



**The General Synod Board of Education (Republic of Ireland)
of the
Church of Ireland**

**Submission to the National Council for Curriculum (NCCA) regarding:
The New Primary Curriculum**

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Date: May 2024

1. The Draft Primary curriculum specification – general observations

The Church of Ireland Board of Education welcomes the opportunity to engage in this consultation and makes the following observation in regards to the extent to which the draft primary curriculum address the key messages outlined. The 1999 primary curriculum had a number of strengths in particular the conceptualization of integration subjects across the school day in the delivering of teaching and learning. It is positive to see the same general approach being taken this new framework, particularly at stages one and two. In this regard, the experience teachers in our schools over the last two decades is that the integration of the patrons programme has not been prioritized as a subject to be promoted within the provision of the curriculum. We note that integration is a priority across all of the other five curriculum areas and, given the essential nature the patrons programme as reflecting the characteristic spirit of our schools, it is the view of the Board that the patrons programme should hold strong prominence generally, and in particular in the areas of social and environmental education and Wellbeing.

The Board is conscious that the workload of teaching principals continues to be an issue which is consistently raised as a matter of concern. Two thirds of principals in schools under Church of Ireland patronage are teaching principals and as a consequence, the workload involved in relation to the introduction of the new curriculum will cause anxiety and stress for teaching principals. While the Board understands the message of agency and flexibility, it should be highlighted that the ability of teachers to exercise such agency and flexibility may have limited other constraints. The Board requests that the NCCA take cognizance of this context in the implementing of the new curriculum. The Board is very supportive of the key message of inclusivity and reflects the characteristic spirit which prevails in all our schools.

2. Arts Education

The Board is interested to learn of the provisions of the Arts Education curriculum and notes in particular that there are many opportunities for the integration of the patron's programme through the arts education curricular area. The Board notes in particular, page 28 of the specification document that refers to integration through the arts involves connecting across curricular areas. The Board welcomes this provision and the opportunity it gives to teachers in exercising agency.

The Board also welcomes the inclusion in the specification document of the recognition and valuing of a culturally responsive pedagogy, and, given the nature of the diversity in our schools this will be greatly welcomed and could provide meaningful links to the local parish and broader community.

Section 2(b) – language

The Board notes that the patron's programme provides an authentic context for language development and opportunities for both disciplinary literacy and critical application of language and literacy skills.

Section 2 c. Social and environmental

The Board notes that page 27 of the specification document outlines how children will learn about religion beliefs and world views in this curricular area. The Board welcomes this inclusion but is concerned that it appears that there is a significant overlap with the existing provisions in our patron's programme in regards to the content. The Board wishes to highlight the distinctiveness of the 'Follow Me' RE curriculum, the patron's programme in Church of Ireland schools. This is a

Religious Education programme, two aims of which are 'to enable the child to have a knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith' and 'to enable the child to develop an awareness of other faiths and none'. In this connection, the Board would welcome clarification on the approach to be taken in the 'toolkit' to ensure that the Church of Ireland is accurately represented. The Board also wishes to note that any cpd or training to be provided would need to reflect such an understanding. The Board notes the language used on page 27, paragraph two, and the use of the term 'safe space'. The Board is of the opinion that the term 'safe space' in conjunction with learning about world beliefs and world views in the social and environmental curricular area may indicate that the patrons programme is not be a 'safe space' as described in the specification document.

Wellbeing

The Board welcomes the draft Wellbeing specification which sits comfortably with the outworking of the characteristic spirit in our schools. The Board particularly welcomes the reference on page 38 to a positive school culture and climate underpinning the learning and teaching in Wellbeing. The Board would welcome further guidance and elaboration on how spiritual development (mentioned on page 1) is to be taught through the curriculum and would highlight that this is core to the patron's programme. The Board notes that reference is made on page 4 to 'children developing an ethical understanding of the world'. The Board wishes to highlight that both the patron's programme and the outworking of the characteristic spirit will further inform and vivify the children's ethical understanding. The Board also notes that are various opportunities for integration of the patron's programme with SPHE, including under the strand of Rights and fairness on page 28 and citizenship on page 29; and this will be greatly welcomed by schools.

Resources

The Board highlights that it is a necessity in implementing the curriculum, for a number of key support resources to be provided. In the first instance, the Board is of the view that, strong CPD must be a part of the practical implementation of the curriculum for teachers and especially for the teaching principal. Clear guidance, template resources and ongoing support as teachers develop the delivery of the curriculum in their own context will be needed. The Board is of the view that the provision of resources must also include the provision of substitutable in-service days, as was provided for in the implementation of the 1999 curriculum.

General comment

The Board assumes that the NCCA will continue to review the implementation of the curriculum on an on-going basis and particularly to listen to the voice of teachers, who have been given much agency in the delivery of the new curriculum. Such a reflexive approach keeps the agency of the teacher active and valued, and also gives expression to the recognition that society changes and develops regularly and that the curriculum should be responsive to societal change and development.

Ends