pre-school settings. **It is imperative that consideration is given to joint initial teacher preparation and continual professional development for all teachers involved in 'Phase 1'.** This is the only acceptable mechanism to:

- Establish and maintain a continuum of learning experiences for young children
- Develop a collaborative approach to children's education
- Create a community of learners across Phase 1 involving early childhood educators and infant teachers, as well are parents, school principals and early years managers

Concerns relating to a diminution of teacher professional identity is well documented within the consultative document. These concerns speak volumes about the current value of play and early childhood education in Ireland. It is evident, that much work is required to elevate the status of, and recognition for both play and early childhood education within Irish society, and within the educational system. Equally there needs to be a strong emphasis in education programmes for early childhood educators and primary school teachers on how play supports learning.

The status of early childhood educators has been the subject of much debate and concern in Ireland (e.g., Madden, 2012; Moloney and Pope, 2013; Moloney, 2015a, 2015b). The relatively low status of early childhood educators is strongly associated with women's work, misunderstanding of what is involved in the care and education of young children, and the diverse qualification profile within early childhood (Moloney, 2015a; 2015b). Analysis of the most recent DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications (2017) indicates that in excess of 500 qualifications are acceptable ranging from QQI Level 5 and 6, to QQI Level 7 and 8 across multiple disciplines including BSc, B.Ed., B.A Early Years Care and Education, B.A Social Care Practice, MA in Therapeutic Childcare and so on. Regardless of qualification levels, there is currently no correlation between educational attainment, professional status, and compensation. It is not surprising therefore, that many educators feel undervalued and

underappreciated, with increasing numbers leaving in search of better paid work elsewhere, including primary school teaching (Moloney and Pope, 2013; Moloney, 2015b).

PLÉ believes that the proposals relating to the structure of a redeveloped primary school curriculum present a meaningful opportunity to advance the professional standing of all teachers/educators working in Phase 1 in a systematic and comprehensive manner. **Here we wish to reiterate the need to extend stage 1 to encompass children from birth to three years.** While we acknowledge that this may not be the case in other jurisdictions (NCCA, 2016), we urge the NCCA to be brave; to grasp the opportunity presented, and to lead the way in this regard, thus becoming the first country to embrace the notion of education from birth.

In order to progress teacher professional identity, **PLÉ suggests that teacher mobility must become a core aspect of Phase 1 under the proposed reforms**. This would mean that ECEC and B.Ed. graduates would be eligible for teaching posts across the entire gamut of Phase 1, i.e., children aged birth to six years. To a certain extent, such mobility already exists with regards to the ECCE scheme, as evidenced through the DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications (2017) where primary school teachers are permitted to work in pre-school settings. Regrettably, ECEC graduates who hold a Level 8 honours degree do not have the same mobility in terms of teaching in primary school infant classrooms.

Professional development pathways, must also be considered for those currently working in early years settings, and trained to Level 5 and 6. It is crucial that these staff are afforded the opportunity to upskill to Level 7 and 8, and that their experience of working within the sector is valued.

We further recommend pay parity for pre-school and primary school teachers where qualification equivalency is evident. Failure to establish pay parity across Stage 1 will result in considerable industrial unrest. The challenge is; that pre-school teachers implementing Aistear with children aged birth to five years, or three to five years (depending on the inclusion of the former in Phase 1) will earn considerably less than their primary school counterparts who will also be tasked with implementing Aistear with children in the five to six year cohort. This situation will be both unacceptable and untenable.

The matter of inspection also warrants attention, and it is noteworthy that the DES (1999) called for a single unitary inspection system. In keeping with the thrust of our response thus far, and building on our previous work (PLÉ, 2015), **PLÉ would like to see a continuum of quality assurance from birth right through Phase 1.** The precedent for such quality assurance has already been established through the recently introduced early years education focussed inspections (DES, 2015). A key benefit of this approach would be a standardised approach to inspection, continuity of experience for children across Phase 1, greater clarification in terms of the respective roles of early childhood educators and primary school teachers, and a less traumatic transition to primary school.

Summary

Although there are inevitable challenges associated with the proposed structure of a redeveloped curriculum, particularly with regards to the value of play, and early childhood education, teacher professional identify, training and continual professional development, and pay equity, PLÉ believes that these can be reduced, and/or eliminated through the following measures:

- **Extend Phase 1 to encompass children from birth to three years**. As stated we urge the NCCA to grasp this recommendation, and in so doing, that Ireland becomes the first country to embrace the concept of education from birth
- **Address the issue of teacher professional identity** throughout Phase 1, rather than focussing solely upon teachers working with children outside of the ECCE scheme
- **Develop a system of teacher mobility as a core aspect of Stage 1** under the proposed reforms, in order to enable ECEC and B.Ed. graduates to teach across the entire gamut of Stage 1, i.e., children aged 3 to 6 years
- **Establish professional development pathways** for educators currently working in the early years sector, who are trained to Level 5 and 6, so that they upskill to Level 7 and 8 if desired
- **Reform initial teacher training to encompass joint/shared training of early childhood educators and primary school teachers** as a means of establishing and maintaining a continuum of learning experiences for young children; developing a collaborative approach to children's education, and creating a community of learners across phase 1 involving early childhood educators and infant teachers, as well as parents, school principals and early years managers
- **Develop and implement a funded national, coordinated Continual Professional Development programme for early childhood educators and primary school teachers** in how to use Aistear in the two years of the ECCE scheme, and with children aged five to six in primary school. The purpose here is to ensure that the formalisation of academic learning in pre-school is avoided, that children are not identified as 'underperforming' or stigmatised re: 'school' readiness. Rather the playification of school must be emphasised
- **Introduce pay parity for early childhood educators** and primary school teachers where qualification equivalency is evident
- **Extend the DES Early Years Education Focussed Inspections** to the early years of primary school in Phase 1. This would result in a standardised approach to inspection, continuity of experience for children across Phase 1, greater clarification in terms of the respective roles of early childhood educators and primary school teachers, and a less traumatic transition to primary school.

References

Bruce, T. 2011. *Early Childhood Education*, (3rd ed.). London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education. 2006. *Síolta: the National Quality Framework.* Available at: http://siolta.ie/

Da Ros-Voseles, D., & Fowler-Haughey, S. (2007). Why children's dispositions should matter to all teachers. Young Children: Beyond the Journal, September, 1-7.

Department of Education and Science. 1999. *Ready to Learn: White Paper on Early Childhood Education.* Available at: https://www.dcya.gov.ie/docsdb/results.asp?rl=6

Department of Education and Skills. 2016. *Early Years Education-Focuses Inspection (EYEI) in Early Years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme.* Available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/A-Guide-to-Early-years-Education-focused-Inspection-EYEI-in-Early-years-Settings-Participating-ECCE-Programme.pdf

Department of Children and Youth Affairs. 2017. *Early Years Recognised Qualifications*. Available at: https://www.dcya.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/20170223DCYAEarlyyearsQualifications.pdf

Early Childhood Ireland and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. 2013. *Aistear in Action Initiative: Final Report.* Available at: https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/aistear-in-action-report/

Fallon, J. 2015. *Teachers' Beliefs about Play in Infant Classes in Primary Schools in the Republic of Ireland*. PhD Thesis University of Dublin, Trinity College.

Hedges, H. 2015. Sophia's funds of knowledge: theoretical and pedagogical insights, possibilities and dilemmas. *International Journal of Early Years Education*. 23 (1), 83-96.

Katz, L. 2015. *Lively Minds: Distinctions between academic versus intellectual goals for young children*. Available at https://www.deyproject.org/dey-archives/lively-minds-distinctions-between-academic-versus-intellectual-goals-for-young-children

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. 2016. *Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation.* Available at: http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary-Education/Primary_Developments/Structure-and-Time-Allocation/Consultation-document_Proposals_StructureandTime_ncca.pdf

Morgan, M. 2014. *Primary Developments, Stages in Educational/Cognitive Development: Current Status and Implications.* Commissioned Research for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Available at: http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary-Education/Primary_Developments/Structure-and-Time-Allocation/mm2016.pdf

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. 2012. Priorities for Primary Education: Report on responses to 'Have your say'. Available at: http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary-Education/Primary_Developments/Structure-and-Time-Allocation/Priorities-for-Primary-education-Report-on-responses-to-Have-your-say-.pdf

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. 2009. *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.* Available at: http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/

Madden, R. 2012. *For Love or Money. Exploring the professional identity of the Early Childhood Care and Education sector in Ireland today. Masters Thesis, University of Limerick.*

Moloney, M and Pope, J. (2013) Where to now for early childhood care and education graduates? A study of the experiences of Irish BA ECCE degree graduates. *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education.*

Moloney, M. 2015a. *Untangling the knots – [k]not easy: professional identity in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector.* A paper prepared for the symposium: Early Educational Alignment – Reflecting on Context, Curriculum and Pedagogy. 15th October, 2015.

Moloney, M. 2015b. Progression or regression. Is the pre-school quality agenda perpetuating a care-education divide in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector in Ireland? *Children's Research Digest, 2*.

Moloney, M. 2015c. PLÉ submission to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs consultation on the statement of strategy 2016 – 2018. Paper written on behalf of PLÉ.

