



Teaching, Learning and Assessment 2021-2022

The 2020-2021 school year was a year like no other for school communities. During this time, schools continually demonstrated their capacity to be responsive to shifting demands and resilient when faced with evolving challenges. While school closures affected all pupils, those with special educational needs (SEN) and most at risk of educational disadvantage were often particularly adversely impacted. Upon reopening, schools continued to apply strategies and approaches used during remote provision, including in the areas of digital technology and outdoor learning, to enhance learner outcomes and experiences. The coming school year will bring with it its own challenges but will also provide opportunities to harness and build on last year's learning.

- Pages 1 - 4 of this guidance outline key information for schools for the year ahead. Reflective questions are provided after each section to support schools in considering and identifying priorities for 2021-2022.
- Page 5 illustrates exemplars, drawn from interactions with schools, of approaches they have taken to prioritising areas for development in 2021-2022.

Pedagogy

- Outdoor learning was a significant feature of pupils' learning last year and contributed to building pupils' sense of wellbeing and contentment. Ongoing use of the outdoor environment to support teaching and learning is encouraged in the coming year. NCCA have developed webinars to support this work, available [here](#).
- Thematic and integrated approaches to teaching and learning last year enabled schools to build efficiencies into how the curriculum was delivered. These approaches facilitated holistic learning for pupils and should continue to be implemented in the year ahead.
- Many schools explored and have mastered digital technologies, especially during periods of remote teaching and learning. Teachers adopted innovative approaches to using digital resources to enhance teaching and learning, while pupils and their families developed their digital skills in order to meaningfully engage with online materials. Schools should continue to capitalise on the strengths of using digital technology as a resource to extend and enrich pupils' learning in the year ahead.
- Guidance used to support pupils who are at very high risk to COVID-19 is available [here](#).



How can we maximise opportunities for outdoor learning?

What thematic approaches are we currently using in our school? How can we extend and consolidate these approaches?

How does our approach to digital learning enhance learner outcomes? Are we maximising the potential of the digital platform(s) we are using?

Collaboration

Pupils

- Collaborative learning enables pupils to engage with the ideas, perceptions and opinions of others. Well-planned pair and group work activities with clear learning intentions and success criteria can help pupils consolidate and extend their learning. They also provide unique opportunities to apply and enhance pupils' communication skills.
- Pupils need opportunities to work collaboratively in the classroom. Teachers should consider opportunities to foster and nurture positive relationships amongst pupils in their own class. Using peer tutoring and strategies to promote pair work such as *Think, Pair, Share*, small group work within pods, and use of digital technologies can facilitate collaborative learning.
- Technology may also be useful for positive relationship building between classes, using video / audio facilities for presentations, for example.

Teachers

- Collaboration between teachers can lead to school improvement and increased success for pupils' learning, while also supporting positive staff wellbeing. Last year, schools developed innovative ways to support staff collaboration and relationship-building, both formally and informally.
- Teacher collaboration can facilitate the implementation of effective whole-school instructional strategies, for example through sharing of expertise and methodologies amongst teachers within the same class groupings. This can happen at school level or with colleagues from other schools.
- Informal opportunities for staff to connect with each other, in line with public health advice, are invaluable in supporting staff wellbeing.



What opportunities do we provide for our pupils to collaborate? What knowledge and skills are our pupils developing from the opportunities they get to collaborate? What formal and informal opportunities do we provide our school's staff to connect and collaborate?

Partnership with Parents

- Last year's restrictions meant schools were often unable to offer parents the opportunity to take an active role in onsite school initiatives. Schools should prepare to implement ways to facilitate active parental involvement, when public health advice allows, for example through Literacy, Numeracy and Wellbeing initiatives.
- To facilitate the early sharing of information regarding pupils' needs and progress, schools should consider convening parent teacher meetings in term one of 2021, in line with public health advice. Guidance on *Supporting Collaboration with Parents* is available [here](#). Ongoing use of the school's digital platform will also be useful in strengthening and maintaining partnerships with parents.
- The National Adult Literacy Association (NALA) has developed the website helpmykidlearn.ie. This brings together relevant information for parents and the wider community to support children's literacy and numeracy development.



