



Primary School Curriculum

Introduction



Curaclam na Bunscoile

Réamhrá

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Introduction

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Minister's foreword

The introduction into schools of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) is a significant landmark in the history of primary education in Ireland. It represents the culmination of many years of development and planning that involved all the partners and interests in primary education.

The preparation of the *Primary School Curriculum* was chiefly the responsibility of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), whose function it is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on matters of curriculum review and assessment. The NCCA was assisted in its work by committees, representing all the principal partners and interests in primary education, who worked on six curriculum areas: Language; Mathematics; Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE); Arts education; Physical education; and Social, personal and health education (SPHE). The development and implementation of the curriculum in religious education in primary schools remains the responsibility of the relevant church authorities.

The *Primary School Curriculum* constitutes a detailed interpretation of the recommendations of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990). It encompasses the philosophical thrust of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971) and the Education Act, 1998.

The curriculum incorporates current educational thinking and the most effective pedagogical practices. It represents a process of revision that is both evolutionary and developmental. It is designed to cater for the needs of children in the modern world.

The introduction of the *Primary School Curriculum* is an exciting opportunity for change and renewal in primary schools. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who were involved in its development. I know that I can depend on their continued co-operation and assistance as the curriculum is implemented in schools.



Micheál Martin TD

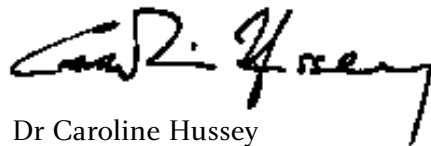
Minister for Education and Science

Chairperson's foreword

Education is an important factor both in the day-to-day development of the child and in contributing to the personal, social, cultural and economic fulfilment of the future adult. The introduction of a revised primary curriculum is, therefore, a significant educational development. The revision of the curriculum, guided by the recommendations of the Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990), incorporates the principles of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971) and develops them. The primary curriculum is seen as having a special relationship with second-level education and this revision has taken place in the context of a number of developments which have occurred in second-level education in recent years.

The revised curriculum also incorporates new content and embraces new approaches and methodologies. A key concern of the curriculum is the importance of literacy and numeracy to personal fulfilment. The curriculum also responds to changing needs, particularly in the areas of science and technology, social, personal and health education, and citizenship, and in taking account of the pilot initiative in modern languages.

I wish to record my deep appreciation to the many people who contributed to the process of revision: the members of the Council and, in particular, the late Dr. Tom Murphy who was chairperson until 1996, the members of the curriculum committees and the education officers who developed and designed the curricula for the different subjects, the Chairperson and members of the Co-ordinating Committee, Ms Lucy Fallon-Byrne who had responsibility for the co-ordination and production of the curriculum and Albert Ó Ceallaigh, Chief Executive, NCCA under whose leadership the review and development of the curriculum took place.



Dr Caroline Hussey
Chairperson



Introduction

Introduction

The introduction of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) represents a major departure in the history of primary education in Ireland. It is the culmination of many years of development and planning that involved all the partners and interests in primary education.

The last major revision of the curriculum for primary schools was *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971). Since then there has been a combination of educational, economic, social and cultural developments in Irish society: these developments have been taken into account in this revision.

The process of revising the curriculum began with the work of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum, which published its report in May 1990. The report constituted a detailed appraisal of the 1971 curriculum and provided the basis for the redesign and restructuring that is presented in this curriculum.

The development of a revised primary curriculum became the responsibility of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, whose function it is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on matters of curriculum and assessment. The NCCA established committees representing all the principal partners and interests in primary education to draw up subject statements and teacher guidelines in each of six curriculum areas: Language; Mathematics; Social environmental and scientific education (SESE); Arts education; Physical education; and Social, personal and health education (SPHE). The development and implementation of the curriculum in religious education in primary schools remains the responsibility of the different church authorities.

The *Primary School Curriculum* constitutes a detailed interpretation of the recommendations of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990). It encompasses the philosophical thrust of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* and reflects the thinking and aspirations of the National Convention on Education (1994), the White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (1995) and the Education Act (1998). Through the work of the NCCA committees, the curriculum incorporates current educational thinking and the most innovative and effective pedagogical practice. It represents a process of

revision that is both evolutionary and developmental. The curriculum is designed to cater for the needs of children in the modern world, and its introduction is an exciting opportunity for change and renewal in primary schools.



Aims, principles and features

Aims, principles and features

The uniqueness of the child

A vision for primary education

The *Primary School Curriculum* celebrates the uniqueness of the child, as it is expressed in each child's personality, intelligence and potential for development. It is designed to nurture the child in all dimensions of his or her life—spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical.

The curriculum recognises the integrity of the child's life as a child and aims to cater for his or her needs and potential as they evolve day by day. By meeting these needs, the curriculum enriches the child's life and the foundations are laid for happiness and fulfilment in later education and in adult life.

The child and society

The curriculum acknowledges that children live in and are a part of society, and that their personal development is deeply affected by their relationships in the home and with other people in society. The curriculum takes full account of these aspects of the child's life in seeking to balance individual and social development, in developing an appreciation of how the different dimensions of life complement each other, and in helping the child to work co-operatively with others.

Education and society

The relationship between education and society is dynamic and interactive. Education not only reflects a society but is an influence in shaping its development. It helps to equip children to share in the benefits of the society in which they live and to contribute effectively to that society's sustenance and evolution. The curriculum reflects the educational, cultural, social and economic aspirations and concerns of Irish society. It also takes cognisance of the changing nature of knowledge and society and caters for the needs of individual children in adjusting to such change.

In order to realise this view of the child and education, the curriculum outlines a detailed and structured framework of content that is comprehensive and flexible. It promotes the active involvement of children in a learning process that is imaginative and stimulating. Its overall vision is to enable children to meet, with self-confidence and assurance, the demands of life, both now and in the future.

The general aims of primary education

This vision of education can be expressed in the form of three general aims:

- to enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual
- to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society
- to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning.

The development of the child

The curriculum recognises the importance of developing the full potential of the child. It seeks to develop children spiritually and morally and to foster in each child an ethical sense that will enable him or her to acquire values on which to base choices and form attitudes; it endeavours to equip children with the knowledge and skills that will serve them not only in their lives as children but later as adults; it is concerned to develop their capacity for creative expression and response; and it promotes their emotional and physical development.

In a rapidly changing society effective interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and skills in communication are essential for personal, social and educational fulfilment. The ability to think critically, to apply learning and to develop flexibility and creativity are also important factors in the success of the child's life. The curriculum places a particular emphasis on promoting these skills and abilities so that children may cope successfully with change.

Learning how to learn

An important goal of the curriculum is to enable children to learn how to learn, and to develop an appreciation of the value and practice of lifelong learning. The curriculum aims to instil a love of learning that will remain with the child through all stages of formal education and that will express itself in an enquiring mind and a heightened curiosity.

These aims are elaborated further in chapter 4, where specific aims and general objectives are outlined.

The principles of the curriculum

The 1971 curriculum was based on a philosophy of education that incorporated the following five principles:

- the full and harmonious development of the child
- the importance of making due allowance for individual difference
- the importance of activity and discovery methods
- the integrated nature of the curriculum
- the importance of environment-based learning.

The Review Body on the Primary Curriculum endorsed these principles and recommended that any future curriculum development should reflect them. The *Primary School Curriculum* affirms the view of the child and the learning process implicit in these principles and develops them. The principles of the full and harmonious development of the child and of making allowance for individual difference are redefined in the broader concepts of

- celebrating the uniqueness of the child
- ensuring the development of the child's full potential.

The three pedagogical principles dealing with activity and discovery methods, an integrated curriculum and environment-based learning are subsumed into a wider range of learning principles that help to characterise more fully the learning process that the revised curriculum envisages. The more important of these are:

- the child's sense of wonder and natural curiosity is a primary motivating factor in learning
- the child is an active agent in his or her learning
- learning is developmental in nature
- the child's existing knowledge and experience form the base for learning
- the child's immediate environment provides the context for learning
- learning should involve guided activity and discovery methods
- language is central in the learning process
- the child should perceive the aesthetic dimension in learning
- social and emotional dimensions are important factors in learning

- learning is most effective when it is integrated
- skills that facilitate the transfer of learning should be fostered
- higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills should be developed
- collaborative learning should feature in the learning process
- the range of individual difference should be taken into account in the learning process
- assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning.

Key issues in primary education

While the curriculum was being revised a National Convention on Education took place, a White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (1995) was published and the Education Act (1998) was passed. The debate surrounding these events and other educational initiatives resulted in a consensus on a number of issues of relevance to primary education. They include:

- quality in education
- literacy and numeracy
- developing a sense of Irish identity
- the place of the Irish language in primary education
- the spiritual dimension in life
- the European and global dimensions of modern living
- pluralism, a respect for diversity and the importance of tolerance
- the function of the curriculum in contributing to equality and fairness of access in education
- partnership in education
- the role of information and communication technologies in enhancing learning
- catering for children with special needs
- the crucial role of early childhood education
- facilitating the transition from primary to post-primary education
- the role of the curriculum in establishing patterns of lifelong learning.

These issues are reflected in the curriculum and are described in detail in chapter 3.

Defining features of the curriculum

The aims and principles of each curriculum area are expressed as a coherent and structured body of content that is characterised by a number of defining features which are outlined here.

A focus on learning

The curriculum is based on a philosophy and psychology of teaching and learning that incorporates the most advanced educational theory and practice. It accords equal importance to what the child learns and to the process by which he or she learns it. One of its essential features is a recognition of the principle that there are different kinds of learning and that individual children learn in different ways. The curriculum articulates, therefore, not only the content to be learned and the outcomes to be achieved, but a wide range of approaches to learning. The curriculum aims to ensure that children's experience of school will be such that they will come to value learning and will develop the ability to learn independently. Most importantly, it aims to enhance the enjoyment of learning and the motivation to learn.

A relevant curriculum

The curriculum seeks to satisfy the developmental and educational needs of the children it serves in the context of the contemporary society in which they live. It provides for children's immediate learning needs and interests, and at the same time prepares them to benefit from further education. It enables children to function effectively in a changing society and to cope successfully with the demands of modern life.

A broad and balanced curriculum

The curriculum is characterised by its breadth and balance. It reflects the many dimensions of human experience, activity and expression, and is directed towards the development of the full potential of every child. Within a clear and structured national framework, it affords flexibility to the school and the teacher in planning the learning experiences that are useful to the individual child at the various stages of his or her development.

A developmental approach to learning

The curriculum reflects a developmental approach to learning. By revisiting knowledge and ideas already acquired, as the starting point for new learning, it allows for the coherent expansion of knowledge and the gradual refinement of concepts. It recognises, too, the integrated nature of knowledge and thought and stresses the connections in content in the different curriculum areas. This creates harmony in the child's learning experiences and serves the complex nature of the learning process.

A detailed statement of content

The curriculum gives a detailed statement of content for each subject. It provides for an extensive learning experience and encourages a rich variety of approaches to teaching and learning that cater for the differing needs of individual children.