McCoy, S., Smyth, E., and Banks, J. 2012. *The Primary Classroom: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study.* Available at: http://www.ncca.ie/en/The_Primary_Classroom_ESRI_January_18_2012.pdf

O'Kane, M and Murphy, R. 2016. *Transition from Pre-school to Primary School: Audit of Transfer Documentation.* Available at: http://www.ncca.ie/en/file/early/National-Audit-Draft-10.pdf

PACEY. 2013. *What Does 'School Ready' Really Mean. Bromley: Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years*. Available at: https://www.pacey.org.uk/Pacey/media/Website-files/school%20ready/School-Ready-Report.pdf

Ring, E., Mhic Mhathúna, M., Moloney, M., Hayes, N et al., 2015. *An Examination of Concepts of School Readiness Among Parents and Educators in Ireland.* Available at: http://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=aaschsslrep

Walsh, G., Sproule, L., McGuinness, C. & Trew, K. 2011. Playful Structure: A Novel Image of Early Years Pedagogy for Primary School Classrooms, *Early Years*, 31:2, 107-119.

Contributor

Rev Dr Seán Corkery

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

primary developments
foráis sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Rev Dr Seán**
Surname	**Corkery**
Position (If applicable)	**Diocesan Advisor on Education**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Diocese of Cloyne**
Address	**2 Bellevue Circle, Mallow, Co Cork. P51 YDX6**
Telephone	**022 21692**
Email	**cloynenewevangelisation@gmail.com**
Date	**28th April 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [yes] Organisation [ ]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [yes] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I believe the loss of curriculum subjects as outlined in the three/two-stage models would be an error, and would also be an affront to the professionalism of the teaching profession.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

The holisitic well-being of children requires that their moral, spiritual and personal development be taken seriously. The proposals would seek to make RE, at best, a discrete subject. A thematic, cross-curricular approach to the teaching of RE takes the moral, spiritual and personal development seriously and should be maintained as a core curricular area.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

There will be many perspectives and views on the NCCA proposals regarding structure and allocation of time in the (primary) school day. I am taking one broad aspect around the issue of Religious Education and the child's holistic development.

The Moral, Spiritual and Personal Development of Students – The Holistic Well-being of Children

The 1998 Education Act states the requirement that schools "promote the moral, spiritual and personal development of students …. in consultation with their parents, having regard for the characteristic spirit of the school" (9.d). Laws of course change when a parliamentary majority decide according to the political and ideological thinking of the time – but what is acknowledged

in this Act is that the moral, spiritual and personal development of students is essential to the wellbeing of young people. And if young people are to spend a large portion of their youth in a primary school, then the school environment should be obliged to take into consideration this aspect of their development. One cannot and should not aim to compartmentalise the development of children as the NCCA proposals around religious education would seek to do. The principle of integrated learning is something that benefits children's holistic development and, for this reason, the proposal to remove Religious Education (RE) as a core curricular area is unacceptable.

A Retrograde Defeat for Parental Rights in the Battle for Diversity in the Irish Primary School System

The new proposals, if implemented, would have the ironic outcome of terminating choice in the Irish primary school sector. Apart from discretionary time, every school would be required to adhere to a singular expression of the core curriculum. In practice, this lack of diversity would be a defeat for parents and their families seeking greater choice in schooling options as every school would be uniform in outlook, and identical in the expression of its core daily activities. How would diversity filter through the primary school sector when the characteristic ethos of the school is downgraded into discretionary time in the school day? Where are the rights of parents in this? How is this enhancing a parent's or guardian's right to choose the type of school they wish for their child?

The Characteristic Spirit of a School

Where does this leave the school's characteristic spirit? These proposals would be making it known that the Irish State believes that management and staff can promote and maintain the characteristic spirit of the school only in discretionary (Flexi) time outside core curricular area time allocations. There is justification in being concerned that RE will be moved into discretionary (Flexi) time and therefore, will no longer be a core curriculum subject. ***This will make RE the only one of the current core curricular areas to be moved into discretionary*** **(Flexi)** ***time.*** Why is RE the one singled out for this treatment? Why not any of the other curricular areas? Is there some other agenda at work here? ***Could it be the exclusion of denominational RE from the state curriculum?*** It is difficult not to have suspicions that the State wishes to remove the Patron's programme as part of a core curricular subject area so that it can manoeuvre itself into a situation whereby it can introduce ERBE as an integrated part of the state curriculum. The reasons why ERBE would be unacceptable in a Catholic school were clearly and repeatedly outlined to NCCA in submissions made to them during their 2016 consultation on the ERBE issue.

Were the NCCA's proposal for structure and time allocation to be implemented, RE/The patron's Programme would be placed in discretionary time. How then would the Patron and Board – Catholic, Church of Ireland, Jewish, Muslin, ETB, Educate Together, etc. – ensure that their characteristic spirit is upheld in the school day? RE/The Patron's Programme would be included along with assembly time, roll call and recreation. How, in such a scenario, could RE/The Patron's Programme be expected to survive in any meaningful way? At least there are certain procedures and regulations surrounding compliance with the roll call! Would the Patron's Programme be afforded similar regulations and codes of adherence? Over time, what is now a core curricular area would simply fade out of existence by being included with what we might call the "logistics" of running the school community – a core academic subject area meriting nothing more than being classified as being equal to assemblies, recreation and roll call?

This means the ethos of a school is no longer central to the life of that school unless management and the principal enforce the issue with his or her staff. This puts immense pressure on principals among their staff, and on Boards. Indeed, it may not even be legal to exert the will to see the school's characteristic spirit maintained in the school environment. Could management and staff be in conflict over maintaining the school's characteristic spirit? Could staff dissociate themselves from the school's characteristic spirit as it is not part of the core curriculum to teach RE anymore? Where would parental choice be in all of this? Who would get to decide how discretionary time is allocated? Would it even be possible anymore to implement the Patron's Programme which should require a full academic school year to teach?

Impact on Existing Teaching Practice

What deficits in the current primary school curricular and allocation of time system are being put forward to merit this radical root and branch level of reform? Does the present system contain deficits that demand such a level of reform? What stats are being used as proof of the need for this? If so, where are they, and why is no other core curricular area being targeted in the way that RE/The Patron's Programme is being targeted? It does appear that Language, Mathematics, SESE, SPHE, PE and Arts Education remain in vogue but RE does not? Could this be the case when 90% of the population claim religious affiliation in Ireland in the Census of 2016?

With all of this in mind, the one issue that comes up repeatedly in schools is curriculum overload. Are we to wonder if this will be meaningfully addressed through these current proposals? Is the exclusion of denominational RE from the state curriculum viewed by the NCCA as resolution of this issue?

As a general observation, the 3-Stage model proposed by the NCCA is very questionable. The impact on learning would be catastrophic if subjects were only introduced in fifth and sixth class. The increased pressure on pupils and teachers in the run up to entry to second level would be intolerable unless the standard of learning outcomes, strands and strand units were to be significantly reduced. When it comes to the lowering of standards in terms of educational content, I am always reminded of my Grandfather who attended a rural primary school in Co Cork in the 1920's. His formal education ended at the age of 12. When I knew him in the 1980's, he was still able to speak of – and quote from – Greek philosophy and Shakespearean dramas which he was taught in school. They guided him throughout his long life. How are teachers to be expected to cope with nebulous curriculum areas for 8 years (preschool-4th class) and then spend two years teaching subjects to prepare children for the vast array of subjects facing them at 2nd level? Do people think through the practicalities of these things at all? Children need to be educated little and often. The Irish classrooms of 10-12/13 year olds should not be turned into pressure-cookers for two years. Educating children in a holistic manner so they can learn to reach their full potential should never be compromised. These are our children and our future, not robotic humanoids becoming economic functionaries for the purposes of commercial and fiscal viability. A society that does not care for the moral, spiritual and personal development of its children in a holistic manner does not serve the future nor social cohesion well. It is in danger of losing its soul as it prides itself in knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Summary Concerns

- **The new proposals, if implemented, mean that the spiritual dimension of the child is inconsequential**
- **The new proposals, if implemented, would have the ironic outcome of terminating choice in the Irish primary school sector. Where is the issue of parent's rights in all of this?**
- **Religious Education would be the only subject to be terminated as a core curricular subject area. What does this say? What does this mean for RE as an academic discipline in the future?**
- **Experience on the ground is telling us that parents, teachers and Boards of Management are largely unaware of what is being is planned/considered for implementation. Are teachers being made aware of this? Has the NCCA meet with teachers on a national-wide basis to consult and work with them. Their voice is surely amongst the most important in all of this? How fair or reasonable is it to carry out consultations without the full cooperation or awareness of parents, teachers and Boards of Management?**

Submitted by

Rev Dr Seán Corkery,

Diocesan Advisor on Education in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Cloyne.

Home

Contributor

Richard Casey

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Richard**
Surname	**Casey**
Position (If applicable)	**Class teacher**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Primary School**
Address	**The Orchard, Causeway, Co. Kerry**
Telephone	**0851128240**
Email	**Richard92Casey@yahoo.co.uk**
Date	**3/5/17**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal ⬅ Organisation ☐

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes ⬅ No ☐

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I agree that it could be beneficial to the younger classes to participate in the three stage model. I feel the three stage may be more beneficial than the two stage as children would be ready for subjects in 1st class.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

I would be worried about the changes to subject times. I feel that schools may misuse times given for flexible time. I have particular fears about how religious education may be treated if not given an allotted time in the curriculum and this could result in religious education being taught less and less.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

I have particular concerns over the provision for RE in the new proposal. I fear, speaking to a lot of teachers, that it is not being taught for its allotted time and this would become far worse if it was put on flexible time as it may be deemed as an unnecessary part of the curriculum. Teaching about faith is something that must be protected in faith-based schools.

