



NCCA

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



The What, Why and How of Children's Learning in Primary and Special Schools

Information for parents

Introduction

As a parent¹ you are the most important person in your child's life. You help them learn many important things and as your child moves through primary school, your ongoing help and encouragement make a big difference in their learning journey. This booklet provides information about your child's learning in primary and special schools. It also includes suggestions on how you can work with your child's school to support your child's learning and development.

What is the Primary School Curriculum?

The Primary School Curriculum outlines what children should learn and how children learn through the four stages of primary school, as appropriate to their needs, interests and abilities.

- **Stage 1:** Junior and Senior Infants
- **Stage 2:** First and Second Class
- **Stage 3:** Third and Fourth Class
- **Stage 4:** Fifth and Sixth Class

The curriculum aims to:

- provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish
- support every child in realising their full potential.

The curriculum views each child as unique, competent and caring. It recognises that every child has the right to keep learning and developing as they grow. There are eight principles that show what is most important in your child's education. They guide how children learn, how teachers teach and how progress is assessed.

Principle	What does this mean for your child?
Learning Environments	Children are supported in their learning across a variety of environments, both indoors and outdoors.
Inclusive Education and Diversity	Children are welcome at school and have opportunities to learn in ways that suit their individual learning needs, interests and abilities. Similarities and differences are celebrated making sure every child feels respected and included in their classroom and school.
Engagement and Participation	Children make choices as part of their learning. They have opportunities to be creative and to work with others.
Assessment and Progression	Children, teachers, parents and sometimes other relevant professionals (for example, speech therapists, psychologists) work together to help understand how children are learning and developing and how they can make progress.

Table continued overleaf

¹ 'Parent' refers to mothers, fathers and those with parental responsibility in different parenting relationships. This may include foster parents, adoptive parents, step-parents, legal guardians and carers.

The What, Why and How of Children's Learning

Principle	What does this mean for your child?
Transitions and Continuity	Children's learning at home and in preschool is built upon in primary school, and foundations are provided for learning in post-primary school. Children are supported with each move on their educational journey.
Relationships	Children are motivated to learn through caring relationships within the school community.
Pedagogy	Pedagogy means how teachers teach and how children learn. Teachers use a variety of approaches that are best suited for the children in the class and are proven to work well.
Partnerships	Schools, parents, families, relevant professionals and communities work together to support children's learning and development.

Table 1: Principles of learning, teaching and assessment

The Primary School Curriculum also includes seven key competencies for children. The competencies describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes that support children in their learning and development. They recognise that children grow, learn and develop important life skills through everything they do at school – whether it's by being part of playful and engaging lessons, interacting with others or experiencing the daily routines.

Key competency	What does this mean for your child?
Being an active citizen	Understanding the rights and responsibilities of themselves and others and how to take positive actions to create a more sustainable and just world.
Being an active learner	Playing, learning and working on their own, and with others, to reflect on their learning, to solve problems and to set goals for future learning.
Being a communicator and using language	Learning to share ideas in different ways, and to listen and respect what others share.
Being creative	Being curious about, taking part in, and enjoying creative and imaginative experiences.
Being a digital learner	Using a variety of digital technologies creatively and learning to be responsible and safe online.
Being mathematical	Seeing maths in the world around them and using maths to solve problems and make sense of the world.
Being well	Supporting them to be healthy and developing their physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

Table 2: Key competencies



What does my child learn in school?

Children's learning is organised across curriculum areas and subjects including:

- Language (English and Irish with Modern Foreign Languages introduced in Stage 3 and 4)
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education
- Wellbeing (Physical Education [PE] and Social, Personal and Health Education [SPHE])
- Arts Education (Art, Drama and Music)
- Social and Environmental Education (Geography and History).

