

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Northern Ireland (RCSLT NI)
Consultation Response to:

Northern Ireland Curriculum Consultation

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK. As well as providing leadership and setting professional standards, the RCSLT facilitates and promotes research into the field of speech and language therapy, promotes better education and training of speech and language therapists, and provides its members and the public with information about speech and language therapy.

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Background

Speech, language and communication skills are essential building blocks for literacy, numeracy and overall learning, development and emotional wellbeing.

Over 10% of children and young people in the UK have some form of long-term communication need which impacts on their daily life (Norbury et al, 2017).

This does not include children who are not typically developing in the domain of SLCN, but with the correct support will develop in line with their peers. However, the impact of any SLCN, short or long-term can have detrimental impacts on our children and young people in a range of areas including:

Education

- A two-year-old's language development can strongly predict their reading skills on entry into school, as well as their later attainment (Snowling et al., 2011).
- Children with DLD have poor play skills in comparison with their peers (Short et al., 2020).
- Literacy difficulties are more prevalent in children with SLCN (Drockell and Howell., 2015).
- In English and Maths GCSEs, 9.8% of pupils with SLCN achieve pass grades vs 42.4% of their peers (Department of Education England, 2020).

Mental Health

- Children with SLCN in the preschool, early and primary years are approximately twice as likely to develop social, emotional, and mental health

difficulties as children with typical language development when followed up over time (Yew & O'Kearney, 2013).

- Children with vocabulary difficulties at age five are three times more likely to have mental health problems in adulthood (Law et al., 2009).
- 81% of children with emotional behavioural disorders have significant language difficulties (Hollo et al., 2014).
- People with SLCN are six times more likely to experience clinical levels of anxiety and three times more likely to have clinical depression (Conti-Ramsden and Botting, 2008).

Youth Justice

- Up to 60% of young people in the youth justice estate have communication difficulties with 46-47% of these in the poor or very poor range. Many of these individuals have experienced poverty and adverse childhood experiences (Bryan et al., 2007).
- Males with SLCN are four times more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour with higher rates of arrests and convictions (Brownlie et al., 2004).

Family Life

- Children with SLCN have a lower quality of life at age 9, in comparison with their peers (Eadie et al., 2018).
- Caregivers of neurodivergent children (which include some SLCN) are more likely to experience clinically significant levels of stress, poor mental health, financial hardship, and negative relationships (D'Arcy et al., 2023).

Prospects

- Vocabulary difficulties at age five are associated with poor literacy in adulthood (Johnson et al., 2010).
- Children with SLCN are at higher risk of expulsion from school, particularly secondary education, and less likely to advance to further education (Clegg et al., 2009).
- Adults with SLCN are twice as likely to go over a year without employment (Law et al., 2009).

Young Person in Care

- Children in care experience SLCN, although, these are often overlooked and not acted on compared to the emotional difficulties these children face, despite the prevalence rates being similar - at 26% and 24% respectively. (Chambers et al., 2010).
- 90% of care leavers were found to have below-average language abilities and over 60% met the criteria for DLD with difficulties in literacy, developmental disorders, and social, emotional, and mental health concerns (Clegg, 2021).

Economy

- 14% of children aged three were considered at risk of developing language difficulties. The lifetime economic costs of unsupported language skills in these

UK children are estimated to be around £330 million. The cost is calculated from reduced lifetime income, the pressure on special education needs, mental health services, and possible related costs due to association with criminal justice services (Pro Bono Economics, 2021).

Health inequalities

- It is important to understand that SLCN can, at times, be due to reduced developmental opportunities in the child's family and educational environment which limit the child's learning of language. These reduced developmental opportunities are commonly linked to social disadvantage. In areas of social disadvantage around 50% of children start school with delayed language and other identified communication needs, indeed, some local studies have found this to be significantly higher in Northern Ireland. (Johnson et al., 2010 & the Institute of Health Equity, 2020).

RCSLT Northern Ireland

SLCN is consistently among the **top three SEN categories**.

Change in recorded in SLCN SEN Register and Medical Register 2019 - 2020/ 2024-2025

Area	Primary	Post-Primary
Overall SLCN	+20%	+80%
DLD with SEN designation	+371%	+173%
Language Disorder associated with a biomedical condition	+527%	+344%
Communication and Social Interaction Difficulties	+229%	+255%
Medical DLD	+419%	+983%

Projected figures for 2029/ 2030 (Year 12) and 2031/2032 (Year 14)

Projected increase from 2019/20	to Year 12	to Year 14
Overall SLCN	280%	374%
DLD with SEN designation	1,369%	1,336%
Language Disorder associated with a biomedical condition	2,138%	2,144%
Communication and Social Interaction Difficulties	251%	308%
Medical DLD	1,783%	2,667%

Source: Department of Education Northern Ireland School Census data, 2019/20–2024/25 (personal communication, 2025). RCSLT Northern Ireland projections based on progression of current mainstream primary cohorts into post-primary year groups. Special school pupils are not included. Small number suppression applies to some categories.

To what extent do you agree the proposed aim of the new curriculum is effective and relevant?

Response: Strongly Agree

Comments

We strongly support the proposed aim of the new curriculum. The emphasis on developing capabilities, enabling genuine choices and empowering young people to make informed and responsible decisions reflects the wider purpose of education and recognises the importance of preparing children and young people for life beyond school.

We particularly welcome the focus on agency and the explicit commitment to high expectations for all learners. This aligns with the principle that no child or young person's future should be limited by assumptions regarding their potential.

From a speech, language and communication perspective, communication is fundamental to exercising agency, making informed decisions and participating fully in education and society. Children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), including Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), may face significant barriers to understanding information, expressing their views and engaging in learning if their communication needs are not recognised and supported.

It is also important that agency and participation are not defined solely through spoken or written language. Some learners communicate through sign languages, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), communication devices, symbols,

gesture, eye-gaze or other means. Others may require information to be presented in accessible visual, auditory or tactile forms in order to understand, participate and express informed choices.

We therefore welcome an aim that seeks to empower all learners and would encourage continued recognition of communication as a foundational element of curriculum access and participation.

To what extent do you agree the proposed objectives of the new curriculum are effective and relevant?

Response: Strongly Agree

Comments

We strongly support the proposed objectives and welcome the broad and balanced vision they present for the development of children and young people.

The objectives appropriately recognise that education should support learners to develop as individuals, members of society, contributors to the economy, stewards of the environment and lifelong learners. These objectives reflect the knowledge, skills and attributes required for successful participation in modern society.

Speech, language and communication (SLC) are central to achieving each of these objectives. Communication skills underpin learning, relationship building, participation in communities, employment opportunities, self-advocacy and lifelong learning. The ability to understand, interpret and communicate information is fundamental to active participation in society and the economy.

For some learners, participation, independence and self-advocacy will depend upon accessible information and recognition of their preferred means of communication. The objectives should therefore maintain high expectations for all learners while recognising that pupils may access learning, participate and demonstrate their knowledge and capabilities in different ways.

We therefore welcome the extent to which communication is embedded within the overall vision for the curriculum and encourage continued recognition that communication acts as a cross-cutting enabler of all curriculum objectives.

To what extent do you agree that the nine capabilities reflect the key qualities and attributes that education in Northern Ireland should aim to develop?

Response: Strongly Agree

Comments

We strongly agree that the nine capabilities reflect the key qualities and attributes that education in Northern Ireland should seek to develop.

In particular, we welcome the inclusion of Language and Communication as one of the nine capabilities. The capabilities framework appropriately recognises that language supports thinking, reasoning, learning, participation and the communication of complex ideas across the curriculum. The document recognises that language and communication enable pupils to interpret, construct and critique arguments, participate in dialogue, and engage with different forms of knowledge and communication.

We also welcome the extent to which language and communication are reflected throughout the wider capabilities framework. The capabilities relating to emotional understanding and empathy, reasoning and problem solving, self-regulated learning and perseverance, and social and civic participation all interact closely with language and communication skills. It is important that the capabilities are interpreted inclusively so that differences in speech, language, sensory access, social communication or mode of expression are not mistaken for limitations in a pupil's underlying knowledge, reasoning, empathy or potential. This reflects the evidence base demonstrating that communication is fundamental to educational attainment, social relationships, wellbeing and future employment outcomes.

The capabilities framework provides a strong foundation for recognising the importance of communication across all areas of learning and development.

Please provide any other comments on the curriculum aim, objectives and capabilities.

We welcome the prominence given to language and communication within the proposed curriculum and capabilities framework.

Speech, language and communication are fundamental to learning, participation, wellbeing and achievement. Communication is not only a capability in its own right but also underpins many of the other capabilities identified within the framework. Children and young people require strong communication skills to develop emotional understanding and empathy, engage in reasoning and problem solving, regulate their learning, participate in society and access opportunities throughout their lives.

Given that speech, language and communication needs are among the most prevalent special educational needs in Northern Ireland, we believe it is important that the curriculum continues to recognise communication as a foundational element of educational success. Ensuring that all learners can access and engage with the curriculum will be essential if the ambition of excellence and equity is to be realised.

