



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Preparation for Teaching and Learning - Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools

*Ullmhúchán don Teagasc agus don Fhoghlaim -
Treoir do gach Bunscoil agus Scoil Speisialta*

Developed by the Department of Education, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Professional Development Services for Teachers and the National Council for Special Education

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1. Introduction

The Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB) for stages 1 – 4 (junior infants to sixth class) was published in September 2019, making it the first fully developed curriculum to be introduced since the Primary School Curriculum in 1999. During times of curriculum change, everyone within an education system is learning collectively and needs support in enacting the proposed change. Opportunities to reflect on established routines and practices are also presented during these times, enabling us to consider how these might be adjusted to further support teaching and learning. The introduction of the PLC/CTB is an example of such change and has been supported in schools by teachers, school leaders, support service advisors and inspectors nationwide.

As with all change, it is inevitable that both challenges and opportunities emerge as it is enacted in schools. One such challenge that teachers are responding to is preparing to teach using two different styles of curriculum, a content objectives-based Primary School Curriculum (1999) and a learning outcomes-based PLC/CTB (2019). It is also worth noting that all future primary curriculum developments will feature learning outcomes. This document is intended to provide guidance to teachers and school leaders in all school contexts, by describing a renewed understanding of ‘preparation for teaching and learning’ for both the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and the PLC/CTB (2019). In the special school context, the intended learning for children should be drawn from an age-appropriate primary or post-primary curriculum to ensure children have access to, participate in and benefit from an education that is inclusive and appropriate to their abilities and needs. For teachers of children at post-primary level in a special school, aspects of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and Primary Language Curriculum (2019) may be used to inform and support preparation for continuity of teaching and learning using rich and authentic learning experiences.

2. Preparation for Teaching and Learning

Circular Letter 0045/2019 supporting the introduction of the PLC/CTB contains important messages regarding the curriculum. It introduces the language of ‘preparation for teaching and learning’ rather than the more conventional language of ‘planning for teaching’. The following guidance outlines a renewed understanding of preparation for teaching and learning, which is aligned with the Looking at our Schools – A Quality Framework for Primary Schools (2016).

Preparation for teaching and learning is best understood as an ongoing process which evolves as we continuously learn new information about the children, their needs, their interests and their abilities. In this way, all preparation for teaching and learning should be understood as being **ongoing and evolving**. Preparation for teaching and learning involves **invisible, visible and recorded** preparation which can take place at the same time as well as before, during and after teaching and learning (Figure1). All three are **complementary** and necessary to support the provision of appropriate learning experiences for all children. While invisible and visible preparation may not be recorded, it is important to acknowledge that **all three components are equally valued**.

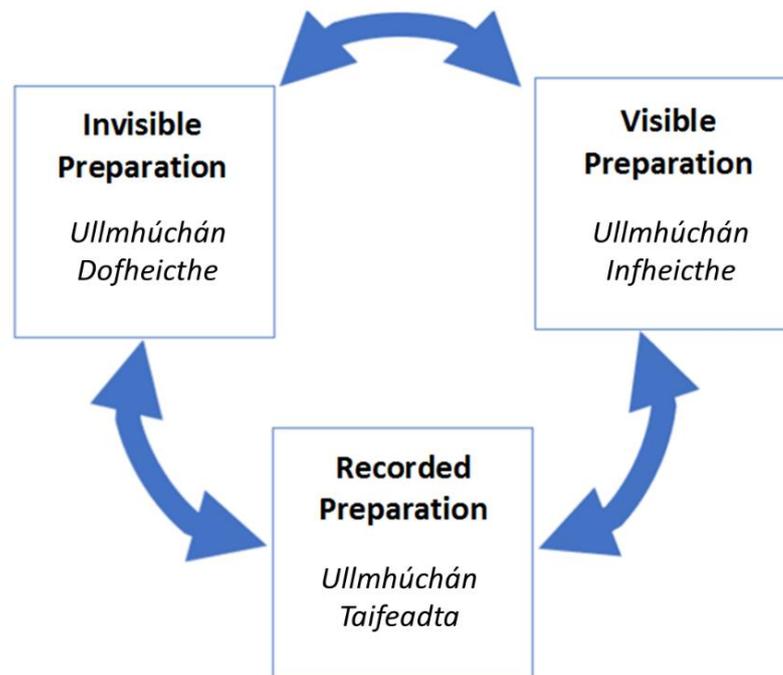


FIGURE 1: PREPARATION FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Invisible Preparation and Reflection

Invisible preparation is **continuous and unrecorded**; whereby teachers draw on their experience, their knowledge of the children, the learning culture in their setting as well as their beliefs about teaching and learning in making decisions about their practice. This **ongoing reflection** about children's learning and development often takes place intuitively before, during and after the learning takes place. This often occurs through **collaboration** with colleagues and others including the children, their parents and other relevant professionals or outside agencies. Invisible preparation involves purposeful **engagement with the curriculum** and its supports to ensure high quality learning experiences are provided for the children.