A balance of knowledge, concepts and skills

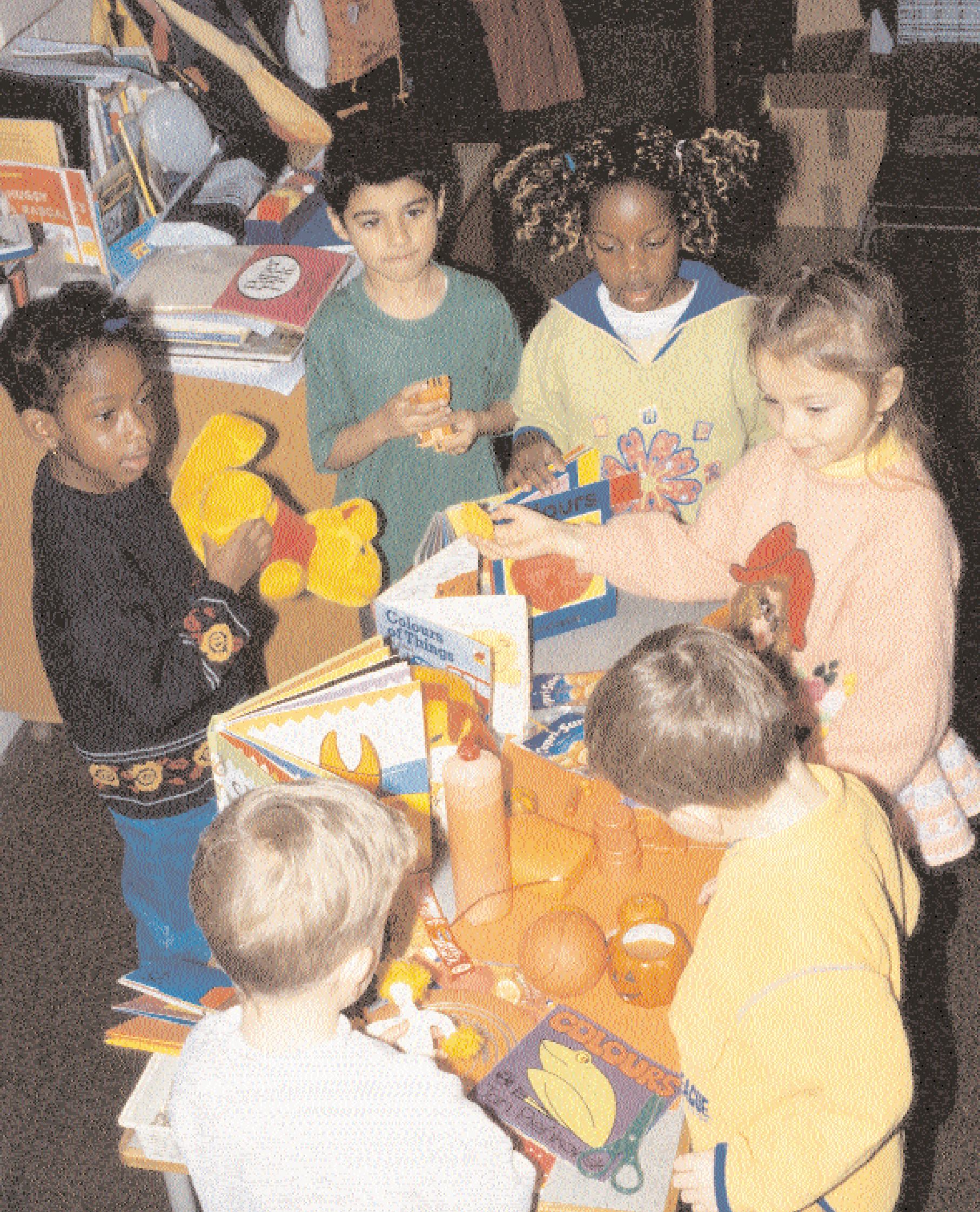
The curriculum envisages a particular relationship between the acquisition of knowledge and the development of concepts and skills. Concepts and skills are outlined at each class level, and their development is approached through the exploration of the content of the curriculum. Strong emphasis is placed on developing the ability to question, to analyse, to investigate, to think critically, to solve problems, and to interact effectively with others.

Assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning

A significant feature of the curriculum is the central position given to assessment in the teaching and learning process. Using assessment strategies that are directed towards the identification of children's needs, and providing experiences that will fulfil these needs, adds enormously to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Each subject in the curriculum, therefore, contains a statement on appropriate assessment procedures and their use.

The importance of planning

The curriculum envisages an integrated learning experience for children. In order to achieve this, strong emphasis is placed on planning. Within the framework of the curriculum schools are afforded flexibility to plan a programme that is appropriate to the individual school's circumstances and to the needs, aptitudes and interests of the children. In the presentation of content and in the exploration of approaches and methodologies, the curriculum assumes that schools, in the process of planning its implementation, will adapt and interpret the curriculum where necessary to meet their own unique requirements.



Chapter 2

Children and learning

Children and learning

The principles of learning in the curriculum

Learning can be described as any experience that contributes to the child's development. It is a process that begins before birth and reflects the child's experience of and interaction with his or her environment. Its rate of progress is most rapid during the early years, and by the time the child comes to school he or she has already acquired a complex range of knowledge, concepts, skills and values.

The impulse for such learning is the child's sense of wonder at the complexity of the world, the desire to understand it, and the spontaneous impetus to explore it through play. This sense of wonder, together with the child's natural curiosity, is at the heart of the learning process and provides the purest and most valuable motivating factor in the child's learning. It is in cultivating the sense of wonder that the curriculum can provide the most fulfilling learning experience for the child and foster an appreciation of the value of learning.

It is an underlying principle of the curriculum that the child should be an active agent in his or her own learning. The structure and content of the curriculum are designed to provide opportunities for active engagement in a wide range of learning experiences and to encourage children to respond in a variety of ways to particular content and teaching strategies.

Conceptual development is not necessarily a linear process. It may take place on a number of planes simultaneously or through the making of an intuitive leap. Having dealt with particular knowledge, ideas and skills at a simple level, the child should have the opportunity to return to them at regular intervals in order to deepen his or her understanding. In this way the curriculum allows for the complexity of the learning process and for a coherent expansion of the child's conceptual framework.

It is a fundamental principle of the curriculum that the child's existing knowledge and experience should be the starting point for acquiring new understanding. The curriculum enables the child to move from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the more complex, from the concrete to the abstract, benefitting from a learning experience that is effective, coherent, and relevant.

The child's sense of wonder and natural curiosity

The child as an active agent in his or her learning

The developmental nature of learning

The child's knowledge and experience as a base for learning

Environment-based learning

The child's environment is an important context for his or her development. First-hand experience that actively engages the child with the immediate environment and with those who live in it is the most effective basis for learning. This will be centred in the home at first. Later it will be extended to include the immediate environment and the school and, as the child matures, will encompass an ever-widening context. This first-hand experience provides a reference framework for the understanding of more abstract concepts. A rich experience of different aspects of the curriculum outside the classroom adds enormously to the relevance and effectiveness of children's learning.

Learning through guided activity and discovery

The principle of guided activity and discovery and the importance of the teacher in providing the most effective learning experiences for the child are central to the curriculum. In order to ensure that learning is fully productive, the teacher needs to identify particular stages of development in the child's understanding and then choose the sequence of activities that will be most effective in advancing the child's learning.

Learning through language

Language has a vital role to play in children's development. Much learning takes place through the interaction of language and experience. Language helps the child to clarify and interpret experience, to acquire new concepts, and to add depth to concepts already grasped. In view of this crucial relationship between language and learning the curriculum incorporates the use of talk and discussion as a central learning strategy in every curriculum area. This facilitates the exploration of ideas, emotions and reactions through increasingly complex language, thus deepening the child's understanding of the world.

The aesthetic dimension

The curriculum enables the child to perceive the aesthetic dimension in every area. This enriches the learning experiences for the child and the different aspects of conceptual development. The uniqueness of the child is perhaps most apparent in the innate creativity of each individual, while valuing the child's creative response and expression of perceptions, insights, interpretations and knowledge is an important principle of the curriculum.

The social and emotional dimensions of learning

It is widely recognised that the child's social and emotional development significantly influences his or her success in learning. This is addressed most effectively through a school ethos that is characterised by a caring, interactive relationship between teachers and pupils. It is also a central concern of learning in every curriculum area. Its importance is stressed, too, through social, personal and health education. By providing children with a successful and happy school experience, by nurturing essential intrapersonal and interpersonal development, and by developing communication skills, children's self-esteem and self-confidence are raised and their motivation to learn is increased.

The integration of learning

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. It is important, therefore, to make connections between learning in different subjects. As they mature, integration gives children's learning a broader and richer perspective, emphasises the interconnectedness of knowledge and ideas and reinforces the learning process.

The transfer of learning

One way to judge the effectiveness of learning is to look at the child's ability to apply what he or she has learned in dealing with problems, choices, situations and experiences that are unfamiliar. The acquisition of this ability to transfer learning is a central feature of the curriculum. Each curriculum area addresses the development of abilities and skills that will enable the child to react creatively to a variety of situations, to approach problems constructively, to communicate effectively, and to relate successfully to others.

Higher-order thinking and problem-solving

In the curriculum the child is encouraged to observe, collate and evaluate evidence, to ask relevant questions, to identify essential information, to recognise the essence of a problem, to suggest solutions, and to make informed judgements. These activities help to foster the higher-order thinking skills, such as summarising, analysing, making inferences and deductions, and interpreting figurative language and imagery.

Collaborative learning

While it is important that children experience a variety of classroom organisational frameworks, working collaboratively provides learning opportunities that have particular advantages. Children are stimulated by hearing the ideas and opinions of others, and by having the opportunity to react to them. Collaborative work exposes children to the individual perceptions that others may have of a problem or a situation. These will reflect the different personalities and particular abilities of other members of the group and make for an interactive exchange that will help to broaden and deepen individual children's understanding. Moreover, the experience of collaborative learning facilitates the child's social and personal development, and the practice of working with others brings children to an early appreciation of the benefits to be gained from co-operative effort.

Taking account of individual difference

The curriculum allows for differences in capacity and in the range of individual intelligence. It also takes account of many other factors of difference, such as urban and rural environments, single-class and multi-class school organisation, variations in socio-economic background, and family and community expectations. The breadth and flexibility of the curriculum, the choices it offers in the selection and sequencing of content and its focus on the developmental needs of children ensures its adaptability to the diversity of children's circumstances and experiences.

Assessment

Role of assessment

Assessment is central to the process of teaching and learning. It is used to monitor learning processes and to ascertain achievement in each area of the curriculum. Through assessment the teacher constructs a comprehensive picture of the short-term and long-term learning needs of the child and plans future work accordingly. Assessment is also used to identify children with specific learning difficulties so that the nature of the support and assistance they need can be ascertained, and appropriate strategies and programmes put in place to enable them to cope with the particular difficulties they are encountering.

Assessment assists communication about children's progress and development between teacher and child, between teacher and parent, and between teacher and teacher. It helps the child to become more self-aware as a learner and to develop powers of self-assessment. It also helps to ensure quality in education.

Areas to be assessed

Assessment is integral to all areas of the curriculum and it encompasses the diverse aspects of learning; the cognitive, the creative, the affective, the physical and the social. In addition to the products of learning, the strategies, procedures and stages in the process of learning are assessed. Assessment includes the child's growth in self-esteem, interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviour, and the acquisition of a wide range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

Approaches to assessment

In order to take account of the breadth and variety of learning it offers, the curriculum contains a varied range of assessment tools. These range from informal tools such as teacher observation, classwork, homework and discussion with pupils to more formal tools such as diagnostic tests and standardised tests. Assessment tools such as projects, portfolios and curriculum profiles that can be used to link formal and informal approaches are also recommended. It is intended that in planning teaching, learning and assessment procedures, schools and teachers will select those that best meet their needs at a particular time.

The child and the learning community

The social context

The social context in which learning takes place is a key influence on the nature and effectiveness of the learning process. The family, the school, the teacher, the board of management and the local community form a social continuum and provide a context of social interaction in which the child's educational development takes place.

The school, the principal and the staff

The school is a learning organisation involved in a continuing process of reflection, development and improvement. This occurs in the context of co-operation between the different partners in the school community in fulfilling a number of interconnecting and mutually supportive roles. The main purpose of the school is to promote the highest quality of teaching and learning for its children, and the principal is central in guiding the school community towards realising its optimum potential.

