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STATUTORY PRIMARY CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

Thank you for the advice contained in your letter of 28 February and the detailed curricular content for the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2 enclosed with your letter of 14 April to my Department. I welcome the extensive consultation which the Council has undertaken, and the high level of support which the proposals have received from schools and other stakeholders.

I am broadly supportive of the Council's proposed curriculum framework. As you will see from the attached appendix, I am happy to accept a great number of the Council's recommendations without modification. However, there are a number of issues that I believe require some further consideration before they can be included in legislation for a revised curriculum and associated assessment arrangements. These issues span the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2, and are concerned with entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum, progression and assessment. The main points are set out below: other issues of detail can be dealt with in discussion between our officials.

Foundation Stage

Whilst I fully accept the educational merit in strengthening linkages between pre-school and primary school, it is the case that, without lowering the compulsory starting age yet further, the Foundation Stage cannot embrace the pre-school year in legislative terms. Rather, I see a more promising way forward in working towards complementarity and consistency in the curriculum across these three years. I would therefore ask Council to undertake a review of the existing *Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education* to ensure that it is consistent with, and feeds appropriately into, the new Year 1 curriculum.

As drafted, there is a certain lack of clarity in the Council's April guidance about children's statutory entitlement in the revised curriculum; the documentation should make it clear that in Years 1 and 2 children should be entitled to access to all of the Key Experiences in all of the curricular areas.

The Council's guidance provides a useful approach to progression between Years 1 and 2 in Language and Literacy, and Mathematics and Numeracy. This approach should be extended to other areas of the curriculum.

I believe that there is now a sufficient degree of commonality of prior learning, secured from curriculum guidance and inspection standards, to build upon with confidence when children enter Year 1. The Council's advice on learning and progress within the foundation stage should therefore reflect better the expected prior learning from the pre-school experience into the Foundation Stage guidance.

As regards the taking forward of proposals that are based on findings from the Early Years Enriched Curriculum pilot, your February advice acknowledged that more information is required on the outcomes for children's learning from this approach in the pilot schools. I share this view. I would wish to see evaluation evidence of the effects on children's learning in the medium to longer term before taking decisions on wider implementation. I should be grateful if you would indicate when you believe the Council will be in a position to offer firm advice on this based on evaluation. In the meantime, support will continue to be provided for those schools already participating in the pilot.

Key Stages 1 and 2

For Key Stages 1 and 2, the Council's advice sets out five curricular areas (The Arts, Language and Literacy, Mathematics and Numeracy, Personal Development and The World Around Us). For each area, examples are given of the sorts of opportunities pupils should have, but the way this is set out in the April guidance varies from area to area. I would ask the Council to set out clearly, for these five curricular areas, key aspects or experiences to which all

pupils should be entitled to ensure a broad and balanced education and therefore for which the legislation should provide a protection.

The Council's guidance on assessment, as set out in these two documents, requires considerable further work. In particular, the Council should develop its guidance on evaluating children's progress and attainment within each area of learning. The assessment arrangements should also promote common standards amongst teachers, and common expectations of progression. They should enable meaningful information to be provided to parents, and allow Government to judge how the system, and schools within it, are doing. It is essential that the curriculum and the means by which it is to be assessed are developed together, and I am aware that Council is conducting further work in this area. I should be grateful for further advice on assessment, including how it should be integrated into the curriculum programme, making particular reference to any aspects which would require a change to the current legislation on assessment.

I should be grateful for your further advice on the matters raised in this letter and its appendix **not later than 31 December 2003**, so that the necessary legislation can be taken forward to be in place by September 2005.

As new policy, your Council's proposals for the curriculum will also need to be considered from the perspective of section 75 equality issues. I am aware that the Council has already undertaken some equality impact work on them, and I will expect your further advice to make explicit reference to equality considerations.

I will also expect the Council to work closely with the CASS services to agree detailed and costed plans, for my Department's approval, for how the implementation of these new proposals will be phased in and supported with inservice training and appropriate resources, in particular setting out how it is intended that existing resources will be deployed to this end. Again, I would be grateful for your plans, agreed with the Boards, **by 31 December 2003**. My Department will be writing separately to the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards on this point.