Visible Preparation and Reflection

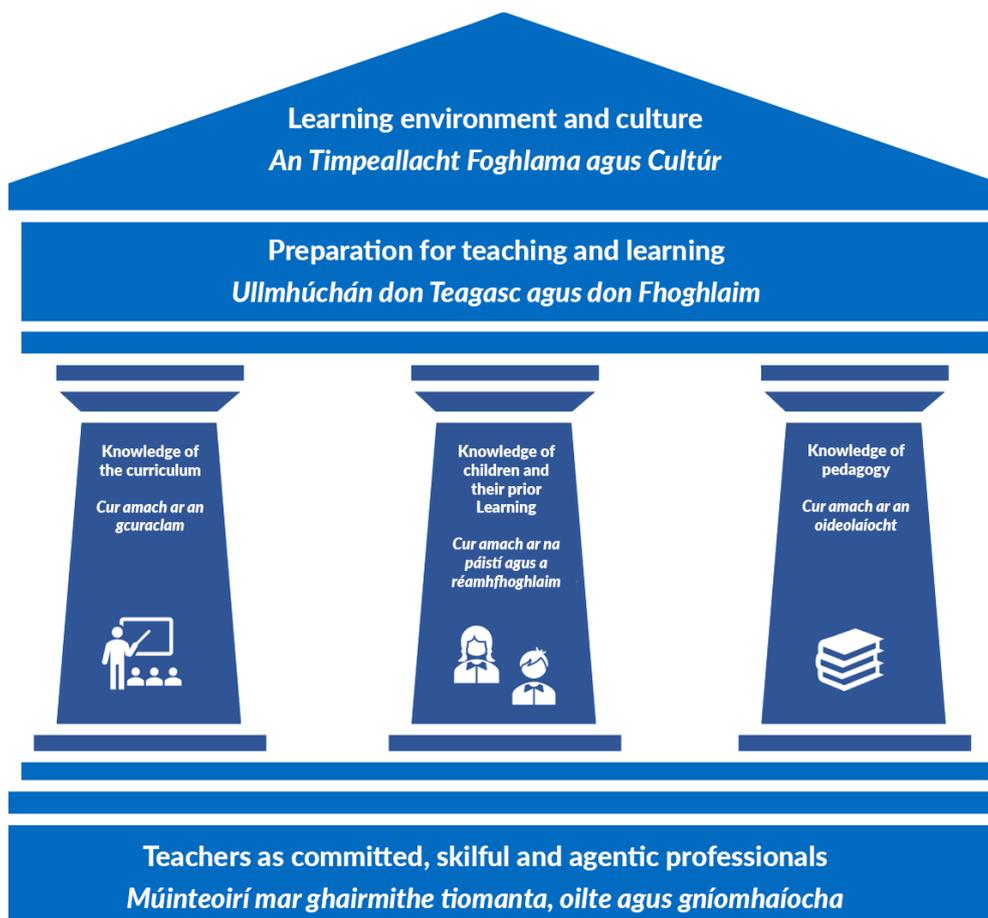
Visible preparation is teaching and learning in action. It involves the provision of appropriate learning experiences to support the intended learning of all children. These learning experiences, informed by the curriculum, are adapted to support the needs, interests and abilities of all children. Visible preparation considers a learning environment where playful and engaging experiences can take place and where meaningful interactions are facilitated. It also considers the use of appropriate resources to support the intended learning for the children. Teaching and learning in action is fluid and flexible and teachers often embrace unexpected and emerging learning opportunities that arise.

Recorded Preparation and Reflection

Recorded preparation is any documentation which **supports teachers' ongoing practice and reflection**. This documentation can include short-term and long-term documentation, student support plans/IEPs, assessment data, cuntas míosúil, end of year reports, personal notes, documentation from other professionals and outside agencies, etc.