In what ways do we facilitate parent-teacher communications? How do we support parents to take an active part in their child's education? How can we increase parental involvement, in our Literacy and Numeracy initiatives for example?

Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)

- Provision for pupils with SEN should continue to be allocated in line with [Guidelines for Primary schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools](#), on the basis of the greatest level of support being given to those with the greatest level of need. Consideration should be given to pupils whose needs have been intensified because of the pandemic.
- Analysis of assessment data from standardised and diagnostic tests as well as other sources of information will enable special education teachers/teams to develop a responsive programme of support for pupils in the coming year.
- *Continuum of Support* plans for individual pupils should be reviewed and developed in line with best practice to meet the current and emerging needs of pupils.
- Targeted interventions for individuals and small groups, on a withdrawal/in-class basis, should be planned, implemented and carefully monitored to ensure the support has maximum impact on learner progress and success.



How do we identify pupils' needs? Is our provision for pupils with SEN allocated to ensure those with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support? Have we analysed assessment data to ensure interventions are specific and targeted? How do we monitor and report on pupil success and achievement? How can we ensure our SEN provision is flexible enough to respond to emerging needs during the year?

Transitions

- The primary curriculum is flexible and child-centred and can be adapted to meet children's needs. Class teachers and support teachers should facilitate sharing of appropriate information to ensure transitions to a new class level are as seamless as possible.
- The Department has provided guidance to support the effective management of transitions from early learning and care settings to primary school. This guidance is available [here](#).
- The NCCA has developed preschool to primary transition resources and guidance to support a positive transition into junior infants, available [here](#). These include the [Mo Scéal reporting templates](#), which can support the transfer of information about the progress and achievement of pupils between preschools and primary schools.



In what ways do we facilitate the sharing of information between teachers as pupils progress through the school? Are there resources we could use to further facilitate a positive transition for children into junior infants?

Assessment

- Assessment, including two-way feedback between pupils and teachers, is integral to the teaching and learning process. By providing positive, informative feedback to pupils the teacher can support them in recognising and taking the next appropriate steps in learning. When feedback emphasises criteria for successful learning, it helps pupils to assess their own work, and gives direction for future learning.
- Assessment data, including the results of standardised tests and other forms of formative and summative assessment, should be used to inform ongoing teaching and learning in 2021-2022. The NCCA [Assessment Guidelines for Schools](#) are useful in this regard.
- The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) Assessments will take place in a sample of already notified schools in autumn 2021.



What information does our assessment data tell us about our pupils? Are we maximising the impact of formative assessment strategies and data from summative assessments to improve pupil learning?

School Self-Evaluation



- As per [Circular 32/2021](#), the current cycle of SSE will be extended into this school year. The next cycle will begin in September 2022. Prior to that, the Department and its Inspectorate will engage in consultation with all stakeholders, including principals, school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils. This consultation will help identify what is working well and what additional actions should be taken to support the use of SSE.
- All SSE Newsletters are available on the recently updated website schoolself-evaluation.ie
- Schools can request an SSE advisory visit from their school inspector via email through info@schoolself-evaluation.ie



How can we address the challenges that have arisen in the pandemic context using the SSE process? Is there remaining work to be completed from our previous SSE cycle?

Wellbeing

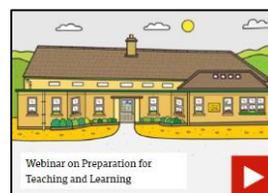
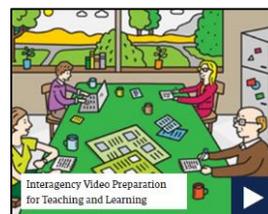
- Wellbeing continues to be a priority for school communities. Schools have already developed many innovative approaches to wellbeing promotion, with all schools expected to embark on their wellbeing promotion process by 2025. Wellbeing resources, including the Department's *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* is available [here](#).
- The national rollout of CPD by the PDST on the wellbeing promotion process will commence in autumn 2021 and will continue for three years.
- The Employee Assistance Service '[Wellbeing Together: Folláine le Chéile](#)' is a free and confidential support service which is available to teachers and other school staff.