Contributor

Royal Society of Chemistry

Education
Thomas Graham House
Science Park, Milton Road
Cambridge CB4 0WF, UK

Tel +44 (0) 1223 420066
Direct line +44 (0) 1223 432125
Email morgann@rsc.org

www.rsc.org

Iain Burns
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
35 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2
D02 KH36

26 April 2017

Dear Iain Burns,

Consultation proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

The Royal Society of Chemistry is the world's leading chemistry community with over 1200 members in Ireland. We invest in supporting science/chemistry education in Ireland, including: our Learn Chemistry Partnership connecting >250 schools to the chemistry community, teacher professional development[i], resources[ii], events, and the Spectroscopy in a Suitcase programme. Through our Dublin-based Education Coordinator we provide support for primary teachers with free resources and workshops designed to give teachers greater confidence with teaching science.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposals to redevelop the Irish primary curriculum. Science has a central role at primary school and should enable every child to begin to explore, investigate and understand the world. Ireland has strong international reputation as an innovative nation[iii], but if this strength is to be maintained Ireland needs to nurture the next generation of scientists. A high quality science education not only provides the population with valuable knowledge and skills but also enables students to see science as a career pathway for them. Studies show that attitudes towards science become fixed at primary school age[iv]. Relying on good science education beginning at secondary school is likely to be too little, too late.

We are in the midst of a large programme of work developing a cohesive chemistry curriculum for ages 5-19, ensuring appropriate progression of knowledge and skills. We have recent experience supporting curriculum reform in Wales, Scotland and England, and would be very happy to share our research and expertise with the NCCA at the appropriate time.

Whatever curricula structure the NCCA chooses to adopt, we recommend that science is given a central role, and the curriculum content should be constructed to ensure clarity of purpose and progression at each age range. This will ensure learning is meaningful and students can make informed decisions in their lives, education and career. Teachers and schools should also be supported through the reforms by pre-empting training needs, resources and necessary guidance.

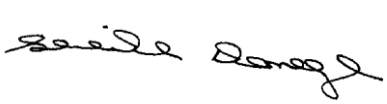
This communication (including any attachments) is intended for the use of the addressee only and may contain confidential, privileged or copyright material. It may not be relied upon or disclosed to any other person without the consent of the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC). If you have received it in error, please contact us immediately. Any advice given by the RSC has been carefully formulated but is necessarily based on the information available, and the RSC cannot be held responsible for accuracy or completeness. In this respect, the RSC owes no duty of care and shall not be liable for any resulting damage or loss. The RSC acknowledges that a disclaimer cannot restrict liability at law for personal injury or death arising through a finding of negligence.

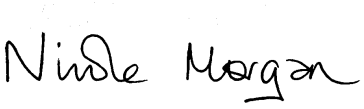
THE QUEEN'S AWARDS FOR ENTERPRISE INTERNATIONAL TRADE 2013

VAT registration number GB 342 1764 71 Registered charity number 207890

Please don't hesitate to contact us once you are starting to work on the detail of the curriculum content.

Yours sincerely,





Dr Sheila Donegan
Chair, Education Division Ireland

Nicole Morgan FRSC
Education Policy Manager

---

[i] Further detail about our CPD offering is available at http://www.rsc.org/careers/cpd/teachers/

[ii] Our Learn Chemistry website provides over 4000 resources to enhance the teaching and learning of chemistry http://www.rsc.org/learn-chemistry

[iii] Why invest in Innovation, Research & Development, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation https://www.djei.ie/en/What-We-Do/Innovation-Research-Development/Why-invest-in-RD/ -

[iv] Aspires project report (Kings College London, 2013) http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/research/aspires/ASPIRES-final-report-December-2013.pdf

This communication (including any attachments) is intended for the use of the addressee only and may contain confidential, privileged or copyright material. It may not be relied upon or disclosed to any other person without the consent of the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC). If you have received it in error, please contact us immediately. Any advice given by the RSC has been carefully formulated but is necessarily based on the information available, and the RSC cannot be held responsible for accuracy or completeness. In this respect, the RSC owes no duty of care and shall not be liable for any resulting damage or loss. The RSC acknowledges that a disclaimer cannot restrict liability at law for personal injury or death arising through a finding of negligence.

VAT registration number GB 342 1764 71 Registered charity number 207890

Contributor

Sligo School Project

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Robert**
Surname	**Hamm**
Position (If applicable)	**Secretary**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Sligo School Project CLG**
Address	**Abbeyquarter** **Sligo**
Telephone	**071 9143073**
Email	**sligosp@eircom.net** **or** **soha2000@gmx.net**
Date	**8th of April, 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

This submission is presented on behalf of Sligo School Project CLG (patron body of Sligo School Project).

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes, we consent for the submission to be published online at the end of the consultation.

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

see under 3.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

see under 3.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

NCCA has opened a debate about a new structure for the primary school curriculum, and about a new time allocation model.

Curriculum is not as clear-cut a term as it may seem. In the case of the primary curriculum it is commonly identified with the written document that states the aims and objectives of the schooling of children, the content of subjects that is to be taught in primary schools in order to achieve these aims and objectives, and the principles of teaching used.

Yet, there are other ways to understand curriculum in a more encompassing manner, be it in discussions about hidden curriculum or in those about cultural curriculum. Unfortunately they do not feature in the published proposal for a reconsideration of the primary curriculum referring to structure and time. This is a self-inflicted constraint. It closes down certain avenues of thinking/talking about school practice/s that would have the potential to significantly add to the development of a more pluralist landscape of innovative and

differentiated approaches within the education sector. We cannot see a reason to restrict the areas of discussion on such a narrowed view. It would be highly desirable for this self-constraint to be shaken off.

In fact, as soon as practitioners are involved in discussions about curriculum there is already an immediate tendency to widen the scope of arguments and areas considered.

In the consultative conference on the NCCA-proposal/s held in Dublin on the 28th of April 2017 there were two short periods during which participants were asked to briefly discuss the proposed stage-models of restructuring the curriculum, and the proposed revision of time allocation. The group discussions were introduced and facilitated by NCCA-members who provided a framework of questions to be considered by participants. Striking in these short exchanges was the difficulty to remain within the narrow constraints as provided by the facilitators. When discussing about curriculum teachers, principals, early childcare practitioners inevitably move away from discussing a written document (or collection of written documents). They instantly bring in the contradictions that they experience and the fields of tension within which they shape their daily practice. Issues that were mentioned in the groups included elements like power structures, teacher mentalities, parental pressure and expectations, exam orientation (standardised testing), resourcing, class-sizes, school size, social equality, rigid school inspections (WSE). This listing is certainly not exhaustive and it can be easily expanded, taking into account e. g. elements like team pressure, pluralism of philosophical underpinnings, constructions of childhood etc.

Another observation from the same conference concerns the presentations of two primary teachers and a primary principal on their current practice in their respective classes, schools. The examples shown referred to:

a) the revision of the delivery of mathematics (and inclusion of elements of coding) resulting in a restructured time-frame (i. e. a full day of maths/coding every two weeks) combinded with a largely explorative learning culture with little interference from adult side;

b) the integration of all subject areas in a theme based approach towards classroom planning and practice;

c) the restructuring of classroom practice based on the implementation of a purely play based learning, with a resulting restructuring of physical space/s in classrooms (school).

Albeit that it was not explicitly mentioned by the moderator/s, these examples were presented not at random, rather they were shown as exemplary “good practice.” What was remarkable about the presentations was the context in which they were placed. Given that the conference was a consultation process as a first step into a revision, overhaul and re-structuring of the primary curriculum these examples gave an impression of the range of practice that is actually possible at present, i. e. against the background of the *current* curriculum.

This is an important observation. It confirms the relative openness of the current curriculum (here understood in the narrow sense of written document, see above) for creative local adaptation and implementation.

As all practitioners know quite well there is an immense overlap between subject areas. In fact the subject areas as distinguished (not only) in the current primary school curriculum are simply a set of theoretical concept of interpreting worldly phenomena and processes in a compartmentalised manner. As such they have been historically established in ideological battles over influence zones in what can be claimed to be legitimate “knowledge.”

From the viewpoint of lived experience (of children and teachers in primary school) the distinctions are a superficial grid that is imposed on this experience. One example[1] for the myriad of others that happen day-in day-out in primary schools in Ireland.

Babies and Bathwater

It started as a scientific exploration about capacities, litres, containers, bottles and their volume, but science is anything but dry matter …

… so it developed into an array of other areas, balance, grace, height, weight …

… until eventually the babies called for attention, which was duly granted …

1 This is from the webpage www.sligoschoolproject.ie

,,, and after having them all cleaned they were dressed and fed …

… while the bathwater remained for more scientific exploration.

In terms of the current curriculum this activity covers as a minimum the subject areas: Mathematics, Science, History, SPHE, English, plus the core curriculum of the school. Hence for the teacher it is possible to subsume the activity in any of these subject areas in her notes (planning and/or recording). However, the mental operation that is necessary to rip the activity apart for subsuming (certain elements of) it under whatever is considered subject-specifically correct snippets of knowledge easily becomes a hindrance in allowing the activity flow in practice. In concrete terms: If the teacher had allowed herself to be stifled by the restrictions imposed by the subject area (in this case originally "Mathematics") she would have most likely stopped the children from pampering the babies … and by doing so prevented the appropriation of a (learning) activity through the children, prevented thus the conversations that ensued over topics of significance for them (their siblings, their growth, their physical and social needs, wants, wishes, demands), prevented the role play in which traditional gender roles are practically challenged, and simply taken out the fun of the whole situation.