We would welcome explicit recognition that communication encompasses a range of forms, including understanding spoken language, expressive language, signed communication, gesture, facial expression, augmentative and alternative

communication (AAC), symbol-supported communication, communication devices and other low- and high-tech communication approaches. Communication access may also depend upon sensory access, including visual, auditory and tactile means of receiving information. Such recognition would help ensure that all children and young people can participate meaningfully in learning and school life.

We also note that the curriculum places significant emphasis on language, vocabulary, discussion, reasoning and communication across subjects. This further highlights the importance of ensuring that curriculum content and associated assessment arrangements are accessible to learners with speech, language and communication needs, including those with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD).

Overall, we believe the proposed aim, objectives and capabilities provide a strong foundation for a curriculum that is ambitious, inclusive and focused on enabling all children and young people to achieve their potential.

Scope of our comments on individual subject frameworks

RCSLT NI is responding to the individual subject frameworks from the perspective of our professional expertise in speech, language and communication and the communication needs of children and young people. We have also considered the extent to which the proposed frameworks enable equitable access, participation and opportunities for learners to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

Our comments should therefore be read within this context. We do not seek to provide subject-specialist commentary on the detailed disciplinary content or pedagogy of individual curriculum areas, which is more appropriately considered by teachers, subject associations and other relevant education specialists. Where we comment on content or progression, our focus is primarily on the language and communication demands placed upon learners and the implications for accessibility and inclusion.

Art and Design

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the emphasis on pupils developing confidence in expressing themselves creatively and discussing art using subject-specific vocabulary. The framework recognises that art and design provide important opportunities for

communication, self-expression and understanding the perspectives of others, which contribute positively to children's wider development.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The inclusion of the creative processes of art and the history of art alongside artistic production helps ensure that pupils develop the language, knowledge and understanding required to discuss, interpret and evaluate their own work and the work of others.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the progressive development of subject-specific vocabulary and opportunities for pupils to discuss, explain, analyse and evaluate artwork throughout the curriculum. These opportunities support not only artistic development but also communication, reasoning and expressive language skills. The framework appropriately recognises that pupils should be able to describe their work, discuss artistic choices and communicate their ideas using increasingly sophisticated language.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The increasing expectations regarding discussion, evaluation, reflection and analysis are particularly welcome and support the development of communication and critical thinking alongside artistic learning.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome the proposed framework and its recognition that art provides opportunities for pupils to communicate ideas, emotions and experiences through a range of visual and creative forms. This is particularly important for some children and young people with SLCN who may find visual and creative modes of expression an important means of participation and self-expression.

We also welcome the strong emphasis on subject-specific vocabulary and discussion throughout the framework. The progressive development of language associated with artistic processes, evaluation and interpretation supports wider language development and helps pupils build the vocabulary needed to engage confidently with artistic and cultural experiences.

Consideration should be given to ensuring that all pupils, including those with speech, language and communication needs, can access opportunities to discuss, explain and evaluate their work through a range of communication methods where required.

Equally, accessibility should recognise that visual presentation alone will not provide equitable access for all learners. Blind and visually impaired pupils may access artistic concepts and creative experiences through tactile, multisensory, descriptive and other non-visual means. Pupils with physical disabilities or complex needs may also require alternative ways to create, manipulate and communicate artistic ideas. The entitlement should therefore be to meaningful participation in art and design rather than dependence upon one mode of access or expression.

Digital Technology

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the emphasis on communication, collaboration, ethical awareness and understanding how digital technologies influence modern life. The framework recognises that digital technologies shape how people communicate, access information and participate in society, making this an important area of learning for all children and young people.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The framework recognises that young people must not only understand technology but also use it responsibly and effectively to create, communicate and engage with others.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The increasing focus on communication, audience awareness and user-centred design reflects the reality that digital technologies are often used to share information, express ideas and interact with others. The inclusion of accessibility and inclusive design at Key Stage 3 is particularly welcome and reflects the importance of ensuring digital products can be accessed and used by diverse populations.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the increasing emphasis on digital communication, collaboration and responsible use as pupils progress through the curriculum.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome the proposed framework and particularly the recognition that digital technologies are important tools for communication, collaboration and participation.

We welcome the inclusion of accessibility and inclusive design within Key Stage 3. Given the prevalence of SLCN and other additional needs within the school population, consideration could be given to introducing concepts of accessibility and inclusive communication at earlier stages of the curriculum. This would help pupils understand that digital technologies can support participation and communication for a wide range of users, including those who use AAC, screen readers, magnification, captions, speech-to-text, text-to-speech, switch access, eye-gaze and other alternative access technologies. Accessibility and inclusive design should not be confined to Key Stage 3. Developing an early understanding that users access information and technology in different ways would support both digital competence and wider understanding of disability and inclusion.

We also welcome the emphasis on digital communication throughout the framework. As digital platforms increasingly shape how young people interact, learn and access services, it is important that pupils develop the skills needed to communicate safely, effectively and appropriately across a range of digital contexts.

The framework provides valuable opportunities to support digital inclusion and ensure that all learners are equipped to participate confidently in an increasingly digital society.

English and Drama

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know**Comments**

We particularly welcome the recognition that English is fundamentally concerned with language as both a means of communication and a tool for thinking, learning and participation. The framework appropriately recognises the importance of speaking, listening, reading and writing and the role of language in shaping understanding, identity and participation in society.

We recognise the strong emphasis on vocabulary development, oral language, discussion, attentive listening and purposeful communication. The recognition that vocabulary acts as a conceptual tool that enables increasingly complex thinking is strongly supported by evidence regarding SLC development.

At the same time, the framework should recognise that not all pupils access or express language primarily through speech. Deaf pupils may use BSL or ISL; some pupils with complex communication needs may use AAC, symbols, communication devices or eye-gaze; and some learners may communicate more effectively through other modalities. The curriculum should retain ambitious expectations for language and communication without equating successful communication exclusively with speech.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?**Response: Do not know****Comments**

We particularly welcome the inclusion of argument, grammar and context alongside more traditional literary concepts. The framework appropriately recognises the importance of spoken language, reasoning, discussion, explanation and interpretation as core aspects of English.

The emphasis on argument, discussion, presentational talk and reasoning reflects the important role that language plays in supporting thinking, learning and participation.

The framework appropriately positions communication as central to the subject rather than as a separate or additional skill.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?**Response: Do not know****Comments**

We particularly welcome:

- The strong emphasis on spoken language and listening from Foundation Stage onwards.
- The recognition of vocabulary development as central to learning and comprehension.
- The explicit progression from oral language to reading and writing.
- The inclusion of discussion, debate, explanation and presentational talk.
- The focus on language comprehension alongside decoding and transcription skills.
- The recognition that spoken language underpins later literacy development.

The Foundation Stage content is particularly welcome in recognising the importance of talk, listening, oral composition, stories, rhymes, songs and rich language experiences in supporting later literacy and learning.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The framework appears to demonstrate clear and logical progression from early oral language and phonological awareness in the Foundation Stage through to increasingly sophisticated language analysis, argument, interpretation and communication by Key Stage 3.

We particularly welcome the progression from:

- listening and participation in conversation;
- oral composition and presentational talk;
- vocabulary development and language comprehension;
- structured discussion and debate;
- analytical reasoning and argument.

The framework recognises that language development is cumulative and that increasingly complex reading, writing and reasoning skills are built upon secure foundations in spoken language and communication. This progression reflects the evidence base regarding language development and literacy acquisition.

The Key Stage 2 English learning entitlements are provided by Key Stage, whereas the entitlements for Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are by year. Would you prefer Key Stage 2 to be broken down by year group?

Response: Yes, English should be by Year Group for Key Stage 2

Comments

Given the cumulative nature of language, literacy and communication development, there would be value in providing greater clarity regarding expected progression across individual year groups within Key Stage 2. This would support a more structured and transparent progression of vocabulary, reading comprehension, spoken language, writing and reasoning skills while maintaining flexibility for schools.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome this framework and believe it represents a significant strengthening of the role of language within the curriculum.

We particularly welcome the prominence given to spoken language throughout the framework. Too often, spoken language is viewed primarily as a precursor to literacy. This framework appropriately recognises speaking and listening as important outcomes in their own right, while also acknowledging their role in supporting reading, writing, reasoning and learning across the curriculum.

Given that SLCN are among the most prevalent special educational needs in Northern Ireland, we would encourage consideration of how the framework can support accessibility for learners with communication needs, including DLD.

The framework places significant emphasis on vocabulary, narrative, comprehension, inference, discussion, argument and reasoning. These are all areas in which children and young people with SLCN may experience difficulties. Explicit recognition that some learners may require additional support to access increasingly complex language would help ensure that the ambition of excellence and equity is realised for all learners.

We also welcome the inclusion of listening, discussion, debate, oral explanation and presentational talk throughout the framework. These skills are essential for educational achievement, social participation, wellbeing, employability and active citizenship and should remain a central feature of English and Drama throughout all key stages.

Where the learning objective is the development or demonstration of ideas rather than speech itself, pupils should be able to participate and demonstrate understanding through their established mode of communication.

Finally, we welcome the strong focus on language development across the curriculum journey. The framework rightly recognises that language is not simply a subject in itself

but the primary means through which children and young people learn, think, reason, communicate and participate in society.