What are our current strengths and areas for development with regard to wellbeing? What strategies can we use to promote positive wellbeing amongst our pupils and staff? How can we capitalise on strategies we developed last year to support positive wellbeing?

Preparation for Teaching and Learning

- Preparation for Teaching and Learning Guidance* was launched in term three of the 2020/21 school year. Teachers should be encouraged to use this guidance to support their preparation for teaching and learning. The guidance is available [here](#) and school leaders should share this with all teachers.
- Whole-school engagement with the [interagency video](#), the guidance document, and the key pillars of preparation for teaching and learning may help build understanding and confidence in how preparation will be reflected in your specific school context.
- The reflective questions in the guidance document (p.12) may prove a useful starting point in guiding staff discussions around preparation for teaching and learning.
- The Inspectorate and support services will be available to support teachers and school leaders as the guidance is enacted. Inspectors will begin engaging with / supporting school leaders and teachers as they develop a renewed understanding of preparation for teaching and learning during the 2021-2022 school year.



What are the current strengths in our approaches to preparation for teaching and learning? What can we develop in light of the new guidance? How can we trial and review new approaches?



Child Protection

- Schools should use the new mandatory templates when completing their annual review of child protection. These templates are available [here](#).
- The Child Safe-Guarding Statement and Risk Assessment template have now been combined into one document, *Mandatory Template 1*.
- The Checklist for Review of the Child Safeguarding Statement is now *Mandatory Template 2*.
- Notification regarding the Board of Management's review of the Child Safeguarding Statement is now *Mandatory Template 3*.



Anti-Bullying

- The [Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary schools \(2013\)](#) give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and addressing school-based bullying behaviour, and in dealing with any negative impact within school of bullying behaviour that occurs elsewhere. Mandatory templates are available [here](#).
- As part of its research during the 2021/22 school year, the Inspectorate will be looking at the extent to which schools are engaging with the requirements of these procedures.
- An online webinar about these developments will be provided for schools and teachers in September 2021.



In accordance with the Child Protection Procedures and Anti-Bullying Procedures when do we need to complete our annual reviews? What actions do we need to take following these reviews?

Inspectorate

- The Inspectorate will continue supporting schools in the 2021-2022 school year. A programme of evaluation will commence in September 2021 as per [Circular 0032/2021](#).
- Information on models of inspection is available in:
 - [A Guide to Inspection in Primary Schools](#)
 - [A Guide to Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections](#)

Continuing Professional Development



- The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) website outlines the programme of professional development opportunities for the year ahead and is available [here](#).
- A revised programme of professional development to support teachers in implementing the *Primary Language Curriculum/ Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* has been communicated to schools.
- The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) [Teacher Professional Learning Catalogue](#) outlines the range of upcoming professional development opportunities for school personnel working with pupils with SEN.
- Schools can also apply to PDST or NCSE for school based support in the coming year.
- The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) provides a continuum of professional development supports commencing with pre-appointment training through to induction of newly appointed principals and continuous professional development throughout the leader's career. Their website contains detailed information on the range of supports being offered in 2021-2022, available [here](#).
- The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) promotes the professional development of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) by way of systematic support in their first year of teaching, thus laying the foundations for subsequent professional growth and development. Details on their supports are available [here](#).
- Webwise and PDST Technology in Education also provide newsletters to which schools can subscribe.



How can we strategically develop the needs of the whole school in relation to professional development? What expertise exists within our staff to support us in developing whole-school capacity on specified professional learning needs? What external expertise can we access to enable us meet these needs? How can we continue to build the expertise of individual teachers and of the entire staff?