Similarly to the presentations at the consultative conference the baby/bathwater example provided here could be seen as good practice – under the conditions of the current curriculum. Yet, there is a process of bending the curriculum (i. e. the written document/s) involved in the presentation of such good practice in teacher's planning notes, reports and the underlying mental (and time) efforts. This process warrants at least two comments.

a) It gives evidence of the actual possibilities offered by the current curriculum, and the flexibility that it allows if teachers are willing to enter into (mental and practical) negotiations over a creative and locally adapted implementation. This is a positive element.

b) It gives evidence of the actual necessities imposed on teachers in (mental and practical) negotiations over a creative and locally adapted implementation of the current curriculum. The time and mental effort that is necessary to bend the written documentation to fit in with the subject driven approach appears completely inappropriate. This is a negative element.

It could be argued that the current curriculum as such does not explicitly require teachers to engage in this process of jamming activities into subject areas (i. e. it is not specifically demanded in the written document). But this is exactly the point where the first observation from the consultative conference comes into play, teachers discussing the curriculum in terms of their practice. It is a shared experience amongst practitioners that school inspectors often push for a certain interpretation of the curriculum in which subject areas are central, and also the time allocation based on these subject areas as incorporated in the current curriculum in spite of the fact that the time allocations are only a suggested framework.

Teachers who use the suggested framework "in the most flexible way" in a bid to "provide a comprehensive and coherent learning experience" for the children in their classes by "adapting the curriculum to the particular needs and circumstances" in "awareness of the distinctive character of the school" therefore easily face a battle against inappropriate attempts for standardisation that are in fact in contravention to the spirit of the current curriculum.

A discussion about a change of curriculum structure and time allocation as opened now by NCCA fails to address this conflict in a straight manner. Indeed, to a large degree the conflicts on the ground do not ensue over issues of content of curriculum as a written document, they rather ensue over issues of the use of the document, its interpretation according to different visions and within certain power structures.

In this regard the discussion of a revised curriculum structure and time allocation simply misses the point.

It is accepted that there is a chance that a revision of the structure of the curriculum (i. e. the written document) could bring about a liberation from the (mental) shackles of subjects, thus opening the avenue to a more holistic approach in teaching in primary schools. In this regard the proposal of NCCA does not reach far enough.

More important however seems a discussion about an increase in the likelihood of schools taking serious the request to adapt the curriculum to their local circumstances and withstanding the demands for standardisation that is put on them. It is here that NCCA should play an important role by making clear – in relation to the current curriculum, as much as in relation to any revised version thereof – that it is the obligation of each school and each teacher to take as their starting point for planning and implementation of their practice the *real children* in their classes and not the fictional child that is implied in a cross-sectional average standard.

Contributor
Safefood

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

primary developments
fóráis sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Charmaine**
Surname	**McGowan**
Position (If applicable)	**Scientific Officer**
Organisation (If applicable)	**safefood**
Address	**7 Eastgate Avenue, Little Island, Co Cork**
Telephone	**021 2304100**
Email	**cmcgowan@safefood.eu**
Date	**25 May 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [***safe*food**]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [Yes] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

Not relevant to our submission except that the development of health literacy and media literacy needs to be incremental/spiral in nature with appropriate skills development for different ages/stages.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

***safe*food** is open to changes in this area provided there is time allocated for media literacy education, with particular emphasis on digital literacy, which has become a critical building block as new literacies have evolved. This is also the case for health literacy education.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

***safe*food** has identified a critical need for media literacy education for primary school children. We believe that media literacy should be embedded as a fundamental part of the redeveloped primary curriculum.

Technology is rapidly changing how we consume media and children as young as three-years old are exposed to thousands of media messages. There is growing concern about the negative effects this over-exposure to advertising and other marketing stimuli is having on children and

their ability to distinguish between real and fake, advertising and editorial, paid and unpaid media messages.

Research by WHO, and more recently by ***safe*food** and IHF in Ireland, points to unequivocal evidence that childhood obesity is influenced by marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages high in saturated fat, salt and/or free sugars (HFSS). One of WHO's core recommendations on Ending Childhood Obesity is to reduce children's exposure to marketing by junk food brands (HFSS foods). WHO has called on Member States to introduce restrictions on marketing of HFSS foods to children, covering all media, including digital, and to close any regulatory loopholes.

This issue is complicated. As we see it, there are two options to respond to the situation. One, is to ban all advertising and marketing of HFSS foods that target children specifically. The second is to develop a mechanism which empowers children and allows them to cope with the effects of this stimuli. As media is now omnipresent, controlling the exposure of children to advertising, particularly online, presents difficulties. Academic research suggests that the second option which focuses on digital literacy in the classroom is more practical. Because children's choices are influenced by what they see, it's crucial that they are equipped with the life skills to make sense of the media landscape around them. This view is supported by the BAI's Media Literacy Policy and the Digital Agenda for Europe which seeks to promote digital literacy, skills and inclusion in member countries.

While there is currently a concerted effort to improve digital literacy in schools, those efforts are more about digital usage and safety implications rather than the actual messaging, where it originates and how it influences the choices we make. Media literacy programmes for primary school children have been introduced in Canada, the UK and most recently Taiwan. The gap in this area in Ireland leaves children exposed to unregulated and unpoliced hidden advertising. It will also help them to develop problem-solving skills in technology-rich environments, an area in which, Ireland scores below average, according to the recent OECD PIAAC adult skills survey (http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/).

The Action Plan for Education has identified the need for a particular focus on numeracy and digital skills in the redeveloped primary curriculum. Areas identified include coding and computer science and the development of digital literacy skills in students.

MediaWise is a media literacy resource which has been developed by teachers and experts to addresses the gap in media and digital literacy critical thinking skills in primary school children. It is the first critical step necessary to prepare school children from Junior Infants right up to 6th class for further digital and computer related learning. MediaWise is cross-curricular and links to English, SPHE, SESE, Drama, Visual Arts and Mathematics in the existing curricula.

Separate to this, a critical issue is the time allocation for health literacy education (which currently sits in SPHE) and how this part of the curriculum will be treated in the new structure. The time allocated to SPHE is currently limited and the subject is vast in its content. The development of lifeskills associated with SPHE needs to be allocated sufficient time in order to meet the needs of our young population.

Contributor

Science Foundation Ireland

Science Foundation Ireland
To: NCCA Primary School Curriculum Structure and Time Allocation Consultation

We apologise for the delay in sending this however we only became aware of the consultation process at the end of last week.

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) are very supportive of the review of the structure and time allocation in the primary curriculum. Through its education and public engagement programme, SFI both directly runs and co-funds significant activity supporting the teaching and learning of science in primary schools. The most significant of these programmes is the SFI Discover Primary Science and Maths (DPSM) programme which supports at least 1,000 teachers annually through a structured CPD programme, based on teaching through an inquiry-based learning framework. The challenges faced by teachers in this programme are varied but the time allocation to the SESE curriculum, generally one hour of science lessons per week, is regularly cited. SFI has recently conducted a significant evaluation study on the impact of the DPSM programme; this informs our consultation input.

In relation to the structure of the curriculum, SFI has found that as teachers apply inquiry-based learning methodologies, their confidence grows in engaging students in cross-curricular learning. Recognising this formally in the structure of the curriculum will be important to help teachers adopt these methodologies and move away from strict subject structures. SFI supports the recognition of informal and non-formal learning in the primary school curriculum. The SFI Awards of Science and Maths Excellence is one such format for recognition of whole school approaches to delivering a curriculum.

In relation to the time allocation, SFI has concern over the current limited time allocated to teaching of science in primary schools. This allocation often leads to the more challenging scientific concepts being the least attended to, due to lack of time and confidence amongst teachers. Allowing a monthly time allocation should allow teachers the freedom to spend longer, concentrated periods on challenging topics which could lend itself to certain aspects of the science curriculum. Changing the structure to increase flexible time should facilitate greater engagement in informal and non-formal learning programmes to assist in the teaching of science and maths (e.g. Discover Primary Science and Maths, RDS Primary Science Fair, Scratch). SFI would recommend that guidance and access to CPD is mainstreamed to all teachers on the impact of cross-curricular teaching methods to increase the impact of the flexible time allowance. It would urge the NCCA to consider a greater percentage allocation of minimum state curriculum time to the SESE curriculum.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the above with you further.

Dr Abigail Ruth Freeman l Director
Strategy & Communications

Margie McCarthy CEng FIEI | Head of Education and Public Engagement
Strategy & Communications Directorate

Science Foundation Ireland
For what's next

Contributor

Scoil Bhride

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Anne**
Surname	**Flanagan**
Position (If applicable)	**Principal**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Scoil Bhríde**
Address	**Kilcullen, Co.Kildare**
Telephone	**045-481428**
Email	**Kilcullenns.ias@eircom.net**
Date	**16.05.2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [X]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [X] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

The 1999 Curriculum is now embedded in schools and certain subject areas are being revised aNd reviewed. The implementation of this curriculum as is, involved changes in teaching methodologies which took time and years to consolidate and bed down. Through whole school planning and School Self Evaluation schools have become very proactive in reflecting and assessing their individual needs and in responding and meeting those needs. Huge pressures exist to bring in all sort of initiatives and programmes to be implemented into primary schools to solve all ills that exist in society. We are coping and managing the existing framework very effectively and to my mind the curriculum as is, is functioning and effective. Change for change sake is not necessary and not always good.