Yours
Jane Kennedy

JANE KENNEDY MP
Minister with responsibility for Education

FOUNDATION STAGE – THE CURRICULUM

1	<p>The Foundation Stage should encompass the Pre-school Year and Years 1 and 2 of Primary School.</p>	<p>It is accepted that work should progress on strengthening the linkages between the Pre-school and the Primary School sectors; but the Foundation Stage cannot encompass the Pre-school Year in legislative terms as pre-school education is non-statutory.</p> <p>Council needs therefore to review the existing <i>Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education</i> to ensure that it is consistent with, and feeds appropriately into, the new Year 1 curriculum.</p>
2	<p>The Foundation Stage should comprise all the elements put forward for, and approved by, consultation.</p> <p><i>These were:</i> <i>Proposal for the approach to teaching and process-based learning in Year 1</i> <i>Proposed statement on equality of opportunity for all children, including those with Special Educational Needs</i> <i>Proposed contribution of the Foundation Stage to the aims and objectives of the whole Curriculum</i> <i>Proposed contribution of the Foundation Stage to development of skills</i> <i>The Proposals for Creative, Expressive and Physical Development</i> <i>The Proposals for Language and Literacy</i> <i>The Proposals for Mathematics and Numeracy</i> <i>The Proposals for Personal Development</i> <i>The Proposals for The World Around Us</i></p>	<p>Accepted in principle – subject to satisfactory evaluation of learning outcomes (see recommendation 3).</p> <p>Council needs to make it clear that children should be <u>entitled</u> to access <u>all</u> the Key Experiences in <u>all</u> of the curricular areas.</p>
3	<p>The current [Early Years Enriched Curriculum] pilot should be continued and expanded to the extent that resources permit (subject to the evaluation of outcomes in Year 2).</p>	<p>It is accepted that support for the current pilot will continue in the medium term, but in the longer term continuation and expansion of the pilot will be subject to satisfactory evaluation outcomes. The Council should indicate when it proposes to be able to offer definitive advice on rollout based on evidence of outcomes for learning.</p>
4	<p>The Department should prepare legislation to</p>	<p>Assuming further advice from</p>

	enable amendment of the statutory curriculum to include the proposed Foundation Stage and allow its phased implementation from 2004, again subject to satisfactory outcomes from the evaluation of the project.	Council satisfactorily addressing key issues for legislation by end of December 2003, enabling legislation can be brought into effect by September 2005 at the earliest, but it is accepted that preparatory work (subject to resource constraints - see recommendation 5, and evaluation outcomes – see recommendation 3), could begin ahead of legislative change.
5	The Department should re-examine its current spending priorities to facilitate the resourcing of the Foundation Stage.	Accepted in principle, but any decisions on resourcing the Foundation Stage will need to be taken on foot of fully costed proposals, agreed with key partners, and based on satisfactory evaluation outcomes. At that point decisions will be subject to availability of resources.
6	Physical Development should be designated as a separate curricular area in the Foundation Stage. This would be in line with the current Pre-school Curricular Guidance which will be revised in the near future to align with the proposed Foundation Stage.	Accepted.
7	Young children should have access to safe play space, both indoor and outdoor, and should be provided with adequate large and small play equipment to make physical play and creative activities both challenging and enjoyable.	This recommendation will be considered in the context of the Department's current review of the School Building Handbook.
8	The Council recommends that the option of re-naming Year 1 is kept under consideration and reviewed in light of further consultation with teachers and, in particular, parents of children involved in the pilot project.	Accepted, although not a priority.
9	Year 2 should be considered as a year when children move at their own pace towards more formal learning.	Accepted.

10	<p>More information should be provided by CCEA as soon as possible on progression from Year 1 to Year 2 and into Year 3.</p> <p><i>This will cover, for individual pupils, issues such as confidence, self-esteem, attention span, visual and oral memory, oral language skills, phonological awareness and practical and mental maths skills.</i></p>	Accepted – greater clarity and further advice for teachers is required in terms of progression from pre-school through the Foundation Stage and on to Key Stages 1-2.
11	Further research should be undertaken to assist teachers in making judgements about more formal learning readiness.	Accepted – Council should take forward within its existing resources.
12	In-service training and resources should be provided to assist teachers in the implementation of change.	Accepted – plans are being developed in consultation with education partners.
13	A shared approach to early literacy development should be agreed with the Literacy Strategy and implemented consistently throughout all ELB areas.	Accepted.

