



Circular Letter 0045/2019

**To Boards of Management and Principal Teachers, Teaching Staff of
Primary Schools and Special Schools and CEOs of ETBs.**

Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile

Stages 1–4 (junior infants to sixth class)

Support and Implementation

1. The Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile

The Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB), Stages 1–4, including special settings, for English and Gaeilge is now available online for teachers and schools to access at www.curriculumonline.ie/primary. A hard copy of the curriculum for each teacher will be in schools in the coming weeks.

The PLC/CTB was introduced on a phased basis from September 2016. Over the last three years, teachers have been working with the curriculum in junior infants to second class. The Department of Education and Skills, its support services and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have engaged with school leaders and teachers as they became familiar with the new curriculum and began to implement it in their classrooms. This engagement, in particular, through the NCCA's Primary Language School Network highlighted the need for enhancements to the curriculum document.

The Department and the NCCA have responded to feedback with an updated curriculum document for pupils of all abilities in primary school, from junior infants to sixth class, Stages 1–4, in English-medium schools, Gaeltacht schools, Irish-medium schools and special schools. There have been significant and innovative changes to the layout, presentation and content resulting in a more streamlined and accessible document which is designed to ensure that



children will gain the required concepts, skills and dispositions as they progress through school.

The Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB):

- Is for **all** classes, junior infants to sixth class and special settings, so includes stages 1 and 2 (which have begun implementation over the last three years) **and** stages 3 and 4 in a single document
- Retains the Strands and Elements with which teachers have become familiar
- Sets out children's language learning for **English and Gaeilge** in clear Learning Outcomes for each stage
- Describes the types of experiences that help children to learn in both languages
- Includes a new section '**Primary Language Curriculum in Practice/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile i bhfeidhm**' which provides guidance and support to teachers on appropriate approaches to language teaching and learning
- Is supported by an updated and expanded online Primary Language Toolkit/Uirlisí Úsáide Teanga na Bunscoile including Examples of Children's Language Learning/ Samplaí d'Fhoghlaim Teanga na bPáistí, Progression Continua/Contanaim Dul chun Cinn, and Support Materials for Teachers/Ábhar Tacaíochta do Mhúinteoirí; www.curriculumonline.ie.

The curriculum is supported with a redeveloped online space that foregrounds the learning outcomes and provides relevant supports to teach towards them.

The curriculum recognises and supports teachers as skilled professionals with the autonomy to make key decisions about teaching and learning in their own school, to include 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.

The curriculum reflects the principles and pedagogies of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009) and it supports continuity between children's learning and development in early childhood settings and in infant classes. In its Strands, Elements and Learning Outcomes, the PLC/CTB is aligned with the junior cycle specifications for English, Irish and Modern Foreign Languages. This provides for continuity of experience and progression in language learning as children make the transition from pre-school to primary



to post-primary school. The curriculum also provides progression for children with special educational needs.

2. Programme of Support

Schools will be aware that professional development support for the introduction and implementation of the PLC/CTB is provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in collaboration with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

A new three year cycle of support from 2019/20 to 2021/22 will commence in September 2019 as follows:

- All schools will be offered a full-day seminar during Term 1 2019. This whole-staff seminar will explore the Primary Language Curriculum (junior infants to sixth class and special settings) and outline its implications for language teaching and learning in the context of a learning outcomes approach. These seminars will be facilitated by PDST/NCSE.
- A programme of sustained in-school support will be made available to all schools, on a phased basis from Term 2, 2019/20. The programme will run across the three school-years, 2019/20 to 2021/22, due to the number of primary schools to be supported. In each of the 3 years a different cohort of schools will be involved i.e. 3 cohorts over the 3 year period. **Participation is on an elective basis** and needs to be applied for by the school principal. This programme provides for up to 6 in-school support visits from PDST/NCSE in line with the school's identified needs with the in-school visits generally taking place over the course of a full year. Full details of the application process to facilitate participation in the sustained in-school support programme will be notified to schools by PDST/NCSE before the end of 2019.
- A series of webinars will be made available in response to the needs in the system as teachers and schools engage with the curriculum. The first of these webinars will become available in early 2020.
- Annual leadership seminars will be available to school principals over the three year period. These seminars will address the theme of Leading Curriculum Change for the PLC/CTB. Substitution cover will be available, where necessary, for principals to attend these seminars.



3. School Closures

The Department understands the need for schools to engage at a whole-school level to achieve the desired changes in practice which will have a real impact on pupils' learning. Both time and support are required to ensure deeper engagement and prior planning of activities by schools to embed this new style of curriculum. Schools may therefore avail of the following:-

2019/20 school year

- a) One full-day school closure for **all** schools to allow for the Term 1, 2019/20 whole-staff seminar (provided by PDST/NCSE)
- b) One half-day school closure for all schools to facilitate whole-staff engagement with **each** webinar, i.e. one half-day closure per webinar (led by schools themselves). There will be two webinars made available in the 2019/20 school year, one in January 2020 and one in April 2020
- c) In addition to a) and b) above, a maximum of three half-day school closures for the **first cohort** of schools involved in the sustained in-school support model as referenced at Section 2 above.

2020/21 school year

- a) One half-day school closure for **all** schools to facilitate whole-staff engagement with **each** webinar (up to a maximum of three webinars) as it becomes available i.e. one half-day closure per webinar (led by schools themselves)
- b) In addition to a) above, a maximum of three half-day school closures for the **second cohort** of schools involved in the sustained in-school support model referenced at Section 2 above.

