Primary Curriculum Framework

For Primary and Special Schools

Contents

Foreword from the Minister for Education

Children's learning in primary school is a building block for the learning they experience throughout the rest of their lives. Exploring, creating, building foundations in for example Language, STEM, the Arts, Social and Environmental Education and in their development of their whole selves. Talents and skills nurtured in the early stages of their education can have a formative impact on their whole lives.

The primary curriculum was launched in 1999, and much has changed in our society and in our classrooms since then.

The redevelopment of the primary curriculum to take account of these changes, and to best serve today's children, has been ongoing for a number of years. This work is embodied in the publication of this *Primary Curriculum Framework for Primary and Special Schools*.

This is the first ever curriculum framework for primary education in Ireland. The framework, developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, in close partnership with schools, education partners, and wider stakeholders, consulting with children, parents, and educators, provides the pathway for the redevelopment of the curriculum for all primary and special schools over the coming years.

I believe that the *Primary Curriculum Framework* supports high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment which places the child at the centre of the learning process. It strives to ensure that all pupils achieve their full potential. I acknowledge that this cannot be achieved without the continued commitment of our highly skilled school leaders and teachers. Their valued endeavours within our classrooms will inspire our learners and ensure improved quality of learning experiences and outcomes.

The success of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* will require the dedication of all those involved in education, our education partners and stakeholders, particularly our school leaders and teachers. It will also require the commitment of my Department to ensure that schools are adequately supported and resourced to include the provision of high quality professional development.

I look forward to the continued collaboration across the primary education system and to working alongside school leaders, teachers, parents, and, of course, the pupils themselves as we navigate this journey to a new primary curriculum for all.

Norma Foley TD
Minister for Education

Introduction

Every child has a right to education in Ireland. The *Primary Curriculum Framework* forms the basis for high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment for all children attending primary and special schools.

A curriculum reflects educational priorities which society, at a point in time, deems important for its young citizens. The *Primary Curriculum Framework* was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) through a collaborative approach, informed by research, sustained work with school communities, wide consultation, and extensive deliberation. As such, the framework embodies society's broadly held view of what a curriculum should provide for our children as we look further into the 21st century.

Education plays a pivotal role in contributing to a democratic, equitable, and just, Irish society. It supports the sense of identity and belonging of all children as members of their community while also contributing to matters of international and global priority. It enables children to see themselves as individuals, with rights and responsibilities, and as part of social groups, including in the classroom and school, the local community, and national and global contexts. The framework recognises children's experiences in primary and special schools as a time of 'being' and 'becoming' – both celebrating children's current childhood experiences, and looking to their futures and what might be.

From birth, children begin their educational journey through interactions and experiences and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* acknowledges and contributes to the learning journey that all children are on. The framework builds on the principles and themes of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009) and connects with the learning experiences provided in Junior Cycle (DES, 2015). The curriculum places children at the heart of their learning and provides for a holistic approach to children's education. Each child's learning journey is different, and so the curriculum provides flexibility and choice to teachers and school leaders as they support children in their holistic development.

Diversity of school type and context is one of the hallmarks of primary education in Ireland. The directions for curriculum change set out in the framework are for all schools, and can take account of the particular needs and interests of children, their parents,[1] the wider school community, and the characteristic spirit of the school.

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[1] 'Parent' encompasses a foster parent, a guardian or other person acting in loco parentis of a child.

The framework supports the development of a primary curriculum which:

- builds on the successes and strengths of previous curricula while recognising and responding to challenges, changing needs, and priorities

- provides agency and flexibility in schools

- makes connections with what and how children learn in preschool, primary, special, and post-primary schools

- identifies and responds to emerging priorities for children's learning

- changes how the curriculum is structured and presented

- supports a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to learning and teaching.

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* reflects our shared understanding of, and trust in, the many positive features of education in our primary and special schools. It supports boards of management in their statutory duties to ensure that appropriate education is provided for all children in our schools and it acknowledges their responsibilities regarding the characteristic spirit of the school. The framework also provides the blueprint for guiding the enhancement of primary and special education for the coming years. As developments progress, new curriculum specifications will be developed for the five curriculum areas and their associated subjects, and toolkits will be provided to support learning, teaching, and assessment. Advancements in special education and Irish Sign Language (ISL), as a recognised language of Ireland, will also be progressed in line with Department of Education and wider policy.

The sections that follow set out the vision; principles; key competencies; structure; approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment; and time allocations of the Primary School Curriculum.

Vision

The curriculum aims to provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish, supporting them in realising their full potential as individuals and as members of communities and society during childhood, as they progress through primary and special education and into post-primary education. Building on their previous experiences, the curriculum views children as unique, competent, and caring individuals, and it views teachers as committed, skilful, and agentic professionals.[2] It supports high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment that is inclusive and evidence-based, recognising the right of all children to make progress in all areas of their learning and development.

[2]   An agentic teacher makes professional and informed decisions in response to the children's learning needs.

Principles of Learning, Teaching, and Assessment

There are eight overarching principles that schools need to consider in pursuing the curriculum vision (see Figure 1). The principles convey what is valued in primary and special education and what lies at the heart of high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment in the primary curriculum. They are broad in nature to reflect varied school contexts and children's different circumstances, experiences, and abilities.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships and collaboration between schools, families, and communities enrich and extend children's learning by acknowledging and supporting their lives in and out of school.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Children's learning is shaped and nurtured by the physical environment, indoors and outdoors. These diverse environments encourage children's independence, and stimulate and support their learning across the curriculum.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION & DIVERSITY

Inclusive education provides for equity of opportunity and participation in children's learning. Inclusive education celebrates diversity and responds to the uniqueness of every child.

PEDAGOGY

Teachers use appropriate and evidence-based pedagogical approaches and strategies to foster children's engagement, ownership, and challenge. Such pedagogical approaches and strategies connect with children's life experience, circumstances, strengths, and interests.

PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING, TEACHING, AND ASSESSMENT

ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION

Children are active and demonstrate agency as the capacity to act independently and to make choices about and in their learning. Curriculum experiences provide them with opportunities for decision-making, creativity, and collaboration.

RELATIONSHIPS

Caring relationships within the school community support and impact positively on children's engagement, motivation, and learning.

TRANSITIONS & CONTINUITY

Children's prior learning, self-worth, and identity are built upon as they move from home to preschool and on to junior infants, and as they progress through primary school. This provides important foundations for learning as they move to post-primary school.

ASSESSMENT & PROGRESSION

Meaningful assessment is collaborative and integral to high-quality learning and teaching. Involving children, teachers, parents, and others, it provides information which enhances teaching and informs and supports progression in children's learning across the curriculum.

Figure 1: Principles of learning, teaching, and assessment

Transitions and continuity

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Learning environments

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Inclusive education and diversity

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Engagement and participation

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Assessment and progression

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Key Competencies

As children interact and engage with the social world of their home, community, and school, they need to be able to navigate a wide variety of contexts and situations, not only in childhood but as they mature into adolescence and adulthood. Children also need to be able to interact and engage with the natural world around them and come to appreciate its value and their responsibilities as custodians of it.