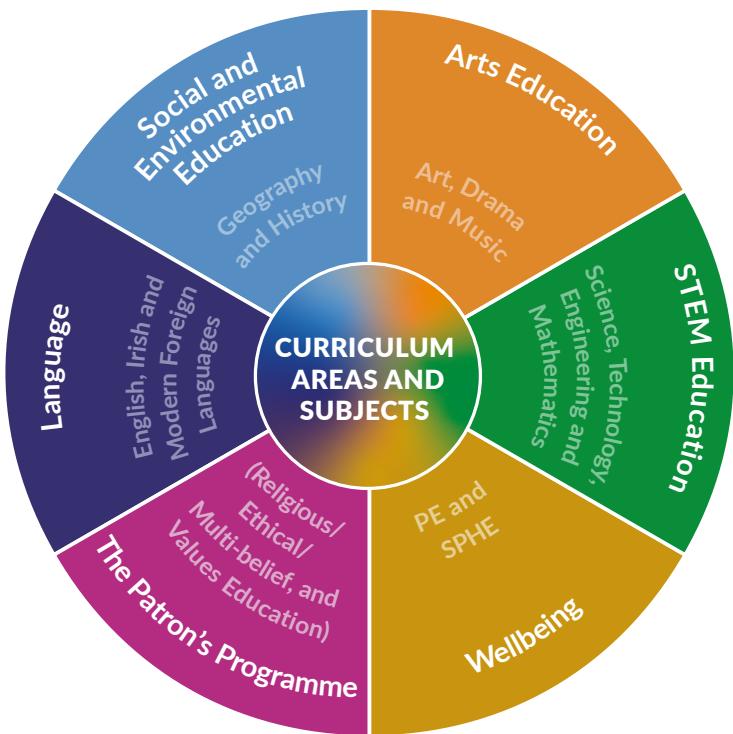


Figure 1: Curriculum areas and subjects



- In stages 1 and 2 (Junior Infants to Second Class), children learn through broad curriculum areas. This helps children connect their learning to everyday life and gives the teacher flexibility to create engaging experiences linked to different topics and subjects.
- In stages 3 and 4 (Third to Sixth Class), as children move through the primary classes, these broad curriculum areas become organised into more specific subjects to reflect their growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising the world around them.
- Children with special educational needs (SEN) will engage with the different curriculum areas, subjects and stages as appropriate to their needs, interests and abilities.
- In addition, the Patron's Programme is developed by a school's patron with the aim of contributing to children's holistic development, particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective, and underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school.

How does my child learn in school?

Through the Primary School Curriculum, your child will learn in lots of different ways such as exploring, communicating, moving, reflecting, creating, presenting, responding, inquiring and problem-solving. As shown in Figure 2, teachers use many different approaches and, where possible, will involve children in choosing learning experiences that are suitable and engaging.