FOUNDATION STAGE – ASSESSMENT

14	A standardised <i>Pre-school Transition Form</i> summarising the child’s progress should be completed by staff in pre-school settings and passed to the Year 1 teacher and the information shared with the parents.	<p>Accepted in principle, although this will not be a statutory requirement for the reasons given at recommendation 1.</p> <p>Greater clarity is required in terms of how expected prior learning in the pre-school year should inform progression into Year 1.</p>
15	Training courses be established for teachers and playgroup leaders in pre-school settings to ensure a consistent approach to completion of the <i>Pre-School Transition Form</i> .	Accepted in principle, although this will not be a statutory requirement for the reasons given at recommendation 1, and will be subject to the availability of resources.
16	The Department of Education review the requirements in pre-school settings and decide if any should be made statutory.	As indicated at recommendation 1 above, the Department does not envisage statutory requirements in relation to pre-school provision.

17	The formative approach to assessment set out in the proposals for Years 1 and 2 be implemented. <i>Teachers would maintain an individual record for each child based on their own observations. The record would reflect the child's achievement throughout the school year and might contain examples of their work as well as teacher observations on all curricular areas.</i>	Accepted.
18	The development and trialling of suitable and efficient methods of recording useful assessment information be undertaken.	Accepted.
19	CCEA explores how the information generated by the teacher in Years 1 and 2 can best be used to provide a meaningful statutory end of year report to parents.	Accepted.
20	CCEA explores how the use of ICT can facilitate recording and reporting within the Foundation Stage eg. by producing different styles of reports for succeeding teachers and for parents.	Accepted.
21	It should be statutory for schools to provide two opportunities each year for parents to meet with staff in both pre-school settings and primary schools.	This should be good (standard) practice, but not necessarily a statutory requirement.
22	Additional meetings should be held as required at the discretion of the school or setting. These meetings would not be statutory.	Accepted.

FOUNDATION STAGE – RESOURCES, TRAINING and IMPLEMENTATION

23	The current Enriched Curriculum Pilot Project should be rolled out in a strategic way to all schools over the next 5 years with the CASS service deploying sufficient resources to support this.	Further research evidence is still necessary before committing to roll-out. The Council should indicate when it proposes to be able to offer definitive advice. In the meantime, support for the current pilot will continue.
24	From 2004/05 the arrangements for assessment and reporting in Years 1 and 2 become operational within a timetable that matches the phased implementation of the curriculum programme for Years 1 and 2. The end date for the implementation of statutory arrangements for annual reporting will be negotiated and agreed with DE. However, it would be expected that all schools would have opted into the assessment programme by 2008.	Arrangements for phasing in of new arrangements are under discussion with education partners.

25	Full-time Classroom Assistants should be made available for all Year 1 and Year 2 classes when they make the transition to the new Foundation Stage Curriculum.	See Recommendation 5 – assuming satisfactory evaluation outcomes, the pace of implementation would have to take account of the availability of resources.
26	CCEA should continue to work closely with the ELB CASS Service and teachers to provide guidance materials and case studies of good practice to assist teachers in the planning and implementation of effective teaching and learning programmes.	Accepted. Common and agreed guidance, and clarity among all partners as to what constitutes good practice, will be particularly important. CCEA should lead on this.
27	CCEA should extend the pilot project research into a longitudinal study in order to ascertain the medium to long term outcomes of the initiative.	Accepted – Council should take forward within its existing resources and should indicate when it proposes to be able to offer definitive advice.
28	Foundation Stage teachers, including those in pre-school settings, should be given sufficient training to help in the early diagnosis of a range of special educational needs.	Accepted, subject to the availability of resources.
29	Relevant Government Departments and other appropriate agencies and services should work in a holistic and co-ordinated way to help provide support for children in general and in particular those with special educational needs.	Accepted - discussions with other agencies are ongoing.
30	Additional resources should be made available to support children with special educational needs in mainstream classes.	Noted. Provision for children with special needs is the subject of ongoing consideration by all school authorities and education bodies.
31	CCEA should work in partnership with the Special Educational Needs sector to develop appropriate guidance and resources to help implement the Foundation Stage.	Accepted.
32	Parents and teachers should be made aware of the availability of recent inspection reports on all pre-school settings that receive Government funding.	Accepted - all inspection reports can be accessed via the Department's website.
33	The number of children in primary classes should be reduced, especially in the early years. In the early years, class sizes eventually should not exceed 26 children, the maximum number permitted in nursery classes.	Noted. Progress has been made in reducing class sizes in Key Stage 1. Further reduction would be for schools to consider in the context of budget and accommodation factors.
34	The physical size of classrooms in new build	This recommendation will be

