

Summary of Proposals for the Revised Primary Curriculum and its Assessment Arrangements

April 2002



Curriculum Review

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Consultation

The consultation will remain open until the end of October 2002. Responses to the proposals are invited from all stakeholders with an interest in the education of our young people. A questionnaire response form is included with this pack. Details of how responses can be made are provided on the questionnaire and are also available on the CCEA website at www.ccea.org.uk/curriculum

What is still to come?

CCEA is currently developing sample teaching plans and is trialling a number of approaches to assessment. On the basis of these trials, CCEA will provide:

- sample teaching plans from which teachers can choose on which they can use to make adjustments to their Schemes of Work;
- lines of development which illustrate how children make progress in learning; and
- further help on integrating assessment into the learning process.

1 SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

The statutory curriculum in Northern Ireland began with the Education Reform Order in 1989. The curriculum itself was introduced into schools from 1991 on. In 1996 it was slimmed down because teachers found there was too much content to teach.

Shortly after the curriculum was introduced, statutory assessment began. In Northern Ireland this takes the form of teacher assessment at the end of Key Stages 1 (Year 4) and 2 (Year 7). The subjects assessed are limited to English and mathematics along with Irish in Irish-medium schools.

1.2 EVIDENCE INFORMING THE REVIEW

Since the introduction of the current curriculum in 1996, CCEA has undertaken a programme of monitoring and research. The monitoring was aimed at finding out from teachers how the curriculum was being received in schools. One of the most important research projects (carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research) was designed to discover the views of pupils and their teachers about the curriculum. Mostly it focused on Key Stage 3, but many of the findings also had implications for primary schools.

In 1998/9 CCEA held a major series of conferences on important issues connected with the curriculum and then, in early 1999, advice was given to the Minister of Education. The advice recommended that the curriculum and the assessment arrangements should be reviewed and he agreed. In the Autumn of that year the review began.

1.3 THE MAIN PRESSURES FOR CHANGES TO THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

From the monitoring and research it became clear that teachers feel that the present curriculum is too rigidly divided up into individual subjects and still has too much content. Recently, initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy have occupied additional time, but there has been no reduction in other areas to compensate.

In the upper primary school the Transfer tests have an enormous effect on what is taught and how it is taught. Improving the curriculum depends upon that influence being removed. Once it is removed teachers will be able to adopt a broader, more varied curriculum and the present proposals are aimed at helping them.

Giving teachers more flexibility in terms of content will allow them to use a topic-based approach for at least some of the time in order to bring together aspects of different subjects. This encourages pupils to see links in what they are learning, to appreciate that the skills they learn in one area can be applied elsewhere and to develop confidence in their ability to think ideas through.

Society is changing rapidly and that must affect the curriculum.

The other important change in society is the development of the new technologies. These are having an ever-increasing effect in the classroom and that needs to be seen in the curriculum. Information is easy to find now and it is not as important as it used to be that we carry large numbers of facts in our heads. It is

more important that we know how to make use of information, how to evaluate its usefulness, to sort out patterns and to solve problems with it.

Science has also provided new insights into the way we learn when young. In particular we know more about the structure of the brain and how it changes. We must make sure that the curriculum is in line with these new insights. This is particularly important in the early years of education when brain development is fastest.

Drawing these threads together we can say that there is good reason to look closely at the curriculum. Schools have, to some extent, been unsure as to how far they ought to respond to these new pressures. It is hoped that the present proposals will go some way to making the position clearer. The purpose must be to ensure that the primary curriculum is one through which teachers can develop young people into confident and enthusiastic learners.

1.4 THE REVIEW PROCESS

The first phase, from Autumn 1999, was concerned with broad issues about the overall shape of the curriculum and how that might change for the reasons given above. Working groups widely representative of the education service provided advice. Proposals were published in the Spring of 2000 and were the subject of widespread consultation before the detailed work of the second phase began.

For primary schools those broad proposals included:

- A new aim and new objectives for the curriculum;
- A framework that brings subjects together into areas;
- A new approach to early years education;
- Greater emphasis on skills that can be transferred from one area to another;
- Inclusion of the personal development of pupils as a formal part of the curriculum.

1.5 OUTCOMES OF THE PHASE 1 CONSULTATION

The feedback from the consultation, both within education and outside, was very positive. There was a high level of acceptance that the principles set out by CCEA and the type of approach taken created a good basis for the second, more detailed, phase. However, we were asked to review the assessment arrangements at the same time as the curriculum arrangements and not afterwards as planned.