3. The Key Pillars of Preparation for Teaching and Learning

Teachers are recognised as **committed, skilled and agentic professionals**. Teachers make key decisions every day about teaching and learning in their school, including decisions about what children learn, the sequence in which they learn, the pace at which they learn, and the activities and experiences through which they learn. These decisions are shaped by key pillars which, as figure 2 below illustrates, include: the teacher’s **knowledge of the children and their prior learning**; their **knowledge of the curriculum**; and their **knowledge of pedagogy**. Decisions are also underpinned by high- quality assessment practice which is used to inform teaching and learning.



The key pillars are interlinked and jointly support all aspects of teachers' preparation - invisible, visible and recorded - as well as the learning environment and school culture.

Knowledge of the Children and their Prior Learning

Knowledge of the children includes both the children as learners and the children as members of a family and community, and can be deepened through observation, information gathering and assessment. Information can be gathered from a variety of sources, including:

- the child
- the child's parents / guardians
- the child's previous and current teacher(s), special education teacher and special needs assistants
- other professionals and outside agencies
- documentation such as student support plans/IEPs, school progress reports, Mo Scéal documents, assessment records, reports from outside agencies, etc.

These sources of information become an integral part of preparation for teaching and learning when they support decision making around the next steps for children's learning.

Knowledge of the Curriculum

Taking time to read and to become familiar with the curriculum, either on one's own or in collaboration with colleagues or advisory support services, is an important step in a teacher's preparation for teaching and learning. Knowledge of the curriculum includes a knowledge of the underpinning **rationale and aims** and the **approaches** to teaching and learning supported by the curriculum. It also includes knowledge of the rationale and focus of each **Learning Outcome**, as well as the links that can be made across elements and strands or indeed across other curriculum areas. As all teachers become familiar with the curriculum, they also become aware of how to access support, through the curriculum website (www.curriculumonline.ie, www.ncca.ie) or from support

services (www.pdst.ie and www.ncse.ie). As familiarisation deepens with increased engagement, teachers internalise this knowledge and develop an understanding of the curriculum through **experience and reflection**. In effect, this means that as all teachers **uncover the curriculum**, they come to interpret its Learning Outcomes in ways appropriate to their school contexts and the needs of their children.

Knowledge of Pedagogy

Pedagogy shapes **teachers' actions, words and judgements**. It is not static; it evolves and is deepened through reflection on practice, conversations with colleagues, and continuous professional development. An understanding of pedagogical approaches is important in choosing, with the child(ren) where possible, appropriate and engaging learning experiences. Teachers' knowledge of content is also an important factor in developing meaningful and engaging learning experiences. This knowledge of the content being taught supports teachers to make decisions about what children learn, the sequence in which they learn and the pace at which they learn. By making professional decisions based on a sound knowledge of pedagogy, of content and taking account of the interests, curiosities and prior learning of the children, teachers exercise their **agency** and efficacy.

4. Preparation for Teaching and Learning in Practice

The concept of preparation for teaching and learning **requires a new way to consider how all teachers demonstrate their preparation** during the school year and at moments of inspection. Preparation for Teaching and Learning may be demonstrated through four sources of evidence.

The Child(ren)

The children and their learning provide insights into a teacher's preparation. Interaction with children can indicate the degree to which the learning experiences have been shaped by children's' prior knowledge and learning, interests and curiosities. Supporting children to **describe or demonstrate/show their learning** and progression provides insight into the culture of the learning environment and the interactions between teacher and child, as well as the use of a range of assessment methods including peer and self-assessment. As appropriate for their age and development, children can describe or demonstrate their learning and progression, the learning experiences which they have enjoyed and learned most from, as well as considering the **next steps in their learning**.

The Teacher

A teacher engaged in preparation for teaching and learning demonstrates their knowledge of the child(ren), the curriculum and pedagogy. The teacher can **explain and elaborate** on their professional decisions related to the learning of the children. Teachers may describe why they have chosen specific learning experiences, which are shaped by the strengths, needs, interests and individuality of the child(ren) with whom they work. The teacher can also identify and describe the aims and rationale of the curriculum, **the focus of learning** at a

point in time and how children will demonstrate their new learning. They may also describe the potential next steps in the children's learning and how these may be supported.