Curriculum Developments

- The *Primary Language Curriculum/ Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB)* toolkit has been updated and now includes additional support information. The toolkit also presents newly developed *Support Materials for teachers* supporting Digital Literacy, Linguistic Diversity and the teaching of Irish in English-medium schools. The *Progression Continua* may also support teachers as they work with the learning outcomes of the curriculum.
- The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* published in February 2020 sets out proposals for the redevelopment of the primary curriculum. Phase one of the consultation closed in January 2021. It is intended that phase two will run from September 2021 to December 2021. All teachers and school leaders are encouraged to engage with the consultation process - more information is available [here](#). To ensure children's voices are central to the finalisation of the draft framework, consultation with children will also take place during 2021-2022. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) will disseminate updates on the consultation through e-bulletins which can be subscribed to [here](#).
- In Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), the NCCA has launched a number of new resources to support teachers. These will be extended over the coming year and are available [here](#).
- The [Languages Connect Programme](#) was launched in term three of last year. The Minister for Education invited expressions of interest from English-medium and Irish-medium primary schools and special schools to participate in a new language sampler module. The proposed language sampler allows schools identify a modern foreign language of their choice, or Irish Sign Language (ISL). Schools will be supported by Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) in providing a six-week sampler module. The module will take place over a six-week period towards the end of the first term of the 2021-2022 school year.
- Development of the new *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* is continuing. While the consultation phase has been impacted by school closures, the aim is to now publish in 2022, as a single specification from junior infants to sixth class.
- *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)* is recognised as a successful approach to language teaching and learning. The CLIL project that was originally due to commence in April 2020 was paused due to COVID-19. It is hoped that this will recommence during the 2021-2022 school year. Seven schools will participate in the first phase and pupils at both infant and fifth and sixth class levels will have an opportunity to have their Physical Education (PE) lessons through Irish. This will enable these learners to encounter Irish in a new context and to use it for authentic communication during their PE lessons.



How can we continue to gather momentum around the implementation of the PLC/CTB in both languages? How can we contribute to the consultation process around the Primary Curriculum Framework? Are all teachers aware of the NCCA toolkit for SPHE/RSE?

Exemplars of Reflections on Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The exemplars below are designed to share the ideas and examples of effective practice that have been gathered by the Department in its recent engagement with schools, and are an amalgam of emerging issues from a variety of schools.

Higher-Achieving Pupils

Following the return to schooling in March, we realised that while our remote provision was effective in meeting the needs of most learners, high achieving pupils were not sufficiently challenged. Analysis of assessment data further highlighted this. We reflected on our practices, consulted with parents and pupils and decided to place particular emphasis on collaborative learning and using more open-ended tasks to ensure our high achieving pupils experienced greater challenge. We looked at the expertise of the staff and members shared their learning. We decided to take a whole-school approach to prioritising provision for high achieving pupils in the year's upcoming professional development programme.



Irish

During the school closures, we noticed that pupils were reluctant to record themselves speaking Irish. On our return to school, we decided to teach the pupils core vocabulary and phrases at each class level, to develop their competence and confidence in communication and create purposeful and meaningful opportunities for them to use this knowledge in context. For the coming school year, each teacher will be linked with a class in another school and pupils will use practiced questions and answers during online calls. They will also send the other class recordings of their mini-dramas, role plays, rainn, dánta agus amhráin. They will read from a range of Irish books suitable for each level and will record each other and share these with parents. We will also supplement their programme with resources from cogg.ie and integrate cartoons from Cúla4 into their learning to sustain high interest levels. Our school has subscribed to the COGG twitter account @CoggOid to stay informed of up-to-date resources.



DEIS

Our school is a large urban DEIS school, and having reflected on teaching and learning from the 2020/21 school year, we prioritised some areas for attention for 2021/22. We were happy with engagement levels overall, but found that many of our children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) had found remote learning the most challenging. Our overall priority area is literacy, and we have decided to prioritise these children for intensive one-to-one and small group interventions for the first term of the new school year. We also want to reinstate team-teaching into our literacy programmes. We will focus firstly on oral language, so using the *Primary Language Curriculum*, we intend to set up initiatives in line with the *Continuum of Support*. These initiatives will include daily oral language lessons, small group sessions and one-to-one support where necessary. We will use evidence of learning from the *Summer Programme* to inform these interventions. The period of school closures really helped us to build relationships with parents, as we were in daily contact with many of them. Our HSCL teacher is hoping to implement many of the in-person courses he usually delivered with parents later in the new school year in line with public health advice. Finally, we have really made progress as a school with digital technologies, and we want to capitalise on this progress and really embed digital technologies into teaching and learning.