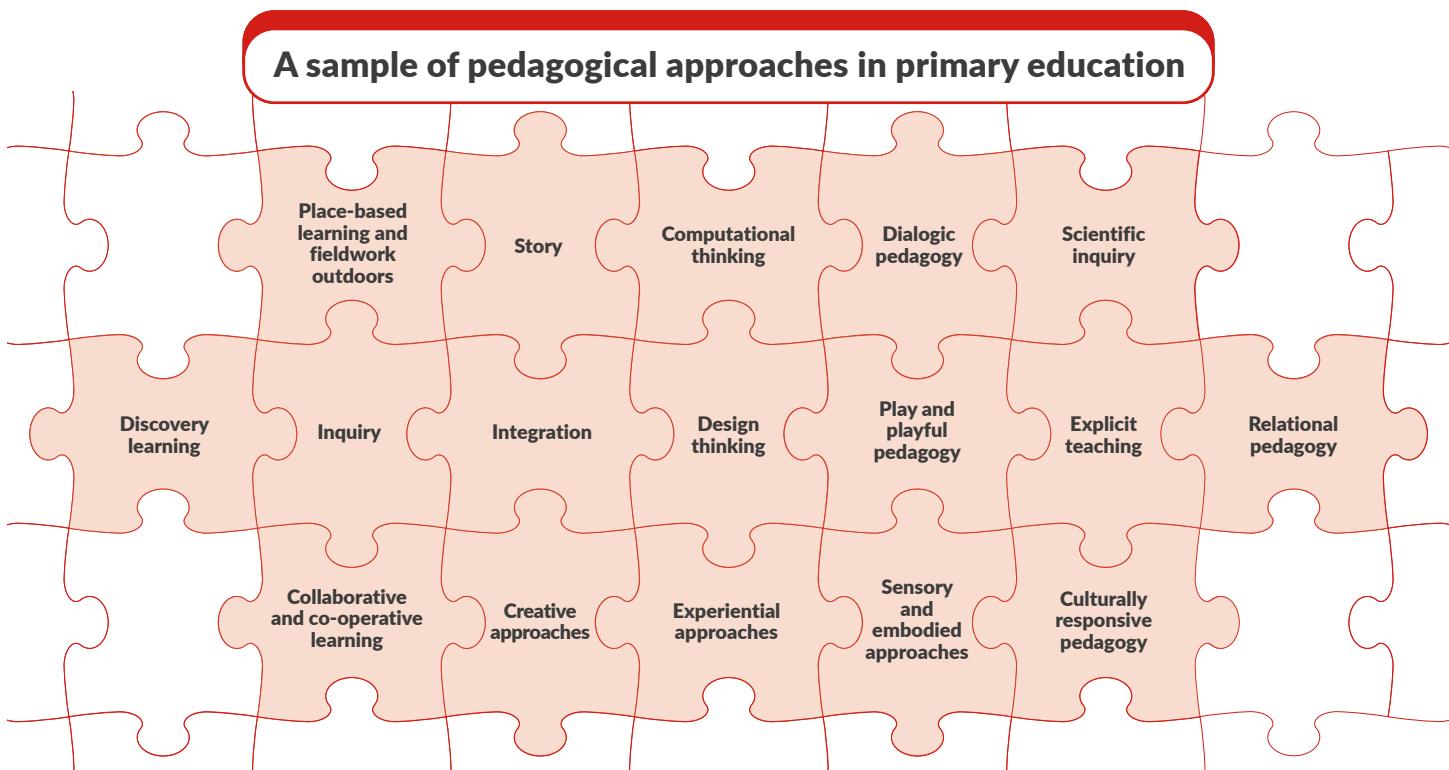


Figure 2: A sample of pedagogical approaches in primary education

Examples of a number of approaches including play, dialogue, explicit teaching and integration are described below.

Play

Play and playful experiences are important aspects of how your child will learn in school. Play fosters creativity, problem-solving and social interaction, enhancing learning by being interactive, engaging and fun. The teacher will ensure that playful learning experiences connect with the learning in the curriculum and your child's interests, for example, engaging in singing and rhythm games, programming robots, going on a sensory trail to explore the local natural environment, or *ag imirt cluichí i nGaeilge* (playing games in Irish).



Dialogic pedagogy

In school, children will learn through dialogue by interacting, talking and thinking together. Communicating their ideas and thoughts with other children and the teacher, can help further develop their understanding and support them in sharing opinions. Teachers will use a variety of approaches, such as circle time activities, to engage children in communication, talk and discussion, ensuring every child's voice is heard and valued.

Explicit teaching

The teacher will sometimes share new learning directly with the children in a step-by-step manner using examples. For instance, when teaching safety rules a teacher may first provide a demonstration before asking questions and providing opportunities for children to practise with support. As children learn and grow in confidence, they will begin to practise independently with activities at the right level of challenge. The teacher will balance showing children how to do things, with encouraging them to explore, problem-solve and inquire when learning.

Integration

To help connect and enhance your child's learning, teachers will often plan learning experiences which include more than one curriculum area or subject (integration). For example, 'food' is a topic that can be used to explore healthy living (Wellbeing), energy (STEM) and cultural practices related to food (Social and Environmental Education). These integrated learning experiences will help children connect their learning in school to their everyday lives.

Using their knowledge of the curriculum, teaching approaches and the children in the class, teachers will vary and choose the best ways to support the learning and development of your child. Further examples could involve children completing projects, carrying out experiments, listening to stories and engaging in hands-on experiences both indoors and outdoors.

Understanding your child's learning and development (Assessment)

Assessment is an essential part of learning and teaching which helps identify each child's strengths, areas where they may need more support and the next steps in their learning. It involves children, teachers, and at times, parents and other relevant professionals working together to find out about a child's learning across the curriculum and their overall development. Your child's teacher may gather information in many different ways including: communicating and listening to your child, asking questions, observing your child interacting with others, noticing how your child approaches tasks and sometimes through teacher designed tests and standardised tests.



How can I support my child's learning at home?

The most important way you can support your child's learning at home is by showing an interest in what your child is doing at school. With a few simple steps and a variety of everyday activities, you can make a big difference to their learning. Here are seven ways to support your child's learning every day.

