

Primary Language Curriculum

Questions & Answers

Communications and availability of PLC in its entirety

1. What date will the hard copy of the PLC be available in schools?

The hard copy of the PLC will be distributed to schools in April. For those attending CPD Day 2 seminars in the month of April hard copies will be available at the seminar venue.

2. What date will the USB key be available in schools?

The USB stick will be made available to principals in all schools in late May. In schools identified as having poor connectivity, USB sticks will also be made available to all teachers in those schools, again in late May

3. Will schools have the option of combining their two half-days and to organise a single whole-school closure following the second CPD seminar?

Confirmation of the position to apply is available on the DES website (<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Primary-/Clarifications-on-the-Implementation-of-the-Primary-Language-Curriculum.pdf>) clarifying that “the half days are sequenced to facilitate reflection following each input from PDST, however schools have discretion as to the timing of the closures within this academic year. Schools may also combine both half days into one full day school closure, to be taken during the current school year, for the purpose of whole staff CPD through use of online supports.”

4. Will clarification regarding combining the two half days into a single school closure and the timeline for same issue in a circular?

Clarification is available on the DES website (<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Primary-/Clarifications-on-the-Implementation-of-the-Primary-Language-Curriculum.pdf>) and in hard copy issued by letter to each school.

5. Will schools be expected to begin implementation before they receive whole-staff training?

No, see clarification on DES website (<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Primary-/Clarifications-on-the-Implementation-of-the-Primary-Language-Curriculum.pdf>)

6. What does DES advise for senior schools (3rd to 6th class) with regard to the current roll-out of the PLC for infants to 2nd class in relation to attendance at training and whole-staff CPD/planning?

In the school year ending June 2016, the focus of CPD is on awareness raising and introduction to the PLC. All principals were invited to Day 1 Seminar which were completed in January 2016. The principal and one other teacher from every school is invited to attend Day 2 Seminar, which takes place after the Easter break.

It is expected that all schools in all contexts will avail of one of the proposed school-closure options (2 half-day closures or 1 full-day closure) in order to familiarise themselves with the content and layout of the Primary Language Curriculum. This will be a school-led CPD event. The staff of every school will be guided and supported on how to optimise their school closure/s by a suite of support material, including online supports.

In the school years 2016/2017 and 2017/2018, it is expected that every member of staff in junior schools and vertical schools will attend CPD for the PLC, infants to second class.

Staff members of senior schools will not be expected to attend CPD for the PLC, infants to second class, in 2016/2017 and also in 2017/2018 unless they specifically request to do so in the context of e.g. a planned move to a junior or vertical school.

Learning support and resource teachers whether solely based in senior schools or having a senior school as their base school, will be afforded the opportunity to avail of CPD for the PLC, infants to second class, in 2016/17 and in 2017/18.

Planning

1. Who will provide guidance to schools on planning and when will this guidance issue?

The NCCA will provide templates and guidelines to schools on long-term and short-term planning based on the Primary Language Curriculum for junior infants to second class. These supports for planning will be available to schools from September 2016 and added to over time. Work with schools and education partners will inform the development of the planning materials.

2. Does planning comprise learning outcomes, progression milestones, and progression steps and how do teachers use the progression continua for the purpose of planning?

Current work with schools in developing planning materials focuses on using Learning Outcomes, Progression Milestones and Progression Steps. With particular Learning Outcomes in mind, teachers use the Progression Milestones to identify where children are in their language learning and development. Having identified which milestone(s) (a-h) to begin teaching from, teachers can use the Progression Steps to plan rich language experiences and activities to support children in their oral language, reading and writing. (See page 14 in the Primary Language Curriculum.)

3. How do teachers in multi-class settings plan and deliver the PLC where the class grouping spans both the junior and senior section of the school, i.e. 2nd 3rd 4th combined?

The supports being developed to assist teachers in using the new language curriculum to plan for teaching and learning, cater for multi-grade classrooms from junior infants to second class. Clarity on planning with both the 1999 curriculum and the new curriculum will be provided for those in multi-grade classrooms spanning the junior and senior classes.

- 4. Will all support material be made available in both Irish and English, i.e. will there be an English and Irish version of each item of support material?**

The Support Material includes practical advice to inform teaching of oral language, reading and writing in the school's first and second languages. Some resources are applicable to the three school language contexts and are available in both English and Irish, for example, *Transfer of Skills Across Languages* and *Playfulness in Language Teaching and Learning*. Other resources are developed for a particular language context or focus on specific aspects of one of the languages, for example, *Fónaic* and *Struchtúr Abairte agus Gramadach*.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

- 1. Is this a language curriculum for all pupils in all settings?**

The Primary Language Curriculum is for teachers of children of all abilities in all school contexts.