1.6 PHASE 2 OF THE REVIEW

Working groups began the second phase in the Autumn of 2000. By mid-2001 most of the work had been completed on the curriculum, but further work was required on assessment. By that time also, the government had set up the Post-Primary Review Body and a report was expected in the Autumn. It was decided, therefore, to postpone the consultation planned for the Autumn of 2001 to the Spring of 2002.

1.7 CONSULTATION

The present consultation will last until October 2002. Some time will be required to take full account of the responses. We will then prepare final proposals for changes to the curriculum. Once approved by the Council of CCEA these will be sent as recommendations to the Minister of Education. Assuming they receive approval, legislation will then be produced by the Department of Education for consideration by the Assembly.

1.8 TIMING OF CHANGE

The present timetable is that the process of implementing change will begin in September 2004. It will not, however, be a sudden overnight change. In fact, it is likely to take a number of years of gradual change, carefully phased to ensure that it is manageable.

1.9 PILOT DEVELOPMENTS

It has been possible to identify a number of projects through which new ideas can be tried out before introduction. One concerns early years education where the new approach is already being piloted in a number of schools. This was started by the Belfast Education and Library Board in a few schools and has now been taken up by the other boards.

The purpose of the pilots is to make sure that what is proposed really works in the classroom and to change anything that is not effective. Teachers also develop expertise through the pilots that can help in preparing others for the new approach. Finally, pilots are test beds for new materials designed to help teachers. By gradually opening the pilots up to more and more schools the change gradually becomes established across Northern Ireland in a manageable way.

1.10 FURTHER SUPPORT

Providing teachers with materials to assist them will be of great importance. CCEA believes that sample teaching plans and teaching and assessment materials are the best ways of doing this. Plans already exist to create a comprehensive range of materials of this type. Advantage will be taken of new technology in the way these materials are made available and link together.

It is also recognised that some aspects of the revised curriculum and assessment arrangements will require careful preparation through teacher training, both initial training and inservice. CCEA intends to work closely with Higher Education and with the Education and Library Boards in order to make sure that there is a co-ordinated approach to the training across Northern Ireland.

2 SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS FOR THE FOUNDATION STAGE CURRICULUM

2.1 A NEW FOUNDATION STAGE

CCEA is proposing that a new approach to early years education should be taken by naming these years the Foundation Stage. It would include the pre-school year and Years 1 and 2 of primary school. Year 2 would be seen very much as a transition year. Key Stage 1 would, therefore, be Years 3 and 4 and Key Stage 2 would remain as Years 5, 6 and 7.

It is important to emphasise that the proposed new approach is not new in practice to many teachers. It simply represents current good practice informed by recent research and by information from other countries. Statutory education begins very early in Northern Ireland at age 4. This is one year earlier than the rest of the UK and two years earlier than other countries in Europe.

2.1.1 Nature of the Proposals for the Foundation Stage

The proposals emphasise the need to take sufficient time to develop children's capacity for effective learning which involves:

- building up their self-esteem as individuals and as members of the class;
- developing their ability to play constructively by themselves and with others;
- generating their interest in stories and books through shared reading;
- developing an understanding of number through practical experiences;
- fostering curiosity and, so, the desire to learn more.

The proposals for the Foundation Stage curriculum set out a carefully structured programme of development for young children starting school. On the basis of evidence from elsewhere, and also evidence beginning to emerge from the pilot in Belfast, we are confident that, by age 7, this will result in better literacy and numeracy skills than at present.

2.1.2 Evidence for Change

In Northern Ireland there are well-documented gaps between high and low attaining children linked to social deprivation and to gender. Again, there is evidence from other countries that the careful preparation for learning emphasised in the proposals has an effect in reducing these gaps significantly. The building up of self-esteem is of particular importance here. Social deprivation often means children coming to school with a low self-esteem. Taking time to correct this in the classroom pays dividends in later years. Evidence from scientific research shows that, for many children, the capacity to read and write is not fully developed until around the age of 6. Too early a start and any sense of pressure can result in a feeling of failure which, in itself, damages self-esteem at a very vulnerable stage.

Not all children attend pre-school. Government policy, however, is to move towards full attendance as quickly as possible. Our proposals would require pre-school provision to be of a uniformly high quality if the objectives are to be met.