The Learning Environment

The cultural and physical context in which learning occurs provide insight into the nature of teaching and learning. Interactions between adult and child(ren), structures and routines, as well as **beliefs and values** associated with teaching and learning are important hallmarks of an effective learning environment.

Quality teacher-child and child-child interactions during which ideas, thoughts, views and opinions of all children are actively listened to and valued, foster positive relationships. High expectations are also an important feature of an effective learning environment. Such expectations can be supported by giving time to the development of agreed standards, procedures, processes and routines supporting the learning needs of all children. Providing opportunities for children to take **responsibility for and ownership of** their learning, where appropriate, and to share their reflections on their progress can be an indication of effective preparation. Alignment between the physical layout of the setting, the needs of all child(ren) and the pedagogical approaches intended to support learning is also an important dimension. The availability and visibility of learning resources linking with and emerging from samples of children's work can provide insight into thoughtful preparation.

Recorded Preparation and Reflection

When considered in a broad understanding of preparation for teaching and learning, recorded preparation is a necessary aspect which is **complementary** to the processes of invisible and visible preparation. Recorded preparation **is first and foremost for the teacher**, and therefore should be **useful, purposeful and practical**. While naturally displaying similarities with the work of colleagues, a teacher's recorded preparation is **personal and bespoke**. Recorded preparation refers directly to the curriculum, identifying selected Learning Outcomes which are guiding preparation. It should provide clarity on the **focus of learning for children** during a series of learning experiences. The teacher draws on the pillars of preparation for teaching and learning to refine and record the **focus of**

learning, the learning experiences that will be provided, and how this learning will be demonstrated by the children. All recorded preparation, signaling the **broad direction and focus of learning for the children**, needs to be understood as tentative and dynamic. It does not need to overelaborate on what may occur in the learning environment. Recorded preparation evolves in response to emerging opportunities and needs of the children. It **may** include teacher's annotations and amendments, as appropriate. Recorded preparation and reflection is a **work in progress**, which is practical and purposeful, evolving as learning progresses. In the special school context, recorded preparation should refer to the age-appropriate primary or post-primary curriculum (see appendix 1) that supports the abilities and needs of the children.

Questions to support teachers to reflect on their preparation for teaching and learning:

1. How do I gather and use information about the child(ren), their prior learning, progression to date, needs, interests and curiosities?
2. Are the preparatory activities I undertake useful, purposeful and practical supports for teaching and learning?
3. How have the teaching approaches I employ been chosen or adapted to meet the needs, interests and abilities of all children?
4. How does my preparation allow me to respond flexibly to unexpected and emerging learning opportunities which may arise?
5. How does my recorded preparation identify the specific learning taking place, the learning experiences supporting the learning and how all children in my context will demonstrate this learning?
6. How does the physical layout of the learning environment support the needs, interests and abilities of all children, as well as appropriate learning experiences?

5. Supporting Preparation for Teaching and Learning

The following guidance is intended to support teachers' recorded preparation across both the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and the PLC/CTB (2019).

Guidance for Teachers - <i>Recorded Preparation to Support Teaching & Learning across all Curricula</i>	
What may be helpful to consider	What may be helpful to avoid
1. Remember, first and foremost, that documentation should be a guide for you as the teacher. It should be a practical and useful support, which is one aspect of preparation for teaching and learning. Consider your documentation as evolving before, during and after teaching and in line with the children's learning. If you find it helpful, add notes, amendments and annotations to your documentation to support your preparation for teaching and learning.	1. Avoid viewing your recorded preparation as the only aspect of preparation for teaching and learning. Your invisible and visible preparation are of equal value to your recorded preparation.
2. A whole school approach can agree on the common features to be included in documentation. These features can be recorded in a way that is practical and useful to support your preparation. The detail contained in documentation may vary	2. Avoid using generic templates which include features which do not meaningfully support your preparation for teaching and learning. While all teachers may include common features in their preparation, they may be presented or recorded in a way