The principal plays a crucial role in energising and motivating the staff, in affirming and encouraging their efforts, in fostering a lively process of communication, and in establishing a continuing process of consultation. It is important that creativity is encouraged, that teachers are given the scope to express fully their individual talents and expertise, and that all of the staff share a sense of ownership in the planning, implementation and success of the teaching and learning process.

Curriculum leadership

The principal is pivotal in creating a shared vision for the curriculum in the school and in providing dynamic and inspirational curriculum leadership. The process of curriculum development will allow the principal, together with the staff, to identify educational goals that are both relevant and realistic and that will reflect the needs, aptitudes and circumstances of the pupils, and the unique character of the school and its environment.

Achieving these goals requires a deep understanding of, and a commitment to, the principles underpinning the curriculum and the approaches to teaching and learning that are inherent in it. It also requires the development of procedures and structures within the school that will facilitate a process of consistent curriculum and organisational planning. This should include the delegation of relevant responsibilities to deputy principals, assistant principals, and special-duties teachers.

The planning process will culminate in the development of a framework for action that will guide the school in the implementation of the curriculum.

Continuity and progression

The monitoring of continuity is one of the most important roles of the principal as a manager of curriculum. Occasions in the child's life in which discontinuity can occur include the transition from home to school, from class to class, and from primary to post-primary school. To maintain continuity for children at all stages, and in order to circumvent unnecessary duplication or gaps in information, principals need to ensure that procedures for consultation and liaison are put in place.

The process of consultation between principal and staff also involves the establishment of an effective and appropriate system for monitoring pupils' performance and achievement. A shared understanding of the importance of assessment in teaching and learning, an awareness of available assessment tools and the use of appropriate assessment procedures and practices are essential in providing children with an effective learning experience.

The principal has a central role to play in ensuring that parents, the board of management and the wider community contribute actively to the educational life of the school. By providing a vision of education and vibrant leadership, the principal creates an awareness not only of what the school is as an organisation but of what it can become. This is achieved through a culture of collaboration and mutual support and through a climate of openness and trust.

The role of the teacher

The demands of administration and planning can pose a particular challenge for teaching principals, and consideration needs to be given to possible strategies that will increase the amount of time available for communication with staff and for the effective management and administration of the school. However, the great strength of the teaching principal is in day-to-day contact with the reality and concerns of the classroom and his or her direct contribution to the pedagogic effectiveness of the school.

It is the quality of teaching more than anything else that determines the success of the child's learning and development in school. The teacher offers a wide repertoire of expertise and competence and exercises professional discretion in planning and directing the learning process. He or she has a complex role as a caring facilitator and guide who interprets the child's learning needs and responds to them. This role is informed by a concern for the uniqueness of the child, a respect for the integrity of the child as a learner and by a sense of enthusiasm and a commitment to teaching. The teacher's professional expertise enables him or her to interpret the needs of the child and the requirements of the curriculum in order to provide effective learning experiences.

The quality of the relationship that the teacher establishes with the child is of paramount importance in the learning process. The teacher's concern for the well-being and the successful development of the child is the basis for the creation of a supportive environment that can facilitate the child's learning. A relationship of trust between teacher and child creates an environment in which the child is happy in school and motivated to learn.

The nature and quality of the learning experiences the teacher chooses will seek to integrate the child's existing knowledge and competence in a way that will contribute effectively to the expansion of his or her conceptual framework. In doing this, the teacher will take account of the differences in children, their interests and motivation, their varied personalities, and the many ways in which they learn.

It is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that the complexity of children's learning needs is served by a learning process that is rich and varied. This involves the teacher in classroom planning and in the wider process of school planning, making judgements and decisions about the choice of content, the way different elements of content are combined, and the sequence in which these are introduced.

Different forms of classroom organisation will complement the variety of learning the curriculum has to offer. Working collaboratively in groups, working individually, and whole-class teaching and learning will all be appropriate in particular learning contexts and in accomplishing different learning goals. As well as variety in classroom organisation, the teacher will bring a rich, imaginative and innovative range of strategies and resources to the learning process. These will include involving parents in the learning process, making full use of the human and physical resources of the wider community, and utilising the learning potential of information and communication technologies.

To provide learning experiences for the child that are relevant to the challenges of contemporary society, the teacher needs to adopt innovative approaches to teaching and to be aware of changes and developments in educational theory and practice. It is important, therefore, that the teacher is committed to a process of continuing professional reflection, development and renewal.

The role of parents

Parents are the child's primary educators, and the life of the home is the most potent factor in his or her development during the primary school years. There is a continuing process through which the child's formal learning experience in school interacts with the less formal developmental experience of the home and the family.

It is widely recognised that significant educational, social and behavioural benefits accrue to the child as a result of effective partnership between parents and teachers. Close co-operation between the home and the school is essential, therefore, if children are to receive the maximum benefit from the curriculum.

The role of management

Regular consultation with parents helps teachers to come to a deeper appreciation of children's needs and so to plan more effective learning experiences. It also provides the means by which teachers keep parents fully informed about children's progress. Good communication between parents and schools will help build a shared understanding of the principles of the curriculum, the learning goals of the school, and the approaches and methodologies it adopts. It will also facilitate easier transition from home to school and later from primary to second-level education.

In a more general context, the involvement of parents in the organisational planning of the curriculum and their active participation in the life of the school enhances co-operation and interaction between home and school. Parents also have a special contribution to make in creating and fostering a positive school spirit in which all members of the school community can feel a sense of belonging and have an interest in the school's development. To encourage this spirit, schools need to reach out to help some parents overcome any inhibiting attitudes they may have. The work of parents' groups can also provide additional support in helping them to become fully involved in their children's progress.

The board of management has responsibility for the overall management of the school and the appropriate accommodation of pupils. It has a crucial role to play in the collaborative process of ensuring that the educational needs of all its pupils are identified and catered for. It therefore has a responsibility in supporting and facilitating the planning and implementation of the curriculum in the school and in formally approving the school plan.

The board provides a valuable forum for the expression of the views and concerns of the different interests it represents. It has a particular function in promoting partnership in the educational and organisational processes of the school and in ensuring effective communication between the different interests involved.

The school and the local community

The board also has a responsibility for supporting and monitoring the characteristic spirit of the school, which is determined by cultural, educational, moral, religious or social values and traditions. Within the resources available to it, the board provides support for the implementation of the curriculum. It can also contribute significantly to staff morale in the school and to effective curriculum development by encouraging and facilitating the professional development of teachers.

The establishment of close links between the school and its local community can be mutually beneficial. The circumstances of schools vary, and some have more clearly identifiable local communities than others. However, it should be a general aspiration that the school would be seen as a key resource in improving the quality of life in the community and would, in turn, regard the community as a rich resource from which to draw educational assistance. It is essential that school planning take cognisance of what the community has to offer in creating relevant and effective learning experiences for its children, and in identifying the contribution that children can, in turn, make to the community.



Key issues in primary education

Key issues in primary education

The following key considerations have been taken into account in the revision of the curriculum:

Quality in education

Each child is entitled to the best possible quality of education and it is the responsibility of the state to provide for this through the education system. Curriculum is an important determinant of quality in education, and the standards of learning children achieve through their engagement with it will be a measure of its effectiveness.

The curriculum provides a national framework that defines learning outcomes appropriate to Irish primary school children. It is designed to give children the opportunity to attain the maximum standards in knowledge, concepts and skills consonant with their intelligence, capacity and circumstances.

Literacy and numeracy

Within the context of a broad and relevant curriculum and a commitment to the highest quality of educational provision for all, the particular educational goals associated with literacy and numeracy are a priority of the curriculum. The acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills is central to effective learning in every area of the curriculum and to the child's social and community life outside school. The successful development of these essential skills during the primary school years will be crucial for educational success in post-primary school and in enabling every individual to realise his or her social and vocational potential.

A sense of Irish identity

Irish education reflects the historical and cultural roots of Irish society and seeks to give children an appreciation of the continuity of the Irish experience and of their relationship with it. It acknowledges the child's right to understand and participate in the diverse cultural, social and artistic expression of that experience, and to appreciate and enjoy the richness of the Irish heritage. It reflects, too, current Irish social and cultural concerns, thus enabling children to contribute to, and benefit from, the particular qualities and advantages of modern Irish life and experience.

The Irish language

It is a particular feature of Irish primary education that children, from the beginning of schooling, have an experience of language learning in two languages. An engagement with the Irish language throughout the period of primary education extends the child's linguistic experience and deepens cultural awareness. The curriculum recognises that an experience and a knowledge of Irish are important in enabling the child to begin to define and express his or her sense of national and cultural identity.

The spiritual dimension

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. This conviction comes from a shared perception that intimates a more profound explanation of being, from an awareness of the finiteness of life and from the sublime fulfilment that human existence sometimes affords. The spiritual dimension of life expresses itself in a search for truth and in the quest for a transcendent element within human experience.

The importance that the curriculum attributes to the child's spiritual development is expressed through the breadth of learning experiences the curriculum offers, through the inclusion of religious education as one of the areas of the curriculum, and through the child's engagement with the aesthetic and affective domains of learning.

The European and global dimensions

In seeking to enable children to realise and express their individual and national identity the curriculum takes account of our historic links with European culture and our modern membership of the European Union. It recognises that children's linguistic and cultural awareness is enhanced by an experience of foreign language learning and that future curriculum development will take account of this in the context of the current pilot project in the teaching of modern languages.

The curriculum acknowledges, too, the importance of a balanced and informed awareness of the diversity of peoples and environments in the world. Such an awareness helps children to understand the world and contributes to their personal and social development as citizens of a global community.

Pluralism

The curriculum has a particular responsibility in promoting tolerance and respect for diversity in both the school and the community. Children come from a diversity of cultural, religious, social, environmental and ethnic backgrounds, and these engender their own beliefs, values, and aspirations. The curriculum acknowledges the centrality of the Christian heritage and tradition in the Irish experience and the Christian identity shared by the majority of Irish people. It equally recognises the diversity of beliefs, values and aspirations of all religious and cultural groups in society.

Equality and fairness of access

A central aim of education is to ensure equality of opportunity for all children. Different factors, including socio-economic disadvantage, can impinge seriously on the child's legitimate entitlement to educational fulfilment. In the context of the general response of the educational system to the inhibiting effects of such social and economic disadvantage and their implications for children's learning, the curriculum offers the school and the teacher a flexible framework through which the learning requirements of all children may be addressed. It recognises, too, the importance of providing appropriate support, in the form of human and physical resources, and of curriculum adaptation to schools to enable them to satisfy the needs of the children they serve.

Stereotyped expectations of gender roles can also inhibit the child's educational achievement. It is important that school and classroom planning ensure an equal educational experience for both boys and girls and that teachers are consistently aware of their own expectations and assumptions in the day-to-day life of the classroom.

Partnership

One of the features of the design and construction of the curriculum has been the process of consultation through which it was produced and the participation and co-operation of all the relevant partners and interests in this process. These included parents, teachers, management bodies, the Department of Education and Science, third-level education, industry and the trade unions. It takes account, consequently, of the concerns and aspirations of a variety of interests and reflects a multi-faceted social and educational perspective. Partnership and co-operation among management, parents and teachers will also characterise the successful planning and implementation of the curriculum in primary schools.

Science education

In a world in which science and technology impinge crucially on social and economic life, science education has a particular relevance to children's experience both now and in the future. A basic understanding of scientific principles and the scientific explanation of natural phenomena, together with an appreciation of the processes of designing and making, can make a significant contribution to children's understanding of the world. The curriculum provides a foundation of knowledge and concepts in the domains of physics, chemistry, biology and botany and seeks to foster an appreciation of scientific methods and a facility in using them.