3 SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS FOR THE KEY STAGES 1 AND 2 CURRICULUM

3.1 MAIN CHANGES TO KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

Year 2 of primary education is seen as a transition year during which children will move on, when they are judged ready, towards the curriculum for Key Stage 1. The curriculum for Key Stages 1 and 2 is now set out in five areas:

- Creative, Expressive and Physical Development;
- Language and Literacy;
- Mathematics and Numeracy;
- Personal Development;
- The World Around Us.

These areas replace the previous list of subjects, but, of course, the elements of those subjects remain within the areas. For example, *The World Around Us* includes elements of science and technology, history and geography. These subject strands become more explicit in Key Stage 2.

3.2 AIM, OBJECTIVES AND SKILLS

One of the themes running through the review has been the desire to give greater prominence to the overall aim and objectives of the whole curriculum (so that teachers at all key stages know what they are contributing to) and to highlight the skills and competences that young people should develop in school. The curriculum proposals therefore focus heavily on a range of skills that each of the areas can contribute to. These skills include:

- Language and Literacy (Talking and Listening, Reading and Writing);
- Numeracy; and
- Critical and Creative Thinking Skills (including Managing Information, Problem Solving and ICT).

The proposals make clear how work in each of the areas helps to develop these skills in different ways.

3.3 REDUCED INTEGRATED CONTENT AND GREATER FLEXIBILITY

In response to the views of teachers that the curriculum is overloaded and disjointed, a certain amount of content is specified, as a minimum entitlement for children in each of these areas. The content is significantly more integrated than in the current curriculum. Creating opportunities for the inclusion of Personal Development and for the increased emphasis on skills. It also gives teachers more flexibility to choose content that interests them and their pupils.

Care has been taken in presenting the proposals to draw attention to the ways in which different aspects of the curriculum link together. These links will be developed further in the sample teaching plans and sample classroom material that we will be creating for teachers to use.

It has already been pointed out that the revised curriculum must provide a vehicle through which teachers develop confident and enthusiastic learners. Setting out a curriculum on paper is only a starting point. Everything depends on teachers using it to best advantage. We believe that the current proposals will point towards active learning and towards young people being encouraged to exploit the technology now becoming available to them.

3.4 ON-GOING INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT

As a result of the consultation on Phase 1, we were persuaded that review of curriculum and assessment should be done together. It is important that the section on assessment following is considered alongside the curriculum proposals. The approach to assessment has been to emphasise the impact of good quality day-to-day assessment as a means of encouraging progress. It also creates the information from which longer-term assessment can be derived.

4 PROPOSALS FOR ASSESSMENT IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The proposals for assessment in the Foundation Stage cover the pre-school year, and Years 1 and 2 and support the structured developmental approach to learning and teaching in the proposed Foundation Stage curriculum. Year 2 will be the transition year to more formal learning and teaching. For this phase of education to be effective, there needs to be a continuity of approach and an exchange of meaningful assessment information which is acted upon by successive teachers. CCEA wishes to carry forward the current good practice in early years which is based on observation of, and interaction with, the children.

4.2 PRINCIPLES

The principles that underpin assessment in the early years are that:

- planned assessments should be undertaken through observation and interaction with the children;
- assessment should be a normal part of learning and teaching;
- assessments should focus on positive aspects of children's development;
- children should be told about what is being assessed and what it means for them;
- all major areas of development should be covered;
- parents should be closely involved;
- assessments carried out in pre-school settings and passed to primary schools should be valued and should form part of the on-going assessment of children in the Foundation Stage.

4.3 PURPOSES OF ASSESSMENT

The purposes of assessment in the early years are to:

- identify a child's strengths and areas for development;
- identify children who have special needs or learning difficulties;
- enable teachers/adults to plan programmes of learning which will meet the child's needs;
- inform parents about their child's progress.

4.4 PROPOSALS FOR ASSESSMENT IN THE PRE-SCHOOL YEAR

All funded pre-school settings will keep a record of significant observations of a child's progress during the year.

At the end of the pre-school year, a *Pre-School Transition Form* should be completed for each child. This

transition form will provide a summary of the child's progress based on whether he or she:

- is beginning to make progress towards learning something;
- is making reasonable progress towards it;
- has achieved it.

The information in the form will be shared with parents.

Pre-school settings should be required to send the *Pre-School Transition Form* to the appropriate primary school before the end of June, along with any other relevant information from the child's record in the pre-school.

4.4.1 Reporting of achievements

At least twice during the year, parents should discuss how their child is getting on with staff at the pre-school setting.