<p>from teacher to teacher, depending on their individual preference, their professional judgement and the context in which they are teaching.</p>	<p>which is most accessible for you.</p>
<p><i>Recorded Preparation - Long Term</i></p>	
<p>1. Be flexible with your long term preparation. It may need to be amended as you learn more about the children in your context or as unexpected learning opportunities arise. Allow sufficient time before completing your recorded long term preparation, so that it meaningfully reflects the learning strengths and needs of all children in your context.</p>	<p>1. It is not necessary to have your long term preparation completed before the beginning of the school year as it is an evolving document. Avoid writing overly-detailed plans for the year ahead which may limit your flexibility to respond to the children's needs, interests and abilities. Avoid rigidly 'sticking to the plan', as the document may be amended or adjusted as the year progresses.</p>
<p><i>Recorded Preparation - Short Term</i></p>	
<p>1. Through your knowledge of the children and their prior learning, and with reference to the curriculum, identify the focus of new learning. Identify the learning experiences chosen to support all children in progressing this learning. Identify the ways in which their progress will be assessed and monitored. This may include the use of peer- and self-assessment. Consider how you will know if the focus of new learning has progressed and how this is reflected in your Cuntas Míosúil.</p>	<p>1. Avoid relying on a narrow set of assessment practices, such as an over-reliance on teacher-designed tests, to identify children's progress. Consider using a range of assessment practices ranging from child-led to teacher-led.</p>
<p>2. Keep your recorded preparation concise. The length of a document is not an indication of its quality. The detail within recorded preparation may vary from teacher to teacher, and the approach taken should support teachers to embrace unexpected and emerging learning opportunities that arise.</p>	<p>2. Avoid spending excessive time writing detailed descriptions of activities.</p>

<i>Cuntas Míosúil</i>	
<p>1. Ensure that your Cuntas Míosúil records the new learning that the children have progressed over the month, and the learning experiences used to support their progress. Where short-term documentation has clearly outlined the new learning and the learning experiences, it may also be used for the purpose of your Cuntas Míosúil.</p>	<p>1. Avoid unnecessary detail, a lengthy account of content taught is not necessarily an indicator of effectiveness. Consider your Cuntas Míosúil as a record of the children's learning which can be used to support continuity and progression in their learning.</p>
<p>2. If you find it helpful, include a brief reflection in your Cuntas Míosúil where you have the option to comment on teaching and learning over the course of the month.</p>	

Learning Outcomes in the Primary Language Curriculum

Learning Outcomes describe the expected learning and development for children at the end of a period of time. Learning Outcomes focus on learning as an enabling process that helps children in their development of concepts, skills and dispositions. Teachers support children in the achievement of Learning Outcomes by providing learning experiences related to aspects of the Learning Outcome/s and which are best suited to the needs of all children. Learning Outcomes recognise that all children learn and all teachers teach in a variety of contexts and that the teaching/learning journeys will be different in these contexts.

The following guidance is intended to support teachers' preparation for teaching and learning when working with the PLC/CTB (2019).

Guidance for Teachers	
<i>Working with Learning Outcomes</i>	
What may be helpful to consider	What may be helpful to avoid
<p>1. Consider the interests, needs, and abilities of all children when selecting the most appropriate Learning Outcome(s) in your context. Using your knowledge of the children and their prior learning, prioritise the Learning Outcomes which will best support the next steps in their learning. Learning experiences should be created and adapted to support all children in their learning. Where possible, engage with colleagues, parents, outside agencies and the children themselves to gain knowledge of their prior learning, as well as their interests, needs and abilities. This also supports continuity and progression in children's' learning.</p>	<p>1. When working with the Learning Outcomes, avoid rigidly following a generic scheme of work, as this does not take into account the interests, needs, and abilities of the child(ren) in your context. Avoid assuming that children have developed certain aspects of Learning Outcomes because they have reached a certain age and/or stage of development.</p>