2021/22 school year

- a) One half-day school closure for **all** schools to facilitate whole-staff engagement with **each** webinar (up to a maximum of three webinars) as it becomes available i.e. one half-day closure per webinar (led by schools themselves)
- b) In addition to a) above, a maximum of three half-day school closures for the **final cohort** of schools involved in the sustained in-school support model referenced at Section 2 above.



Format of Closures

Apart from the Term 1 seminar in 2019/20 which is provided by PDST/NCSE, all other closures referenced in Section 3 above will be facilitated by schools themselves. Schools will have the autonomy to plan their school closures as best suits their needs and context. For example, schools in cohort 1 may decide in 2019/2020 to combine a half-day webinar closure (led by the schools themselves) with a half-day sustained support closure (see section 2 above), resulting in one full-day's closure. However, it is not possible to combine two webinars in one full-day closure as the release of webinars is staggered in nature in response to emerging professional development needs.

4. Implementation

Schools will continue to implement stages 1 and 2 of the Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB) for junior infants to second class and special settings. The PLC/CTB for **all classes** (stages 1–4) is available from September 2019.

In 2019/2020, teachers in all schools are expected to:

- Continue to implement stages 1 and 2 (junior infants to second class, and special settings) of the PLC/CTB, based on the curriculum published in September 2019¹
- Fully familiarise themselves with the rationale, aims, strands, elements, learning outcomes and the big ideas of the curriculum for stages 1 – 4 for both languages, English and Gaeilge. Section 6 of the curriculum document provides guidance on appropriate approaches to language learning and looks at areas such as supporting second language learning, digital literacy, cross-curricular literacy, linguistic diversity, play and other approaches to language teaching and learning
- Engage with the series of PLC/CTB webinars that will be produced by PDST on a termly basis. Schools are encouraged to discuss/tease out/explore/reflect on the ideas being presented in the webinar and in relation to the context of their own school

¹ The learning outcomes have been refined and adjusted at stages 1 and 2. While these can be quite minor the outcomes are not the exact same as the 2015 version. The layout has been improved, and progression continua have been moved to the online toolkit. It is important that teachers see the 2019 version as the version to work from.



- Become familiar with the range of Support Materials/Ábhar Tacaíochta and Examples of Children's Language Learning/Samplaí d'Fhoghlaim Teanga na bPáistí available at www.curriculumonline.ie and begin to use these to inform their teaching of English and Gaeilge
- Attend the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) seminar facilitated by PDST and/or NCSE.

School leadership teams are expected to support teachers as they become familiar with the PLC/CTB by:

- Leading whole-school staff discussions and collaborative reflection and learning and planning to ensure that the PLC/CTB is put into practice in an incremental way
- Encouraging teachers to become familiar with and to use the range of support materials in the online Primary Language Toolkit/Uirlisí Úsáide Teanga na Bunscoile available at www.curriculumonline.ie to support classroom practice
- Using staff meetings/Croke Park hours to encourage teachers to engage with the series of PLC/CTB webinars that will be produced by PDST on a termly basis
- Applying to the PDST for sustained support visits to help with the implementation of the PLC/CTB. Using the school elective closures and webinars to support the implementation of the curriculum
- Engaging with parents around the introduction of the PLC/CTB, what this means in terms of their children's learning experiences and in terms of school closures for staff CPD
- Considering an element, learning outcome or pedagogical approach from the PLC/CTB as their priority area of focus for the School Self-Evaluation process for the 2019/2020 school year.

5. School and Classroom Planning

Effective school and classroom planning for teaching and learning is important in order to become familiar with the Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB). Schools and teachers should decide on the best approach to planning based on their own individual contexts.



At school level, planning should help the school to provide for implementation of the PLC/CTB so that continuity and progression in pupils' learning are promoted. At classroom level, planning should ensure sufficient preparation to support high quality teaching and learning and support language learning for all pupils.

The process of planning for teaching, learning and assessment gives teachers an opportunity to consider how best to implement the PLC/CTB in their own settings and to consider how to support the next stages of children's learning. Preparation for teaching clarifies the learning outcomes on which the class is working; the specific approaches chosen by the teacher to support pupils' in achieving those outcomes, and the way in which the teacher will assess and monitor pupils' progress. The process of planning varies from teacher to teacher but they should:

- Plan in accordance with the particular needs, aptitudes and interests of the children in their classroom
- Plan in accordance with the learning outcomes set out in the PLC/CTB Stages 1–4, 2019
- Use their professional discretion to decide how to plan for teaching and learning, drawing on their knowledge of pupils' learning strengths and needs, and how these are best met
- Use a template or planning rubric that best suits their needs. This approach can allow the practitioner to engage and think about implementation in a way that makes sense to them, while keeping the principles of the PLC/CTB to the fore. Arising from this approach, teachers individually and collaboratively will move towards creating a methodology for planning that is useful in guiding their practice, in their own context.
- Ensure that the focus of planning is on the provision of rich and authentic language learning experiences for children which will support their achievement of the outcomes set out in the PLC/CTB.

The Department understands that planning at this stage of implementation of the PLC/CTB is tentative and dynamic, reflecting teachers' growing knowledge and understanding of the new curriculum and responding to the needs of the children in their classrooms. As such, the Department advises teachers to develop clear, short-term, language learning plans which are reflected upon, evaluated and amended in the light of experience.



6. Further Information

Further information can be found via the following websites:

www.ncca.ie

www.curriculumonline.ie

www.pdst.ie

www.ncse.ie

www.schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary

Evelyn O'Connor

Evelyn O'Connor
Principal Officer
Curriculum & Assessment Policy Unit
Department of Education and Skills

2 September 2019