Geography

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The framework appropriately recognises the importance of language in supporting geographical understanding and participation in debate.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the inclusion to provide opportunities for pupils to develop observation, discussion, questioning, explanation and communication skills alongside geographical knowledge. The framework appropriately recognises that geographical understanding is developed through investigation, interpretation and communication.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the strong focus on geographical vocabulary, explanation, interpretation, analysis and debate throughout the curriculum.

The framework recognises that pupils need increasingly secure understanding and use of geographical terminology in order to communicate their understanding of places, processes and geographical issues. This emphasis on vocabulary and communication is important in supporting both subject learning and wider language development.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the progression from:

- observing and discussing places and environments;
- using geographical vocabulary;
- asking and answering geographical questions;
- communicating findings and conclusions;
- participating in informed geographical debate.

This progression reflects the cumulative nature of both geographical understanding and the language required to express increasingly complex geographical concepts and ideas.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome the proposed geography framework and its strong emphasis on vocabulary, enquiry, interpretation, communication and informed discussion.

The framework recognises that geography requires pupils to understand and use increasingly sophisticated subject-specific language. This includes the development of geographical vocabulary, explanation of complex processes, interpretation of data, evaluation of evidence and participation in debate. These are all important aspects of disciplinary learning and support the wider Language and Communication capability proposed within the curriculum.

Given the prevalence of SLCN in Northern Ireland schools, consideration should be given to ensuring that increasingly complex geographical language remains accessible to all learners. Geography contains a significant amount of specialised vocabulary and abstract concepts which may present barriers for some pupils with SLCN, including DLD.

Accessibility should also be considered within geographical enquiry, fieldwork, maps, diagrams and data representation. Pupils with visual impairment, physical disabilities, sensory differences or complex communication needs should have equitable opportunities to participate in fieldwork and to access and communicate geographical information through appropriate tactile, auditory, visual, digital or communication supports.

We particularly welcome the emphasis on fieldwork, enquiry and discussion, which provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop communication, reasoning and critical thinking skills in authentic contexts. The framework successfully demonstrates how geographical knowledge and communication work together to support understanding of the world and informed participation in society.

History

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the emphasis on stories, narrative, historical reasoning, argumentation and debate. The framework recognises that historical understanding is developed through language, discussion, interpretation and the communication of ideas, and that pupils learn to construct and challenge narratives about the past.

We also welcome the recognition that pupils learn to respond respectfully through dialogue and debate, supporting both disciplinary understanding and wider communication skills.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The distinction between substantive knowledge and disciplinary knowledge provides a clear and coherent framework for historical learning. We particularly welcome the recognition that pupils require both knowledge of the past and an understanding of how historical knowledge is created, interpreted and communicated.

The framework appropriately recognises the importance of vocabulary, narrative, explanation, argument and evidence in helping pupils engage with historical enquiry and communicate historical understanding.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- The emphasis on stories and narrative as a means of developing historical understanding.
- The progressive development of historical vocabulary.
- The focus on questioning, interpretation and evidence.
- The inclusion of argumentation, reasoning and debate.

- The recognition of multiple perspectives and interpretations.

The framework develops pupils' ability to understand, discuss and communicate increasingly complex historical ideas and concepts.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the progression from:

- talking about the past and sequencing events;
- listening to and discussing historical stories;
- using historical vocabulary;
- asking and answering questions about the past;
- evaluating evidence and interpretations;
- constructing historical arguments and participating in debate.

The framework recognises that historical understanding develops cumulatively and that increasingly sophisticated historical thinking relies on secure knowledge, vocabulary and communication skills.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome the proposed history framework and its recognition of the central role that language plays in historical learning.

History places significant demands on pupils' language skills. The subject requires learners to understand and use increasingly sophisticated vocabulary, engage with narratives, interpret evidence, understand abstract concepts, compare perspectives, construct explanations and participate in reasoned discussion and debate. The framework appropriately reflects these disciplinary requirements and supports the development of the Language and Communication capability across the curriculum.

Given the prevalence of SLCN in Northern Ireland schools, consideration should be given to ensuring that learners with communication needs, including DLD, can access the increasingly complex language demands associated with historical study. This is particularly relevant when engaging with abstract historical concepts, source analysis, interpretation, inference and extended historical argument.

Historical sources also place different sensory and literacy demands on learners. Consideration should therefore be given to ensuring that access to written, visual, audio

and artefact-based sources does not unnecessarily disadvantage pupils because of communication, sensory or other access needs. Multiple means of accessing evidence and communicating historical understanding can support inclusion without reducing the disciplinary ambition of the subject.

We particularly welcome the emphasis on stories throughout the curriculum. Narrative is a powerful tool for developing historical understanding and provides important opportunities to support language development, comprehension, perspective-taking and communication skills.

The framework demonstrates how language, communication and historical thinking are closely connected and provides a strong foundation for developing informed, thoughtful and critically engaged citizens.

Home Economics

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the emphasis on applying knowledge in real-world contexts and developing the judgement required to make safe, responsible and informed choices about food, health, family life and consumer issues. The framework appropriately recognises the importance of communication, relationships and participation in family and community life.

The emphasis on independent living should also recognise that independence does not necessarily mean completing every task without support. For some pupils with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, sensory impairments or complex needs, independence may involve making choices, directing support, using assistive technology, communicating preferences and participating as fully as possible in everyday decisions and activities.

Accessible health, food and consumer information is particularly important for learners who may experience difficulties with literacy, language comprehension, numeracy or processing complex information.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the inclusion of Home, Family and Relationships alongside nutrition, food preparation and consumer awareness. This reflects the important role that communication, relationships and family life play in supporting health, wellbeing and independence.

The categories successfully integrate practical knowledge, decision-making, health literacy and social understanding, helping pupils apply learning to everyday situations and future life experiences.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- The strong focus on independent living skills.
- The emphasis on health literacy and informed decision-making.
- The inclusion of consumer awareness and critical evaluation of information.
- The recognition of family life, relationships and wellbeing.
- The consideration of cultural and dietary diversity.
- The focus on communication and relationships within families.

The framework recognises that young people need knowledge and skills that support participation in everyday life, personal wellbeing and future independence.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome the proposed Home Economics framework and its strong emphasis on practical life skills, informed decision-making and wellbeing.

We particularly welcome the inclusion of Home, Family and Relationships and the recognition that communication and relationships influence the health and wellbeing of individuals and families. Communication is fundamental to family relationships, understanding health information, expressing needs, resolving problems and participating successfully in everyday life.

From a SLC perspective, the framework contains many important opportunities to develop functional communication skills. These include interpreting information, evaluating evidence, understanding food labelling, recognising misinformation, making consumer decisions, participating in family life and understanding the impact of

relationships on wellbeing. Such skills are particularly important for young people as they prepare for adulthood and independent living.

Given the prevalence of SLCN in Northern Ireland schools, consideration could be given to making more explicit reference to communication as a component of healthy relationships, family functioning, decision-making and independent living.

Communication skills are essential for self-advocacy, accessing services, understanding information, maintaining relationships and participating fully in society.

We also welcome the focus on evaluating information and recognising misinformation, particularly in online environments. These skills increasingly require young people to understand complex language, evaluate competing messages and make informed decisions, all of which rely upon strong communication and comprehension skills.

Overall, the framework provides a strong foundation for supporting health, wellbeing, independence and successful participation in adult life.

Language and Cultural Awareness

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the recognition that language is valuable in its own right and that understanding how languages work can broaden perspectives, challenge stereotypes and support meaningful participation in an increasingly diverse society. The emphasis on communication, multilingualism, intercultural understanding and language awareness aligns with the proposed Language and Communication capability within the wider curriculum.

We particularly welcome the recognition that language shapes how people think, communicate and understand the world, and that pupils should develop curiosity and confidence in relation to language learning and communication.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- Learning strategies.
- Language knowledge, skills and communication.

- Explicit recognition of communication across multiple modalities.

The inclusion of sign language, braille, translation, interpretation and different communication systems is particularly welcome and reflects an inclusive understanding of communication.

To what extent does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- The focus on language as a system.
- Explicit teaching of communication strategies.
- Recognition of multilingualism and bilingualism.
- Consideration of language variation.
- The inclusion of translation and interpretation.
- Recognition of sign languages and alternative communication systems.
- Opportunities to develop metalinguistic awareness.

There is a strong evidence base demonstrating that understanding how language works can support wider language development, literacy and learning. The framework successfully complements and extends learning within the English curriculum.

What timescale would be appropriate for the introduction of LCA?

Response: 5 years or more

Comments

Whilst we support the introduction of Language and Cultural Awareness, a phased implementation period of five years or more appears appropriate. The framework is ambitious and introduces concepts such as BSL and Braille that may be unfamiliar to teachers. Sufficient time will be required to develop teacher confidence, curriculum resources and supporting materials to ensure effective implementation.

What conditions or supports would be required for the LCA framework to be fully embedded?

Comments

Successful implementation would require:

- Practical guidance on teaching language awareness and communication strategies.

Consideration should also be given to ensuring that examples reflect Irish, Ulster-Scots, British Sign Language (BSL), Irish Sign Language (ISL) and community languages used across Northern Ireland.

Which aspects of the Language and Cultural Awareness curriculum have potential to offer coherence with other subject areas?

Comments

There is particularly strong coherence with:

English

- Vocabulary development.
- Grammar and sentence structure.
- Figurative language.
- Reading comprehension.
- Oracy and communication.
- Metalinguistic awareness.

