An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

Social and Environmental Education Specification

For Primary and
Special Schools

Contents

Preface

The *Social and Environmental Education* (*SEE*) specification is for all children attending primary and special schools. It is inclusive and holistic in nature, recognising primary and special education as a time of 'being' and 'becoming' – connecting with children's prior learning, celebrating children's current experiences and looking to their futures.

Building on the *Primary Curriculum Framework*, the redeveloped curriculum's specifications work together to provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish, supporting them in realising their full potential as individuals and as members of communities and society.

The *SEE* specification places an important emphasis on child and teacher agency, ensuring children have a meaningful say in their learning and supporting teachers in making informed professional decisions within the parameters of the curriculum.

The *SEE* specification is part of the wider redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum. A particular focus has been placed on ensuring coherence across the specifications. As you get to know the specifications, you will notice a consistent structure and use of terminology, chapters and subsections of similar lengths and the avoidance of unnecessary duplication and repetition of Learning Outcomes. You might also recognise many of the positive aspects of current practice that take place in our primary and special schools, as well as enhancements in the learning children will experience through the pedagogical and assessment approaches supported across the curriculum.

SEE explores social, environmental, cultural, religious and political phenomena through history and geography. It fosters appreciation for nature, recognition of diverse human experiences, past and present, and emphasises interconnections between the human and natural worlds. Children deepen their knowledge and understanding in *SEE* through inquiring; communicating; and understanding and connecting. These shape how children learn as historians and geographers, being and becoming active, informed and responsible citizens.

1. Introduction

Every child in Ireland has the right to an education based on their strengths, interests and needs. The *Primary Curriculum Framework* aims to provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish, supporting them in realising their full potential as individuals and as members of communities and society. It recognises primary education as a time of 'being' and 'becoming' – highlighting the importance of enjoyable, interesting, relevant and appropriately challenging experiences for all children that empower them as learners both now and into the future. Importantly, the Primary School Curriculum supports high-quality learning, teaching and assessment for all children attending primary and special schools.

Education plays a pivotal role in contributing to a democratic, equitable and just Irish society. *Social and Environmental Education* (*SEE*) comprises the subjects History and Geography, incorporating learning about religions, beliefs and worldviews. Learning in this curriculum area enables children to see themselves as members of society with rights and responsibilities and empowers them to contribute to matters of local, regional, national, European and global priority. This is realised through enriching learning experiences that are inclusive and responsive, with children at the centre of these educational experiences.

From birth, children begin their educational journey through interactions and experiences with the world around them. In primary and special schools, children have playful and engaging learning experiences that build upon the knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values they have acquired at home and in preschool settings through *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. As children move through primary or special school, their learning connects with, and is further progressed through, the learning experiences provided in post-primary school. Given the diversity in the contexts in which children learn and the uniqueness of each child's learning journey, the curriculum promotes agency and choice and acknowledges that teachers play a critical role in facilitating equitable, meaningful and holistic learning experiences for all children.

Principles of learning, teaching and assessment

Eight overarching principles underpin and guide schools in pursuing the vision of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*. These principles convey what is valued in primary and special education and what lies at the heart of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment in the primary curriculum. They are broad in nature to reflect varied school contexts and children's different circumstances, experiences and abilities. As such, they support boards of management, school leaders, teachers and others in their duties to ensure high-quality education is provided for all children in our schools.

Table 1 presents a non-exhaustive set of examples of the principles in action within the *Social and Environmental Education* specification.

Table 1: Principles of learning, teaching and assessment

Principle of learning, teaching and assessment	Examples within the *Social and Environmental Education* specification
Assessment and progression	• Looking at and using a variety of assessment materials to monitor children's progress and inform future learning and teaching in *SEE* • Using *SEE* curriculum portfolios, projects and work samples to assess and record achievement in working as historians and geographers • Drawing on assessment data to inform, shape and guide future learning experiences within *SEE*
Engagement and participation	• Promoting collaborative work as children engage in historical and geographical inquiries and investigations • Providing opportunities for children to select curriculum-based topics for inquiry reflecting their interests, and preparing rich, playful and engaging learning experiences which expose children to new interests • Drawing on a range of pedagogical practices and child-centred methods, utilising digital technologies and applications as appropriate
Inclusive education and diversity	• Fostering a culture based on the Global Learning Themes of: Human rights, Democracy, Equity, Social and environmental justice and Sustainable development (Section 6d) • Creating a safe and accessible learning space for the active exchange of ideas, perspectives and knowledge • Challenging stereotypes and misconceptions while promoting empathy, respect and multi-perspectivity
Learning environments	• Undertaking learning in the school and local outdoor environment that includes purposeful fieldwork and place-based learning • Exploring buildings and sites of interest within the local natural and built environment at appropriate times throughout the year • Displaying and celebrating children's learning, e.g., project work, exhibitions, showcases and digital media
Partnerships	• Inviting members of families, the local community and/or local interest groups to contribute to learning in and about the local area • Working collaboratively with local, regional and national historians and geographers • Forging partnerships with the library, museum and/or heritage centre to access resources (e.g., books, articles, photographs, maps, artefacts and collections)