4.5 ASSESSMENT IN YEAR 1

For those children who attended pre-school, the Year 1 teacher will have the benefit of the information in the Transition Form. In this situation there will not be any need for statutory Baseline Assessment for children entering primary schools.

If there is no such information available, the Year 1 teacher should complete an assessment focussing on language and literacy, numeracy, personal and social skills and physical development. The assessment should be done on the basis of observations during the first 4–6 weeks.

Year 1 teachers will continue to maintain a record for each child. This record should reflect the child's achievement throughout the school year and might contain, for example, *samples of the child's drawings and paintings and emergent writing, photographs and teacher observations on all curricular areas*.

It is strongly recommended that parents should meet with school staff three times in Year 1. The first meeting should be shortly before or after their child starts school. The purpose of this meeting would be for parents to provide additional information about their child.

The second meeting, around the end of October, will provide feedback to parents on how their child has settled into school, what the programme will be for the child over the next few months and how the parents might support their child's learning at home.

Finally, during the second term, the third meeting will give parents feedback on how their child is progressing and describe what is planned for the rest of the year.

At the end of Year 1, the teacher will transfer the updated record for each pupil to the Year 2 teacher.

4.5.1 Reporting of achievements

By the end of June, parents will receive a report, in a standard format to be used by all schools, describing the child's progress in all of the areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum. It will also identify any special needs that should be addressed.

4.6 ASSESSMENT IN YEAR 2

Assessment in Year 2 will be largely as in Year 1. The teacher will continue to maintain the formative record for each child. As the child develops he or she will be able to play an increasing part in selecting work to be included.

Two meetings with parents should be held, one in October and the other during the second term. Each meeting will be to discuss how the child is getting on and what is planned for the next few months.

At the end of Year 2, the updated record for each child will be passed to the Year 3 teacher. Among other areas this will indicate exactly what stage has been reached in the transition to formal learning in reading, writing and mathematics. The updating will, therefore, include completion of a *Foundation Stage Transition Form*.

4.6.1 Reporting of achievements

As with Year 1, an annual report in a standard format, will be forwarded to each parent before the end of June.

4.6.2 Moderation

It is **not** proposed that there should be any form of formal moderation for assessments in the Foundation Stage. Rather CCEA intends to hold meetings to try to ensure consistency of assessments both within and across schools. CCEA will also support the formative process of assessment, record-keeping and evaluation of assessment information through guidance and in-service.

CCEA does propose, as part of its quality assurance programme, to use the information on the *Pre-School Transition Form* and the *Foundation Stage Transition Form*, drawn anonymously from a stratified sample of schools (approximately 5%), to examine the patterns of children's achievement on entry to Year 1 and to identify patterns of progress by the end of Year 2. This information may provide useful benchmarks for schools.

4.6.3 ICT Support

CCEA intends to work in collaboration with Classroom 2000 to ensure the maximum availability of computer support for the keeping of records and the generation of reports. As children progress towards the later part of the Foundation Stage, it is expected that they will be able to undertake a significant amount of work on computer which itself will provide additional information for the record.

5 PROPOSALS FOR ASSESSMENT IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

5.1 PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSMENT

The key principles of assessment at Key Stages 1 and 2 are that:

- planned assessments should be undertaken through observation and interaction with the children and evaluation of their work;
- assessments should focus on positive aspects of children's development as well as setting targets for the future;
- children should be told about what is being assessed and what it means for them. As they mature they should increasingly be able to contribute to the assessment process;
- all areas of the curriculum should be covered;
- parents should be closely involved;
- information from assessment should be carried through from year to year.

5.2 PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CURRENT SYSTEM

At present schools are required to:

- keep a record of the progress of each child;
- report annually to parents;
- carry out End of Key Stage Assessments in English and mathematics (and Irish in Irish-medium schools) at the end of Year 4 and Year 7;
- provide a Primary Record of Achievement for pupils when they leave primary school.

CCEA proposes that this system should be changed by combining the second and third of these into a single standardised system of annual reporting.

Teachers will continue, as at present, to evaluate the work of pupils on a day-to day basis in order to:

- record pupil's attainment and progress during a key stage;
- to help pupils understand what they have achieved and to plan the next steps;
- to report to parents in a way that gives a rounded view of the progress made.

5.3 WHAT IS TO BE ASSESSED AND REPORTED?

The Annual Reports on pupils that schools currently provide are generally comprehensive and reflect the current statutory curriculum. Although the Department of Education provides a model format, schools are not required to adhere to it.