1 Checking in

Ask your child questions and check in with them about different parts of their day. Try to use open questions and visual supports which encourage your child to give more than a yes or no answer such as, *Can you tell me about your picture? Teach me something you learned in Irish today. What were you practising in PE today? What was the most interesting thing you learned about in school today?* Checking in with your child and having a positive attitude towards all parts of the curriculum helps your child's learning.

2 Making learning part of everyday life

When opportunities arise, connect what your child is learning in school to real-life situations. Everyday opportunities to connect their learning may include interacting with people in their locality, map reading on a hike, counting or measuring money/objects, noticing plants and animals on walks or using safety skills such as crossing the road in different situations.

3 Communicating with your child's teacher

Children benefit when parents and schools work together because it helps them feel supported and confident in their learning, for example, this may involve volunteering or attending school events. Taking the time to communicate with your child's teachers by attending parent-teacher meetings shows your child that their education is important and it can also help you stay informed and support your child's learning.

4 Providing encouragement

Children thrive on encouragement and praise from the important people in their lives. It can help grow their confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Celebrate and praise your child for their effort and improvement, rather than only focussing on getting things right. For example, *Great job on your writing today, I can see you have been really working hard on practising.* Encouragement is also important when your child is finding something difficult, for example, *I'm really proud of how you stayed focused on improving your skipping. It took patience and effort to keep at it - well done.* Encouraging words can go a long way towards helping your child to keep trying and to figure things out.

5 Reading

When parents and family members read to their children, and listen to their children reading, it really helps support their learning and progress across all areas of the curriculum. Encourage your child to read at home by finding books, magazines or other texts which your child is interested in. Visiting your local library together can also help to make reading part of your daily routine. Talk about what your child is reading with them and ask questions that encourage them to share their thoughts and opinions such as, *What do you think is going to happen next?*

6

Playing

Play helps your child in many different ways. Set aside time to play a variety of fun games with your child on a regular basis. Play can take many different forms and will look different as your child grows. Younger and older children enjoy playing with blocks, exploring magnets, experimenting with robotic kits and engaging in animation and coding activities; engaging in creative and imaginative play using paints, playdough, clay and other materials; language play with puppets, storytelling, riddles and word games; movement and physical play; and solving jigsaw puzzles, playing board games, exploring coding games and designing their own games.

Encourage your child to try out different types of play and don't forget to join in! Let your child guide the play, follow their lead and have fun. Through play, children develop many important skills like problem-solving, communication and use of language, while enjoying themselves and building positive relationships with others.

7

Supporting home learning activities suggested by the school

During their primary school years, your child will sometimes be provided with a variety of different learning activities for home, which may include homework or other activities not involving written work. The teacher will vary the type of home learning activities according to the needs of your child and their developmental stage. You can help your child by taking an active part in any home learning which requires family members (for example, reading, projects, active homework, etc.). If your child needs help, encourage them to solve the problems themselves or provide helpful tips, rather than doing the activities for them.



Why is it important to support my child's learning at home?

- Supporting your child's learning at home is important for a number of reasons, as it:

- **helps your child remember and understand things better.**

Helping your child learn at home supports what they are learning in school and can also help them learn even more.

- **supports your child's motivation and confidence.**

Demonstrating a positive attitude towards school and learning across all the different areas of the curriculum, can have a big influence on how your child approaches learning. You may have disliked some subjects in school, but your child is on their own learning journey, and your positive attitude will help them build confidence and stay motivated. By supporting and showing an interest in your child's learning, you are acting as a positive role model. When your child knows you are interested in their learning, it can help enhance their motivation and engagement in school and encourage them to keep trying when learning feels difficult.

- **develops a positive home school partnership.**

Positive relationships and good communication between parents and schools is important to support your child's learning and development. This communication enables teachers and parents to share information about your child's learning in and out of school. Helping your child learn at home gives you useful information that you can share with their teacher. This helps the teacher support your child even better.

Supporting your child's learning at home can make a big difference to their progress and development. Your child's teacher will always welcome your support and involvement and be willing to answer your queries.

Further parent information on the Primary School Curriculum and guidance on supporting your child's learning can be found on:



www.ncca.ie



www.curriculumonline.ie



Email NCCA at: info@ncca.ie