To support and enable children to do this, the primary curriculum builds on and further develops children's early learning experiences in the home and preschool. It seeks to equip children with the essential knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes, and values which enable them to adapt to and deal with a range of situations, challenges, and contexts in support of broader Learning Outcomes. These capabilities are presented as seven inextricably linked key competencies that are relevant from stages 1 to 4 (Junior Infants to Sixth Class) (see Figure 2). They link closely with *Aistear's* four themes and the eight Key Skills in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.
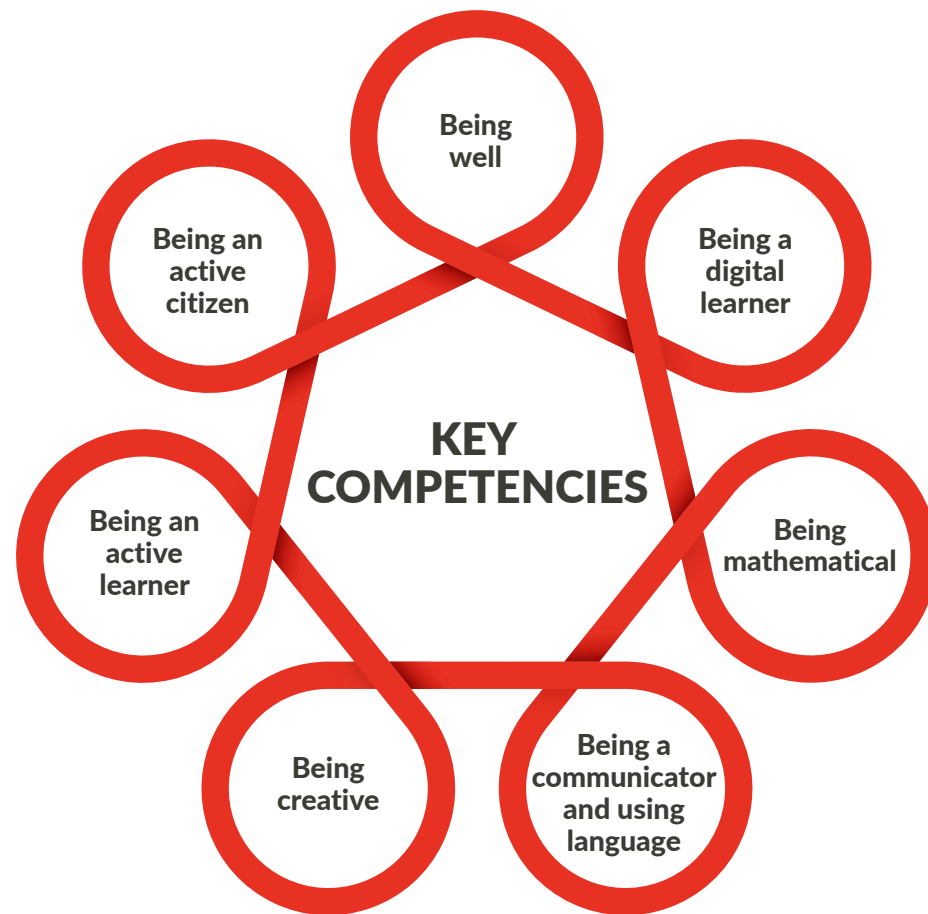

KEY COMPETENCIES

- Being well
- Being a digital learner
- Being mathematical
- Being a communicator and using language
- Being creative
- Being an active learner
- Being an active citizen

The seven key competencies, because of their interconnecting nature, support the curriculum's vision of empowering children to act and make decisions in relation to specific learning experiences, events, and situations. As such, they extend beyond skills and knowledge. For example, the emphasis is on locating, critiquing, acting on, and using knowledge, and appreciating it for its own sake. In this way, the competencies enable and foster deep learning while also contributing to children's holistic development. The eight principles of learning, teaching, and assessment are reflected through the competencies and embody the same set of values and beliefs.

Because the competencies play a central part in children's learning, they require ongoing attention, and are embedded across all curriculum areas and subjects from stages 1 to 4 through the Learning Outcomes. In this way, the curriculum areas and subjects contribute to the development of the key competencies. They also contribute to and influence the 'what and how' of learning, as children demonstrate the development and application of the competencies with increasing proficiency. This gives them relevance across the curriculum and provides continuity and connectivity in children's learning as they move through primary school. Like all learning supported through the Learning Outcomes, children's progress towards the key competencies will be influenced by their varying circumstances, experiences and abilities. Each competency is described below.

Being an active citizen

This competency fosters the knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values, and dispositions in children that motivate and empower them as citizens to take positive actions to live justly, sustainably, and with regard for the rights of others. It helps children to question, critique, and understand what is happening in the world within a framework of human rights, equity, social justice, and sustainable development. It also raises awareness of global challenges such as climate change, conflict, and growing inequalities. It places democratic practices at the centre of the learning process. This competency develops children's capacity and motivation for active and meaningful participation in society at local, national, and global levels, and fosters their ability to contribute positively and compassionately to creating a more sustainable and just world.

Being creative

This competency recognises children's innate creativity. Children have creative energy and require lots of opportunities for creative behaviour. The focus is on nurturing and promoting children's interests and opportunities for meaningful creative experiences through exploring, clarifying, and expressing ideas and feelings. Creativity is expressed in many ways, in all areas of human activity and culture, and involves originality. Creative learners are curious, open-minded, and imaginative. Through creative activity, children can produce works that are original and of value across the curriculum. As children develop this competency, they come to understand that creative activity involves enjoyment, effort, risk-taking, critical thinking, and reflection. Unlocking and promoting children's creative potential impacts positively on their motivation, self-esteem, and overall development.

Being a digital learner

This competency supports children to become curious, creative, confident, and critical users of digital technology. Being a digital learner fosters children's ability to collaborate and thrive in a world increasingly immersed in technology. Children develop their knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values, and dispositions through problem-solving, experimenting, and creating. Developing this competency increases their confidence in using a range of digital technology to harness their imagination and expand their creative thinking and creative expression. Through empowering children to be active digital citizens, this competency develops their responsible, respectful, safe, and ethical use of technology. It enables children to critically engage and contribute in a digitally connected and interdependent world.

Being mathematical

This competency supports children to develop and apply mathematical thinking and logic to solve a range of problems. It involves having the confidence and skill to recognise and use mathematics in all aspects of life. Being mathematical involves children drawing on a range of knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values, and dispositions as they recognise, interpret, and apply real-world information presented mathematically. Children need to be able to think and communicate quantitatively, to reason, to make sense of and critically engage with data, to have spatial awareness and to understand patterns and sequences. When opportunities for using mathematics across the curriculum are identified, children can transfer their mathematical knowledge, skills, and logic to other curriculum areas and the wider world, enriching their experiences.

Being a communicator and using language

This competency develops children's understanding and enjoyment of interacting with others. Being a communicator and using language means being able to understand, interpret, and use different forms of communication, including gesture, expression, language (which can include English, Irish, Irish Sign Language, and other languages), printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. It also involves children engaging purposefully in the creation and exploration of different text types.[3] Children need to be able to communicate and connect with others, in order to participate in wider society, share meaning, and develop new knowledge. Developing this competency increases children's confidence in using a range of media and methods of communication suited to different purposes and audiences. It is about children learning how to share their experiences, thoughts, ideas, and feelings in a variety of ways, and learning how to observe, listen to, interpret, and show respect for the perspectives of others.