We have developed an effective model of teaching and learning in our schools that works for us and through tweaking and reforms identified by us, we are delivering high quality well rounded and highly motivated pupils to the second level system. Were something to change, may I suggest an improved pupil teacher ratio and that the level of funding and resources being given to primary school be increased.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

While Aistear is praiseworthy and a great curriculum for young children up to six, I have concerns about extending it upward to older children.

Challenges

- Inadequate resources
- Large class sizes and room size in the majority of our primary schools-too small to cater

for bigger and older children

- Aistear requires lots of space and pre-planning and storage space for resources-most schools don't have any
- Developmentally children, as they get older like structure and learn effectively in an organised, sequential and well managed learning environment that caters for diverse and varying needs. Some special needs children cannot cope in a play environment and find it stressful
- Quality of teaching and learning is harder to assess and quantify and learning objectives could be hazy and vague
- A considerable amount of C.P.D. for teachers would be required if the Aistear model were to be extended. When would this be done? During school time?
- Teachers currently teach using thematic approach and link various curricular subjects. Significant time would be required to devise, plan, implement, assess, set up class, clean up, storage-time if Aistear extended.

The 2 stage model I believe would be detrimental to pupil's development and readiness for second level. The excellent standard we have established in the core areas of literacy and numeracy would be decimated and our system would come under increasing demands from all corners to implement various programmes- which could be selected by a teacher depending on their own personal experiences and interests. Core subjects and allocated time are essential to the smooth running of schools. It's difficult enough to ensure progression and use a variety of approaches without totally pulling the rug away and giving up 40% flexible time in school. Is there any empirical data to suggest that this model is more beneficial than the existing model. Why is radical change necessary?

We have one of the best educational systems in the world. Teachers are the experts, the most knowledgeable and experienced and undermining a system that works and changing it will ultimately lower standards. Serious concern that some subject areas will not be taught e.g. Art, music. P.E. and will be pushed to the fringes, subjects that may require certain expertise. On the contrary some teachers will devote more time to their preferred subject and other subjects may suffer. This system would be very difficult to manage and children leaving primary school would not have had an equal exposure to instruction in the various subject areas.

There would be scattered profiles of achievement and equal opportunities for children would be minimised. In certain circumstances the core subjects may be the only one taught to raise standards to the detriment of the personal and holistic development of every child.

Boards of Management who are responsible for the running of schools would have to ensure all children received a well-rounded, balanced and holistic education. Additional flexible time is hard to supervise and control/manage. Board of Management members are volunteers and need strict guidelines and regulations in place to guide them.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

As I reflect on the curriculum proposals and time allocation I feel as a Catholic school our ability to implement our ethos would be undermined. We have diverse religions and views, successfully and respectfully integrated. Our school, our pupils, parents and teachers question and welcome and respect diversity. This fosters a welcoming community where all are welcome and included. The majority of our parents appreciate, support and want a Catholic Ethos in this school. They may not be practising Catholics but they certainly appreciate and welcome the teaching of R.E. in our school. Were this to change I feel there would be significant consequences. Mental health issues are becoming increasingly apparent in young children. The promotion of spirituality (whatever code) significantly helps young children and adds to their security and personal development. Traditional values and beliefs of the majority cannot be sacrificed or diminished to appease all. Enrolment issues in schools should not be confused with the teaching of religion in our schools as there would be a backlash from our parents if R.E. was removed. In a "flexible" time situation R.E. may be abandoned by teachers under pressure to improve in other curricular areas or to indulge specific interests. The teaching of R.E. is therapeutic for children allowing time for reflection, prayer etc. It enhances moral development and promotes a caring considerate community who look out for, support and help each other, it places our schools at the heart of the community. Society cannot risk abandoning this moral development and must acknowledge the achievements of a Catholic based education system. Religion, as taught in Irish primary schools provides a strong ethical framework for the children in these schools which no secular instruction can replace.

Contributor

Scoil Mhuire Girls' National School

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Mary**
Surname	**McIvor**
Position (If applicable)	**School principal**
Organisation (If applicable)	**Scoil Mhuire Girls' National School**
Address	**Main Road, Lucan, County Dublin**
Telephone	**01-6280056**
Email	**Smgns.lucan@gmail.com**
Date	**26th May, 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [Yes]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [Yes] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

- I believe that the curriculum in its current format is working well and delivering for pupils. I believe there is good teaching and learning taking place in our schools under the current model. I am concerned that the changes being proposed are too radical and perhaps not even necessary. Schools are being challenged by a multiplicity of demands which has the effect of eroding time from the curriculum. We struggle with over-crowded classrooms, less than adequate school buildings in many cases and a host of new educational initiatives. These are challenges which may be more 'real' than 'curriculum overload' per se.
- I am also concerned that Government must not narrow the focus on the curriculum as we know it. Initiatives on Literacy and Numeracy must not be ideologically driven at the expense of the Arts, etc. Could the proposed new models be used in this way leading to a diminution of other subjects across the curriculum?
- I am concerned that a thematic structure would impact negatively on individual subjects. Aistear is being proposed as a curriculum framework while many experienced teachers view it rather as a methodology. Aistear has not been sufficiently resourced and / or embedded in schools at this time such that we can determine if it is the best model to form such a large part of the reform suggested here. Will schools find themselves having to spend hours to determine what themes will form part of Aistear? Will critical content and learning outcomes be lost in 'playful teaching and learning?' The intrinsic value of subjects may be lost in the generality of delivery and a watered down curriculum may be the end result. I believe standards in teaching and learning will fall at the expense of either of the proposed models.
- I question whether we are at a stage where the two free ECCE years should form part of either the two or the three stage model proposed. Primary schools are subject to inspection by the DES in terms of our standards of teaching and learning, we are governed by Rules and Regulations. Can we be sure that ECCE providers work to a national standard?

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**

- The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
- The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
- Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

- I am concerned about the justifications for setting about changing the suggested minimum weekly time framework which was set out in the 1999 Primary Curriculum.
- I completely disagree with the proposal to move R.E. out of the Core Curriculum and into flexible time.
- I believe moving R.E. into 'flexible time' would have serious negative consequences for our school's ethos and specifically for the holistic vision of the child which we hold dear.
- It would also compromise the religious education and formation of the child, which is central to our school.
- I believe that putting R.E. into 'flexible time' along with non –teaching activities such as breaks and roll call would be problematic, suggesting, for example, that it is a non-teaching activity.
- Moving R.E. to 'flexible time' could potentially diminish the right of parents to the religious education and formation of their child.
- I believe there is a risk that ERB and Ethics will be introduced as part of either a curricular theme or area or even as a discreet subject. This would be the death knell for the ethos of the school and our Catholic R.E. programme.
- I feel the question as to whether time should be allocated on a weekly, monthly, termly, annual basis is less important. If a weekly allocation is set out as heretofore, school principals and teachers can do the Math on that. A weekly allocation gives clarity and the Inspectorate allow discretion here for non-core subjects to be taught fortnightly/ in a block of time to allow for project work, etc, once schools comply with the allocation overall.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

Assigning the R.E programme to 'flexible time' is nothing short of an infringement of the rights of parents to the religious education and formation of their children. It will bring enormous pressure to bear on the maintenance of the ethos of the school and our holistic vision of the child.

The curriculum structure as it stands is serving us well. I am not confident that the proposed new models will offer a better structure. It could be perceived as change for the sake of change.

Contributor
SPHE Network

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Margaret**
Surname	**Nohilly**
Position (If applicable)	**Chairperson of the SPHE Network**
Organisation (If applicable)	**SPHE Network**
Address	**c/o Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Rd, Limerick**
Telephone	**061 774744**
Email	**Margaret.Nohilly@mic.ul.ie**
Date	**April 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [X]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [X] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

Considering the current structure of the curriculum, and taking into account the structure of the Aistear framework, along with research on how young children learn, the SPHE Network agrees with the proposed changes. Either model has the potential to allow for meaningful integration and to allow for thematic learning. Both the review of the Curriculum phase 1 and 2 conducted by the NCCA, along with various Inspectorate reports highlight that time remains one of the greatest challenges to teachers in terms of curriculum implementation, and with careful planning both the three/two stage model has the potential to alleviate some of the time pressure.

Two stage model
Benefits

- Two stage model allows for thematic learning and meaningful integration
- The theme of wellbeing is central to Aistear. Many policy developments in relation to wellbeing in education have taken place in recent years. Wellbeing is a central theme of Aistear and is a subject in the revised Junior Cycle. The Wellbeing Guidelines, published for primary schools (2015), highlight the importance of the SPHE curriculum in developing a wellbeing culture in schools and furthermore promote the development of a positive school culture and climate as central to wellbeing, which is one of three contexts for implementing the SPHE curriculum
- All of the Aistear themes have direct links to the SPHE curriculum which indicates that the subject area is core to children's education

Challenges

- Aistear themes are subject to interpretation. For example, the theme of wellbeing is open to multiple interpretations and has links with many subject areas in the primary curriculum. Pupils may experience themes based on a teacher's preference, or comfort level in delivering a subject area and a subject area like SPHE that to date has limited curriculum time and limited opportunity for continued professional development in the area may not be central in every classroom as pupils experience and explore the theme of wellbeing
- Teachers have never received continued professional development in Aistear. While continued professional development is available, it has not been offered at whole school level and teachers experience of the Aistear curriculum varies greatly
- The two stage model is a very different approach to the curriculum that is currently taught from Infants to Second class. This model will involve more change and challenge in terms of integration that the proposed three stage model