Information and communication technologies

Technological skills are increasingly important for advancement in education, work, and leisure. The curriculum integrates information and communication technologies into the teaching and learning process and provides children with opportunities to use modern technology to enhance their learning in all subjects.

Children with special needs

All children have a right of access to the highest-quality education appropriate to their needs. This includes children whose disabilities or circumstances inhibit their effective participation in the education that is normally provided for children of their age, or for whom the provision of education in mainstream classes may not be sufficiently challenging. It is important that a range of educational provision is available that is flexible enough to cater for the special needs of individual children at the various stages of their development.

The range of content and learning experience inherent in the curriculum facilitates the development of frameworks adapted to serve the diversity of children's special needs. These should, in particular, address the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes relevant to the practicalities of children's lives, both in and out of school.

Effective education for children with special needs involves a balanced provision of education and care, the nature of which can vary as the child develops and progresses. It is essential, therefore, that it is flexible enough to accommodate both ease of movement between special and mainstream education and the transition from primary to post-primary level.

Early childhood education

The commitment to providing many children with special needs with an integrated educational experience in mainstream classes has added a further dimension to the range of curriculum provision required in the primary school. This will be a particular consideration in the process of planning curriculum implementation both at school and class level.

A characteristic feature of Irish primary education is that many children begin formal schooling from the age of four. This requires a curriculum that is appropriate to the developmental and learning needs of young children. Research and educational experience underline the crucial importance of the early years in the child's developmental experience. The rate of maturation and development, and the pace of learning, is greater during these years than at any subsequent period in the child's life. The child's experience of learning in the early years, therefore, will have a profound influence on later learning.

Although children come to school with a variety of educational experience, both from the home and from pre-school education, the child's entry into the formal education system marks a significant transition in his or her life. In this sharing of care it is important that a learning continuum is preserved between the home and the school. There is a need for a continuing process whereby the child's experience in the infant classes interacts with the developmental experience of home and family. This highlights the importance of the teacher's dual role as carer and educator.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that, for a variety of social, cultural and economic reasons, the level of development reached by some children at the time they come to school may not reflect their potential. An appropriate special intervention in the pre-school years and in the early years in school can enable such children to benefit fully from the learning experience that the curriculum has to offer.

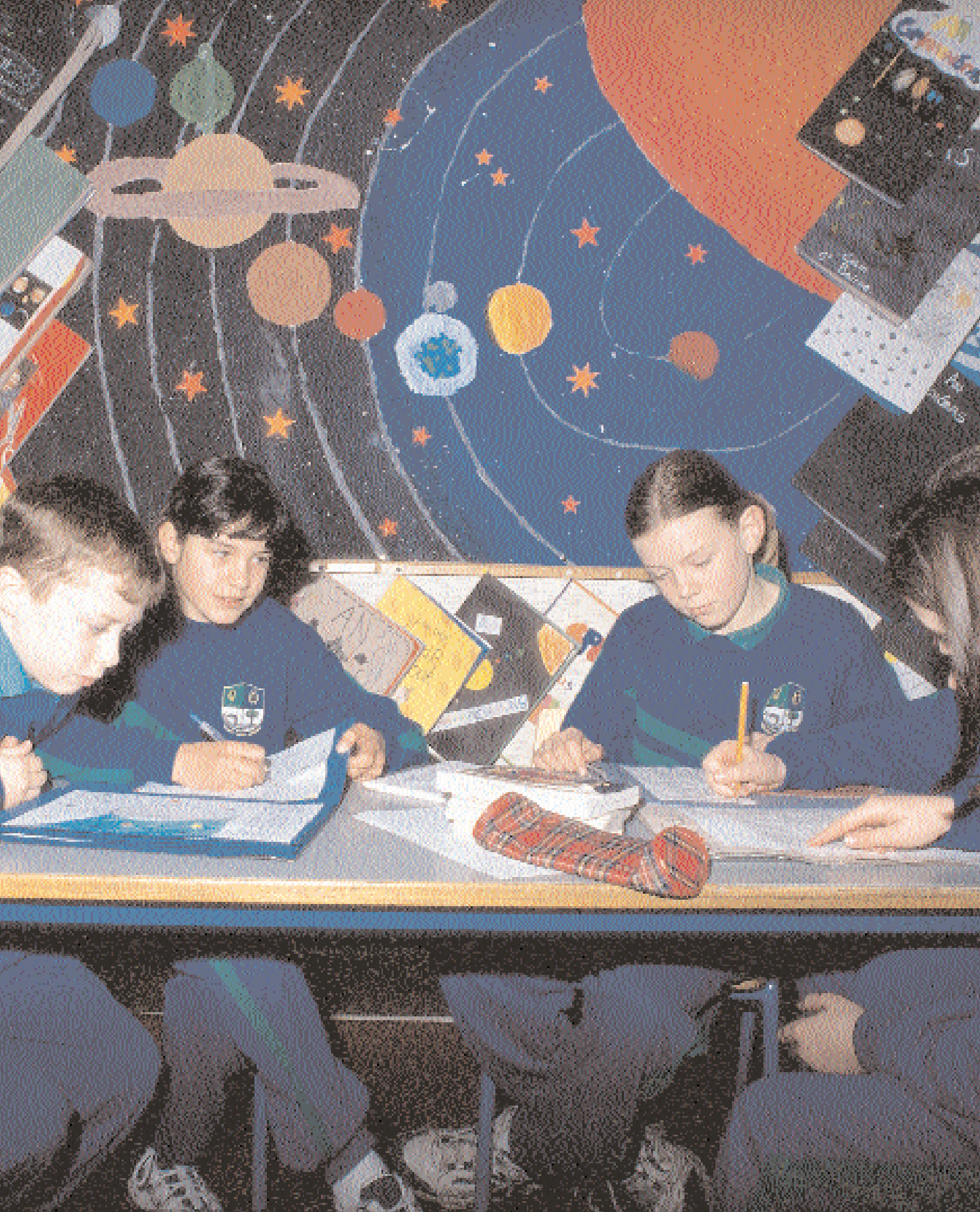
The curriculum for infant classes takes account of all these factors. It is, in the first place, based on the uniqueness of the child and the particular needs of individual children at this stage of development. The informality of the learning experience inherent in it, and the emphasis it gives to the element of play, are particularly suited to the learning needs of young children. It stresses, too, the centrality of language in early childhood learning and the importance of activity and the manipulation of a variety of materials in promoting motor and sensory development.

Transition from primary to post-primary

One of the functions of primary education is to prepare children for engaging effectively with education at second level. The importance of this function is acknowledged in the general aims of the curriculum. The transition from primary to post-primary education represents a significant and challenging step in the child's educational experience and may present difficulties for some children. Consistency of approach between the primary curriculum and junior cycle curricula, and the developmental nature of the learning experience they offer, should help to ease children's progress from one level to the other. Furthermore, the detailed statement of content in the primary curriculum, and the assessment procedures inherent in it, will greatly assist in facilitating communication between teachers and schools at both levels.

The curriculum and lifelong learning

The experience of primary school is one element in an educational continuum that includes pre-school care and development, second-level and further education and training, and life experience. Lifelong learning, which involves a continuing process of updating knowledge and renewing skills, can help to equip the individual to cope with the rapidly changing nature of modern life, with its unpredictable patterns of life and work. A commitment to lifelong learning can be nurtured from the earliest years in school, thus laying the foundation for the development of self-reliance in learning and a sense of responsibility for personal fulfilment.



Specific aims and general objectives

Specific aims and general objectives

The three general aims of primary education are

- to enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual
- to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society
- to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning.

The achievement of these aims entails the acquisition of a wide range of knowledge and the development of a variety of concepts, skills and attitudes appropriate to children of different ages and stages of development in the primary school. These may be elaborated in a number of specific curriculum aims:

Specific aims

- to enable children to come to an understanding of the world through the acquisition of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes and the ability to think critically
- to enable children to apply what they learn to new contexts in order to respond creatively to the variety of challenges they encounter in life
- to enable children to become lifelong learners through developing positive attitudes to learning and the ability to learn independently
- to enable children to develop spiritual, moral and religious values
- to enable children to develop literacy skills, comprehension skills and expressive skills in language and to appreciate the power and beauty of language
- to enable children to develop numeracy and problem-solving skills and an understanding of mathematical concepts
- to enable children to develop a respect for cultural difference, an appreciation of civic responsibility, and an understanding of the social dimension of life, past and present
- to enable children to develop skills and understanding in order to study their world and its inhabitants and appreciate the interrelationships between them

General objectives

- to enable children to develop their creative and imaginative capacities through artistic expression and response
- to enable children to develop and express themselves physically through the acquisition of a range of movement skills and to appreciate the potential and importance of health and well-being
- to enable children to develop personally and socially and to relate to others with understanding and respect.

In achieving these specific aims, further, more detailed objectives can be identified. These delineate particular skills, aspects of knowledge and facets of development that are relevant to the child's educational needs. The general objectives articulate learning outcomes and learning experiences that will facilitate the attainment of the aims of the curriculum.

In engaging with the curriculum, the child should be enabled to

- communicate clearly and confidently using a range of linguistic, symbolic, representational and physical expression
- explore and develop ideas through language
- develop an appropriate range of comprehension strategies and problem-solving skills
- understand and apply the vocabulary and phraseology particular to the different subjects in the curriculum
- locate, extract, record and interpret information from various sources
- use information and communication technologies to enhance learning
- listen attentively and with understanding
- read fluently and with understanding
- develop a love of and an interest in reading
- write fluently and legibly and acquire an appropriate standard of spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation

- develop a competence in a second, and perhaps a third, language at a level appropriate to his or her ability and cultural and linguistic background
- understand computational skills and apply them with accuracy and speed
- understand and apply mathematical concepts
- extend his or her knowledge and understanding of, and develop a range of skills and interest in, the cultural, historical, geographical and scientific dimensions of the world
- develop and apply basic scientific and technological skills and knowledge
- extend his or her knowledge and understanding of, and develop curiosity about, the characteristics of living and non-living things, objects, processes, and events
- develop an appreciation and enjoyment of aesthetic activities, including music, visual arts, dance, drama and language
- develop the skills and knowledge necessary to express himself or herself through various aesthetic activities, including music, visual arts, dance, drama and language
- acquire a knowledge and understanding of the body and movement, and develop agility and physical co-ordination
- develop a positive awareness of self, a sensitivity towards other people, and a respect for the rights, views and feelings of others
- develop a foundation for healthy living and a sense of responsibility for his or her own health
- develop self-discipline, a sense of personal and social responsibility, and an awareness of socially and morally acceptable behaviour
- acquire sensitivity to the spiritual dimension of life
- develop the capacity to make ethical judgements informed by the tradition and ethos of the school
- develop a knowledge and understanding of his or her own religious traditions and beliefs, with respect for the religious traditions and beliefs of others.

The specific aims and the general objectives outlined above are intended for all primary schools. However, in pursuing them, certain factors need to be considered:

- the child's stage of development
- differences between children owing to variations in personality and intellectual and physical ability
- the particular circumstances of the school.

Although individual aims and objectives may appear to focus mainly on one aspect of the child's development, it is recognised that all areas of child development are inextricably linked.