Being well

This competency develops children's understanding and appreciation of wellbeing and their ability to be as healthy as they can be – physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. It fosters self-acceptance and self-awareness and promotes the importance of children seeing themselves as competent and resourceful. This supports their ability to deal with the normal challenges of life, become resilient, and cope in a variety of situations and circumstances. This competency helps children become healthy through physical activity, food, self-care, and interaction with nature. It helps children become positive and engaged in their learning and realise their own uniqueness and potential. It supports healthy relationships with themselves, their peers, their family, and the wider world. It also recognises the spiritual dimension of living, which enables children to experience a sense of awe and wonder and to know that life has a meaning.

Being an active learner

This competency helps children develop an awareness of themselves as learners. It promotes the development of the knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values, and dispositions needed for being an active, agentic learner who can learn independently and with others. Children also learn how to communicate, set personal and collaborative learning goals, solve problems, and manage interactions with others. This competency involves children finding out about and making sense of people, things, and places around them and in the wider world. Through developing this competency, children also learn to reflect on their learning. This competency taps into and nurtures children's innate curiosity and involves having opportunities to interact, investigate, question, and wonder. Learning with and about others supports children's wellbeing, as it creates a sense of belonging and connection, and builds awareness of the unique contribution that every child can make. Learning with and about others also enables children to develop empathy, an important capacity that allows them to tune in, to see and feel what another person is experiencing.

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[3] 'Text' includes all products of language use: oral, gesture, sign, written, Braille, visual, tactile, electronic, and digital.

Table 1 provides a sample set of attributes for each key competency. These are not intended as an exhaustive list but instead describe characteristic learning and development opportunities for children within each key competency which will be embedded through Learning Outcomes in the curriculum specifications.

Table 1: Attributes of each key competency

Key competency	Attributes
Being an active citizen	• Developing an understanding of, and acting on, the rights and responsibilities of myself and others • Experiencing learning through democratic practices • Recognising injustice and inequality and ways to take action • Developing capacity to make choices and take action in favour of a sustainable future
Being creative	• Participating in and enjoying creative and cultural experiences • Being curious • Being imaginative • Being innovative • Using creative processes • Exploring alternative ways of communicating
Being a digital learner	• Communicating and collaborating with others through digital technology • Accessing, analysing, and managing content using digital technology • Enabling content creation, problem-solving, and creativity using digital technology • Interacting ethically, critically, and responsibly with digital technology
Being mathematical	• Understanding the usefulness and beauty of mathematics • Thinking and communicating mathematically • Solving problems and making sense of the world using mathematics • Observing, estimating, predicting, and calculating • Recognising relationships, trends, connections, and patterns • Interpreting, processing, and evaluating information and data
Being a communicator and using language	• Developing understanding and enjoyment of words and language • Developing expressive language • Reading for enjoyment and with critical understanding • Writing for different purposes and for a variety of audiences • Exploring and creating a variety of texts
Being well	• Showing awareness of how to make good choices in relation to wellbeing • Participating with growing confidence and skill in physical activity • Being self-aware and resilient • Acting responsibly and showing care towards self and others • Being spiritual and having a sense of purpose and meaning • Being persistent and flexible in solving problems • Being able to assess risk and respond
Being an active learner	• Playing, learning, and working, both individually and with others • Developing metacognitive skills and strategies • Fostering and maintaining positive relationships • Dealing with conflict • Respecting difference • Learning about others • Caring for and showing empathy towards others

Curriculum Areas and Subjects

The curriculum is presented in five broad curriculum areas:

1. Language
2. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education
3. Wellbeing
4. Arts Education
5. Social and Environmental Education.

As shown in Figure 3, the curriculum areas become more differentiated by subjects as children move through the primary classes.

In addition to the five areas, school patrons have a legal right to design their own programme in accordance with the ethos of their school. This programme forms part of children's learning experience in primary and special schools.
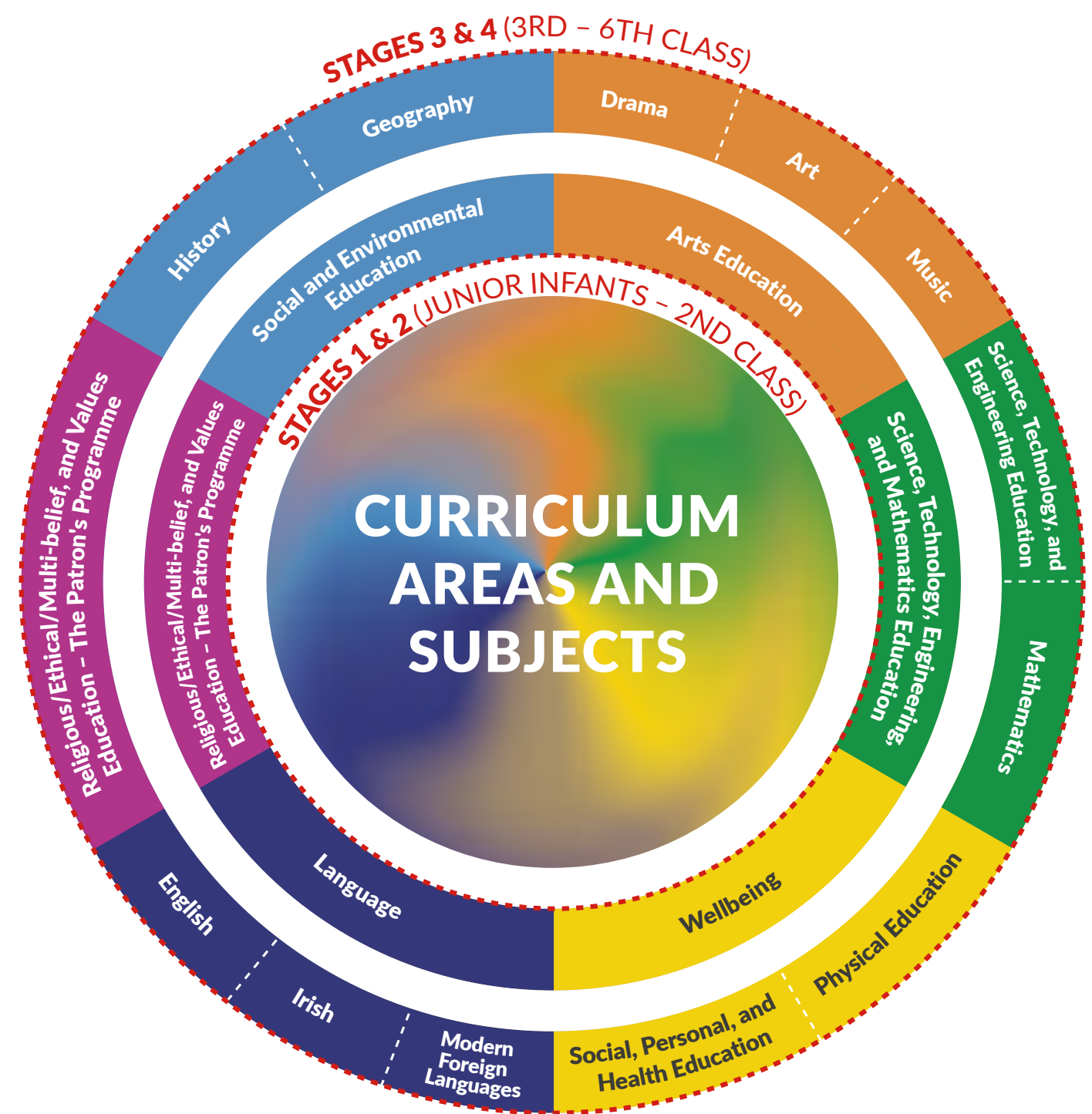