PSCC

- Respect for diversity.
- Challenging stereotypes.
- Social participation.

History and Geography

- Cultural understanding.
- Language change over time.

The framework has significant potential to strengthen understanding of language and communication across the curriculum rather than operating as a standalone subject.

Which elements of the curriculum are most likely to support successful transition into Key Stage 3 language learning?

Comments

The most valuable aspects for transition are likely to be:

- Learning strategies.

- Intercultural communication strategies.
- Constructs and metalanguage about how languages work.
- Language knowledge, skills and communication in another language.

These elements help pupils understand how languages function and provide transferable skills that support future language learning. The emphasis on communication strategies, vocabulary learning, recognising patterns and understanding language structures provides a strong foundation for progression into Key Stage 3 language study.

Does any part of the content extend beyond feasibility for operationalising in a Key Stage 2 classroom?

Comments

The overall ambition of the framework is welcome. However, some of the more advanced linguistic terminology and concepts included within the appendices may be challenging for non-specialist primary teachers to implement consistently without substantial support and exemplification.

Consideration could be given to providing clearer guidance regarding the depth of understanding expected for concepts such as translanguaging, language families, metalanguage, translation and interpretation, language change and grammatical analysis. These concepts have considerable educational value but may require additional guidance to support consistent implementation.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome this framework.

From a SLC perspective, the framework is particularly valuable because it explicitly recognises communication as multimodal and acknowledges that communication can occur through speech, writing, sign language, gesture, facial expression and other forms. This represents an inclusive and contemporary understanding of communication.

We particularly welcome the inclusion of sign languages, braille and communication strategies. These provide important opportunities to increase awareness of communication diversity and support wider inclusion. This creates an opportunity for pupils to understand that there is no single 'correct' mode through which human communication occurs.

Given the prevalence of SLCN in Northern Ireland schools, consideration could be given to explicitly recognising AAC approaches used by some children and young people. This could include communication devices, speech-generating technology, communication

boards, symbol-based systems, Makaton and other low- and high-tech communication supports. Such recognition would help promote understanding that communication can take many forms and would support the inclusion of children and young people with complex communication needs.

Understanding that individuals communicate in different ways can help foster positive attitudes towards communication diversity, reduce barriers to participation and support the curriculum's wider aims of inclusion, respect and meaningful communication.

Overall, this framework makes a valuable contribution to the curriculum by promoting curiosity about language, strengthening communication skills and preparing young people to participate in an increasingly diverse and multilingual world.

Mathematics

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the emphasis on reasoning, problem-solving, precision and understanding the underlying structures that govern mathematical thinking.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

n/a

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- The strong emphasis on secure foundational knowledge.
- The clear progression from concrete to abstract concepts.
- The balance between fluency, reasoning and problem-solving.
- The explicit focus on mathematical thinking and reasoning.

- The recognition of mathematics as both a practical and intellectual discipline.

The framework provides a foundation for future study, employment and participation in society.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The year by year structure at primary level is particularly helpful in reflecting the hierarchical nature of mathematical learning and ensuring that foundational concepts are securely established before more complex ideas and language are introduced.

The progression from early number sense and mathematical language in the Foundation Stage through to increasingly sophisticated algebraic reasoning, statistical analysis and mathematical modelling at Key Stage 3 seems logical.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome the proposed mathematics framework.

Whilst mathematics is often viewed primarily as a numerical subject, successful mathematical learning relies heavily on language and communication. The framework appropriately includes the development of mathematical vocabulary and increasingly sophisticated reasoning throughout the curriculum. Many aspects of mathematical learning require pupils to understand and use specialised language, interpret instructions, explain their thinking, compare solutions, justify conclusions and solve worded problems.

Given the prevalence of SLCN in Northern Ireland schools, consideration should be given to the language demands associated with mathematics. Difficulties with mathematical vocabulary, comprehension of word problems, understanding abstract concepts, following multi-step instructions and explaining reasoning can present significant barriers for some learners, including those with DLD.

We particularly welcome the references to mathematical language in the Foundation Stage and the emphasis on reasoning and explanation throughout the framework. These provide valuable opportunities to support both mathematical understanding and the wider Language and Communication capability proposed within the curriculum.

Consideration could also be given to recognising the importance of explicitly teaching mathematical vocabulary and language structures that underpin mathematical reasoning and problem-solving. Supporting pupils to understand and use mathematical

language confidently will help ensure that all learners can fully access the curriculum and demonstrate their mathematical understanding.

Modern Languages

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the emphasis on communication, cultural understanding, language awareness and the development of multilingual competence. The framework recognises that language learning broadens perspectives, supports participation in society and helps pupils develop confidence in understanding and being understood. It also highlights the importance of language learning in preparing young people for future study, employment, travel and intercultural engagement.

The recognition that learning how language works strengthens wider language awareness and analytical thinking, while also supporting communication and lifelong learning.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the integration of phonics, vocabulary, grammar, language proficiency, communication strategies and cultural understanding.

The framework recognises that language knowledge and communication are interconnected and that listening, reading, speaking and writing should not be viewed as isolated skills. This reflects current understanding of language development and language acquisition.

The inclusion of communication strategies and intercultural competencies is particularly welcome as these are essential components of meaningful language use and successful communication.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- The strong emphasis on phonics and sound-symbol correspondence.
- The focus on high-frequency vocabulary.
- The structured approach to grammar.
- The integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- The inclusion of communication strategies.
- Opportunities for meaningful communication rather than isolated language exercises.

The framework appears to balance knowledge acquisition with opportunities to apply language through purposeful communication and interaction.

However, the emphasis on phonics and sound-symbol correspondence should also be considered in relation to deaf learners, recognising that access to the phonological features of an additional spoken language may differ according to an individual pupil's hearing, language background and communication profile. This should not unnecessarily limit access to the wider linguistic, cultural and communicative benefits of language learning.

Care should also be taken not to conflate difficulty producing spoken forms with lack of linguistic understanding.

Which format for the vocabulary list is most useful?

Response

✓ **In an Excel document, so that users can sort the lists as they wish.**

✓ **In a Word document, in thematically clustered categories.**

Comments

Providing vocabulary in an Excel format would support flexibility and allow teachers to sort vocabulary according to frequency, theme, grammatical function or teaching sequence. Thematically clustered lists may also support planning and help pupils make meaningful connections between words and contexts.

Are there any additional vocabulary items that you consider essential for pupils' likely communicative needs at Key Stage 3 level that are currently absent from the prescribed lists?

Response Do not know

Comments

The principle of focusing on high-frequency, useful vocabulary is strongly supported. Care should be taken to avoid vocabulary overload and maintain a focus on words and phrases that support meaningful communication and interaction. We welcome the inclusion of a small personalised vocabulary component which allows pupils to communicate information that is meaningful to them.

In the grammar section of the language content, which specific grammar features seem most appropriate, and which seem better suited to Key Stage 4?

Most appropriate to KS3

The proposed focus on high-frequency grammar that supports communication appears appropriate for Key Stage 3. We particularly welcome the emphasis on enabling pupils to understand and express meaning across past, present and future contexts and to participate in everyday communication. The principle of using the least complex means of expression wherever possible is particularly welcome.

Better suited to KS4

No specific recommendations. The proposed progression appears broadly appropriate, although language specialists may wish to comment on individual language-specific features.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we strongly welcome this framework.

From a SLC perspective, the framework provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop language awareness, communication confidence and understanding of how languages work. We particularly welcome the emphasis on phonics, vocabulary, communication strategies, paraphrasing, inference and clarification, all of which support wider communication skills beyond the language classroom.

The framework also has significant potential to support metalinguistic awareness by helping pupils understand patterns within language and make connections between languages. This can strengthen understanding of language structures and communication more broadly.

Given the prevalence of SLCN in Northern Ireland schools, consideration should be given to ensuring that learners with communication needs can access language learning successfully. Some pupils may require additional support with vocabulary learning, phonological awareness, memory, comprehension and expressive language. Clear progression, repeated retrieval practice and the focus on high-frequency language are likely to support accessibility for many learners.

We particularly welcome the emphasis on communication as the central purpose of language learning. The inclusion of strategies such as paraphrasing, seeking

clarification and managing misunderstandings reflects the reality of authentic communication and provides valuable transferable skills that can support communication across all areas of learning and life.

Consideration could also be given to recognising that communication occurs through a range of modalities. While the focus of this framework is on spoken and written languages, there may be value in making explicit links to sign languages and AAC approaches. This could include communication devices, speech-generating technology, communication boards, symbol-based systems, Makaton and other low- and high-tech communication supports. Such recognition would reinforce wider curriculum messages about communication diversity, inclusion and respect for different ways of communicating.

Finally, there may be value in making explicit links between this framework and the Language and Cultural Awareness curriculum, particularly in supporting understanding that people communicate in different ways and across different languages, cultures and communication systems. This broader understanding of communication diversity supports inclusion, respect and participation for all learners.

Music

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the recognition that music is a universal form of human expression that can help individuals connect with others, express themselves and participate in their communities.