Three Stage Model

Benefits

- The exploration of curriculum areas leading onto subjects, given that all subjects are given the appropriate time ensures that all children's talents and aptitudes are explored appropriately
- Considering the link between the four Aistear Themes and the subject area of SPHE, the three stage model has the potential for a more definitive focus on SPHE at an earlier stage in the child's education at primary level. It is recognised in the consultation document that a number of areas require additional time for meaningful engagement and one of the areas noted is SPHE
- The three stage model is likely to facilitate the exploration of the discrete areas of SPHE at an earlier stage; Substance Use, Relationships and Sexuality Education and Personal Safety education. This is very significant given the mandatory nature of the Stay Safe programme.
- The three stage model has much potential for real and meaningful alignment between the early years programmes and Infant education which is a welcome and necessary development

Challenges

- The distinction between curriculum areas and subjects requires considerable research, thought and explanation to mark this phase of education as distinct from the current focus on subject areas
- This model may be interpreted as three distinct phases in children's learning

In conclusion, the SPHE Network recommend the two stage approach model for a revised curriculum. Overall, the Network believe this model allows for the most meaningful integration with SPHE. However, it must be noted that there needs to be further information provided on the three stage model, in particular the distinction between curriculum areas and subjects.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

- Reflecting on the minimum weekly time framework suggested in the introduction to the curriculum (DES, 1999), SPHE is afforded the least amount of time on the curriculum. The consultation document referenced a study conducted by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) on the primary curriculum. This study found that teachers often trade off one subject against the other in an attempt to prioritise teaching and learning in other areas. Research conducted by Nohilly and Tynan (2017) with teachers on the topic of wellbeing highlighted that often SPHE is a subject area that gets side-lined given the limited amount of time it has on the curriculum and considering that it can be integrated with other subjects. Department of Education circular 0056/2011 required school to allocate

additional time to literacy and numeracy and this has only diluted even further the time available to SPHE and other subjects. This dilution of certain subject areas needs to be challenged in future proposals with SPHE being recognised as a core subject of the primary curriculum and given a time allocation that reflects this.

- While the proposal of flexible time is a welcome development to better meet the needs of children in terms of their learning and schools in terms of their planning, teaching and assessing, the model as presented needs to be reconsidered. Given all the elements that are currently proposed as part of in flexible time; (patron's programme, recreation, assemblies and roll call) this does not allow for real and meaningful flexible time to give teacher's the opportunity to really meet the need that it is intended for. There is a danger that it will be "business as usual" in denominational schools in particular, which would be a missed opportunity for real reform.

- The SPHE Network recommend specifying time allocations for themes/curriculum areas/subjects to ensure that a curriculum is delivered by all teachers that is broad and balanced. The amount of time that is dedicated to each subject needs to be reconsidered. The aforementioned INTO study highlighted that the time currently allocated to a number of subjects is not enough to ensure children are given adequate space and meaningful engagement with the curriculum and SPHE is listed among these subjects.

- In 2000, the Department of Education Inspectorate published a report on the findings of a thematic evaluation of SPHE in forty primary schools. The report highlighted that in 8% of classrooms, direct teaching in SPHE was occurring on a very irregular basis. The main explanation given by teachers was the time pressure they felt in coping with all areas of the primary curriculum. (Department of Education and Skills, 2009)

- Allocating time on a monthly basis would allow greater flexibility to schools to explore a topic of a subject area in greater depth across a wider timeframe and also has the potential to allow for more meaningful integration across curriculum areas and subjects

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

'Social, personal and health education (SPHE) provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development, health and wellbeing of the individual child, to help him/her create and maintain supportive relationships and become and active and responsible citizen in society (Government of Ireland, 1999, p 2)'. Professor Mark Morgan's video clip on stages of children's learning, which is available on the NCCA website highlights that 'social and emotional development is important in learning, that cultivation of resilience is hugely important in learning'. Social and emotional learning must be at the core of curriculum learning for children.

In summary the SPHE Network believes that of those proposed, the following developments would be most advantageous to children's learning and teacher's professional development:

- There are potential benefits and challenges to both the two and three stage model, but given the amount of information available on the three stage model, the two stage model is recommended by the SPHE Network
- Allocating specific time for themes/curriculum areas on a monthly basis will ensure the curriculum is delivered in a broad and balanced way
- SPHE and related areas/themes should be at the core of a revised curriculum going forward

References

Department of Education and Skills (2009). *Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in the Primary School.* Evaluation Support and Research Unit

Government of Ireland. (1999) *Social, Personal and Health Education.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

NCCA (2016). *Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation.* Available at: http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary-Education/Primary_Developments/Structure-and-Time-Allocation/Consultation-document_Proposals_StructureandTime_ncca.pdf. (Accessed 26/04/2017).

Contributor

St Fiacc's NS

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

primary developments
forás sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**John**
Surname	**Brennan**
Position (If applicable)	**Principal**
Organisation (If applicable)	**St Fiacc's NS**
Address	**Killeshin Road, Graiguecullen, Carlow**
Telephone	**0599132444**
Email	**St.fiaccs@gmail.com**
Date	**25/05/2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [x]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

I am in favour of the transition to a three staged model. I feel the three stage model allows for a smoother progression from thematic learning to curricular area learning and finally to subject based learning in an age appropriate fashion whereas the two stage model, while accommodating both junior and senior ends of Primary, doesn't serve the needs of the 1st – 4th cohorts.
Frankly if the foundations of literacy and numeracy aren't mastered to an acceptable degree then pupils are going to struggle to access and enjoy deep understanding in the other subject areas. Perhaps spending more time in the language and numerical domains in the middle classes will reap dividends for the pupils at the latter stages of Primary. For too long now, teachers have been looking for more flexibility and autonomy to make these calls for the benefit of their pupils.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

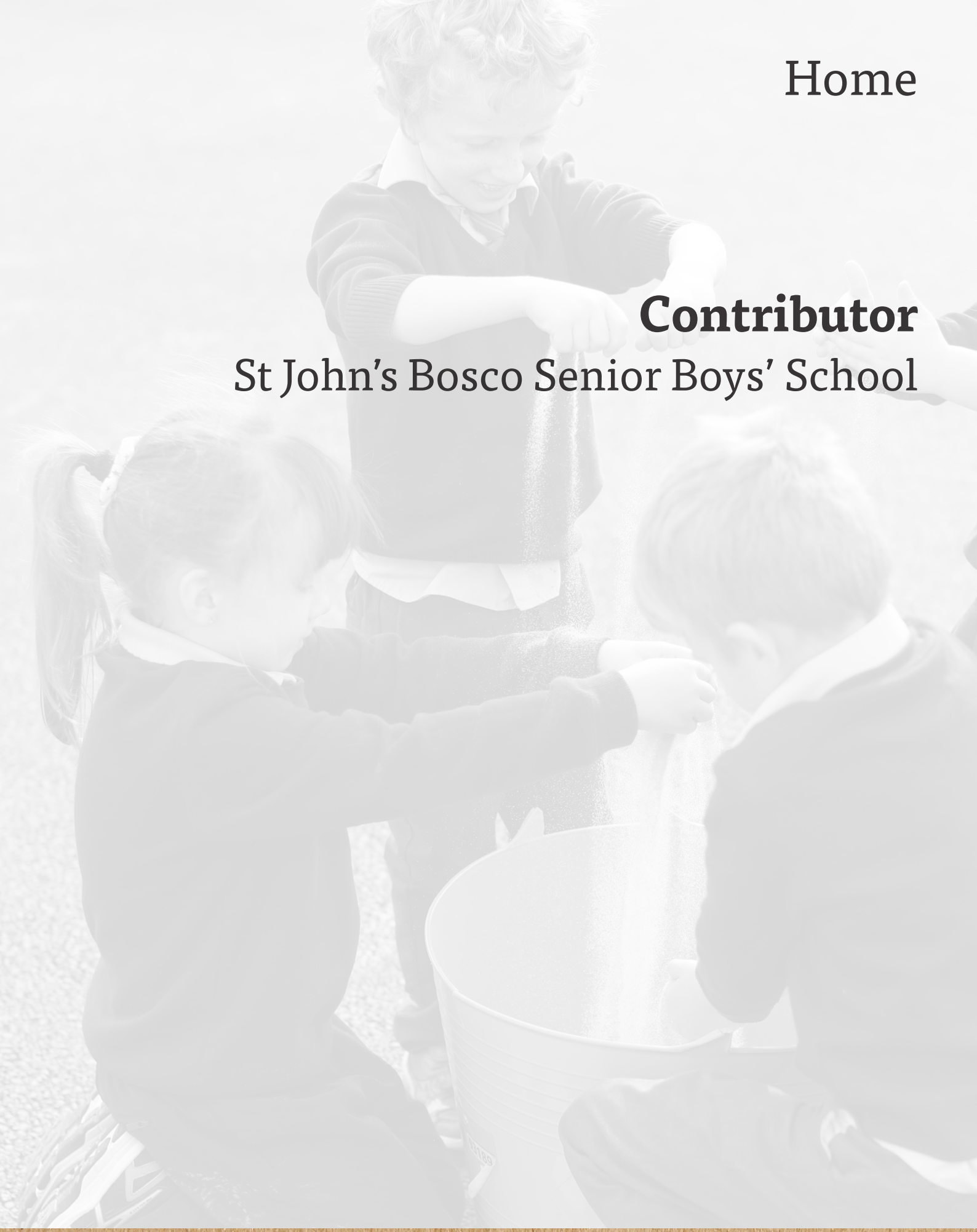
I cautiously welcome the minimum state curriculum time as on the one hand it maintains the weekly requirements for Language and Numeracy and on the other hand allows autonomy to spread other subject areas over a month as opposed to a week. This is a more fluid model. However, some of the flexible time is questionable. For example, roll call and recreation time is fixed on a daily basis so I don't see any change here. There will still be time pressures in accommodating Education about religions and beliefs and ethics alongside Religious Education unless the former is subsumed into SPHE and/or SESE.

Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share? I broadly welcome the proposals. The litany of changes since 1999 have impacted detrimentally on the delivery of the Primary Curriculum. On the ground, the demands of the national Literacy/numeracy initiative; the introduction of Aistear, the proposed language curriculum, the progress in ICT and the growing awareness of pupil emotional well-being have resulted in a hurried and overloaded curriculum with many subjects side-lined to accommodate more pressing requirements. And yet Education about Religions and beliefs and ethics may also have to be taught. Therefore, the curriculum in its current form will not sustain these latest developments.

The new stages will allow Aistear as a basis for thematic learning in infants and not merely be viewed as an add on. However, Aistear has never been properly resources by the DES and the PTR in infants is still too high to cater for the complex needs of a typical class in an urban area of disadvantage (without DEIS status). Aistear has neither been properly resourced nor embedded to a degree that it could be assumed that it forms a basis for reform both at preschool and Primary. Aistear thus far, is not compulsory and its implementation at best amounts to *ad hocery*. However, with on site training and funding, it has potential to act as a platform for infant to 1st curricular delivery. The themes of wellbeing; identity; communication and exploring and thinking are central to curricular deliver at said class levels.

Focus on curricular areas from 1st – 4th will allow for thematic teaching and integration reducing pressures to cover all subject areas. The agreed monthly time will provide teachers with autonomy to use their professional judgement and make decisions about curricular priorities allowing for deeper learning for pupils unfettered by weekly time constraints. I think the question: *What are the current pressures on 5th and 6th class teachers?* needs to be addressed. I think, in a lot of schools, the pressures are generated from within ie an expectation from teachers/DES/parents that pupils score highly in Standardised Tests in Maths and English which leads to teaching to the test. We need to focus far more on Assessment FOR learning instead of Assessment OF Learning. I don't think the introduction of subjects in 5th and 6th will bring any additional pressures as it's not a huge leap from curricular areas to subject areas. In addition, the Arts/SESE subjects are not tested to death. They are areas of tremendous enjoyment and exploration for pupils

Finally, curriculum overload will continue if the DES insist on foisting Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics on Catholic schools when the Grow in Love Programme caters for the needs of other faith/non faith pupils in our Catholic schools. Why the need for duplication? I think in Catholic ethos schools Religious Education should remain in the core curriculum time as it is central to the school's ethos and to relegate it to "flexible time" is to diminish its importance and to run the risk of it not been taught on a daily and weekly basis.



Contributor

St John's Bosco Senior Boys' School

St John's Bosco SBS

On behalf of the BOM of St John Boscos SBS (Roll # 179120) I wish to raise some points in relation to the newly proposed NCCA process.
We are a school guided by our Catholic ethos and have much experience in dealing with children of different faiths and cultures and social backgrounds and it is this very ethos which informs how we treat all our children ; and that is with respect and fairness and utmost care. The NCCA consultation process would propose a number of different models of education which would essentially undermine the guiding ethos of our school. It proposes to make flexible the teaching of religion and faith formation in our school. In our school day the inclusion of religion and prayers and meditation allow the spirit of our ethos permeate the very fabric of our school life. It enables us to guide our children to consider the golden rule of treating others as you would have them treat you. By downgrading the importance of religion this would impact greatly on how we lead the children in our care ; religion becomes a subject apart , taught at the discretion of staff. Religion should be considered one of the most important subjects in that it informs the entire experience of a child in our school in their faith formation and in preparation for their life journey.
Religion is the cornerstone of our educational model and this NCCA proposal would seem to be pushing a secularist model of reducing the importance and significance of religion in the life of our school ; that somehow religion can be reduced to a discretionary subject and this misses how vital the daily inclusion and teaching of religion supports both our ethos but also the management of the school ; in both the classroom and in yard time and any extra curricular activities.
It is fair to add that not only will our parents be disappointed and concerned if we lessen the value we place on religion in supporting the ethos of our school but also our staff will be dismayed . These are educators who have chosen to work in a Catholic ethos school and contribute to its development and growth on a daily basis and would then be expected to have this work devalued at great cost to their teaching and planning .

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns ,

Yours faithfully ,

Emmanuel Bourke.
boscosen.ias@eircom.net

Contributor

St Laurence's National School

St Laurence's NS
Greystones
Co Wicklow
A63 Y6P9
Tel: 01 287 6198
Email: office@stlaurences.ie
www.stlaurences.ie

Bunscoil Lorcáin Naofa
Na Clocha Liatha
Co Chill Mhaintáin
A63 Y6P9
Fón: 01 287 6198
Email: office@stlaurences.ie
www.stlaurences.ie

26 May 2017

NCCA
35 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2

Dear Sirs

SUBMISSION ON NCCA PROPOSALS FOR STRUCTURE AND TIME ALLOCATION IN A RE-DEVELOPED PRIMARY CURRICULUM

1. Structure

I am aware that the curriculum has not been changed since the publication of the 1999 Curriculum which was introduced to clarify and to give a more in depth interpretation of the 1971 Curriculum. In my opinion, the current curriculum works well. I am aware that the time given to the seven subject areas, as laid out in the 1999 Curriculum needs to be tweaked slightly to take into account Circular 0056/2011 but not so radically that we now have to talk about core time and flexible time. In relation to the school where I am currently Principal, we adjusted our teaching time within the 1999 Framework and in line with the suggestions in that Circular. Language permeates all subject areas and with intelligent timetabling it was possible to fulfil the requirements of Circular 0056/2011 within the 1999 Framework. I would question if the radical options that are being proposed are actually necessary.

In both proposals it would appear that that Aistear is taking centre stage. I would always have considered Aistear as a teaching tool to be used as a very valuable resource at junior level, one which teachers have been incorporating into all subject areas alongside other teaching methods.

I also note that in one of your proposals a subject based curriculum structure is not being introduced until 5th and 6th Class level. I wonder what impact this kind of staged approach would have on individual subjects and the teaching of these subjects to children. I would also have concerns about the increased pressure this might have on pupils and teachers in the run up to second level entry.

2. Time Allocation

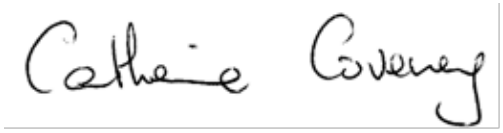
The Primary School Curriculum currently suggests a minimum time allocation for:-

- each of the six curriculum areas
- Religious Education
- breaks and assembly time.

I note that the time allocation as proposed provides for “Minimum State Curriculum Time” (60% of school time) and “Flexible Time” (40% of school time). I note that patron’s programme (in the case of our school Religious Education) has been moved to Flexible Time along with recreation, assemblies and roll call. I feel that this move effectively demotes religion as it has been grouped with non-teaching time activities. In a school with Catholic patronage, Religious Education should not be deemed discretionary or non-core but rather is a core and fundamental area in a Catholic school. To allow Religious Education to be discretionary will cause confusion and has the potential to reduce the Catholic school sector to a secular system.

I would respectfully request that you consider my submission when further debating a re-developed primary curriculum.

Yours faithfully



Catherine Coveney
Principal

Contributor

St Mary's Parish Primary School

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Philip**
Surname	**Ward**
Position (If applicable)	**Principal**
Organisation (If applicable)	**St Mary's Parish Primary School**
Address	**Bryanstown Drogheda, Co Louth**
Telephone	**041 9845372**
Email	**pward@smpps.ie**
Date	**25th April 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [ ] Organisation [x]

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes [x] No [ ]

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
   - The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
   - **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

The Patrons programme is an integral part of the school ethos and needs to be part of the core curriculum or as a separate but still non -discretionary element of the curriculum. Hence we would like to see RE maintain it's position .
The pace of change has to slow down. SSE, new language curriculum Coding new foreign language initiative mooted by minister are just some of the initiatives on going at the moment. No sooner than one initiative was being implemented than another was being planned, ,there is real sense of initiative overload

o There was no time to allow things to settle

o Principals/ Teachers were focused on the SEN model of allocation, were not talking about curriculum and time allocation, real danger that this consultation could slip them by without real teacher engagement

o Whatever emerges needs to be piloted, there is a history of small or poor pilots leading to poor implementation which required major fixes "get it right first time"

o Sense that constant change could hollow out or seriously damage the overall primary system which is working, will always need improvement but would suffer from constant tinkering.

Contributor

St Patrick's Stamullen

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

primary developments
forais sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Michelle**
Surname	**Griffin**
Position (If applicable)	**Mainstream Teacher (Representing teaching staff)**
Organisation (If applicable)	**St Patrick's NS, Stamullen, Co Meath**
Address	**St Patrick's NS, Cock Hill Rd, Stamullen, Co Meath**
Telephone	**01-8411804**
Email	**michelle_grif@yahoo.com**
Date	**Thursday, March 2nd 2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum can be found here.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

1. The first set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends moving from a model comprising four two-year stages to an incremental model of either three stages or two stages.

   Please consider:

- The extent to which you agree / disagree with this proposed change to a **three-/two-stage model**
- The benefits / challenges of the **two-stage model**
- The benefits / challenges of the **three-stage model**
- **Your preferred** model and **reasons** for this preference.