Figure 3: Curriculum areas and subjects

Stages 1 and 2: Junior Infants – Second Class

The curriculum areas are interrelated. They support younger children's learning and development by extending their earlier learning experiences through *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. The curriculum areas support an integrated approach to learning and teaching, while supporting progression. Curriculum areas recognise younger children's ages and stage of development, and give the teacher greater choice in preparing for and facilitating rich learning experiences through playful and engaging approaches. Two curriculum areas include subjects for stages 1 and 2 – Language; Science, Technology, and Engineering Education; and Mathematics. While subjects are not specifically defined in the curriculum areas of Wellbeing, Social and Environmental Education, and Arts Education for stages 1 and 2, the Learning Outcomes will provide important foundations towards more subject-based learning.

Stages 3 and 4: Third – Sixth Class

The curriculum supports older children's learning and development in stages 3 and 4 (Third to Sixth Class) by building on the strong foundations provided in stages 1 and 2. Curriculum areas become more differentiated into subjects to reflect children's growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising the world, while continuing to provide important opportunities for learning and teaching in integrated ways. Each curriculum area contains subject-specific Learning Outcomes which are complementary and draw upon the other subjects in that curriculum area. This supports connections across children's learning while acknowledging their capacity for more abstract thinking and learning through age- and developmentally-appropriate treatment of concepts, skills, and knowledge within subject-based inquiry and investigation. Building on stages 1 and 2, the curriculum areas continue to provide opportunities for playful and engaging teaching and learning.

The components of curriculum specifications are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Components in curriculum specifications

Content	Description
Introduction	A summary of the philosophical and educational basis for the curriculum area.
Rationale	A description of the nature and role of the curriculum area and associated subjects within the broad primary curriculum.
Aims	A vision for the curriculum area and associated subjects articulated through a set of aims.
Strands and elements	Each curriculum area will be divided into strands, and across the strands, the elements will describe the essential learning.
Learning Outcomes	Learning Outcomes will describe the expected learning and development for children at the end of a period of time.
The curriculum in practice	Guidance and support focusing on the big ideas that underpin high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment in the classroom.

Each curriculum area for stages 1 to 4 will be presented within a single document. For stages 3 and 4, this creates stronger links across subjects and minimises duplication in the area. The Learning Outcomes for all four stages will be presented side by side to show progression in learning and to help differentiate learning experiences for children, for example, in multi-grade classrooms.

The following paragraphs outline each curriculum area.

Language

Language learning enables children to understand the world around them and to communicate effectively with others. Communication takes many forms and is often multimodal. Exposure to a wide variety of texts fosters children's appreciation for and enjoyment of literature from different cultures. Language enables children to engage emotionally, socially, cognitively, imaginatively, and aesthetically in relationships and cultural experiences. Providing children with opportunities to be creative through language fosters a sense of enjoyment in their language learning. The curriculum acknowledges the language learning journeys that all children are on in English and Irish. It also acknowledges and harnesses the diversity of languages, including Irish Sign Language, used in Irish primary and special schools. It supports the introduction of modern foreign languages in stages 3 and 4, incrementally building on children's existing knowledge and awareness of language and progressing from a language awareness model to a competency model in stage 4.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education supports children's capacity to understand and engage fully with the world around them. Mathematics provides the foundation for science, technology, and engineering and is the study of the relationships, connections, and patterns that surround us. Science, technology, and engineering are intrinsically linked and enable children to benefit from learning about and working with traditional, contemporary, and emerging technologies. Using an engineering design process, children experience opportunities to generate solutions to real-life problems through playful experimentation and investigation. Scientific inquiry enables children to develop an interest in and understanding of the biological, material, and physical world by exploring and investigating scientific concepts and processes.

Arts Education

A broad experience in the arts is integral throughout a child's experience in primary school. The arts give expression to and extend children's understanding, imagination, and creativity through a broad range of experiences. Such experiences have the capacity to engage, inspire, and enrich all children, exciting the imagination and encouraging them to reach their creative and expressive potential. Art, Drama, and Music provide opportunities for broad-ranging experiences in the arts, including visual arts, media arts, and dance, that play a valuable role in children's experience of childhood. Such experiences help them to participate fully in their community and in society as a whole. While Art, Drama, and Music have a common creative process and share transferable skills, each has its own knowledge, concepts, skills, and intrinsic value. By drawing on more than one subject, learning in other art forms can be enhanced and developed through an integrated approach to Arts Education.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing supports children's social, emotional, and physical development now and into the future. It enables children to develop self-awareness and knowledge, build life skills, and develop a strong sense of connectedness to their school, their community, and wider society. To develop these skills and dispositions, it is important for children to develop their own ethical understanding of the world. Values education encourages reflection on choices, exploration of opportunities, and commitment to responsibilities. Children will be encouraged to value what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities, in local and wider contexts. Wellbeing provides structured opportunities for children to be as physically and emotionally well and healthy as they can be. This happens by building their motivation and commitment to physical activity and to inform healthy lifestyle choices. Wellbeing also supports children to value positive and healthy relationships with others, which includes acquiring an understanding of human sexuality that is balanced and connected with the relational and emotional aspects.

Social and Environmental Education

Social and Environmental Education contributes to children's understanding and development of the interconnected historical, geographical, and societal dimensions and processes of life. It supports children's awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the world through learning about the rich diversity of peoples: their experiences, cultures, religions, beliefs, and environments in different times, places, and circumstances. It helps children to develop an understanding of the human and natural environments and the relationship between them. Through Social and Environmental Education, children develop the attitudes, concepts, dispositions, knowledge, skills, and values that motivate and empower them to become informed and active citizens who promote a more sustainable future. This is made more meaningful and empowering through children's active identification, exploration, and investigation of local, national, and global challenges and opportunities, past and present. Hence, children come to an understanding and appreciation of their inherent rights and responsibilities as custodians of this planet.

Religious/Ethical/Multi-belief, and Values Education – The Patron's Programme

The Patron's Programme is developed by a school's patron with the aim of contributing to children's holistic development, particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective, and underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school. There are a number of patrons' programmes in the Irish primary school system, reflecting the diversity of patronage. Some are denominational or religious, emphasising the place of children's faith, spiritual, and moral development in their lives. Some are ethical or multi-belief and values-based, and emphasise children's understanding of ethics and values and their application in the life of the child. All patrons' programmes contribute to children's development and sense of identity and support their connection to their community and to wider society.