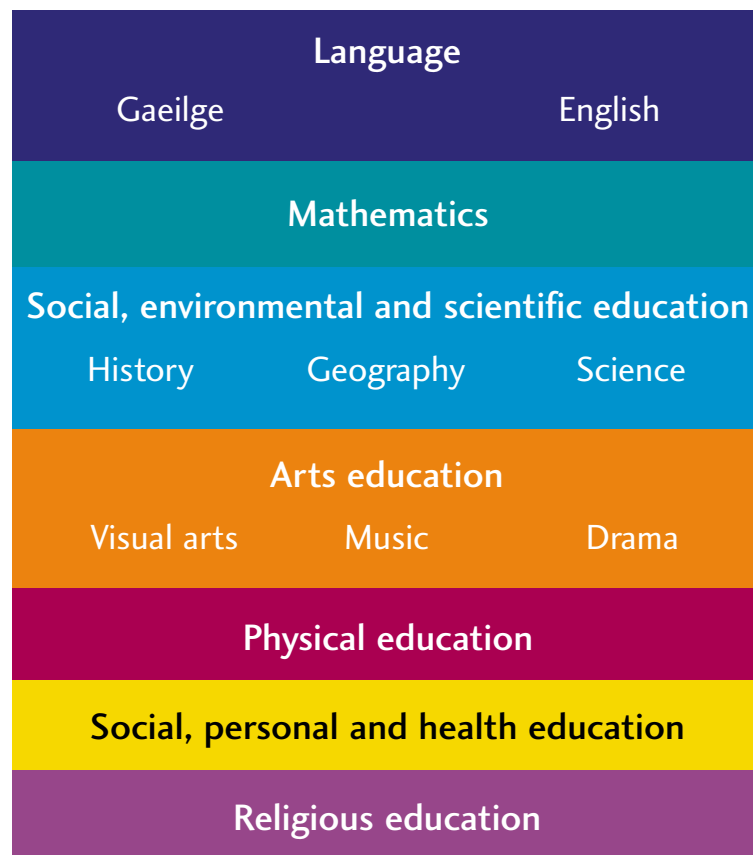
Chapter 5

Curriculum areas

Curriculum areas

A guide to the structure of the curriculum

The curriculum is presented in seven curriculum areas, some of which are further subdivided into subjects. These are: Language: Gaeilge and English; Mathematics; Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE): history, geography and science; Arts education: visual arts, music and drama; physical education; and Social, personal and health education (SPHE). The development of curriculum for Religious education remains the responsibility of the different church authorities.



Within this organisational framework, it is important to emphasise that all aspects of the child's development are interrelated and that the developmental process is interactive and complex.

Components of the curriculum statements

Each curriculum statement has a similar structure and similar components. These include:

- introduction*
- aims*
- broad objectives*
- overview tables*
- content*
- concepts and skills development*
- guidance on the selection of content*
- assessment statement.*

The introduction to each curriculum statement gives the philosophical and educational rationale for the subject and the thinking that underpins the new emphases. It outlines the structure of the curriculum and the methodological approaches assumed in the content. The aims and broad objectives provide a clear statement of the general and particular learning and developmental goals of the subject.

Overview tables present an outline of the content, while planning pages provide guidance on the sequence and progression of the objectives. The content of each curriculum statement is laid out at four levels—infant classes, first and second classes, third and fourth classes, and fifth and sixth classes—and articulates a progressive and developmental learning experience.

The principal division of content in each subject is the *strand*, and the number of strands varies with the nature of the content in a particular subject and curriculum area. The *strand unit* is a subdivision of the strand and focuses on the more specific areas of learning that will achieve the developmental goals of the strand. Each strand incorporates detailed *content objectives*. These encompass the learning experiences and the activities that enable the child to acquire and develop the knowledge and understanding that the strands and strand units address. In many cases the content objectives are further elucidated by *exemplars*. Summaries of the skills and concepts to be developed at the different class levels are also presented.

The strands are not discrete areas of learning, as they overlap and interact to form a holistic learning experience for the child. They will also assist teachers in identifying possibilities for integrated learning within subjects and curriculum areas, and throughout the curriculum as a whole. At the end of each curriculum statement, the purposes of assessment are delineated, and several approaches and recommended tools are explained.

In the following pages the rationale for each curriculum area is outlined and a brief description of the content for each subject is provided.

Language

Language is the principal means of human communication. Through it ideas and information are expressed and communicated, aspirations, attitudes and emotions are articulated, and imaginative possibilities are predicated.

Language in the curriculum comprises Gaeilge and English and is taught in three different school contexts: schools in which English is the mother-tongue of the children and the principal medium of instruction; schools where Irish is, typically, the language of the home and the medium of instruction in school; and scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge, where Irish may or may not be the language of the home but where it is the medium of instruction in school.

This reflects the close and complex relationship between Irish and English, which has its roots in an interactive co-existence of the two languages over several centuries. An appropriate experience of both languages has an important contribution to make to the development of the child's cultural awareness and sense of cultural identity. Psychologically, historically and linguistically, an experience of both languages is the right of every Irish child.

The contribution that a third language can make to language acquisition at primary level should also be considered in the context of the outcome of the pilot project on modern languages.

Gaeilge

There are two curriculums in Gaeilge: one for schools where English is the medium of instruction and one for Gaeltacht schools and scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge. In schools where English is the medium of instruction, children are given the opportunity to achieve a competence in Gaeilge that can be developed in second-level education and in later life. The experience of second-language learning adds a further dimension to the child's sense of language and cultural awareness. In Gaeltacht schools and scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge, Irish is the language of the school. The curriculum for these schools provides a context in which children will achieve a more extensive mastery of Irish. Their proficiency will be further enhanced by experiencing Irish as a learning medium.

Snáitheanna

- Éisteacht
- Labhairt
- Léitheoireacht
- Scríbhneoireacht

At the heart of the Gaeilge curriculum is a communicative, task-based approach to language learning, in which the child learns to use the language as an effective means of communication. Topics are based on the children's own interests, concerns, and needs, and children are encouraged to speak the language in real contexts and situations. The emphasis is on enjoyment and on using the language in activities such as games, tasks, conversations, role-playing, sketches, and drama. The language the children use in these activities is relevant and reusable from lesson to lesson.

Teachers are encouraged to use a variety of approaches and strategies to promote active and independent language learning. Children's contact time with the language is maximised through co-operation and sharing in pair and group work, and the child's appreciation and enjoyment is enhanced through songs, poems, rhymes, stories, riddles, and tongue-twisters.

In each lesson there is an element of language learning, through which the children acquire the vocabulary and language functions that they will need to perform a task or to play a language game. This language input is used immediately, in the same lesson, to perform the task or to play the game. In this way the child is encouraged to use Gaeilge for relevant communicative purposes.

Children are given as much freedom as possible in their efforts to use the language and this also involves an acceptance of the concept that inaccuracies in the language the child uses when trying to communicate are an integral part of language learning. The lesson often includes a period of reflection, which will give the opportunity for simple language awareness exercises.

In schools where English is the medium of instruction, it is important also that children see Irish used as a natural means of communication in the daily life of the class and the school. This is accomplished through the regular use of Irish as an informal means of communication.

Irish can also be used as a medium of instruction in other carefully selected areas of the curriculum. Above all, whether in informal contexts or during the language lesson, the fostering of the child's enthusiasm for and enjoyment in using the language is a central goal of the curriculum.

English

The English curriculum envisages language learning as an integrated process in which the three forms—oral language, reading, and writing—are inseparable. It also sees language as a central influence in the learning process. Children learn language, but they also learn through language. These two principles are enshrined in the four strands of the curriculum, and the forms of language and the operations they entail are seen as interactive contributors to the child's language development in each of the strands.

The development of receptiveness to language, of language awareness and of the ability to use language competently and confidently is a central concern of the English curriculum. It also takes account of the close relationship that exists between language and learning. In the process of acquiring language skills, and in developing the ability to use language, other crucial elements of the child's personality and potential are cultivated. For instance, the learning of a new word, or a new connotation of a word that is already known, entails more than an extension of vocabulary. It can interact with ideas already familiar to the child in a way that broadens and deepens understanding. Likewise, in attempting to express emotional or imaginative experience, language helps children to come to a deeper knowledge of themselves and to clarify their imaginative perceptions and insights.

Oral language is accorded particular importance in the curriculum, as it is central to the development of the child's general language ability. Oral language is a crucial factor in the development of the child's cognitive abilities and it facilitates the acquisition of social and communicative skills. It is, above all, the principal integrating element in the English curriculum. Activities such as comprehension, responding to text and the approach to writing are grounded in a process of talk and discussion. It is also central to learning in other curriculum areas, where the use of talk, discussion, questioning and response constitutes a key learning strategy.

The acquisition of literacy skills is a key feature of the English curriculum. The approach to the teaching and learning of reading is based on the child's general language development and on the development of phonemic and phonological awareness. Having developed an awareness of the sounds in words through a rich oral language experience, the child then begins to acquire an understanding of sound-letter relationships. The child is encouraged to interpret text using a growing mastery of sound-letter

Strands

- Receptiveness to language
- Competence and confidence in using language
- Developing cognitive abilities through language
- Emotional and imaginative development through language

Literacy

relationships in the context of a range of other cueing strategies. Particular emphasis is placed on comprehension and the development of higher-order skills through reading and responding to a wide variety of texts. The acquisition of literacy skills should be relevant and appropriate to the child's various needs and stages of development in the primary school and at the same time provide a competence that allows for further development in second-level education.

It is an important feature of the English curriculum that children's reading should encompass a rich and varied range of text. From the earliest years they should experience a print-rich environment in which they have ready access to books. Through such an atmosphere, in which books are seen to be valued, children are led to appreciate the usefulness and the pleasures of reading.

The ability to write clearly and expressively is developed progressively through the process of writing. The child is encouraged to write for different audiences and purposes and in a variety of genres. This diversity and flexibility will stimulate creativity and develop the child's ability to use written language to convey effectively a wide range of ideas, attitudes and emotions. He or she is enabled to develop a sense of appropriate presentation in writing through drafting a piece of writing, discussing it, editing it, and then recasting it in further drafts.

Children's language development should be monitored closely at every stage in primary school, and it is particularly important that appropriate assessment procedures be used to identify children with reading difficulties as early as possible so that suitable intervention and support can be provided.

Mathematics

Mathematics enables the child to develop an understanding of particular and important dimensions of the physical world and of social interactions. It furnishes children with the means of manipulating, recording and communicating concepts that involve magnitude, number, shape and space, and their relationships.

Strands

- Number
- Algebra
- Shape and space
- Measures
- Data

The mathematics curriculum, therefore, caters for both the cognitive and the social development of the child and is directed towards helping him or her to think quantitatively and spatially, and to recognise situations in which mathematics can be applied.

The importance of developing the child's ability to solve problems is a key feature of the mathematics curriculum. A wide variety of activities are directed towards enabling the child to connect the different aspects of a problem, to ask relevant questions, to make predictions, and to identify solutions. Emphasis is placed on presenting children with real problems related to their own experience and on encouraging them to develop strategies for solving them imaginatively.

Prediction and estimation skills are taught from junior infants onwards. This will enable children to develop the ability to gauge the accuracy and validity of possible solutions. It also affords them the opportunity to reflect on how they approached a task or solved a problem. In developing the ability to predict and estimate the possible outcomes in mathematical operations, children come to a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts.

The curriculum gives particular consideration to the social importance and relevance of mathematics. It emphasises the value of real contexts for mathematical activity in school and gives prominence to the constructivist approach. The child is encouraged to be active in learning and to engage in discussion with the teacher and with other children. He or she is involved in the practical manipulation of numbers and materials in real-life situations and in learning through guided-discovery methods. A special feature of this approach is the way in which mathematical activity can relate to other subjects, as a context for mathematical experience.

Numeracy

As well as learning to manipulate numbers, symbols and shapes it is important that the child becomes familiar with the language of mathematics and develops the ability to use it to communicate mathematical ideas accurately. The curriculum promotes approaches and strategies that build children's confidence in approaching mathematical tasks and develop their ability to verbalise the processes that are used.