The framework presents music as both a creative discipline and an important means of communication and cultural understanding. We also welcome the recognition that music contributes to listening skills, social interaction, perseverance and awareness of different cultures and perspectives.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the inclusion of Communicating Through Music as a core category. This appropriately recognises that music is a form of communication and that pupils can create, interpret and respond to meaning through musical experiences. The

integration of performing, composing and listening across the framework provides opportunities for pupils to develop both musical understanding and expressive confidence.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- the strong emphasis on singing and music-making from the earliest stages;
- the focus on listening, responding and describing;
- the progressive development of musical vocabulary; and
- the emphasis on communicating meaning through music.

The framework appropriately balances practical music-making with the development of musical understanding and appreciation.

There may, however, be value in ensuring that the statutory entitlement recognises that pupils can access, experience and participate in music in different ways. This is particularly relevant for deaf children and young people and for pupils with sensory processing differences.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the progression from:

- listening and responding to sounds;
- singing and vocal expression;
- musical vocabulary development; and
- group music-making and ensemble participation;

As the framework progresses, it will be important that the entitlement remains sufficiently inclusive to recognise that listening and responding to music may take different forms for different learners, including those who access musical information through visual, tactile or vibrational means.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome the proposed Music framework.

From a SLC perspective, music provides important opportunities for communication, self-expression, participation and social connection. We particularly welcome the emphasis on singing, listening, responding, describing and communicating through music across all stages of the curriculum. These experiences can support attention, listening, vocabulary, turn-taking, social interaction and expressive communication.

We also welcome the recognition that pupils should use musical language to describe sounds, feelings and experiences. The progressive development of musical vocabulary provides valuable opportunities to support wider language development and communication skills.

Music can be a particularly important means of participation and self-expression for some children and young people with SLCN. Opportunities for rhythm, movement, performance and creative expression can enable pupils to communicate ideas, emotions and experiences in different ways and support participation in school life.

We would, however, welcome more explicit recognition that children and young people may access and experience music in different ways. For deaf children and young people, musical experiences may include vibration, rhythm, movement, visual cues and signed or other forms of communication, alongside or instead of auditory access. An inclusive curriculum should not assume that engagement with music is dependent solely upon hearing sound in a conventional way.

Equally, some neurodivergent pupils and other learners with sensory processing differences may experience particular sounds, volumes or auditory environments as overwhelming or distressing. The curriculum entitlement should therefore recognise sensory diversity and that pupils may need different ways of accessing and participating in musical experiences.

Consideration should also be given to pupils who communicate and participate through a range of methods, including AAC, sign languages and sign-supported communication, visual supports, movement and other forms of expression. Recognising multiple ways of accessing, participating in and responding to music would help ensure that the curriculum remains ambitious while being genuinely inclusive of pupils with SLCN, deaf pupils and those with sensory or complex communication needs.

We particularly welcome the framework's emphasis on community, culture and shared musical experiences. Music has a unique capacity to bring people together, foster belonging and support participation across different backgrounds and abilities.

Explicit recognition of sensory and communication diversity would further strengthen the statutory framework and help ensure that the entitlement to music is meaningful and accessible for all learners.

Physical Education (PE)

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the emphasis on participation, confidence, inclusion, self-expression, collaboration and lifelong engagement in physical activity.

The framework presents PE as more than physical competence alone, recognising the importance of communication, teamwork, decision-making, self-regulation and social participation. The emphasis on enabling all pupils to participate meaningfully regardless of starting point is particularly welcome.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the inclusion of:

- Conventions.

The Conventions category is particularly important as it recognises that successful participation in physical activity depends not only on movement skills but also on communication, cooperation, decision-making, leadership, understanding rules and social interaction. This reflects the broader educational value of PE and its contribution to personal development.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- The inclusion of communication, teamwork and leadership.
- The focus on health and wellbeing.

- The emphasis on inclusion and lifelong participation.
- The recognition of physical, mental and social aspects of health.
- Opportunities for decision-making and self-regulation.

The framework seems to balance physical development with broader personal, social and emotional development.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the progression from:

- Following simple instructions and routines.
- Turn-taking and cooperation.
- Communication through words, gestures and actions.
- Teamwork and tactical awareness.
- Independent decision-making and self-management.

The progression reflects both physical development and the increasing social and communication demands associated with participation in physical activity and sport.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome the proposed Physical Education framework.

From a SLC perspective, PE provides important opportunities for pupils to develop communication, social interaction, teamwork, leadership and self-regulation skills. We particularly welcome the explicit references to verbal and non-verbal communication, collaboration, decision-making and participation throughout the framework.

The framework recognises that successful participation in physical activity often depends upon understanding instructions, responding to feedback, communicating with peers, interpreting rules, negotiating roles and making decisions in real time. These skills are important not only within PE but also across education and wider life.

Given the prevalence of SLCN in Northern Ireland schools, consideration could be given to ensuring that communication demands within PE are recognised alongside physical demands. Some pupils may require additional support to understand instructions, process information, participate in team discussions, interpret rules or communicate effectively within games and activities.

We particularly welcome the recognition of communication through words, gestures, signals and actions from the Foundation Stage onwards. This reflects an inclusive understanding of communication and participation. Consideration could also be given to recognising that some pupils may communicate through AAC, sign-supported communication, visual supports or communication devices. Such recognition would reinforce wider curriculum messages regarding inclusion, participation and communication diversity.

We would also welcome explicit recognition that meaningful participation may look different for pupils with physical disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, sensory processing differences or complex needs. Adaptation of activities, rules, equipment, environments and modes of communication can enable pupils to work towards the same broad curriculum purposes through different forms of participation.

For deaf pupils in particular, instructions, signals and changes during fast-moving activities need to be accessible visually or through the pupil's established communication approach. For blind and visually impaired pupils, orientation, environmental information and accessible signalling may be necessary to enable safe and meaningful participation.

The emphasis on confidence, belonging, cooperation and participation is especially important. For many children and young people with SLCN, PE can provide valuable opportunities to develop friendships, social communication skills and confidence through shared activities and positive peer interactions.

Personal, Social, Civic and Careers (PSCC)

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the emphasis on personal development, emotional understanding, relationships, participation, decision-making and preparation for adult life. The framework appropriately recognises that young people require knowledge, skills and understanding to navigate an increasingly complex world and to participate confidently in society.

We also strongly welcome the recognition that language, reasoning, reflection and participation underpin many aspects of personal, social and civic development. The emphasis on agency, self-regulation, relationships and informed decision-making aligns closely with the wider curriculum aim and the proposed Language and Communication capability.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the recognition that relationships, communication, emotional understanding, decision-making and participation are essential components of successful learning and life outcomes.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- The strong emphasis on emotional literacy and self-regulation.
- The focus on understanding feelings, behaviour and wellbeing.
- The inclusion of healthy relationships and consent.
- The emphasis on communication, listening and respect.
- The focus on citizenship, rights and participation.
- The recognition of diversity and inclusion.
- The emphasis on careers, employability and life skills.
- The focus on online safety and digital participation.

The framework provides a foundation for helping children and young people understand themselves, relate to others and participate meaningfully in society.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the progression from:

- Recognising feelings and expressing needs.
- Listening and taking turns.
- Understanding friendships and relationships.

- Developing empathy and perspective-taking.
- Understanding rights, responsibilities and participation.
- Managing relationships and conflict.
- Ethical reasoning and decision-making.
- Active citizenship and future planning.

The curriculum revisits concepts with increasing complexity and maturity while maintaining coherence across all stages.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome this framework and believe it makes an important contribution to the development of confident, resilient and socially engaged young people.

From a SLC perspective, the framework is particularly significant because communication underpins many of the concepts and experiences addressed throughout the curriculum. The ability to understand and express emotions, develop relationships, resolve disagreements, seek help, advocate for oneself, participate in decision-making and engage in civic life all depend upon effective communication skills. This is reflected throughout the framework and is a notable strength.

We particularly welcome the emphasis on:

- Emotional understanding and emotional vocabulary.
- Listening and turn-taking.
- Perspective-taking and empathy.
- Respectful disagreement and discussion.
- Consent, boundaries and self-advocacy.
- Participation in decisions that affect children and young people.
- Communication within relationships and communities.

Given that SLCN are among the most prevalent special educational needs in Northern Ireland, consideration could be given to making more explicit reference to communication as a foundation for many aspects of personal, social and civic development. Difficulties with understanding language, expressing thoughts and feelings, interpreting social situations, understanding non-verbal communication and managing relationships can significantly affect participation and wellbeing.

The emphasis on consent, boundaries, help-seeking and self-advocacy makes communication accessibility particularly important. Pupils with learning disabilities,

SLCN or complex communication needs must be able to access these concepts in a form they can understand and have a reliable means of communicating agreement, refusal, discomfort, questions and requests for help.

We particularly welcome the references to expressing feelings through words, body language and actions, recognising emotions in others and understanding that communication occurs in different ways. Consideration could be given to explicitly recognising communication diversity, including AAC, communication devices, symbol-based systems, Makaton, sign-supported communication and other low- and high-tech communication supports. Such recognition would reinforce the wider curriculum commitment to inclusion, participation and respect for diversity.

The framework also presents valuable opportunities to support understanding of visible and invisible differences. Consideration could be given to including speech, language and communication needs within examples of neurodiversity, disability and individual difference where appropriate. This would help promote understanding of communication differences and support inclusive attitudes among peers.