Learning, Teaching, and Assessment

The vision and principles on which the *Primary Curriculum Framework* is based place high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment at the heart of the curriculum. Each principle is significant, and they combine to support children's learning. As teachers and children develop and engage in rich learning experiences, the principles of Relationships and Pedagogy become particularly pertinent. Teachers, as skilful and agentic professionals, enact the curriculum by making decisions about what to teach, when to teach it, and how to sequence and pace learning. This includes decisions about the specific learning experiences to be provided, shaped by the children's strengths, needs, interests, and individuality.

This section, based on the framework's principles, looks at the importance of teachers' knowledge of the children and their prior learning, knowledge of pedagogy, and knowledge of the curriculum as central components of high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment.

Knowledge of the children and their prior learning

Knowledge of the children includes the children as learners and as members of a family and community. This knowledge can be deepened through positive interactions, sharing relevant information on children's backgrounds, good relationships, and assessment.

Positive interactions are central to supporting relationships with children and are important in getting to know children and their prior learning. The curriculum recognises the value of the full range of interactions between the teacher and children – informal and formal, planned and incidental, social and cognitive - as contributing to a teacher's understanding of the child. The quality of these interactions impacts on children's learning, development, and wellbeing. The framework's principle on Partnerships underpins the contribution of all relationships and interactions in the school community and between schools and other educational settings (including preschools and post-primary schools) to responsive learning, teaching, and assessment.

Assessment

As the framework's principle on Assessment and progression states, assessment is a collaborative process involving children and teachers and, at times, parents and other stakeholders, as they gather, record, interpret, use, and report information about a child's progress and achievement in developing knowledge, concepts, competencies, skills, and dispositions.

Assessment:

- is an integral part of learning and teaching

- provides information for various stakeholders, most importantly children

- exists along a continuum.

Assessment is integral to learning and teaching

Assessment is a shared endeavour that reflects an understanding of learning as an inherently social activity, in which teachers and children work together to use information to inform learning and teaching. Providing children with regular time to talk about their learning and to identify and reflect on their next steps contributes to their self-identity as learners, while peer assessment and other collaborative learning enable children to support and extend each other's learning.

Assessment provides information for various stakeholders

Assessment provides information for various stakeholders, primarily children. Children require information that allows them to identify where they are in terms of their learning, and what they need to do to progress beyond that point. Other stakeholders who require information from assessment include teachers, support staff, parents, school leaders, policymakers, and other professionals. They require information not for themselves but to make decisions that will ultimately have a positive impact for children (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Stakeholders for whom assessment provides information

Assessment exists along a continuum

The curriculum supports a continuum of assessment ranging from 'intuitive' to 'planned interactions' to 'assessment events', as shown in Figure 5. The three types of assessment are complementary and are necessary to gain a comprehensive picture of a child's progress and achievement. Across the continuum, the child is viewed as an active agent who makes choices, and whose actions shape assessment practices in both anticipated and unexpected ways. Having a clear understanding of child development is a significant factor in teachers' professional capacity to support children's progression in learning. All children develop in their own unique way, and yet, certain patterns can be identified as children develop. Such knowledge and awareness contribute to the effectiveness of teachers' assessment of and reporting on that progress.

INTUITIVE ASSESSMENT
Unplanned, unrecorded, and ongoing
Children usually unaware they are being assessed

Example
posing appropriate questions to scaffold learning; being flexible and responsive to indications of children's misconceptions

PLANNED INTERACTIONS
More visible, may be recorded, and related to Learning Outcomes/competencies
Children may or may not be aware they are being assessed

Example
asking children to construct concept maps to communicate their current understanding of a topic; conferencing with a child about a piece of work

ASSESSMENT EVENTS
Distinct, visible, recorded events
Children are usually aware they are being assessed

Example
teacher designed tests/quizzes; externally constructed standardised assessments; diagnostic assessments
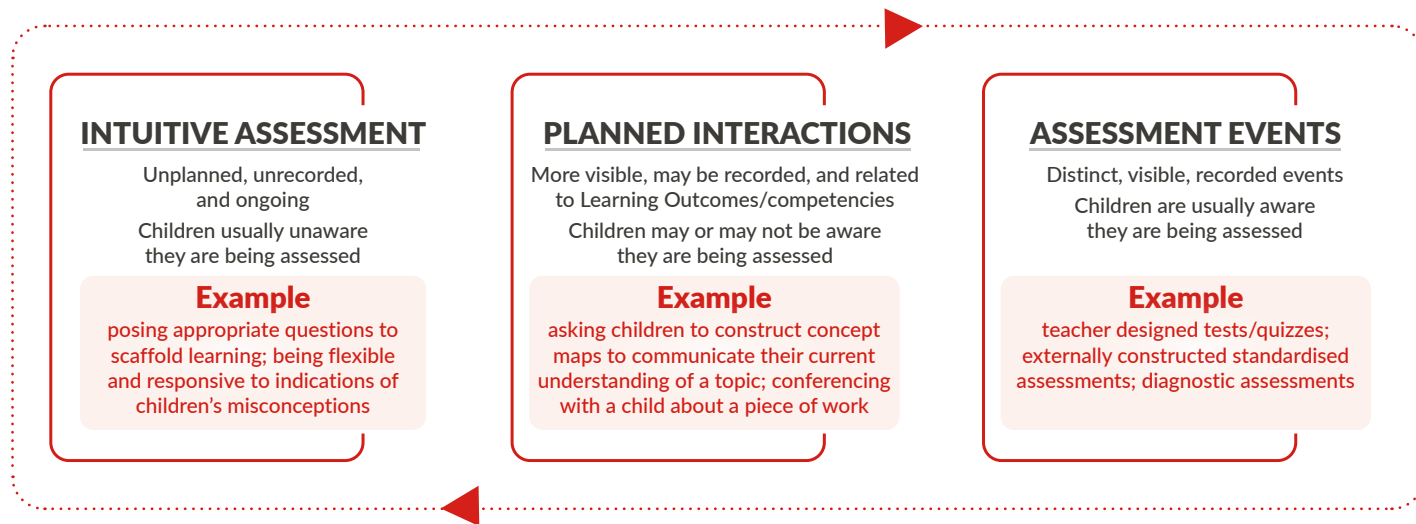
Figure 5: Continuum of assessment

Intuitive assessment occurs naturally and on an ongoing basis during learning experiences. It is integrated into pedagogy, can be invisible, yet still intentional to the teacher, and is a very real part of the process.

Planned interactions are a little more explicit and include practices such as having conversations with children, questioning, asking children to construct concept maps, and following up on intuitive assessments or assessment events.

Assessment events differ from other types of assessment in that (1) they are distinct events, (2) they almost always involve producing a record of the outcomes of the assessment, and (3) children are aware they are being assessed. Used correctly, these assessments can inform and enhance learning and teaching. Standardised testing falls into this category and, while important, it is not more important than other types of assessment. Teachers can use different ways to document assessment information, such as notes, photographs, videos, and learning stories.