	schools should be increased and, where possible, adjustments made to existing buildings to increase classroom space for younger children.	considered in the context of the Review of the School Building Handbook.
35	The maximum number of children in a composite class in the Foundation Stage should eventually not exceed 22.	Noted. This would have to be considered by schools in the context of budget and accommodation factors.
36	Every effort should be made to inform parents of the recommended approach to teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage (NB The Council has already produced an information leaflet and a video for parents).	Accepted.
37	The Council should work with other agencies to provide appropriate resources and support for parents. <i>To support the development and reinforcement of learning skills at home.</i>	Accepted - Council should take forward within its existing resources.
38	The appropriate training and support is provided to teachers and staff in schools and pre-school settings to carry out assessment for learning within each year of the Foundation Stage.	Accepted, subject to the availability of resources.

KEY STAGES 1 & 2 – THE CURRICULUM

39	<p>The proposed curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2 is implemented with the following alterations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Area of Creative and Expressive and Physical Development should be re-named The Expressive Arts and should include drama and dance; - Personal Development should be renamed Personal and Physical Development and should include PE. <p><i>The Council subsequently revised these two proposed alterations, and the now recommended set of Proposals are as set out in Council's 18 April advice:</i></p> <p><i>Proposal for a more integrated approach to teaching and learning at Key Stages 1 & 2.</i> <i>Proposed statement on equality of opportunity for all children, including those with Special Educational Needs</i> <i>Proposed contribution to the aims and objectives of the whole Curriculum</i> <i>Proposed contribution to the development of</i></p>	<p>Council needs to make it clear for these five curricular areas key aspects or experiences to which all children should be entitled.</p> <p>Council also needs to provide guidance to teachers, particularly of composite classes, to help them plan, provide and manage an integrated programme which develops pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding and connects their learning across the other curricular areas.</p>
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	<p>skills</p> <p><i>The curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2 should be set out in Areas, rather than as separate subjects.</i></p> <p><i>There should be an increased emphasis on skills</i></p> <p><i>There should be a minimum entitlement in each of the Areas</i></p> <p><i>Curriculum Areas should be:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>- The Arts (including art and design, music and opportunities to include drama and dance)</i> <i>- Language and Literacy (including talking and listening, reading and writing and opportunities to include drama)</i> <i>- Mathematics and Numeracy (focusing on the development of mathematical concepts and numeracy across the curriculum);</i> <i>- Personal Development (focusing on emotional and physical development, health, self-protection (keeping safe), relationships and sexuality and mutual understanding in the local and global community); and</i> <i>- The World Around Us (focusing on the development of skills and knowledge about the environment, geography, history, science and technology).</i> 	
40	<p>Implementation is phased over a 5 year period from 2004, utilising the ETI guidance of Self-evaluating Schools and the ELB recommendations in relation to school development planning as means of assisting schools in the management of change.</p>	<p>Timing of phasing is to be agreed in consultation with education partners.</p>
41	<p>Implementation and support should be planned in close co-operation with all partner agencies.</p>	<p>Plans are being developed in consultation with education partners.</p> <p>Council needs to work with these partners, and particularly teachers, to develop guidance on how teachers' understanding of how links across the curriculum might be used to ensure children's learning experiences have breadth, balance, continuity and progression.</p>
42	<p>Mechanisms should be established as soon as possible to ensure the appropriate alignment of Initial Teacher Training.</p>	<p>Accepted – plans are being developed in consultation with education partners.</p>