<p>2. Keep in mind that Learning Outcomes outline expected learning and development over a two or four year period. As the Learning Outcomes are broad in nature, you may use your professional judgement to identify aspect(s) of the Learning Outcomes you wish to develop through appropriate learning experiences. This should be considered as the ‘focus of new learning’ for the child(ren).</p>	<p>2. Do not expect to ‘cover’ or ‘complete’ Learning Outcomes in a short space of time, as they are intended to be developed over a longer period through a combination of explicit teaching and classroom culture.</p>
<p>3. When recording short term preparation consider all children when identifying the focus of the new learning. Use the Learning Outcome and, if helpful, the Progression Continua, to help you identify what the focus of new learning will be. Use your professional judgement to decide what is appropriate when preparing for teaching and learning and to support the progress of all children in your context. Depending on your context, it may be necessary and helpful to record the focus of new learning for an individual child. However, there is no requirement to record this information for every child in a mainstream class</p>	<p>3. Avoid addressing too many Learning Outcomes at the same time. There is no specified number of Learning Outcomes to be identified in your short term preparation. As Learning Outcomes outline expected learning over a two or four year period, it may not be helpful to quote the full text from a Learning Outcome in your short term documentation. It may be more practical to record the focus of new learning in your own words. Avoid recording every Learning Outcome that may be developed incidentally, or over longer periods of time in your short term documentation. Focus on recording the new learning for child(ren).</p>
<p>4. Learning Outcomes are a combination of concepts, skills and dispositions, aspects of which can be achieved over shorter or longer periods of time. For instance, fostering a disposition of ‘pleasure and interest’ towards reading (PLC, Reading strand, Learning Outcome 2: Motivation and Choice) may take a longer time to develop than the ability to ‘identify words with similar sounds but different meaning’ (PLC, Reading strand, Learning Outcome 6: Vocabulary). Rich learning experiences can support children’s learning across a combination of Learning Outcomes.</p>	<p>4. Avoid only valuing aspects of the Learning Outcomes which are developed in the short-term. Consider how classroom routines, classroom culture and longer term interventions and practices support the development of Learning Outcomes over longer periods.</p>

5. When recording **long term preparation**, consider outlining the **Learning Outcomes** in **broad terms** for the intended time frame (term or year) ahead, including:
- a. the range of learning experiences
 - b. the range of assessment practices
 - c. the integration of the learning with other curricular areas, whole- school practices/events
 - d. how the classroom routines, classroom culture and longer term interventions and practices support the intended learning.

While you will prioritise particular Learning Outcomes based on the needs, interests and abilities of the children, ensure that children have the opportunity to engage with the learning described in all the Learning Outcomes across the curriculum.

5. When recording **long term preparation**, avoid specifying when and how long to spend developing Learning Outcomes, such decisions should be informed by ongoing assessment and therefore cannot be made too far in advance.

Guidance for Teachers

Using the Primary Language Toolkit to Support Preparation for Teaching and Learning

<https://curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Primary-Language/Primary-Language-Toolkit/?lang=en-ie>

<p>1. The Examples of Children’s Language Learning give insights into how teachers work with Learning Outcomes to make decisions about what they teach, the types of activities, experiences and pedagogies they use, and the information they gather on how well children are progressing in their language learning.</p>	<p>1. Avoid seeing the Examples as ‘best practice’, as they have been developed to support teachers in reflecting on your own practice for the children in your context.</p>
<p>2. The Progression Continua are designed to be a tool to support teaching and learning. They describe aspects of the Learning Outcomes in more detail and can be used to gain a further understanding of what is described in a Learning Outcome. You may use the Progression Continua as a fluid and flexible resource to inform and support your teaching and to help identify the potential focus for new learning.</p>	<p>2. If you are using the Progression Continua, avoid viewing it in a linear manner. While the Progression Continua charts a potential learning journey, remember that not every child will follow the same sequence. The Progression Continua should not be viewed as a mandatory part of any recorded preparation. If you are using the Progression Continua, avoid copying progression steps directly into your recorded preparation, as it may be more practical to express the new learning in your own words. Avoid labelling individual children according to the continua.</p>
<p>3. The Support Materials for teachers present a range of teaching strategies and methodologies to help children in their language learning and are illustrated with videos and photos.</p>	<p>3. Avoid trying to use every approach outlined in the Support Materials available, as teachers should use their professional judgement in deciding on the best approaches to language learning for the children in their contexts.</p>

6. Further Supports

Further supports can be found at:

- The Curriculum Preparation pages on the NCCA's website; <https://ncca.ie/en/primary/preparation/>
- The Primary Language Toolkit which supports preparation through the Examples of children's learning, Progression Continua and Support Materials for teachers; <https://curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Primary-Language/Primary-Language-Toolkit/?lang=en-ie>
- The updated Primary Planning Tool; <https://nccaplanning.ie/>
- Through sustained school support provided by PDST and NCSE
- The PDST Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile webinars
- The PDST Literacy webpages; <https://www.pdst.ie/primary/literacy/webinars>
- The NSCE Primary Language Curriculum webpage; <https://www.sess.ie/resources/curricular/primary-language-curriculum>

Appendix 1: Curriculum Provision from Birth to 18 years