Overall, this is a highly relevant framework that places relationships, communication, participation and wellbeing at the centre of children's and young people's development.

Science

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the emphasis on curiosity, scientific reasoning, evidence-based thinking and the development of precise scientific language.

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

n/a

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- The development of scientific vocabulary and conceptual understanding.
- The progression from concrete experiences to increasingly abstract scientific concepts.
- The emphasis on communicating scientific ideas and conclusions.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

We particularly welcome the cumulative approach to:

- Scientific vocabulary.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome the proposed science framework.

From a SLC perspective, science provides important opportunities for pupils to develop subject-specific vocabulary, reasoning, explanation, questioning, discussion and evidence-based argument. We particularly welcome the explicit emphasis throughout the framework on observation, communication, interpretation, explanation and the use of precise scientific language.

The framework appropriately recognises that scientific understanding depends upon language. Pupils are required to understand and use increasingly complex vocabulary, follow explanations, interpret information, ask questions, discuss evidence and communicate conclusions. These skills are fundamental to success in science and across the wider curriculum.

Given the prevalence of SLCN in Northern Ireland schools, consideration could be given to recognising the language demands associated with scientific learning. Many scientific concepts are abstract and rely on specialist vocabulary and complex language structures. Supporting pupils to access, understand and use scientific language will be important in ensuring equitable participation and achievement.

Scientific enquiry should also be accessible to pupils who access information or practical experiences differently. Consideration should be given to how observations, diagrams, demonstrations, practical investigations and data can be accessed by pupils with visual or hearing impairments, physical disabilities, sensory differences or complex needs. Alternative means of observing, recording and communicating findings should be recognised where these do not alter the scientific knowledge or construct being assessed.

We particularly welcome the references to communicating findings through verbal, pictorial, oral and written forms. This reflects the importance of communication within scientific enquiry and supports inclusion for learners who may express understanding in different ways.

The inclusion of human biology, health, development, reproduction, disease prevention and wellbeing also provides valuable opportunities to strengthen pupils' understanding of communication, health literacy and informed decision-making.

Technology and Design

To what extent does the vision statement clearly capture the purpose, identity and distinctive contribution of the subject area?

Response: Do not know

Comments

n/a

To what extent do the organising categories for content appropriately reflect the key dimensions of learning within the subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the distinction between:

- Technological-conceptual knowledge.
- Technological-procedural knowledge.
- Design-conceptual knowledge.
- Design-procedural knowledge.

How well does the subject framework cover the most important content that pupils should learn in this subject?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome:

- The strong emphasis on design thinking and problem-solving.
- The consideration of user needs and contexts.

Is content appropriately sequenced across the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know**Comments**

We particularly welcome the progression from:

- Designing for inclusion and diverse users.

Do you have any other comments regarding this subject framework?

Overall, we welcome the proposed Technology and Design framework.

From a SLC perspective, the framework contains many strengths. We particularly welcome the emphasis on understanding users, identifying needs, communicating ideas, evaluating solutions and considering inclusion throughout the design process. These provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop reasoning, communication, collaboration and problem-solving skills.

The framework appropriately recognises that good design must consider the needs of different users and contexts. We particularly welcome references to inclusion, accessibility and user-centred design. These provide opportunities for pupils to consider how products, environments and technologies can enable participation for people with differing needs and abilities.

Given the prevalence of SLCN in Northern Ireland schools, consideration could be given to making explicit reference to communication needs within examples of inclusive design. For example, pupils could be encouraged to consider how products, systems and environments can support people who communicate in different ways, including users of AAC, communication devices, symbol-based systems, Makaton, sign-supported communication and other communication supports.

We particularly welcome the emphasis on communicating ideas through sketches, diagrams, models and prototypes. This reflects the reality that communication can occur through a range of methods and provides valuable opportunities for pupils to represent and share their thinking in different ways.

The framework also presents valuable opportunities to explore universal design principles and accessibility. Consideration could be given to including examples of technologies and products that support communication, independence and participation for people with disabilities, including those with communication, sensory, cognitive, physical and complex access needs.

This could include consideration of tactile information, visual and auditory alerts, alternative input methods, switch and eye-gaze access, communication technologies and environments that reduce unnecessary sensory or communication barriers.

Foundation Stage

How well does the content across the Foundation Stage frameworks reflect the key knowledge, skills and experiences that children require at this Key Stage?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The proposed Foundation Stage curriculum provides a foundation for future learning. We particularly welcome the clear emphasis on communication, language, literacy, numeracy, creativity, physical development, personal development and understanding of the world.

The curriculum appropriately recognises the central role of language in learning and development. Across the subject frameworks, children are provided with meaningful opportunities to listen, understand, communicate, reason, explain, describe, question and interact with others. These skills are fundamental to educational attainment, social participation and emotional wellbeing.

We particularly welcome the strengthened emphasis on spoken language, vocabulary development, oral composition and communication within the English and Drama framework, recognising that communication underpins learning across all curriculum areas.

Is the content clear and understandable?

Response: Very clear

Comments

The content is clearly presented and progression is easy to follow. The learning entitlements provide clarity regarding the knowledge and skills children should develop during the Foundation Stage while maintaining coherence with later stages of the curriculum.

The organisation of learning within subjects supports understanding of how knowledge and skills develop over time and provides a strong basis for progression into Key Stage 1.

What do you see as the strengths of the proposed Foundation Stage curriculum, and where are the areas for development?

Strengths

The curriculum demonstrates a number of significant strengths:

- A clear focus on communication and language development across the curriculum.
- Strong emphasis on vocabulary, listening and spoken language.

- Appropriate attention to early literacy and numeracy.
- Recognition of creativity, curiosity and exploration.
- Opportunities for children to develop reasoning, problem-solving and critical thinking.
- Strong links between communication, social development and learning.
- Improved coherence between subjects and progression into later key stages.

The English and Drama framework is particularly strong in recognising the importance of spoken language, discussion, storytelling, listening and communication. This aligns with growing evidence that oral language development is a critical foundation for later educational achievement and life outcomes.

Areas for Development

Given the prevalence of SLCN, consideration should be given to making communication development more visible across all subject frameworks rather than primarily within English and Drama.

The curriculum could also more explicitly recognise that children communicate in different ways. Consideration should be given to including references to AAC, communication devices, symbol-supported communication, Makaton, sign-supported communication and other approaches used by children with communication needs. This would support inclusive practice and reinforce the principle that all children should be able to participate fully in learning and social interaction. The recent Oracy Education Commission report explicitly recognises communication as including sign language, non-verbal communication and AAC.

The curriculum may also benefit from greater recognition of communication as a foundation for learning across all subjects, reflecting the growing evidence base around oracy, language development and educational attainment.

Foundation Stage is also where differences in communication, sensory access, interaction and development may first become particularly apparent within the curriculum. The statutory entitlement should therefore be sufficiently inclusive of children who are deaf or visually impaired, autistic or otherwise neurodivergent, have learning disabilities, physical or complex needs, or communicate in ways other than speech.

High expectations should apply to all children, while recognising that engagement, communication and demonstration of learning may look different. A child should not be judged as lacking understanding simply because they do not respond through speech, sustained eye contact, conventional play or another expected mode of participation.

Please provide any other comments on the Foundation Stage curriculum

Overall, we strongly welcome the proposed Foundation Stage curriculum. It provides a clear, ambitious and coherent foundation for children's future learning.

We particularly welcome the strengthened focus on communication, language and spoken interaction. Research consistently demonstrates that early language skills are among the strongest predictors of later educational achievement, wellbeing and life outcomes. A curriculum that places communication at its core is therefore likely to have significant long-term benefits for children and young people.

As implementation progresses, we would encourage continued emphasis on speech, language and communication development across all curriculum areas and explicit recognition of inclusive communication approaches to ensure that all children, including those with speech, language and communication needs, can participate, learn and thrive.

Key Stage 1

How well does the content across the Key Stage 1 frameworks reflect the key knowledge, skills and experiences that children require at this Key Stage?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the strong emphasis on language, communication, literacy, numeracy, scientific understanding, creativity and personal development.

The strengthened focus on spoken language, vocabulary development, storytelling, discussion, explanation and argument is particularly welcome. These skills underpin learning across the curriculum and support educational attainment, social development and participation. The inclusion of both English and Drama provides meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop confidence, expression, listening skills and communication competence.

How well does the content within the Key Stage 1 framework build logically from the Foundation Stage content?

Response: Do not know

Comments

Across subjects, the curriculum builds appropriately upon earlier learning while increasing expectations regarding knowledge, vocabulary, independence and reasoning.

In English and Drama there is a particularly strong progression from early oral language and communication towards more structured storytelling, discussion, explanation,

argument and performance. Pupils are supported to move from recognising patterns in language to using language deliberately for different purposes and audiences.

Is the content clear and understandable?

Response: Very clear

Comments

The content is clearly organised and progression is easy to follow. The learning entitlements provide clarity regarding the knowledge pupils should acquire while supporting continuity into later phases of education.

The structure of the curriculum appears to allow practitioners to understand how learning develops within and across subjects while maintaining coherence with Foundation Stage and later Key Stages.

What do you see as the strengths of the proposed Key Stage 1 curriculum, and where are the areas for development?