Knowledge of pedagogy

The curriculum's vision and principles recognise teachers as committed, skilful, and agentic professionals in a complex role. The term 'pedagogy' refers to this role and takes account of teachers' actions, words, and judgements on what and how children learn, and why particular experiences are important for learning. Knowledge of pedagogy begins with initial teacher education and evolves and deepens through reflection on practice, conversations with colleagues, and continuing professional development.

Professional preparation, as supported through *Preparation for Teaching and Learning – Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools* (Government of Ireland, 2021), and which includes invisible, visible, and recorded aspects, is a critical element of a teacher's pedagogy, as is knowledge of content (see Figure 6). Teachers' preparation of the learning environment, both indoor and outdoor, and the resources that will provide opportunities for the children to play, explore, inquire, experiment, and discover, are critical contributions to pedagogy. Even more important than the physical learning environment is the creation of a respectful, caring, and secure atmosphere that nurtures learning and development.
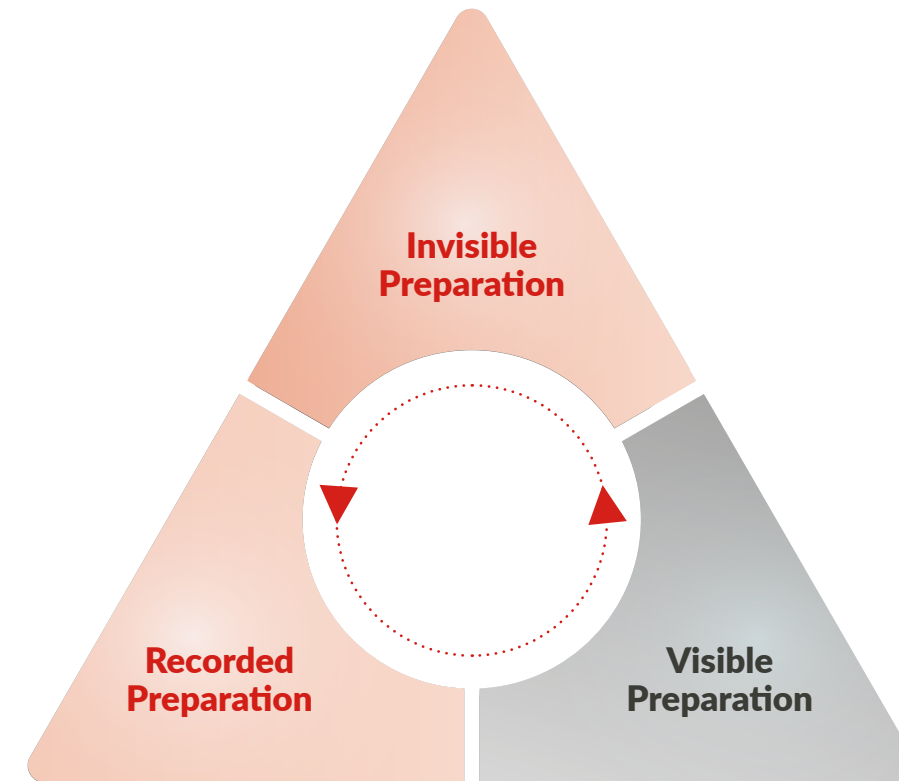

Figure 6: Preparation for Teaching and Learning (adapted from Government of Ireland, 2021, p. 5)

Playful and engaging learning experiences, grounded in an understanding of pedagogical approaches and, where possible, chosen with children, enact the framework's principle on Engagement and participation. In being fully engaged, children are active and show agency in their capacity to act independently and make choices about and in their learning.

In turn, teachers exercise agency in responding to children's choices by making professional decisions based on children's interests, curiosities, and prior learning, and on the curriculum and whole-school approaches. Curriculum experiences provide both teachers and children with opportunities for decision-making, creativity, and collaboration, and such engagement is a significant purpose of teachers' pedagogy.

The framework promotes the use of varied and flexible approaches to pedagogy and, in turn, learning experiences, recognising the differences that exist across schools, classrooms, and, of course, children.

Play and playfulness

While *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* are for different sectors, they are now aligned to support continuity and progression for all children as they make the transition from preschool to primary and special schools. This alignment is particularly evident in the focus in both frameworks on a pedagogy of play. *The Primary Curriculum Framework* provides clarity and certainty on the appropriateness and centrality of play and playful approaches in primary and special schools, where they are key elements of learning and teaching.

Throughout childhood, play is of value in and of itself, and children have both a right and a desire to play. Play and playfulness are also important elements of children's learning experiences and of curriculum enactment in general. Play and playful approaches in school generally happen in three different ways: play that is completely led by children; playful activities that are planned for and led by the teacher; and times when the teacher and the children share play activity, developing the play together. During these experiences, teaching and learning are fluid and flexible, and unexpected and emerging learning opportunities arise. Teachers prepare for play by providing extended blocks of time, adapting the learning environment appropriately, and ensuring a supportive atmosphere. Play and playful experiences lend themselves to children taking ownership and responsibility for their own learning.

Integration

Children live their lives in an integrated world, and, for most real-world problems, children need to apply knowledge and skills from multiple areas. Consequently, they need opportunities in school to develop the disposition to use knowledge and skills flexibly, and integrated learning experiences can provide that context.

The curriculum encourages and supports integration in a number of ways by:

- approaching learning through curriculum areas
- embedding key competencies in Learning Outcomes across all curriculum areas and subjects
- providing opportunities, through Learning Outcomes, for teachers and children to draw on multiple sources of knowledge and skills as they pursue learning.

Additionally, the curriculum recognises that the teacher's interactions with children and their lived experience enable the identification of fruitful themes, interdisciplinary skills, big ideas, and real-world problems that are starting points for integrated learning and teaching. Connecting curriculum to children's lives in meaningful ways is central to the rationale for promoting integration in the primary classroom and an enactment of the curriculum's principles.

Knowledge of the curriculum

The curriculum provides the direction and destination for learning across the four stages of primary school. Teachers' knowledge of the curriculum (including the vision, principles, key competencies, curriculum areas, and learning, teaching, and assessment processes) enables high-quality learning experiences for all children in primary and special schools. Curriculum knowledge also includes the Learning Outcomes and, with familiarity, the links that can be made across elements and strands or indeed across curriculum areas or subjects.

Such knowledge is associated with pedagogical content knowledge, a significant element of

teachers' professional capacity. Teachers who build on children's prior learning and forge a close relationship between curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment greatly enhance children's progression in learning. Knowledge of the curriculum is essential in realising the curriculum vision of providing every child with a strong foundation on which to thrive, flourish, and reach their full potential. In the special school context, the intended learning for children should be drawn from an age-appropriate primary or post-primary curriculum to ensure children have access to, participate in, and benefit from an education that is inclusive and appropriate to their abilities and needs.

Time Allocations

Suggested time allocations assist teachers and schools in their work with the curriculum. They are intended to be used flexibly as teachers prepare rich learning experiences and respond to the learning needs of children over the course of a month (based on a period of four weeks). The suggested time allocations can be seen in the Appendix. As illustrated in Figure 7, the allocations comprise two categories of time: Minimum Curriculum Time (weekly and monthly allocations) and Flexible Time (monthly allocations).