An important goal of the curriculum is the development of the children's numeracy skills. The understanding and memorisation of number facts and the ability to apply them appropriately are fundamental to children's wider mathematical development and to their ability to use mathematics to attain an understanding of the world. Numeracy skills are also central to the children's life outside school and to the success with which they engage with education in later life.

Above all, the child should be enabled to experience mathematics as an intellectual pursuit in its own right and as a source of fascination, challenge, and enjoyment. The child's enthusiasm for the subject can be kindled and fostered through the exploration of patterns and relationships, through the satisfaction of solving problems, through the development of an appreciation of shape and design, and through an awareness of the historical and cultural influences that have shaped modern mathematics.

Social, environmental and scientific education

Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE) contributes to the development of the child's awareness and appreciation of the natural, human, social, cultural and historical dimensions of life. SESE is presented under three distinctive yet closely related subject headings: history, geography, and science. The SESE curriculum seeks to enable the child to come to an understanding of the physical world, the relationship of humans with their environment, and the historical process through which that relationship has grown. In developing this understanding, the curriculum helps the child to acquire open, critical and responsible attitudes and to live as an informed and caring member of the local and wider communities.

History

History is the interpretation of what are considered to be significant human activities in the past and the process by which these activities are selected, investigated, and analysed. Successive generations reinterpret the past in the context of present perceptions, and these, inevitably, are influenced by current preoccupations. However much historical interpretation may be limited by this element of relativity, it can be validated at any particular time by the rigour with which available evidence is used.

The history curriculum reflects the nature of history itself. It is concerned with knowledge of the lives of people in the past and how this is interpreted, and it enables children to experience something of the way in which historians go about their work. The beginnings of the child's historical engagement will come through recalling personal experiences and elements of family history. In exploring this historical experience the child will, in simple ways, become familiar with the process of collecting a wide range of evidence, examining and exploring it, and drawing simple conclusions from it. The development of historical skills, the beginnings of a concept of chronology, a realisation of the relationship of cause and effect, and an appreciation of change and continuity are, therefore, central elements in the child's engagement with history from the earliest years.

The exploration of local history remains a central element of the curriculum at all levels, but as children mature they encounter a widening range of peoples, events, and periods. These are drawn from local, national, European and non-European contexts and from diverse social, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, so that children acquire a balanced understanding of local, Irish and international history.

Strands (fifth and sixth classes)

- Local studies
- Story
- Early people and ancient societies
- Life, society, work and culture in the past
- Eras of change and conflict
- Politics, conflict and society
- Continuity and change over time

Geography

In this way history equips children to live as informed and critical citizens, aware of the influence of human character and motivation, respectful of the opinions and beliefs of others, and conscious of the ways in which the past has shaped contemporary society in Ireland, Europe, and the wider world.

Geography encompasses the study of the Earth, its inhabitants, and the interrelationships between them, and is particularly concerned with the themes of place, space, and environment. The geography curriculum provides opportunities through which children can come to explore and understand the peoples and features, both natural and human, distributed over the Earth's surface, and it enables them to appreciate the distinctive characteristics of places. By exploring the interrelationships of peoples and their environments, geography helps to promote knowledge about and concern and awareness of the potential of these environments.

Geography is also characterised by a distinct set of skills, particularly those concerned with fieldwork and graphicacy, that allow us to explore and understand the Earth's environments. As with the other subjects in SESE, the development of these skills will take place in parallel with the acquisition of geographical knowledge and concepts. The curriculum places an emphasis on skills development through observing and exploring the richness of the immediate environs of the school and home. This involves the children in questioning, observing, experimenting and recording the features of the natural and human environments that they encounter. In the course of this exploration, children develop an awareness of spatial patterns and the ability to use a range of investigative and communicative skills.

While the curriculum emphasises the centrality of the child's immediate environment, other environments are explored as the children mature. The wider locality is examined, as are other environments in Ireland, in Europe, and in other parts of the world. This progression from the local and immediate to the wider world contributes to children's development in a number of ways. It fosters not only their sense of local identity but their sense of being members of national, European and global communities. It encourages them to appreciate the interdependence of individuals, groups, and communities, and it promotes an understanding of and a respect for the cultures and ways of life of peoples throughout the world. It fosters, too, an informed sense of individual and community responsibility for environmental care.

Strands

- Human environments
- Natural environments
- Environmental awareness and care

Science

Science is concerned with a knowledge and understanding of the physical and biological aspects of the world and the processes through which these are developed. The science curriculum provides a broad and balanced range of knowledge and skills and suggests contexts and activities through which children develop the scientific concepts that help them to make sense of their world. The curriculum emphasises the importance of starting with the children's initial ideas and enabling them to develop and modify these ideas in order to attain a more scientific understanding.

Strands

- Living things
- Energy and forces
- Materials
- Environmental awareness and care

A distinctive feature of the science curriculum is the emphasis it places on helping children to develop scientific skills. Practical investigation is central to scientific activity and to the development of a broad range of enquiry skills. Scientific activity involves children in observing, hypothesising, predicting, experimenting, planning fair tests, and analysing results. Skills and methods that are developed through scientific investigations, such as decision-making, data collection, the interpretation of evidence and the communication of results and ideas, are relevant to history and geography as well as to other curriculum areas.

Skills of investigation are developed in conjunction with the subject matter or scientific concepts being used. Through direct experience of objects and events children develop a framework of scientific ideas and concepts about *Living things*, *Energy and forces*, *Materials* and *Environmental awareness and care*. These four areas are chosen because they are relevant to children's immediate everyday experiences and reflect the major areas of scientific investigation.

The 'designing and making' section of the curriculum aims to provide children with an understanding of technological process. It also helps to develop the skills and attitudes required to undertake practical tasks. Designing and making includes exploring materials, planning designs and making and evaluating models that will provide solutions to practical problems. Through investigating a range of topics, and through solving open-ended problems in familiar contexts, children's practical, aesthetic and imaginative capacities, sensitivity to design and awareness of basic scientific ideas and concepts are fostered.

The curriculum seeks to foster positive attitudes to science and to develop an appreciation of its relevance and the contribution science and technology make and have made to the social, economic and cultural dimensions of society. Children should become aware of the application of science in familiar contexts of the home, the school, the community, and the work-place. It is important, too, that learning activities promote curiosity and enjoyment so that children are encouraged to cultivate a lasting interest in science.

Arts education

Through the arts we express human experience creatively and imaginatively. Ideas, feelings, insights and experience are communicated through images, music, language, gesture, and movement. Arts education enables children to use a range of communicative expression through which they can explore their experience of, and interaction with, the world. It also affords them the opportunity to respond as viewers, listeners or readers to the expressive creativity of the artist, the composer, the writer, and the performer. It involves both the cognitive and affective domains and deals with a dimension of experience that contributes uniquely to the child's conceptual development and to the expansion and refinement of their view of the world. The experience of art deepens children's sense of beauty and artistic expression and makes them more responsive to nuances of reflection, thought, feeling, attitude, and action. It is, above all, a source of endless enjoyment and fulfilment that can add enormously to the richness of their lives and experience.

The arts education curriculum comprises the visual arts, music, and drama. Dance is developed in the physical education curriculum, and the contribution of literature is experienced through the curriculum area of language.

Visual arts

Strands

- Drawing
- Paint and colour
- Clay
- Construction
- Print
- Fabric and fibre

Visual arts activities in the curriculum enable the child to make sense of and express his or her world in visual, tangible form. They are also unifying forces in the child's learning and development. Drawing, painting, inventing and constructing bring together different elements of the child's experience is from which new conceptual development can grow.

Understanding visual imagery opens additional modes of learning and enables the child to express ideas, feelings, and imaginative insights. Opportunities to explore and investigate the visual elements of the environment help children to appreciate the nature of things and to channel natural curiosity for educational ends.

The visual arts curriculum emphasises the importance of both making art and responding to art. Attention is also drawn to the significance of the creative process and to the development of an understanding of visual concepts. The six strands of the visual arts curriculum are: *Drawing, Paint and colour, Clay, Construction, Print and Fabric and fibre.*

Observation, imagination and the child's own experience provide the starting points for artistic activities. Children will experiment with a range of stimulating materials and tools in an assortment of colours and textures, using a variety of techniques. In selecting these materials, separately or together, children will be enabled to develop an awareness of the elements of art, and their pictures and inventions will gradually reflect their growing understanding. Children will also be encouraged to look at and respond to a wide range of art works at first hand, from local traditional crafts to contemporary Irish art, as well as art works of different cultures, styles and periods. In talking about these art works, children will develop sensitivity to visual elements and will begin to use them purposefully in their own two-dimensional and three-dimensional creations.

Music

Music is a universal part of all cultures. It exists in a great many forms, for a great many purposes, and at many levels of complexity. As a diverse and lifelong activity, music is enjoyed by people of all ages. Music involves both making music and listening to music. These are unique ways of knowing because they entail the construction of sound patterns and structure through reflection and analysis. Music making is also a kinaesthetic activity, requiring the body and the mind to co-ordinate and interpret simultaneously. Music is an art that combines many concepts and techniques and uses them to inspire, to imagine, to invent and to express feeling. These are the features of listening and responding, performing and composing, on which the curriculum is based.

Strands

- Listening and responding
- Performing
- Composing

The music curriculum emphasises the importance of enabling all children to participate fully in a wide range of enjoyable music-making activities. It comprises three strands: *Listening and responding*, *Performing* and *Composing*. They are interrelated, and activity in one is dependent upon and supportive of understanding in another.

In the music curriculum, children will have opportunities to listen and respond to a wide range of musical styles and traditions, including the many forms of Irish music. Responses may take different forms, including movement, dance, illustration, story-telling, discussion and drama. Listening skills are also emphasised in performing and composing activities, where the development of inner hearing, or thinking in sound, is nurtured. Song singing is a central aspect of the music curriculum and from this, children are introduced to a progressive programme of music reading and writing, and to the playing of classroom instruments. Composing is an exciting

aspect of the music curriculum. The children will enjoy exploring sound, playing with simple musical ideas and experiencing the satisfaction of working alone or with others to create their own simple compositions. The musical elements that are developed through the strands will enable children to develop a deeper understanding of musical concepts and to foster a lifelong appreciation of musical activity.

Drama

Educational drama is a creative process that provides children with a wide range of valuable learning experiences. It is a unique gateway to learning and affords ways of perceiving and knowing that are otherwise inaccessible. It is improvisational in nature and involves every aspect of the child's personality: spiritual, moral, emotional, intellectual, imaginative, and physical. The essence of the drama is its imaginative context. In the enactment of a story about characters in certain circumstances, at some particular time and in some particular situation, children can explore conflicts, issues, consequences, attitudes, emotions, concerns and preoccupations in a unique way.

It is, moreover, in the particular nature of the dramatic engagement that its power as a developmental and learning experience lies. In acceding to the story or the fiction, the child projects himself or herself imaginatively into a situation. In 'knowing and living' a character's circumstances, dilemmas, choices and actions, and their consequences, the child comes to new perceptions and fresh insights.

A key feature of the drama curriculum is the involvement of children in the spontaneous making of drama based on a story or a fiction. Through the interaction of characters in a particular situation children make up the plot as they go along and in the course of making the drama they address choices and issues and analyse problems and solve them. Using a story or a fiction, aspects of life can be explored closely enough to afford an effective learning experience but distant enough to provide safety for the child.

The content of drama is life itself. It involves children's experiences, concerns and needs, things they imagine or read about, aspects of life from the past, present or possible future that arouse their curiosity, and particular issues the teacher may wish children to explore from any of the other curriculum areas. What is special about children's learning through drama is that it harnesses children's imaginative potential and leads them to new knowledge and perspectives not available to them in any other activity.