There are benefits and drawbacks to both models. A three-stage model makes sense toward the senior end of the primary school, in that pupils need to begin preparations for second-level in 5th and 6th classes. It therefore makes sense not to have 3rd and 6th class within the same 'stage bracket' as it were.
However, the two-stage model would mean the Aistear model being followed up to second class. This would be beneficial to the vast majority of pupils, mainly through its facilitation of very organically integrated learning.
Neither model is ideal and this aspect of the NCCA's proposals needs to be re-considered.

2. The second set of proposals in the Consultation Paper recommends a new model of time allocation for primary schools.

   Please consider:

   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **minimum state curriculum time**
   - The extent to which you agree / disagree with the proposals on **flexible time**
   - The idea of **specifying time allocations** for themes/curriculum areas/subjects
   - Your views on whether time should be allocated on a **weekly, monthly termly, annual basis**.

We see very little change, in practical terms, suggested in this section of the proposals. The issue of subjects is central to any real restructuring of teaching/discretionary time. If there are no changes to the quantity of time and the amount of teaching and learning we are trying to achieve, any changes are only nominal. The actual amount of content, including many recent proposals by the government, needs to examined and, frankly reduced, to allow for any real alterations in time allocation.
Monthly time allocations for subjects are preferable to weekly.

3. Reflecting in general on the proposals for a new primary curriculum structure and for rethinking how time is used within the curriculum, are there any further comments or reflections that you would like to share?

It does appear that many decisions have already been made. If this process is to be truly fruitful, the NCCA needs to take a pragmatic approach to actually fitting in everything that needs to be done in order to enable children to reach developmental milestones and achieve learning objectives in meaningful, measurable ways. This may require the NCCA to be brave enough to really open up these proposals for examination and improvement. Real, honest consultation with the teachers responsible for delivering the curriculum every day, is essential.

On a separate point, training in eg Aistear is vital, at undergraduate and post-graduate levels, if such an aaproach is to be formally introduced and rolled out in all schools.

Contributor

St Vincent's Girls' National School

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

primary developments
fóráis sa bhunscolaíocht

Consultation on proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum

Respondent's details

First name	**Anne**
Surname	**Neylon**
Position (If applicable)	**Chairperson St Vincent's GNS**
Organisation (If applicable)	**School**
Address	**St Vincent's GNS , North William Street, Dublin 1**
Telephone	**087 6228267**
Email	**anneneylon@daughtersofcharity.ie**
Date	**24-05-2017**

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation : St Vincent's GNS, North William Street, Dublin

Do you consent to the submission being published online at the end of the consultation?

Yes

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Please email your submissions to structureandtime@ncca.ie

The NCCA Time and Structure Consultation (revision of Primary School Curriculum)

With regard to the two-stage or three- stage model it is felt that neither model is necessary. Introducing a new system of structuring the curriculum and time allocation could complicate a system that is working well presently. Reform of the curriculum would involve more unnecessary paper work which ultimately would take from valuable teaching time and pupil learning time. The curriculum as it stands is serving children learning and teachers teaching. As reflected in many reports of the Whole School Evaluation and in the day to day work of the school teachers are valued as highly skilled, motivated and professional practitioners who can adapt the curriculum to the cohort of the pupils they teach.

The current curriculum is perceived by the teachers as a menu which allows for integration and for a variety of practical work which is proven to engage and inspire the pupils. Teachers teach thematically and they have the flexibility to use subjects or themes, depending on the needs of the pupils. The teacher is the best judge of the children in his or her care and with the support of the principal as an instructional leader the team can deliver an exciting holistic curriculum which appeals to all pupils and at the same time caters for individual needs.

A movement towards an incremental stage model of a curriculum would have time divided between curriculum areas and subjects identified 'core' and 'discretionary'. A stage approach to individual subjects may provide even more emphasis on literacy and numeracy which would reduce teaching time of other subjects. This could result in the compulsory introduction of and teaching of ERBE in school even though it has already been rejected in an earlier consultative process.

Introducing subject learning in 5th and 6th class in primary school would place an added pressure on pupils and eventually children may become part of the post primary system at an earlier age. Where might the preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation be included in such a system?

Two-Stage, Three-Stage Model..

If a model had to be chosen it would be the three- stage model. Looking at the present situation it is difficult to imagine how the pre-school and the primary school could dove tail. The disparity in training and the standard of qualification is vast. Primary school teachers have a standard degree qualification which is internationally recognised.

Introducing the stage- two model would cause more concern since pre-school is linked up to pupils of nine years of age. Again there is an issue envisaged around teacher training and Aistear themes. Linking pre-school learning to primary education and primary education to post primary education may be good for a curriculum and the State but may not necessarily best for the children in primary school.

The new consultative process of the NCCA concerning 'Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework'

The new consultative process of the NCCA concerning 'Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework' is considered as being the medium through which the preschool and infant stage will progress. Only a minority of schools have had formal training in 'Aistear' and training which has been completed by teachers has been evaluated as of a varying quality. It is based on a secular model and Religious Education is not included in it which has huge implications for the ethos of a Catholic school. This therefore has potential implications for a revised structure of the primary school curriculum and also the introduction of ERBE. The Aistear model hasn't been sufficiently resourced to form such a large part of the basis of reform that is proposed by the NCCA.

Pre-School education is vitally important and more resources need to be provided for a standard of excellence to be reached. The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015) includes a level for Preschool Religious Education.

The Teaching of Religious Education in the light of Curriculum Reform and Time

Reform of the Primary School Curriculum would have a major impact on the teaching of Religious Education within this incremental, phased learning approach. The raison d'être for the Catholic school is the central place of the person of Jesus Christ and his teaching. Religious education cannot be taught within a flexible time frame. This would not give the subject its central place in the school day. There is a possibility that any subject that is granted flexible time will soon be diminished.

Religious Education is a core subject in the Catholic school. It is included in the suggested minimum weekly time framework in the primary school. It was recognised as contributing to the specific aims and general objectives of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum which respected 'the principle of integrated learning weaving connections between spiritual, moral and religious education and all other curriculum areas.'

In 2015 the Irish Episcopal Conference introduced the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* to ensure the provision of a 'solid foundation for the development of religious education programmes and other resource material to enhance the teaching of Catholic religious education at pre-school and primary level in the years ahead.'

In 2015 the new primary school Religious Education series *Grow in Love* programme was introduced in the primary school and is being introduced on a phased basis throughout the school. The *Grow in Love* programme ensures that all pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the Catholic tradition. It is designed to allow teachers to take a thematic, cross curricular approach to the teaching of Religious Education.

In studying Religious Education pupils are engaging critically with its content in four interrelated strands Christian Faith, The Word of God, Liturgy/Prayer and Christian Morality. The children will learn the necessary skills to help them engage critically with the questions that will arise for them about doctrine, religious practice, interpreting sacred scripture and the teachings of the Church. The skills of Religious literacy will enable, equip, prepare and empower students to use 'an outcomes approach' which aligns Religious Education with the other six areas of the NCCA curriculum.

In addition to the outcomes approach the Faith Formation Goals outlined in the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* aim to support the core purpose of Religious Education which is to ensure that all pupils have a good knowledge and an understanding of the Catholic theological tradition.

Religious Education is not just taught as a subject throughout the school day. This subject is integrated into every facet of the school day which defines the Catholic ethos of the school. The lived ethos ensures that Gospel values are supporting the identity of the school and the dignity of each person. Prayer and reflection are a most prominent part of the school day in a Catholic school. Moving Religious Education to a flexible time would have a detrimental effect on the ethos of the school and eventually the characteristic spirit of the Catholic school would be eroded.

One of the fundamental principles of the Catholic Social Teaching is the dignity of the human person and the vision that Jesus Christ is present in every person. Other principles in Catholic Social Teaching include call to family, community and participation; rights and responsibilities; preferential option for those who live in poverty; dignity and rights of workers; solidarity and care for the environment. These principles are at the core of policies compiled for Catholic schools by Boards of Management in addition to directives from the Department of Education and Skills.

Parents have a right to send their children to a Catholic school where beliefs and values have a core place. These values are Gospel values and are centred on the person of Jesus Christ and his mission. Time, space and resources need to be available to children throughout the school to reflect on what their lives are according to God's will and desire for them.

If the primary school curriculum is reformed it will mean more work for the members of the Board of Management. This voluntary body will have an added responsibility to become involved and proactive in overseeing how flexible time is used in implementing the patron's programme and the teaching of Religious education. This may put the Board of Management in a vulnerable place with regard to building relationships with school and may not prove to be the best for Religious education. Members of the Board will have an added responsibility to ensure that Religious education is valued on an ongoing basis by principals, teachers and parents.

Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics (ERBE)

An ERBE programme cannot be compatible with the Patron's *Grow in Love* programme. It is unrealistic given existing curriculum overload and time constraints.

In a Catholic school the current religious education programme *Grow in Love* fosters self-respect and the respect of others and the environment; tolerance towards others; open mindedness and civic mindedness (as proposed by the ERBE programme). Commitment to one's faith is what helps a person grow in love of God, self, others and the environment and this is what the lived ethos of the catholic school entails. The ERBE is not a religious education programme and if introduced into a Catholic school where the *Grow in Love* programme is being taught would cause major confusion for children, parents and teachers. The fostering of the partnership between home, school and parish, centred on the person of Jesus Christ is absolutely fundamental in the presentation of the *Grow in Love* programme. If the ERBE is introduced and integrated into thematic and curricular areas it will make the patron's programme irrelevant. This will have implications also for the training of teachers in teaching Religious Education in third level colleges.

primar
developments
foráis sa bhunscolaíocht

NCCA

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