- 2. What additional material will be made available to support pupils with special educational needs?**

The Learning Outcomes and Progression Continua are intended to support teachers in planning and providing differentiated experiences to enable children to progress at their own pace in oral language, reading and writing. The continua and their accompanying examples, do this by illustrating children's 'learning journeys' towards the Learning Outcomes, while Support Material provides practical advice on particular teaching approaches highlighted in research to be especially important in language teaching in the early years of primary school.

- 3. What specific advice is to be given to teachers of pupils in special classes, special schools and to teachers of individual pupils requiring resource hours with regard to the use of the PLC?**

For some children who may have a greater level of need and who may need a more individualised approach, the priority learning contained within Milestone 'a' on the Progression Continua has been identified and used in the development of a Priority Learning Unit entitled, *Communication, Language and Literacy*. This unit has one continuum to help teachers differentiate teaching and learning for children with moderate to severe and profound general learning disabilities. Examples of children's language learning along this continuum and appropriate support material for teachers working with this cohort of children, will be developed. These will have the same structure as those in the Primary Language Curriculum. These materials will be available to schools in the 2016/17 school year.

- 4. Will data relating to milestones, and the number of pupils on each milestone, be used to determine the 'school context' for the new model of support being developed by NCSE? (Similar to use of standardised tests)**

No. The Progression Continua are not standardised and therefore can't be used for this purpose.

Planning and the Inspectorate

- Inspection will not run ahead of the timeframe for implementation of the new language curriculum in schools as outlined in Circular 0061/2015 and subsequently clarified at <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Primary-/Clarifications-on-the-Implementation-of-the-Primary-Language-Curriculum.pdf> .
- The key focus of the Inspectorate in the course of inspection activity during the phasing in of the language curriculum will be on supporting schools through:
 - encouraging them to reflect on practice in relation to language teaching and learning
 - discussing what schools are doing in this regard
 - affirming good practice and progress to date in engaging with the new curriculum, and
 - providing advice on how to commence/advance implementation.
- The advisory role of the Inspectorate in supporting engagement of schools and teachers with the Primary Language Curriculum will be particularly emphasised during 2015/2016 & 2016/2017 when schools and teachers are familiarising themselves with the curriculum and beginning to implement the oral language strand.
- During 2017/2018, progress made by schools in the implementation of the oral language strand in infants to second class will be considered during inspections of language provision in primary schools. From September 2018, the implementation of the full Primary Language Curriculum in infants to second class will be incorporated into inspection processes.

1. What expectations will the Inspectorate have for short-term and long-term planning in 2016/17, 2017/2018, and beyond?

It is left to schools to decide what planning processes they will put in place to support the delivery of the Primary Language Curriculum at whole school and classroom level. The NCCA is currently developing materials and tools that will support schools and teachers in this regard.

The focus of inspectors' input during 2016/17 will be on advising schools and teachers on how they might engage in planning for the implementation of the oral language strand. During 2017/2018, review of how schools and teachers are planning for the implementation of the oral language strand will be considered during inspections of language provision. From September 2018, consideration of planning for implementation of the full language curriculum for infants to second classes at whole school and classroom level will be incorporated into inspection of language provision.

2. Can teachers use the milestones/progression continua as they see fit or will they be directed how to use them by the DES or Inspectorate?

Guidance to schools and teachers on the role and use of the progression continua are provided in the new language curriculum and its support materials. The use of the progression continua is intended to be

developmental and formative and this is reflected in the messages being communicated to schools and teachers during support seminars.

Together with the learning outcomes, the progression continua provide important reference points for teachers to plan for, and make judgements about, children's language learning, and to decide on the next steps in teaching and learning to help children progress in English and Irish. The progression continua offer schools flexibility in identifying expectations for children's language learning and development based on their particular language learning and demographic context and in line with the learning outcomes for each stage, and to set goals appropriate to their own context.

Planning and Assessment

1. *How do teachers use the progression continua to support teaching and learning?*

The progression continua are intended to support teachers in planning their next steps in teaching oral language and literacy so that all children can make progress in both English and Irish. In using the continua for this purpose, teachers gather information on an ongoing basis from conversations with children, from listening to children read and from their written work. In doing this, teachers gain a deeper understanding of the development of language and literacy skills by the children in their classroom. This understanding helps teachers to build up rich pictures of children as language learners in the schools' L1 and L2. Using these insights along with the progression continua, teachers use their professional judgement about what children know and can do, to plan further language experiences to help them make progress.

Using the progression continua in this way involves teachers thinking about:

- Where are children now in their language learning?
- What is the next appropriate step for the children in their language learning?
- What experiences do I need to plan and provide to help the children get to the next step in their learning?