Strand

- Drama to explore feelings, knowledge and ideas, leading to understanding

Physical education

The physical education curriculum provides opportunities for children to learn through the medium of movement. The primary focus is on the body and on physical experience, enabling children to develop physical skills and co-ordination. It contributes to their social and personal development and helps them to lead full, active and healthy lives.

Strands

- Athletics
- Dance
- Gymnastics
- Games
- Outdoor and adventure activities
- Aquatics

The physical education curriculum seeks to satisfy the physical needs of the child through a consistent and comprehensive experience of movement and play that challenges the child to realise his or her individual physical potential. It provides for a wide range of physical experiences appropriate to the developmental needs of each individual child in *Athletics, Dance, Gymnastics, Games, Outdoor and adventure activities, and Aquatics*. Within each of these, a variety of activities is provided that can enable the school to plan a balanced physical experience appropriate to the needs and abilities of each child and to the circumstances and environment of the school.

Physical education has a particular contribution to make to the child's personal and social development. It promotes diversity of experience rather than specialisation and provides a wide range of activities and games that help develop the child's co-operative skills and his or her appreciation of the value of co-operative activity. It also fosters the concept of fair play and a balanced perspective on, and acceptance of, success and failure.

The concern of physical education for the emotional development of the child is met in a number of ways, not least of which is the emphasis it places on encouraging the child to focus on the achievement of his or her personal physical goals. This engenders positive attitudes and contributes to the enhancement of the child's self-esteem.

Physical education also contributes to the child's cognitive development. It helps, for example, to develop the child's estimation skills when judging time, speed and distance in athletics. It assists in the development of the child's mapping skills in outdoor and adventure activities. More generally, it develops an understanding of physical movement as the child is engaged in a variety of activities.

Dance

Dance gives the child opportunities to explore the potential of movement in order to express ideas, emotions, and imaginative insights. Dance education involves the child in exploring, creating, performing and appreciating movement as a form of expression and communication. It includes creative dance, Irish dancing, and folk dancing from other cultures. Dance differs from other aspects of the physical education curriculum in that its primary concern is with the expressive dimension of movement and with the enjoyment and appreciation of the artistic qualities of physical expression.

Through dance, concepts that relate to the body in space, to the changing dynamics of movement and to the implications of moving in relation to other people and the environment are explored. Children are encouraged to dance in response to different stimuli and accompaniments and to view dance as performance. Their appreciation of dance and its possibilities is enriched when they are given opportunities to see the more accomplished work and performance of others.

Social, personal and health education

While all curricular areas contribute to the development of the child, social, personal and health education (SPHE) provides specific opportunities to enable the child to understand himself or herself, to develop healthy relationships, and to establish and maintain healthy patterns of behaviour. In fostering a range of personal and social qualities and dispositions, it helps children to develop a foundation of skills, knowledge and attitudes that will inform their decision-making in the social, personal and health dimensions of their lives, both now and in the future. It also helps to prepare children for active and responsible citizenship.

Strands

- Myself
- Myself and others
- Myself and the wider world

It is a particular concern of the curriculum to develop in the child respect and care for his or her body and an appropriate concern for safety. It also enables the child to acquire the knowledge and attitudes that help to promote a healthy life-style. This includes becoming aware of the influence that advertising, peer pressure and other factors can have on individual life-styles and developing the ability to make appropriate choices and decisions on a range of health issues.

A particular feature of the curriculum is the importance it places on the concept of the interdependence of individuals, groups, and peoples. In the context of social, economic, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, it seeks to foster in the child attitudes and behaviour that are characterised by understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. It addresses, too, the issues of equity and human rights, and fosters in the child the realisation that rights have associated responsibilities. Concepts of democracy, justice and inclusiveness are nurtured through the learning experiences offered and through the attitudes and practices inherent in the organisational structures of the class and the school.

The approach to the SPHE curriculum is determined in the first instance by the school ethos and will be mediated to the child in three contexts: through a positive school climate and atmosphere, through integration with other subjects, and in specifically allocated curriculum time. Active learning is essential to the SPHE programme. Through it children can explore issues, acquire relevant information and develop skills that are relevant to the social, personal and health dimensions of their lives. As they engage in these processes and work together, they begin to internalise what they have learned and are able to transfer it to situations they encounter in everyday living.

Religious education

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. Religious education specifically enables the child to develop spiritual and moral values and to come to a knowledge of God.

Irish society recognises the right of the individual to choose the particular form of religious expression that reflects the spiritual aspirations and experience he or she seeks. It acknowledges, too, the importance of tolerance towards the practice, culture and life-style of a range of religious convictions and expressions, and aspires to develop in children a tolerance and understanding towards the beliefs of others.

Education, generally, seeks to reflect and cater for a variety of religious conviction and acknowledges the right of parents to arrange for their children's education in a school whose religious ethos coincides with their own religious belief. It is the responsibility of the school to provide a religious education that is consonant with its ethos and at the same time to be flexible in making alternative organisational arrangements for those who do not wish to avail of the particular religious education it offers. It is equally important that the beliefs and sensibilities of every child are respected.

Since the Department of Education and Science, in the context of the Education Act (1998), recognises the rights of the different church authorities to design curricula in religious education at primary level and to supervise their teaching and implementation, a religious education curriculum is not included in these curriculum documents.



Curriculum implementation

Curriculum implementation

An understanding of the processes of change

The implementation of the *Primary School Curriculum* provides schools with a unique opportunity to enhance the quality of educational provision. This will involve a collaborative planning process that will focus on the identification of school development goals and teaching and learning priorities.

The process of curriculum implementation requires an understanding of the dynamics and complexities of change. A central element in the process of change is a belief in the process itself and a recognition that renewal and development are essential. Embracing new content, emphases, teaching approaches and methodologies presents a particular challenge to schools as organisations committed to self-development. A school culture that fosters openness, trust and mutual support will assist teachers in identifying the nature and extent of the change the curriculum entails, to reflect on their perceptions and attitudes, and to modify them accordingly.

The pacing of change

Managing effective curriculum change will involve critical decisions in the selection of starting points and appropriate areas for development and renewal. Essentially, it requires the setting aside of time for reflection and adjustment. Change also involves new behaviours and practices, and ultimately new beliefs and understandings. It involves changes in what people know and assume. Most importantly, the pacing of change entails the identification of the current strengths and capacities of the school, the recognition of elements that are already working effectively and the development of processes and supports that will build on these in an organic and incremental way.

Key elements of implementation

Planning curriculum change in the school encompasses a number of key elements:

- a sense of purpose and a commitment to providing the optimal learning experiences for each child
- a clear understanding of the nature and essential elements of the curriculum

- an awareness of the distinctive nature and character of the school and the importance of adapting the curriculum to the particular needs and circumstances of the school
- a recognition of the strengths and capacities of the school
- the development of a framework for action that will guide the implementation process.

A sense of purpose

Planning in the school will be informed by a sense of purpose and a commitment to providing the optimal learning experience for children. It should be rooted in the belief that the process of curriculum change will make a real difference to the quality of children's lives both now and in the future. It will be sustained by a vision of the child at the centre of the learning process, by high expectations in achievement, and by the conviction that the planning process itself is vital in providing the child with curriculum experiences that are relevant and appropriate to his or her needs.

An awareness of the nature and goals of the curriculum

The general and specific aims and general objectives of the curriculum should form the basis for strategic curriculum planning. It is particularly important that the school takes account of the principles of learning that characterise the curriculum and the various approaches to teaching and learning that are promoted in each curriculum area. In recognising the principle of the uniqueness of the child, a variety of learning styles and different pathways to learning need to be accommodated.

An awareness of the distinctive character of the school

Each school is a unique organisation, with a distinctive character, tradition and culture, and a particular set of values and priorities. It is influenced by its size and location, and by particular internal and external environmental circumstances and dynamics. Hence, it serves its own community of pupils and parents in a unique way. The values, attitudes and expectations that characterise the ethos of the school will have a continuous influence on the child's learning experience throughout the period of his or her life in school.

A recognition of strengths and capacities

Schools have many strengths and capacities that can be drawn upon in implementing changes in the curriculum. Special talents of the staff in areas of the curriculum and expertise in implementing innovative programmes can be identified and merged to support the change process. Content that is selected and sequenced appropriately can be supported by available school resources in order to create a tailor-made programme that reflects the energy and potential of the school.

A framework for action

All of the elements in the planning process will lead to the development of a clear framework for action. This will provide the overall direction for curriculum implementation in the school. The framework will facilitate the pacing of change and will ensure the ownership and commitment of the school community.

School planning

Detailed advice on curriculum, organisational and classroom planning is offered for each subject area in the teacher guidelines. A collaborative approach is advocated, and schools are encouraged to involve parents, the board of management and the wider school community in the planning process, where it is appropriate.

Curriculum planning

In planning for the implementation of the curriculum, schools will need to consider the nature and purpose of each curricular area, how subjects can be treated in a discrete as well as in an integrated manner, the amount of time to be devoted to each curriculum area, the balance between strands, the development of concepts and skills within each subject, and, finally, the approaches to assessment that will be adopted.

Organisational planning

Several organisational factors need to be considered in the effective implementation of the curriculum, as the success with which curriculum decisions are implemented will be directly related to the practical arrangements that the school puts in place. This requires not only a careful consideration of the organisational structures that are planned and adopted initially but a continuous process of monitoring that will ensure their relevance and appropriateness.

The curriculum envisages the school as a continuously developing teaching and learning organisation that is alive to the changing personal, social and educational needs of children. A continuing process of reflection, self-evaluation, review and innovation will enable the school to realise the optimum learning experience for the children in its care. This is best achieved through regular formal and informal consultation among the principal, the staff, and the school community. Collective insights, experiences, reflections and ideas can be pooled in a structured way and directed towards strategic planning for school improvement. This generates a shared commitment in achieving the planning goals of the school and in the successful implementation of the curriculum.

Classroom planning

In the overall context of school planning, individual teachers will plan for the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. This planning will be based on a concern for the needs and abilities of the children in the class. A clear perception of the aims, broad objectives and essential nature of the content in each curriculum area will guide the teacher in the planning process and enable him or her to provide the children with a relevant and effective learning experience appropriate to their stages of development.

Classroom planning will have both a short-term and a long-term dimension. Planning for a week, a term, a year or indeed other periods provides the means by which the teacher can ensure that all the principal elements of the curriculum are covered adequately in a way that is relevant to the needs of the different individuals in the class. Initially, this will involve the teacher liaising with other teachers and consulting class and assessment records in order to establish the children's learning experience. The particular experiences, capabilities and achievements of individual children will provide the necessary basis for the organisation and construction of new areas of learning that will be of the greatest benefit to children. It is important, too, that the teacher continues to consult the children's previous class teachers. This can be of great value in addressing particular learning difficulties of individual children.

Assessment

Assessment is an essential component of a successful teaching and learning process. The curriculum indicates the elements of each subject area that should be assessed and suggests several procedures that can be used. In both short-term and long-term planning the teacher should give careful consideration to the forms and uses of assessment that will best facilitate the learning process and provide the most relevant information about the progress of individual children.

Teacher guidelines

A book of teacher guidelines accompanies each curriculum statement. The teacher guidelines explore a wide range of approaches and methodologies that develop the new emphases and give expression to new thinking on teaching and learning. The teacher guidelines are designed as an aid and resource for teachers and schools as they encounter the curriculum and begin to implement its recommendations.

Guidelines in the different subjects share a co-ordinated format that includes:

Introduction to the curriculum

Exploration of content

School planning for the subject

Classroom planning

Approaches and methodologies.