Strengths

The curriculum demonstrates several notable strengths:

- Clear emphasis on knowledge-rich learning.
- Explicit attention to vocabulary development and subject-specific language.
- Strong development of spoken language, discussion, storytelling and communication.
- Increased opportunities for reasoning, explanation and argument.
- Inclusion of drama as a distinct area supporting communication, expression and creativity.

The English and Drama frameworks are particularly strong. Pupils are supported to participate in exploratory and presentational talk, express opinions, justify views, listen to others and communicate for different purposes and audiences. These are important foundations for future learning, participation and citizenship.

Areas for Development

Given that SLCN are among the most prevalent special educational needs in Northern Ireland, consideration should be given to making communication and language development more visible as a cross-curricular foundation for learning.

Whilst spoken language is particularly well developed within English and Drama, communication underpins success across all curriculum areas. Pupils are expected to listen, understand, question, explain, reason, discuss, justify opinions, collaborate with peers and communicate their understanding in every subject. Making these

connections more explicit would reinforce the importance of communication throughout the curriculum.

The curriculum would also benefit from recognising communication diversity. Consideration should be given to explicitly acknowledging that some pupils communicate through AAC, communication devices, symbol-supported communication, Makaton, sign-supported communication and other low- and high-tech communication supports. Such recognition would reinforce the curriculum's wider commitment to inclusion, participation and equity.

There may also be value in highlighting the relationship between communication, emotional wellbeing, self-regulation, relationships and learning. For many children and young people, communication skills are fundamental to expressing needs, managing emotions, building relationships and engaging successfully in education.

Please provide any other comments on the Key Stage 1 curriculum

Overall, we strongly welcome the proposed Key Stage 1 curriculum.

We particularly welcome the strengthened emphasis on spoken language, vocabulary development, storytelling, discussion, explanation and argument. These are critical foundations for educational attainment, social participation, emotional wellbeing and future employability.

From an RCSLT NI perspective, we are pleased to see communication recognised as an important component of learning across the curriculum. We would encourage the Department to build further on this strength by ensuring that communication is consistently recognised as a foundation for learning across all subjects and by explicitly recognising communication diversity and inclusive communication approaches.

Early language and communication skills are among the strongest predictors of later educational outcomes. A curriculum that places communication, language and participation at its heart will help support the Department's ambition of excellence and equity for all learners. As expectations for independent language, literacy and classroom participation increase, it will be important that progression is understood in relation to the individual learner. Pupils should retain access to established communication systems, assistive technologies, sensory supports and alternative means of demonstrating understanding as curriculum demands increase.

We therefore support the overall direction of the Key Stage 1 curriculum and welcome its enhanced focus on language, communication, reasoning and participation.

Key Stage 2

How well does the content across the Key Stage 2 frameworks reflect the key knowledge, skills and experiences that children require at this Key Stage?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the increasing emphasis on subject-specific knowledge and vocabulary, alongside reasoning, enquiry, discussion, explanation and critical thinking. Across the curriculum, pupils are supported to develop increasingly sophisticated knowledge while also learning to interpret information, communicate their understanding and apply their learning in different contexts.

The strengthened expectations for language and communication are particularly important at Key Stage 2, as pupils encounter increasingly complex vocabulary, concepts, texts and classroom discourse across subject areas.

How well does the content within the Key Stage 2 framework build logically from the content at Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The curriculum builds upon established foundations while increasing the depth and complexity of subject knowledge, vocabulary, reasoning and independent learning.

There is particularly clear progression in English and Drama, where earlier foundations in oral language, vocabulary, storytelling and discussion develop into increasingly sophisticated comprehension, inference, argument, explanation and communication.

This progression is also evident across mathematics, science, history and geography, where pupils move towards more specialised vocabulary, abstract concepts and subject-specific forms of reasoning and explanation.

Is the content clear and understandable?

Response: Very clear

Comments

The content is clearly structured and the progression of knowledge and skills is easy to follow.

The organisation also helps demonstrate how subject knowledge, language, reasoning and wider capabilities develop in preparation for the transition to Key Stage 3.

Would you prefer Key Stage 2 English to be broken down by year group?

Response: Yes, English should be by Year Group for Key Stage 2

Given the significant progression in language, reading and writing demands across Years 5, 6 and 7, a year by year structure would provide greater clarity regarding

expectations and progression. This would support consistency, early identification of difficulties and smoother transition into Key Stage 3.

What do you see as the strengths of the proposed Key Stage 2 curriculum, and where are the areas for development?

Strengths

We particularly welcome:

- The strong emphasis on vocabulary development and disciplinary language across subjects.
- The increasing focus on reasoning, enquiry, analysis and critical thinking.
- The progression in reading, writing, discussion and communication skills.
- The inclusion of structured argument, debate and evidence-based reasoning within English.
- Opportunities for pupils to engage with increasingly complex concepts across science, geography, history and mathematics.
- The clear progression of knowledge within individual subjects and across the curriculum.

The English and Drama framework is particularly strong. It appropriately recognises the importance of spoken language, discussion, narrative, argument, inference, interpretation and audience awareness. The emphasis on supporting claims with evidence, participating in structured discussion and debate, and considering alternative viewpoints reflects the communication demands pupils will encounter in later education and adult life.

Areas for Development

Given that SLCN are among the most prevalent special educational needs in Northern Ireland, greater recognition could be given to communication as a cross-curricular foundation for learning.

Whilst communication is particularly visible within English and Drama, pupils are expected across all subjects to understand increasingly complex vocabulary, follow explanations, ask questions, interpret information, explain reasoning, participate in discussions and communicate their learning. Making these expectations more explicit across subject frameworks would strengthen coherence and reinforce the importance of communication throughout the curriculum.

Consideration should also be given to recognising communication diversity. Some pupils communicate through AAC, communication devices, symbol-supported

communication, Makaton, sign-supported communication and other communication supports. Explicit recognition of these approaches would reinforce the curriculum's commitment to inclusion, participation and equity.

There may also be value in recognising the increasing language demands associated with subject learning at Key Stage 2. Subjects such as science, geography and history require pupils to understand and use specialist vocabulary, interpret increasingly complex information and communicate explanations using subject-specific language. Making these language demands more visible would support curriculum accessibility for all learners.

Please provide any other comments on the Key Stage 2 curriculum

Overall, we welcome the proposed Key Stage 2 curriculum.

We particularly welcome the significant emphasis placed on language, communication, reasoning and evidence-based thinking. These skills are evident not only within English and Drama but across the wider curriculum, where pupils are increasingly expected to analyse information, justify opinions, solve problems and communicate their understanding.

From an RCSLT NI perspective, we would encourage continued recognition that communication underpins learning across all curriculum areas. Success in science, geography, history, mathematics, PSCC and other subjects depends upon pupils' ability to understand language, engage in discussion, reason verbally and communicate their thinking.

Early and ongoing development of speech, language and communication skills remains one of the strongest predictors of educational attainment and wider life outcomes. We therefore welcome the curriculum's strengthened focus on language and communication and would encourage explicit recognition of communication diversity and inclusive communication approaches to ensure that all learners can participate fully and achieve their potential.

This stage may represent a particular point of vulnerability for pupils whose underlying language, communication, sensory or learning needs become more apparent as curriculum demands increase. The curriculum should therefore distinguish between increased intellectual ambition and unnecessary increases in barriers to access.

Progression should not depend upon a pupil becoming less reliant on AAC, signing, assistive technology or other established means of access and communication.

Key Stage 3

How well does the content across the Key Stage 3 frameworks reflect the key knowledge, skills and experiences that children require at this Key Stage?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the strong emphasis on disciplinary knowledge, critical thinking, reasoning, analysis, problem-solving and communication. Across subjects, pupils are expected to engage with increasingly complex concepts, evaluate information, construct arguments, justify conclusions and communicate their understanding using specialist subject vocabulary.

The curriculum appropriately prepares pupils for further study, employment and participation in society by developing both subject knowledge and wider capabilities such as reasoning, communication, self-regulation and civic participation.

The inclusion of opportunities for discussion, debate, evaluation and evidence-based reasoning across the curriculum is particularly welcome and reflects the growing demands placed on learners during adolescence.

The transition to post-primary education also brings changes beyond the complexity of subject content: pupils encounter multiple teachers, different subject-specific vocabularies, changing classrooms, increased organisational demands and greater expectations for independent learning and self-advocacy. These demands may interact particularly strongly with SLCN, autism/neurodivergence, sensory impairment, learning disability and complex communication needs.

It is therefore important that increasing independence is not interpreted as reducing access to communication systems, assistive technology or other established supports.

How well does the content within the Key Stage 3 frameworks build logically from the content from previous Key Stages?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The curriculum seems to have a logical development from foundational knowledge and skills towards greater depth, complexity and independence.

We particularly welcome the progression in language and communication demands. Pupils move from developing foundational communication skills in earlier key stages towards using language as a tool for learning, reasoning, analysing and evaluating across all subjects.

Is the content clear and understandable?

Response: Very clear

Optional Comments

The relationship between curriculum content and the proposed capabilities is also generally clear, helping to demonstrate how subject knowledge contributes to wider learner development.

What do you see as the strengths of the proposed Key Stage 3 curriculum, and where are the areas for development?