Minimum Curriculum Time provides a weekly minimum time allocation for Language, Mathematics, and Wellbeing and a monthly minimum time allocation (based on a period of four weeks) for Science, Technology, and Engineering Education; Social and Environmental Education; and Arts Education. By delineating time on a monthly basis, the framework gives schools and teachers greater flexibility in deciding how best to use time across the curriculum. It also reduces the likelihood of a particular curriculum area receiving too much or too little attention, thereby ensuring that children have a broad and balanced learning experience.

The framework recognises that children learn many different things, often from across curriculum areas and subjects, at the same time during rich and immersive learning experiences. It also provides opportunities for teachers to use substantial blocks of time in their curriculum planning to enable the use of particular pedagogical approaches such as project work, play, inquiry-based learning, Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and involvement in local initiatives.

The second category, Flexible Time, is intended to be used flexibly and creatively. It supports responses to schools' present and future educational priorities, helping schools determine how best to meet the learning needs, interests, and abilities of children and the needs of teachers and schools in terms of preparing, teaching, and assessing. Each school decides how best to allocate this time to learning, teaching, and assessment. Across a year, a school may decide to use Flexible Time for one, some or all of the following:

- extended periods of in-depth learning in one or more of the five curriculum areas
- whole-school activities or participation in local, regional, and national initiatives and events
- planning and carrying out a project in the local area
- focusing on learning associated with the key competencies
- using particular pedagogical approaches that benefit from extended periods of time
- learning related to a particular aspect of the Patron's Programme.

It is the goal of the curriculum to provide a comprehensive and coherent learning experience for every child. It is important to consider the use of the time allocations in the most flexible way, in order to embrace integrative learning, avail of unexpected learning opportunities, pace learning in response to children's needs, and support immersive and engaging learning experiences.
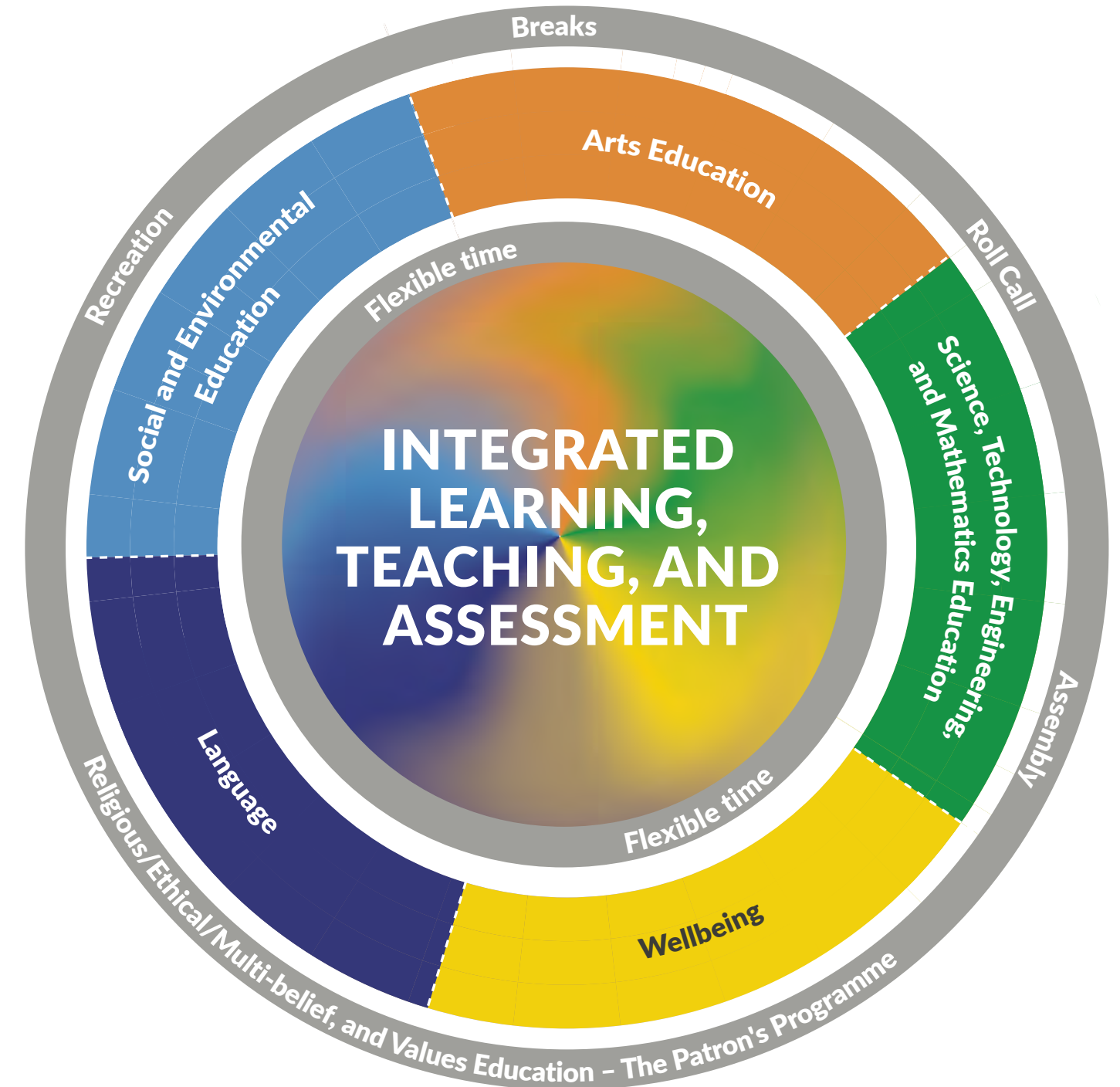

Figure 7: Using time to support integrated learning, teaching, and assessment

Transitions and Continuity in Children's Learning

Transitions and continuity in children's learning is a principle of learning, teaching, and assessment in primary and special schools. Children come to these schools with a rich and varied set of experiences shaped by their family and community and, increasingly, by their time in early childhood settings, including preschools. From and through these experiences, they develop attitudes, concepts, dispositions, knowledge, skills, and values. The curriculum recognises this learning and the importance of building on it as children continue their learning journeys in primary and special school before moving to post-primary school.

Children spend eight years in primary school. As highlighted in the curriculum vision, these years provide an important foundation for them to thrive and flourish, and help them realise their potential as individuals and as members of communities and society during childhood and into the future.

Continuity of experience and progression in learning are important throughout these eight years. Primary education brings key transitions for children, including, for most, the move from preschool to primary or special school, and then to post-primary school. Sharing information about learning and development is especially important at these transition points, so that teachers can plan experiences that enable children to continue to progress in their learning across the curriculum. This transfer of information is supported through *Mo Scéal:* Preschool to Primary Reporting Templates and through the *Education Passport.* Relationship-building between preschools, primary and special schools, and between primary and post-primary schools, can in turn, support children and their families at these two key transition points.

Transitions also happen year by year in the school. Where children move from one teacher to another, either at the beginning of a new school year or as part of the daily or weekly routine, it is important that those teachers have opportunities for professional conversations about the children's learning and how they can be further supported in their learning.