The introduction gives an overview of the subject and explains the principles that informed the design of the curriculum. It also outlines the major areas of content and the new emphases incorporated in them. This section is particularly useful for teachers in their first encounter with the curriculum and in the early stages of curriculum implementation.

The exploration of the content of the curriculum takes account of the stages of development of the child at each of four levels and considers the processes and outcomes appropriate to each level. There is also a detailed analysis of skills and concepts development and practical advice on how these are taught through the content of the curriculum. In this as in many sections of the teacher guidelines, particular attention is given to new areas of content and methodology.

The section on school planning addresses what is to be planned for in each subject, the essence of the subject, the key elements in successful implementation, and how the planning of resources and processes can support a successful programme. It also provides information and guidance on developing an assessment policy in the school.

The section on classroom planning will be an important resource for teachers. Classroom planning is based on curriculum content, on the school plan for that subject, and on the need to respond to the particular needs, aptitudes and interests of the children. A range of planning grids and suggestions for integration and cross-curricular themes also presented.

A significant portion of the teacher guidelines is devoted to a detailed exploration of approaches and methodologies in teaching and learning. A particular emphasis is placed on the newer approaches envisaged in the curriculum, and detailed exemplars and sample lessons that demonstrate these are included.

Appendixes include lists of available resources, bibliographies and glossaries.

Time allocation in the curriculum

To assist teachers and schools in planning the implementation of the curriculum, a time framework is suggested that allocates a minimum time to each of the curriculum areas. Such a guideline on time allocation provides an organisational framework that will assist teachers in mediating the curriculum both at class and school level and in facilitating the provision of a balanced and integrated learning experience for children. The guideline includes three elements:

- the time allocated to religious education
- a suggested minimum time allocation for each of the other six curriculum areas, along with a period of discretionary curriculum time
- the time allowed for breaks and assembly time.

In accordance with the Rules for National Schools and relevant circulars, the suggested time framework is based on the minimum of four hours of secular instruction, with the modification of this to take account of the shorter day in infant classes.

Discretionary curriculum time

A particularly important feature of the framework is the inclusion of a period of discretionary curriculum time. This affords the teacher and the school the flexibility to accommodate different school needs and circumstances and to provide for the differing aptitudes and abilities of the children it serves. It can be allocated, at the teacher's and at the school's discretion, to any of the six curriculum areas—language; mathematics; social, environmental and scientific education; arts education; physical education; social, personal and health education—or to any of the subjects within them. This framework also allows for the inclusion of a modern language in the curriculum where this is available.

The element of discretionary curriculum time can be used for different purposes and in different ways. It could be used, for example, to provide extra time for the completion of an aspect of learning in one subject, to respond to children's needs in particular areas of learning, or to afford flexibility when dealing with a specific project or theme.

Planning in blocks of time over an extended period

It is the goal of the curriculum to provide a comprehensive and coherent learning experience for the child. It is important that teachers use the suggested framework on time allocation in the most flexible way, in order to make the mediation of the curriculum as effective and efficient as possible. In addition to weekly planning, this will entail planning over extended periods such as a month, a term, and a year. For example, over a four-week period the framework might suggest an allocation of twelve hours for social, environmental and scientific education. Such a block of time could be used

- to pursue a common theme in geography and science
- to deal in a concentrated way with different aspects of history
- to allow for field trips in geography, history or science.

Similarly, in planning over a twelve-week period, the suggested time allocation for first-language learning would provide forty-eight hours. This could allow the teacher the flexibility to use the time

- to plan an integrated oral language, reading and writing programme based on a particular out-of-school experience that would require the consistent use of blocks of time over a twelve-week period

- to accommodate regular library and other visits outside school
- to allow for a focus on the regular integration of language with other curriculum areas, where the time allocations in more than one curriculum could be manipulated flexibly.

However, whether the planning period encompasses a week, four weeks, twelve weeks, or a shorter or more extended period, it is important that discretionary time is used flexibly and that all subjects benefit from it. It should not be given exclusively to any one subject or curriculum area.

Time allocation in infant classes

Because the period of secular instruction for children in infant classes may be shorter than that provided for older children, the suggested time framework is not directly applicable, as it is for other class groups. The child at infant level perceives and experiences learning in an integrated way. This requires particular approaches to teaching and learning and will entail a more flexible use of the suggested time frame. However, the particular balance of time that it strives for will still provide a useful guide in planning the learning experiences that are most appropriate to the developmental needs of children of this age.

Suggested minimum weekly time framework

Curriculum areas	Full day		Short day [infant classes]	
	One week		One week	
	Hours	Minutes	Hours	Minutes
Secular instruction				
Language				
L ¹	4	00	3	00
L ²	3	30	2	30
Mathematics	3	00	2	15
SESE	3	00	2	15
SPHE	0	30	0	30
PE	1	00	1	00
Arts education	3	00	2	30
Discretionary curriculum time	2	00	1	00
Total secular instruction	20	00	15	00
Religious education (typically)	2	30	2	30
Assembly time	1	40	1	40
Roll call	0	50	0	50
Breaks	0	50	0	50
Recreation (typically)	2	30	2	30
Total	28	20	23	20

Note: Some modification of this framework may be necessary in the context of the outcome of the pilot project on modern languages.



Conclusion

Conclusion

The *Primary School Curriculum* marks the development of a process that has evolved since the publication of the Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum through to the passing of the Education Act in 1998. It incorporates the highest aspirations that have characterised Irish education and takes account of the most up-to-date educational theory and practice in helping to prepare children to engage with the modern world. The curriculum underlines the importance of an integrated learning experience that will enable children to acquire knowledge, concepts, skills and values that are relevant and appropriate to their present and future lives.

In providing the flexibility to fulfil such requirements, the curriculum emphasises particular empowering elements of learning. It stresses the importance of developing generic skills and abilities that help the child to transfer learning to other curriculum areas, to future learning situations, and to his or her life experience.

The curriculum provides a comprehensive learning experience for the child. It takes account of the enriching and humanising contribution that arts education can make to the child's life. It acknowledges that physical, personal and emotional growth are crucial in the development of the whole child. These dimensions of learning are stressed throughout the curriculum generally, and also in the areas of physical education and social, personal and health education. The importance of language in the child's cognitive, social and imaginative life and as a crucial factor in the learning process is given new emphasis. Mathematics is presented as an area of learning that is central to the development of life skills and as a field of interest and enquiry that is fulfilling in itself.

The principle that the child's learning should encompass the full range of experience is reflected in the inclusion of social, environmental and scientific education in a developmental process that begins from the earliest years in school. The curriculum redefines both the importance and the content of the child's education in the area of science and seeks to give an understanding of the practical applications of science in the modern world. It also takes account of the extent to which information and communication technologies have made the accessibility, variety and exchange of knowledge a central element in work and leisure. The potential of such technology in enriching the child's learning experience is acknowledged in every area of the curriculum.

The overall purpose of the *Primary School Curriculum* is to enhance the quality of children's learning and to provide them with a developmental experience that is relevant to their present and future needs. These goals will only be achieved if the philosophy, aims and objectives of the curriculum are realised in its implementation. Achieving this presents a significant challenge to everyone involved in primary education. Open-mindedness, a commitment to curriculum change and the most effective deployment of all the resources of primary education will be required if the educational potential the curriculum has to offer is to be reflected in children's lives and learning. The success of implementation depends on the use of effective existing resources and the addition of a varied range of additional human and physical supports. Such an infrastructure can help and sustain parents, teachers and schools in maximising children's learning experience.

The advent of the *Primary School Curriculum*, therefore, presents an exciting challenge to everyone in the learning community. It is a reflection of the cultural, social and economic aspirations and ideals of Irish society and provides an opportunity to incorporate the fruits of the most modern research and thinking in the theory and practice of primary education in Ireland. It envisages primary education as an experience that is an integral part of the child's life in general and as a crucial component in a continuum of lifelong learning. Above all, it incorporates an educational philosophy that cherishes every child and provides an educational framework that is dedicated to serving his or her particular needs. In valuing the heritage of the past, in embracing the highest ideals and aspirations of the present, and in seeking to equip the child to adjust successfully to and avail fully of future change, it can truly serve the children of Ireland in the new millennium.



Appendix

Membership of the Primary Co-ordinating Committee

To co-ordinate the work of the Curriculum Committees, the Primary Co-ordinating Committee was established by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Chairperson	Tom Gilmore	
Committee members	Sydney Blain <i>(from 1995)</i>	Church of Ireland General Synod Board of Education
	Liam Ó hÉigeartha <i>(from 1996)</i>	Department of Education and Science
	Dympna Glendenning <i>(to 1995)</i>	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
	Fionnuala Kilfeather <i>(from 1995)</i>	National Parents Council—Primary
	Éamonn MacAonghusa <i>(to 1996)</i>	Department of Education and Science
	Fr Gerard McNamara <i>(from 1995)</i>	Catholic Primary School Managers' Association
	Peter Mullan	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
	Sheila Nunan <i>(from 1995)</i>	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
	Eugene Wall	Irish Federation of University Teachers
Co-ordinator	Caoimhe Máirtín <i>(to 1995)</i>	
Assistant Chief Executive Primary	Lucy Fallon-Byrne <i>(from 1995)</i>	
Chief Executive	Albert Ó Ceallaigh	

Members of the Support Group to the Co-ordinating Committee:

Paul Brennan <i>(from 1996)</i>	Nóirín Ní Nuadháin <i>(from 1997)</i>
Michael Dee <i>(1994-1995)</i>	Gary Ó Donnchadha <i>(1997-1998)</i>
Harold Hislop <i>(1995-1997)</i>	Valerie O'Dowd <i>(from 1997)</i>
Declan Kelleher <i>(1994-1995)</i>	Bryan O'Reilly <i>(1995-1996)</i>
Frances Murphy <i>(1995-1997)</i>	Máire Roycroft <i>(1995)</i>
Regina Murphy <i>(from 1998)</i>	

Membership of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Chairperson	Dr Tom Murphy (<i>to 1996</i>) Dr Caroline Hussey (<i>from 1996</i>)	
Vice-Chairpersons	Sr Pat Murray (<i>to 1998</i>) Sr Bríd Rowe (<i>from 1998</i>) Mr Tom Gilmore	
Members of Council	Dr Sinéad Breathnach Sr Betty Foley Ms Catherine Byrne (<i>from 1998</i>) Mr Pat Burke Mr John Carr Mr Tom Creedon Mr Oliver Donohoe Ms Nuala Henry (<i>to 1996</i>) Mr Sean Higgins Mr Fionnuala Kilfeather Mr Tom Kilraine (<i>to 1998</i>) Mr Liam Lenihan (<i>from 1998</i>) Mr John McKay Fr Gerard McNamara Ms Rose Malone (<i>to 1998</i>) Dr Kenneth Milne Mr Seán Mitchell (<i>from 1996</i>) Ms Deirdre O’Keeffe Mr Diarmuid Ó Murchú (<i>from 1998</i>) Ms Sally Shiels (<i>to 1998</i>) Ms Eileen Sweeny Mr Eugene Wall Mr John White	Joint Managerial Body Minister’s Nominee Irish National Teachers’ Organisation Department of Education and Science Irish National Teachers’ Organisation Teachers’ Union of Ireland Irish Congress of Trade Unions National Parents Council—Post-Primary Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland National Parents Council—Primary Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools Teachers’ Union of Ireland Irish Vocational Education Association Catholic Primary Schools Managers’ Association Teachers’ Union of Ireland Church of Ireland Board of Education National Parents Council—Post-Primary Department of Education and Science Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools Irish National Teachers’ Organisation Irish Business and Employers Confederation Irish Federation of University Teachers Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland
Assistant Chief Executive Primary	Lucy Fallon-Byrne (<i>from 1995</i>)	
Chief Executive	Albert Ó Ceallaigh	

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