Principle of learning, teaching and assessment	Examples within the *Social and Environmental Education* specification
Pedagogy	• Utilising a variety of pedagogical practices and promoting playfulness • Providing opportunities for children to engage in rich learning experiences outdoors • Integrating digital tools (e.g., virtual field trips, multimedia presentations, digital mapping or other online simulations) to enhance children's understanding of historical events or geographical phenomena
Relationships	• Inviting children to share stories about aspects of their locality and community • Co-operating with people within the locality to enhance learning about personal, family, local and national history • Fostering respectful and caring relationships towards people from different and diverse backgrounds, and towards the natural world and other living things
Transitions and continuity	• Beginning with integrated curriculum-based topics in *SEE* in Stages 1 and 2 and then turning to more subject-based topics in Stages 3 and 4 to further extend subject knowledge • Building on learning experiences from *Aistear* and developing foundational knowledge, concepts, skills, dispositions and values to support children's transition to post-primary school • Ensuring a broad and comprehensive range of curriculum topics are explored across Stages 1 to 4

Children's learning experiences in *SEE*

SEE involves the study of social, environmental, cultural, religious, economic and political phenomena. This curriculum area has a historical, geographical and contemporary focus, from personal and Irish to global contexts. It considers the challenges that may occur in the future. It plays an important role in (1) supporting children to understand local, regional, national, European and global issues and events and (2) building their capacity to be active, informed, empowered citizens who have an appreciation for the world around them. Learning in this curriculum area encourages children to develop an understanding of systems and events in the world they live in, to recognise their roles and responsibilities as custodians of this planet and to participate in society in a just, compassionate and sustainable manner.

Overview of the *Social and Environmental Education* specification

The opening chapters of the *Social and Environmental Education* specification present the Rationale, Aims, Strands, Strand Units, Elements and Learning Outcomes. Chapter 6 provides guidance on the curriculum in practice, while the final chapters present an overview of the online toolkits, the glossary and references.

The *SEE* specification is supported by the online Primary Curriculum Toolkit and the *SEE* Toolkit. These online toolkits offer a variety of supports in enacting the curriculum, including supports for curriculum planning, inclusion, assessment and pedagogy. You can access the online version of the specification and the toolkits by visiting **www.curriculumonline.ie**.
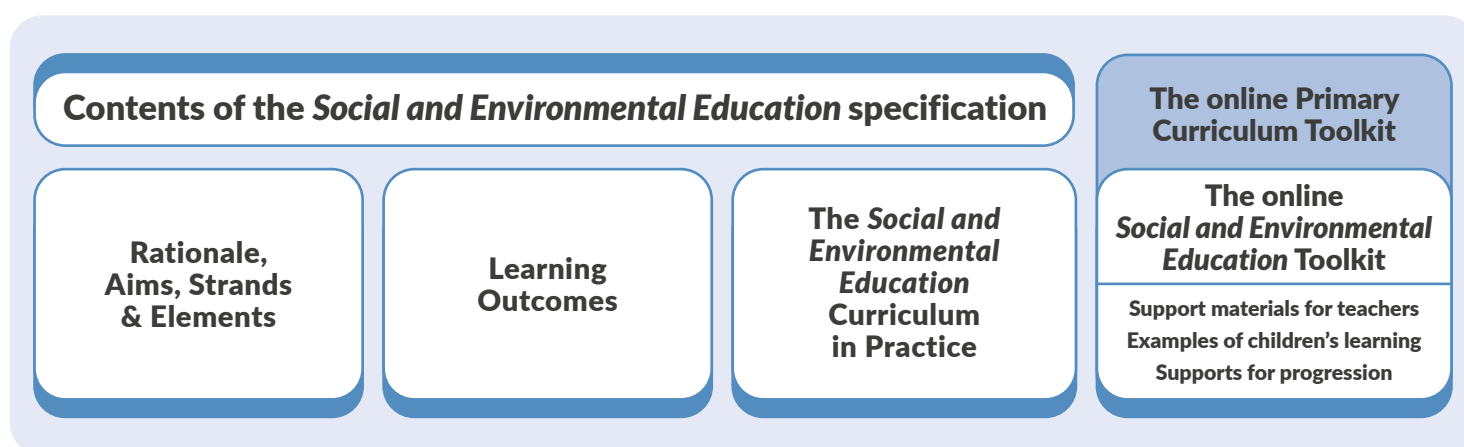
Contents of the *Social and Environmental Education* specification