The progression continuum for each strand in each language provides practical support to teachers in planning and teaching the two languages.

In the case of some children, teachers might decide that it would be beneficial to the child and to the teacher to use the progression continuum for a particular strand and language, to observe that child's progress more closely. For example, this might be helpful where a child has a particular identified need. Again, the purpose is to support planning for teaching and learning so the particular child is helped to make progress.

2. *Will there be an expectation that teachers report to parents using milestones/progression continua?*

No. There is no expectation that the progression continua and their associated milestones are to be used for reporting purposes. Primary schools use the Report Card Creator or Report Card Templates on the NCCA's website at www.ncca.ie/primaryreporting to report to parents on their children's progress and achievement in English and in Irish.

Múineadh na Gaeilge and Immersion Education

1. In the absence of specific *téamaí* and specific *feidhmeanna teanga*, where will the Gaeilge content come from?

- *Téamaí* are listed on page 110 of the PLC in Glossary Section. The *téamaí* listed are the same themes as those listed in the 1999 Gaeilge curriculum. These are suggested themes and schools are encouraged to create their own themes drawn from areas of interest and relevance to the children in their context.
- Support material will be made available on the *feidhmeanna teanga* and this will be supported with exemplars of language functions.
- The recommended approach for the teaching of the Irish language remains the same as the approach with the 1999 curriculum. Support material will be available for how to implement *an cur chuige cumarsáideach* (the communicative approach).
- Support material is available on form focused instruction in Irish, *Struchtúr abairte agus gramadach*
- Support is available to assist teachers in making sense of the additional features for Irish, *Gluais na gramadaí: eiseamláirí de struchtúir Ghaeilge*
- Support material is available for the teaching of Irish literacy skills in areas such as: phonics, guided reading, writing genres and the writing workshop.
- English-medium schools are encouraged to engage with the practice of content language integrated learning (CLIL) and support material will be available on using CLIL as an approach to language learning.
- Transfer of skills across languages is supported with support material.
- Pathways in learning Irish as a second language provide an understanding of how children acquire and develop the language.

2. Can English-medium schools with a specific language need (e.g. schools where pupils' language is poor or schools with a high proportion of pupils with EAL) also apply immersion education in their setting, but focus on English? If the research is there for Gaeilge, does it apply for English too?

- Immersion education in Irish provides an authentic context for the learning of Irish as a second language and strengthens a child's overall language competence. It immerses children during school time in the minority language of Irish; children in Irish immersion settings add to their language base without risk to their English language development as they are surrounded by English in the wider community as the majority language. The benefits of immersion education are evident in Irish-medium schools populated by children from different backgrounds, including those in schools that are located in disadvantaged areas.
- In light of its linguistic and cultural importance, all children at primary level, except in exceptional cases, learn Irish from the commencement of their primary schooling. There is no evidence to suggest that the learning of Irish as a second language has an adverse effect on children's English language development regardless of their background. Indeed, giving all pupils the opportunity to learn Irish and to engage in enjoyable and communicative Irish language learning experiences from the start of primary school will enhance their interest in and skills in acquiring additional languages. Learning a new language from the start of schooling will also ensure equity of learning experiences for all children.

School Self-Evaluation and the Primary Language Curriculum

School Self Evaluation and the Primary Language Curriculum

The Inspectorate has offered these answers to the following questions to aid schools in their use of School Self Evaluation (SSE) to support the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC).

Overall position:

- The most important thing to remember is that SSE is a *process of continuous review and improvement* which makes a difference to teaching and learning in the classroom.
- The Department has published circular 0039/2016 recently and this sets out the requirements for the second cycle of SSE from 2016 to 2020. Schools are required to continue to focus their SSE on teaching and learning. Schools can choose to focus on 2, 3 or 4 aspects of teaching and learning over the four year-period, depending on their own needs and on the breadth and depth of the areas of focus. The inspectorate has published Revised SSE Guidelines to accompany the circular as a support to schools in the SSE process.
- SSE is a useful way of supporting the implementation of any priority change in a school and it can be used flexibly. Circulars 0016/2015 (Primary Language Curriculum) and Circular 0039/2016 suggest that schools will typically use the SSE process to review their current practice when introducing any new initiative, including the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC).
- School self-evaluation and external evaluation are complementary processes, both focused on improvement. External evaluations, in particular whole school evaluations, will take account of schools' engagement with and outcomes of self-evaluation.

1. How can schools use the SSE process when planning for and implementing the PLC?

Circular 0061/2015 (The Primary Language Curriculum) and circular 0039/2016 (SSE) both encourage schools to use the SSE process to implement the PLC. The SSE process is a tried and tested way of ensuring:

- (i) that the review of current practice is collaborative and inclusive
- (ii) that the school identifies aspects of current practice that are effective and aspects that need to change and develop
- (iii) that a school is enabled to determine the targets and actions needed in the change process.