Moving from primary to post-primary school, children continue to build on prior experiences as their learning is supported through the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. What they learn and how they learn in primary and special schools provides a strong foundation for their Junior Cycle experience.

Inclusive Education and Diversity

The framework's principle on Inclusive education and diversity centres on the values and practices that enable children, as individuals, to belong and to feel respected, confident, and safe so they can engage in meaningful learning and reach their potential. The framework is concerned with the best interest of every child, considering that they vary in their competence, language, family background, age, culture, ethnic status, religion, gender, and sexual identity.

The curriculum supports schools in providing each child with an inclusive and developmentally appropriate learning experience in primary school as they move from the home learning environment or preschool setting. Through its vision and principles, the curriculum encourages an appreciation of children's unique capabilities, interests, culture, language, and background. Informed by this knowledge and with the help of appropriate resources, primary and special school teachers can create a respectful school climate and build their curriculum and interactions to proactively promote inclusive principles in their school.

Inclusive learning environments work to remove barriers to make learning more meaningful and relevant for every child, particularly those most vulnerable to exclusionary pressures. It also acknowledges that there are challenges to creating inclusive learning environments. There are a number of key approaches that schools and teachers can take to develop inclusive learning environments:

- Understanding that children have individual needs, views, cultural backgrounds, and beliefs, which need to be recognised, understood, treated with respect, and represented throughout their school experience

- Promoting responsive pedagogies and practices so that all children and families feel included, valued, and visible

- Working in partnership with and communicating with the child's family and the wider community

- Recognising and valuing that all children are unique and will develop and learn at their own pace

- Encouraging children to recognise their individual qualities and the characteristics they share with their peers

- Engaging children in making decisions about their own learning

- Respecting the diversity of the child, their family, and their community during their time in primary and special schools.

Through varied learning experiences, children make connections with diverse languages, cultures, and worldviews. This helps to build school communities that nurture and respond to the variability of learners, fostering a sense of belonging for all.

Parents and the Home Learning Environment

Parents play a key role in their child's education. They are the child's primary educators, and the curriculum promotes a partnership approach with parents to support their child's holistic development. Positive relationships and proactive communication between parents and schools support an awareness of the principles of the curriculum, the learning it provides, and the approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment that are used. This also enables teachers and parents to share observations and keep each other informed about the child's progress in and out of school.

Extending and consolidating the child's learning at home is supported through positive dispositions towards learning by parents, as well as diverse and enriching experiences through learning activities which may include homework. The curriculum supports learning at home through activities that are purposeful, diverse, engaging, supportive of child agency and choice, considerate of the home learning environment, developmentally appropriate, and aligned with children's diverse needs and abilities.

Supporting School Communities with Curriculum Enactment

Working towards the vision and principles in this *Primary Curriculum Framework* brings opportunities, new thinking, and possibilities. However, change on this scale also brings challenges, uncertainty, and disruption. The introduction and enactment of the Primary School Curriculum requires a highly dynamic set of sustained conditions. These conditions are necessary to enable and support schools to work successfully with the curriculum, and include the need for:

- Time and space to become familiar with the new ideas and changes in the curriculum, and time to work with colleagues to plan for curriculum enactment at school level

- Ongoing access to, and opportunities for, high-quality, school-based, professional support

- Enabling and supporting teachers and school leaders to identify and prioritise school-based professional support needs alongside national priorities

- Ongoing opportunities for schools as learning communities to reflect upon, consider, prepare for, and enact the changes in the curriculum

- Embedding educational leadership as a distributed practice that is anchored in learning, teaching, and assessment

- Reviewing and, where necessary, updating requirements of schools, for example in relevant areas such as curriculum planning and documentation, and standardised testing

- Embedding the curriculum changes across the continuum of teacher education

- Coordinating the contribution of the wider education partners, Inspectorate, and support services in working together to enact curriculum change.

The Department of Education is working closely with the education stakeholders to identify practical ways in which schools can be supported comprehensively as they become familiar with and begin to use the *Primary Curriculum Framework* and the new curriculum specifications.

The experiences of introducing and supporting the enactment of the 1999 primary curriculum, and more recently the introduction of the new *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* (Government of Ireland, 2019), provide rich learning about supporting curriculum change that can yield positive outcomes for schools. This includes the types, nature, timing, and pacing of the supports. All of this can inform the design and implementation of a comprehensive approach to supporting and enabling schools to work with the curriculum.

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Appendix: Suggested Time Allocations[4]

The suggested time allocations comprises two categories: Minimum Curriculum Time (weekly and monthly) and Flexible Time (monthly). Minimum Curriculum Time provides a weekly minimum time allocation for Language, Mathematics, and Wellbeing and a monthly (based on a period of four weeks) minimum time allocation for Science, Technology, and Engineering Education; Social and Environmental Education; and Arts Education.

The time allocations are intended to be used flexibly, in order to embrace integrative learning, avail of unexpected learning opportunities, pace learning in response to children's needs, and support immersive and engaging learning experiences.

Stage 1 (Junior and Senior Infants)			
Weekly allocations		Monthly allocations (four weeks)	

Language
    Language 1
    Language 2
	5 hours 45 minutes
	3 hours 15 minutes
	2 hours 30 minutes
			23 hours

Mathematics	3 hours		12 hours
		Science, Technology, and Engineering Education	3 hours 20 minutes
Wellbeing	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
		Social and Environmental Education	6 hours
		Arts Education	9 hours
		Flexible Time	5 hours

Stage 2 (First and Second Class)			
Weekly allocations		Monthly allocations (four weeks)	

Language
    Language 1
    Language 2
	7 hours 45 minutes
	4 hours 45 minutes
	3 hours
			31 hours

Mathematics	4 hours		16 hours
		Science, Technology, and Engineering Education	4 hours
Wellbeing	3 hours		12 hours
		Social and Environmental Education	9 hours
		Arts Education	9 hours
		Flexible Time	6 hours

Stages 3 and 4 (Third to Sixth Class)			
Weekly allocations		Monthly allocations (four weeks)	

Language
    Language 1
    Language 2
    Language 3
	7 hours 45 minutes
	3 hours 45 minutes
	3 hours
	1 hour
			31 hours

Mathematics	4 hours		16 hours
		Science, Technology, and Engineering Education	5 hours
Wellbeing	3 hours		12 hours
		Social and Environmental Education	8 hours
		Arts Education	8 hours
		Flexible Time	7 hours

Weekly allocations		
Religious/Ethical/Multi-belief, and Values Education – The Patron's Programme	Stage 1	1 hour 40 minutes
	Stages 2 to 4	2 hours

Weekly allocations	
Roll call and assembly time	1 hour 15 minutes
Breaks	50 minutes
Recreation	2 hours 30 minutes

4 In Irish-medium schools, gaelscoileanna and Scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht, where tumoideachas (immersion) takes place in Irish, language allocations will require particular consideration. In these contexts, Irish is the medium through which the entire curriculum is accessed, apart from the English language curriculum. In order to support the acquisition of Irish the introduction of formal English learning can be delayed until first class.

Notes