Strengths

The proposed Key Stage 3 curriculum demonstrates a number of significant strengths:

- Strong subject identity and disciplinary knowledge.
- Emphasis on reasoning, critical thinking and problem-solving.
- Increased opportunities for analysis, evaluation and evidence-based argument.
- Strong focus on subject-specific vocabulary and conceptual understanding.
- Preparation for further learning, employment and participation in society.

We particularly welcome the inclusion of Language and Communication as one of the proposed curriculum capabilities. By Key Stage 3, pupils are increasingly expected to learn through language. Understanding subject-specific vocabulary, interpreting complex information, engaging in discussion, reasoning, evaluation and problem-solving all depend upon strong speech, language and communication skills.

Areas for Development

Given that SLCN are among the most prevalent special educational needs in Northern Ireland, consideration should be given to making the language demands of the curriculum more visible.

Many Key Stage 3 subjects require pupils to engage with increasingly specialised vocabulary, abstract concepts, complex language structures and discipline-specific forms of reasoning. Success within the curriculum depends not only upon subject knowledge but also upon pupils' ability to understand, process and use increasingly sophisticated language. This is particularly relevant at post-primary level where communication demands increase significantly across all curriculum areas.

We would encourage the Department to recognise communication not solely within English and Drama but as a cross-curricular foundation for learning. Communication underpins success in science, history, geography, mathematics, PSCC, technology and modern languages as well as English.

The curriculum would also benefit from recognising communication diversity. Consideration should be given to explicitly acknowledging that some learners communicate through AAC, communication devices, symbol-supported

communication, Makaton, sign-supported communication and other low- and high-tech communication supports. Such recognition would reinforce the curriculum's commitment to inclusion, participation and equity.

There may also be value in recognising the important relationship between communication, emotional wellbeing, self-advocacy, participation and successful transition into post-16 education, training and employment.

Please provide any other comments on the Key Stage 3 curriculum

We particularly welcome the increased emphasis on reasoning, critical thinking, communication, evidence-based decision-making and independent learning. These are essential skills for successful participation in modern society and align strongly with the proposed curriculum capabilities.

From an RCSLT NI perspective, we welcome the recognition of language and communication across the curriculum. Communication should be recognised not simply as an outcome of education but as a fundamental enabler of attainment, participation, wellbeing and future employability. Young people who experience difficulties understanding and using language can face significant barriers to accessing learning, particularly as curriculum content becomes increasingly abstract and language-dependent during post-primary education.

We therefore encourage continued recognition of communication as a cross-curricular foundation for learning and explicit acknowledgement of inclusive communication approaches to ensure that all learners, including those with speech, language and communication needs, can participate fully and achieve their potential.

Curriculum as a whole

How well does the curriculum, taken as a whole, set out a clear and coherent learning entitlement for pupils?

Response: Do not know

Comments

The proposed curriculum is a sound basis for children and young people across Northern Ireland. We welcome the strong emphasis on knowledge, progression and the development of capabilities that will support lifelong learning, participation and wellbeing.

The curriculum articulates what pupils should know, understand and be able to do at each stage of their education. We particularly welcome the balance between disciplinary knowledge and the wider capabilities that support successful participation in education, employment and society.

The inclusion of Language and Communication as one of the nine curriculum capabilities is especially welcome and reflects the central role that communication plays in learning, relationships, participation and future life outcomes.

How clear and understandable is the curriculum as a whole?

Response: Very clear

Comments

The curriculum is generally clear, coherent and accessible. The structure of the subject frameworks, capabilities and progression pathways helps to demonstrate how learning develops across the different stages of education.

We particularly welcome the stronger subject identities, the clearer progression of knowledge and the increased coherence between curriculum aims, capabilities and subject content.

How well does the curriculum ensure coherent progression across Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3?

Response: Do not know

Comments

We particularly welcome the progression in language, communication, reasoning and critical thinking. Across the curriculum, pupils move from developing foundational communication skills in the early years towards using language to reason, analyse, evaluate, solve problems and communicate increasingly complex ideas by Key Stage 3.

This progression reflects the reality that language and communication become increasingly important as pupils move through education and encounter more specialised and abstract curriculum content.

What do you see as the main strengths of the curriculum as a whole, and where are the areas for development?

Curriculum Strengths

The curriculum demonstrates a number of significant strengths:

- Greater emphasis on reasoning, critical thinking and problem-solving.
- Recognition of communication, self-regulation and participation as key capabilities.
- A broad and balanced curriculum that prepares young people for further learning, employment and life.
- Greater clarity regarding what pupils should know and understand at each stage.

- Stronger emphasis on evidence, enquiry, discussion and communication across subject areas.

We particularly welcome the inclusion of Language and Communication as a curriculum capability and the strengthened focus on spoken language, vocabulary development, discussion, reasoning and communication across many subject areas.

Areas for Development

Given that SLCN are among the most prevalent special educational needs in Northern Ireland, we would encourage greater recognition of communication as a cross-curricular foundation for learning.

Whilst communication is explicitly referenced within the Language and Communication capability and is particularly visible within English and Drama, success across all curriculum areas depends upon pupils' ability to understand language, process information, engage in discussion, reason, solve problems and communicate their understanding.

As pupils progress through the curriculum, the language demands of learning increase significantly. Subject-specific vocabulary, abstract concepts, complex sentence structures and disciplinary forms of reasoning become increasingly important, particularly at Key Stage 3. We would therefore encourage the Department to continue strengthening recognition of communication as an enabler of learning across all subjects.

We would also welcome greater recognition of communication diversity. Consideration should be given to explicitly acknowledging that some learners communicate through AAC, communication devices, symbol-supported communication, Makaton, sign-supported communication and other low- and high-tech communication supports. Such recognition would reinforce the curriculum's commitment to inclusion, participation and equity.

Please provide any other comments on the curriculum as a whole

Overall, we welcome the proposed Northern Ireland Curriculum and support its overall direction. The curriculum is focused on preparing children and young people for learning, employment, citizenship and life.

From an RCSLT NI perspective, we particularly welcome the recognition of Language and Communication as a curriculum capability. Communication should be recognised not simply as an outcome of education but as a fundamental enabler of educational attainment, wellbeing, participation and future employability.

SLCN are among the most prevalent special educational needs in Northern Ireland and can affect every aspect of learning. Early language skills are among the strongest

predictors of later educational outcomes, while communication skills remain essential throughout education and into adulthood.

More broadly, we would encourage the Department to consider accessibility as a curriculum design principle rather than solely as an adjustment made after content has been developed. An inclusive statutory curriculum should anticipate variation in how pupils receive information, communicate, participate and demonstrate learning.

This includes learners with SLCN and DLD; deaf; blind and visually impaired learners; autistic and other neurodivergent learners; pupils with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and complex needs; and pupils whose needs overlap across these groups.

Accessibility should not mean reducing curriculum ambition. Rather, the aim should be to identify where the intended knowledge or skill can be maintained while unnecessary linguistic, sensory, physical or communication barriers are removed.

We therefore encourage continued recognition of communication as a cross-curricular foundation for learning and explicit acknowledgement of inclusive communication approaches to ensure that all learners can participate fully and achieve their potential.

Final Comments

RCSLT NI strongly support the inclusion of Language and Communication as one of the nine curriculum capabilities. Communication is not only an outcome of education but a fundamental enabler of learning. Across every subject area, pupils are required to understand language, process information, reason, solve problems, participate and communicate their understanding. Communication therefore underpins access to the entire curriculum.

Given that SLCN are among the most prevalent special educational needs in Northern Ireland, we would encourage the Department to continue strengthening recognition of communication as a cross-curricular foundation for learning. This becomes increasingly important as pupils progress through the curriculum and encounter more complex vocabulary, abstract concepts, subject-specific language and expectations for independent learning.

Given the increasing demands of subject-specific language across the curriculum, we would also welcome consideration of agreed terminology lists for individual subject areas, developed with relevant subject specialists. These could identify key terminology consistently across the curriculum and support its explicit teaching and use across year groups and settings. This would benefit all learners by providing greater clarity and consistency, while being particularly important for children and young people with SLCN, including DLD, who may experience difficulties acquiring, understanding and using subject-specific vocabulary.

We would also welcome a consistent commitment to communication diversity and accessibility across the statutory curriculum. Children and young people may communicate through speech, sign languages, AAC, communication devices, symbols, gesture, eye-gaze and other means. Learners may also access information through different visual, auditory, tactile or technological approaches.

The curriculum should be sufficiently inclusive of learners with SLCN and DLD, deafness, blind and visually impaired learners, autistic and other neurodivergent learners, pupils with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and complex needs, recognising that these needs may also co-occur.

Crucially, accessibility should not be understood as reducing curriculum ambition. High expectations should apply to all learners. The focus should be on removing unnecessary linguistic, communication, sensory and physical barriers while maintaining the knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils are intended to learn and demonstrate.

We would therefore encourage consideration of accessibility from the outset of curriculum design, so that different ways of accessing information, participating, communicating and demonstrating learning are anticipated wherever possible rather than addressed only retrospectively through individual adjustments.

Overall, we believe the proposed curriculum represents a significant opportunity to improve educational outcomes for children and young people across Northern Ireland.

RCSLT NI looks forward to supporting the Department in ensuring that communication, language, accessibility and inclusion remain central to its successful implementation.