CCEA proposes that a standardised annual reporting format, designed to reflect the revised curriculum, should replace **both** current reporting arrangements **and** the system of key stage assessment. A standard format helps to ensure consistency in the information supplied by different schools, but it will also be of great assistance in developing computer-support in order to reduce teacher workload.

The report will require that teachers record a level in the following skills areas based on assessments made across the curriculum:

- Talking and Listening;
- Reading;
- Writing;
- Numeracy;
- Critical and Creative Thinking;
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

It will also contain information about average levels for the class in that year and for year groups across Northern Ireland taken from the previous year's reports.

Teachers will also comment formatively on the child's attainment in the five curricular areas – Creative, Expressive and Physical Development, Language and Literacy, Mathematics and Numeracy, Personal Development and The World Around US. These comments will focus on what the child has achieved and on targets for future progress.

The last section of the report will record the teachers observations on five key areas:

- Physical Development, for example, *gross and fine motor skills*;
- Self-management, for example, *ability to organise their own learning*;
- Working with others, for example, *helping with planning and organisation in project work*;
- Attitudes and attributes, for example, *self-confidence, eagerness to learn*;
- Interests and aptitudes, for example, *mathematics and sport*.

The teacher will make a final overall comment on the pupil's achievement in the past year. Thus the report would provide a complete *'pupil profile'*.

It is important to note that much of this information will be stored electronically and will be automatically generated or can be called up by the teacher as required.

5.4 MAKING JUDGEMENTS

Key Stage assessment currently employs an 8-level scale (only Levels 1–5 are used in primary schools) as the basis for the numerical result. This has now become established in English and mathematics (and Irish in Irish-medium schools) and CCEA would not propose to replace it with something different. There are ways in which its use can be improved, however:

- familiarity can be improved by extending the use of the scale to all curricular areas and years;
- ‘+’ and ‘–’ can be used to indicate progress through a level;
- the number of assessments can be kept to a minimum.

Teachers normally do provide, a mark or grade in the annual report for each area of the curriculum. What is proposed is not additional, but the standardisation of practice. Again this will aid the creation of computer software designed to simplify and streamline the process.

As they do currently, teachers will use the information about pupils built up during the year in order to determine the appropriate level. Having done so, they will then be able to use the ‘+’ or ‘–’ system to describe progress within the level. CCEA will provide additional guidance and sample materials in order to underpin the assessment process.

In each of the other five skills areas, CCEA will explore with teachers how formative assessment can be developed using performance indicators or lines of development such as those currently used for English and mathematics. These indicators will record in levels (and superscripts) the attainment of pupils as they work through the schemes of work prepared by their teachers. By the end of each year a teacher should be able to assess with some confidence the overall achievement of each pupil in each skill area.

5.5 USING ICT

Over the next five or more years, CCEA proposes, through the use of information and communication technology, to make available:

- a range of high quality assessment tasks, some assessed by the computer, others by the teacher;
- a range of other source and stimulus materials for use in assessment tasks;
- samples of assessed work, to aid marking by teachers and to help pupils be clear as to what they are expected to do;
- a computer-based system (effectively replacing the mark book) for storing information about pupils.

This will facilitate:

- holding samples of pupils’ work, either done on computer or scanned in from paper;

- the easy collation of information as a basis for reports;
- the computer-generation of some of the content of reports;
- the creation of summary statistics for evaluation and benchmarking purposes including average year group statistics for the whole of Northern Ireland.

5.6 MODERATION

The computer support described above will also enable moderation to be carried out using the electronic records maintained by schools. On a rolling programme of schools and curriculum areas, schools will be asked for sample pupil records that they consider represent assessment processes and standards in the school. Feedback on these should be rapid and should identify any change of standards required. Use of the '+' and '-' system described earlier will make such adjustments easier.

5.7 QUALITY ASSURANCE

As an additional quality assurance measure, CCEA also proposes that, at the end of each key stage, a stratified sample of approximately 5% of the school population take a set of short standardised tasks in Literacy and Numeracy. These tasks would be administered by teachers but marked electronically and/or externally by markers trained by CCEA.

The outcomes would be collated and reported anonymously and the patterns and trends compared with the Northern Ireland outcomes for teacher assessment.

This data would provide a useful quality assurance check that the assessment system was operating appropriately, without the disadvantage of distorting the curriculum.

5.8 PRIMARY RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

CCEA proposes to compare the potential of the proposed recording and reporting system with the current Primary Record of Achievement in order to evaluate and make recommendations about how the objectives currently met by the Record of Achievement can best be served in the new situation.



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