KEY STAGES 1 & 2 – ASSESSMENT		
43	A statutory standardised annual report should be used in Years 3 to 7 to replace the current end of key stage assessment.	Accepted in principle subject to consideration of Council's further advice on assessment.
44	The report should be based on a review of formative assessments at the end of each year.	Accepted in principle subject to consideration of Council's further advice on assessment.
45	<p>The report should:</p> <p>(a) identify attainment in Talking and Listening, Reading, Writing, Numeracy and ICT;</p> <p>(b) comment formatively on competence within the curricular areas;</p> <p>(c) comment on the development of personal and interpersonal skills, and the ability to manage learning;</p> <p><i>Reporting should be in Levels from 1-5. Levels should be divided into three eg "+" "0" and "-"</i></p>	<p>Accepted in principle subject to consideration of Council's further advice on assessment.</p> <p>There is a need to link any differentiation in levels to indicators of progression within and across Key Stages.</p>
46	A standardised approach to annual reporting is piloted to ensure its appropriateness and feasibility.	Accepted.
47	The report be generated electronically using systems developed by CCEA.	Accepted subject to further work and advice as to feasibility, preparedness and timescale.
48	Schools should have the discretion to customise the report provided that the statutory requirements have been met.	Accepted in principle.
49	<p>Moderation of assessment in schools should be statutory.</p> <p><i>The moderation process should be based on three key elements.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Assessment training in which standards would be set as teachers review and assess exemplar materials and consider the use that can be made of the information generated. Teachers and pupils could use these exemplar materials to establish benchmarks for attainment and targets for future learning would support these tasks.</i> • <i>Provision of good quality exemplar materials by CCEA linked to teaching plans and schemes of work. CCEA is currently working with a technology partner to develop an ICT based system which will provide assessment tasks and items, complete with learning outcomes, assessment criteria and exemplar</i> 	<p>It is accepted in principle that assessment should be moderated. It is also accepted that moderation, like assessment, should be formative in nature. However, the process of training in effective assessment for learning, essential in its own right, needs to be viewed as a separate process from the process of moderation: moderation evaluates the standards of assessment (which, by definition, therefore, need to be set first).</p> <p>Further consideration of the form that moderation should take should be the subject of further advice, together with and subservient to the forthcoming</p>

	<p><i>materials. Use of these materials would not be statutory.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The third element of this strategy would be to adopt a “formative” approach to moderation. This approach would be a more supportive, on-going style of moderation which would occur during the school year.</i> 	advice on assessment.
50	<p>CCEA should establish a rolling programme of “formative” moderation to support schools in making effective assessments and judgements.</p> <p><i>It is proposed to have a rolling programme of moderation whereby roughly one third of schools would be moderated every year. As CCEA develops electronic pupil portfolios, this process could be carried out remotely and feedback to teachers could be almost immediate.</i></p>	Accepted.
51	<p>CCEA should explore the possibility of monitoring standards through a sampling approach similar to that operating in Scotland.</p>	Accepted.

KEY STAGES 1 & 2 – SUPPORT, RESOURCES AND TRAINING		
52	<p>Sample Teaching Plans should be provided as soon as possible to help teachers with planning a more skills-based and integrated curriculum.</p>	Accepted – across the curriculum.
53	<p>Lines of Progression should be provided in Mathematics and Numeracy, in collaboration with the Numeracy Strategy.</p>	Accepted.
54	<p>Detailed guidance should be developed on the implementation of the revised curriculum for pupils with Special Educational Needs in partnership with the Special Needs sector, which should be thoroughly consulted upon throughout.</p>	Accepted. This needs to be given particular attention, including with the Regional Steering Group and other key stakeholders in the special education sector.
55	<p>CCEA (in liaison with the Education and Library Boards) should plan the nature of in-service training over the next five years which will enhance teachers’ ability to help children develop personal, inter-personal, thinking, learning and ICT skills.</p>	Accepted.
56	<p>CCEA (in liaison with the Education and Library Boards) should strategically expand the small Personal Development pilot scheme taking place in 13 schools. The experience from the expanded pilot should be used to amend the proposals where necessary; to develop and disseminate case studies and models of good practice, as well as to develop and refine support materials.</p>	Accepted. Any extension of the pilot should be managed within Council’s existing resources.
57	<p>A shared approach to Language and Literacy</p>	Accepted.

	should be developed by CCEA (liaising with ETI, and the five Education and Library Boards) which is in harmony with the curriculum proposals.	
58	A strategic approach to the introduction of modern language teaching in the primary school should be undertaken over time, in line with the more detailed Council recommendations developed by the CCEA Primary Languages Project.	Accepted. The Department awaits the Council's further detailed proposals.
59	The current rolling programme for moderation should continue through the transition process with schools making the change at different times during that period.	Accepted.
60	Appropriate training and support should be provided to teachers and staff in schools to carry out assessment for learning within each year of the primary phase.	Accepted.
61	CCEA should develop ICT systems for recording electronically useful and significant assessment information which facilitates the generation of the statutory annual report for parents and provide useful information to subsequent teachers.	Accepted. This should be taken forward in consultation with C2K.