Therefore, it is an ideal process to introduce any new initiative that relates to classroom practice.

2. Will separate guidance for the use of SSE in planning for the PLC be provided and when will this be available?

Circular 0039/2016 sets out the context and requirements for the second cycle of SSE from 2016 to 2020. A suggested timeframe for implementing the PLC using the SSE process is set out on page 3 of the circular. An article explaining how the SSE process can be used by schools to plan for the introduction of the PLC in English and Irish is included in issue 7 of SSE Update (May 2016), which is available at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie. The Inspectorate looks forward to adding materials to the SSE website over time and hopes to include videos of school principals talking about how to use the SSE process to introduce the PLC.

The Interagency Planning Group (which includes representatives of NIPT, PDST, SESS, the Inspectorate and the Colleges of Education), is at an advanced stage in the preparation of guidance for individual teachers' long-term and short-term planning for the PLC. Draft templates will be available from September 2016.

3. In the first cycle of SSE, schools have worked on three school improvement plans. Do schools continue to implement these plans, while at the same time planning to implement the PLC in the second cycle of SSE?

Yes. The SSE process is a process of continuous improvement allowing time for new practices to embed and become a part of 'the way we do things in our school'. Each school should continue to implement actions for improvement from the first cycle of SSE and to monitor their impact. Schools will develop improvement plan(s) that incorporate the implementation of the PLC in English and Gaeilge as part of the second cycle of SSE. Schools might like to look at the diagram on page 3 of Circular 39/2016 which suggests a way to think about the movement from cycle one to cycle two of SSE, whilst implementing the PLC.

4. Are the PLC and SSE really compatible? Schools are *required* to begin implementation of oral language in 2016/17 and reading and writing in 2017/2018, and SSE is supposed to be about schools working on improvement plans in their own context.

Yes, the use of the school self-evaluation process is highly compatible with the introduction of the PLC. Circular 0039/2016 recognises that every school is different and has different priorities. For example, schools can choose to prioritise 2, 3 or 4 areas between 2016 and 2020 for SSE, depending on their own context. However, part of *every* primary school's context is the delivery of the curriculum. All schools are required to introduce the PLC in a phased way, and it makes sense for schools to use the SSE process to examine current practice regarding pupils' language and literacy development to support the implementation of the PLC.

5. A school is already implementing a literacy improvement plan from the first cycle of SSE. How can the school integrate the implementation of the PLC into its existing school improvement plan for literacy?

SSE is a continuous and cyclical process in which schools are constantly reflecting on their progress and reviewing how the SSE actions for improvement are being implemented in classrooms. Schools should review the progression of their targets and actions annually in light of new evidence that emerges from the ongoing review. In the light of such an annual review and the evidence that emerges, schools could choose either to incorporate new or revised targets and actions into their literacy plan, or could develop a new improvement plan to support the implementation of the PLC in classrooms.

6. In light of the implementation of the PLC, do schools just focus on literacy (English and Gaeilge) in the next cycle of SSE?

No. Circular 0039/2016 gives flexibility to schools to focus on 2, 3 or 4 areas of teaching and learning relevant to their own context and needs in the second 4-year cycle of SSE. However, it is expected that all schools will continue to seek improvements in pupils' literacy and numeracy and other aspects of teaching and learning that the school has prioritised. In the second cycle of SSE, all schools should continue to embed the practices they have introduced to support literacy and numeracy development. Language learning takes place across all areas of the primary curriculum and this is a core message of the PLC. To support the implementing of the PLC, schools might choose to examine how language learning could be extended and improved in the context of the development of numeracy skills, or other curricular areas. Schools should also become familiar with the domains and standards for teaching and learning outlined in *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Schools* and may decide to focus on an aspect of teaching and learning across a range of curriculum areas.

7. Will vertical schools need to have two improvement plans for literacy, one based on the PLC from junior infants to 2nd class and one based on the 1999 curriculum from 3rd to 6th class?

8. Schools will decide how best to introduce the PLC in their own context. In its improvement plan, a school might have specific target(s) and actions for Junior Infants to Second Class that relate to the PLC, and different

improvement target(s) and actions for 3rd to 6th class. The SSE process will assist in determining what is effective and what needs to change in relation to language teaching and learning in English and / or Gaeilge across all classes.

In summary, the focus of SSE is not on paperwork or plans but on changes in how teaching and learning happens in the school. When talking about SSE in action, many teachers have remarked that small changes in classroom practice can have very significant impacts on pupils' learning experiences and outcomes. SSE provides a process for schools to bring about change and improvement and is therefore the ideal process to support curriculum change.