Rationale, Aims, Strands & Elements	Learning Outcomes	The *Social and Environmental Education* Curriculum in Practice

The online Primary Curriculum Toolkit

The online *Social and Environmental Education* Toolkit

Support materials for teachers
Examples of children's learning
Supports for progression

Figure 1: Contents of the *Social and Environmental Education* specification

2. Rationale

Social and Environmental Education (*SEE*) is an integrated curriculum area that draws upon History and Geography and incorporates learning about religions, beliefs and worldviews. Within this curriculum area, children explore their own and others' heritage, reflecting on who they are, where they come from, where they belong and how they contribute to the society in which they live. *SEE* fosters children's sense of identity by facilitating investigation of local, regional, national, European and global issues and events and promoting an understanding of diverse experiences, cultures, traditions, values and environments across different times and places.

History within *SEE*

History within *SEE* is concerned with the influence of the past on the present, involving the exploration of human experience over time. Children deepen their sense of identity, personally, as members of their family, nationally and as members of other communities. They recognise how their identity has been shaped by the cultural and social experiences of many different people in the past. '*Working as a historian*' promotes the development of historical skills and an understanding of historical concepts. It contributes to the formation of values and fosters a positive disposition towards History.

Geography within *SEE*

Geography within *SEE* is concerned with the study of the Earth, its inhabitants and their interactions in the context of place, space and environment. Learning in Geography helps children to understand their surroundings (local, regional, national, European and global) and to cultivate a sense of identity and an awareness of environments, people, places and their interconnections. '*Working as a geographer*' promotes the development of geographical skills and an understanding of geographical concepts. It contributes to the formation of values and fosters a positive disposition towards Geography.

SEE contributes to children's development as active citizens

Children develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values which enable them to actively participate in their communities and in the world as agentic, informed, empathetic, respectful and caring members of a diverse and democratic society.

SEE engages children's natural sense of curiosity and wonder

Children's curiosity, open-mindedness, wonder and awe are nurtured through an integrated approach with inquiry at its core. Children are provided with opportunities to explore the natural world, people and places, now and in the past. This curriculum area evokes a sense of intrigue that can remain with children for the rest of their lives.

SEE espouses a sustainable future

Children are afforded time and space to interact meaningfully with the natural world around them. They come to appreciate its value and their responsibilities as custodians of it, developing an individual and collective sense of environmental stewardship.

SEE promotes children's critical thinking

Children draw on a range of skills such as questioning, predicting, hypothesising and analysing. These skills encourage critical thinking as children critique a range of evidence in a variety of formats. They reflect on human actions in the past and present and examine the motivations for, and implications of, these actions.

SEE recognises and appreciates the rich heritage of Ireland, Europe and the wider world

Children explore their own and others' heritage. They become aware of the individuals, events, traditions, cultures, religions, beliefs and values, including those of the Traveller community, which have impacted the lives of people in the past and shaped contemporary society in Ireland, Europe and the wider world.

3. Aims

This chapter outlines the seven aims underpinning learning, teaching and assessment in *Social and Environmental Education* (*SEE*). Together, they enhance children's understanding of the world within key historical, geographical and cultural contexts. By working as historians and as geographers, children acquire the knowledge, skills, dispositions and values to live as informed, active and caring members of local and wider communities. Children's learning experiences in *SEE* are framed by considerations for local, regional, national, European and global learning. These include human rights; democracy; equity; social justice; and sustainable development.

The *Social and Environmental Education* specification aims for children to:

connect with their innate curiosity, imagination and wonder.
Experience diverse learning environments – indoors and outdoors – inquiring, interacting and investigating in their local area and beyond.

cultivate their critical thinking and active engagement.
Question and explore people, places and systems around them in their community, country and in the wider world. Make informed judgements and actively participate in shaping a just and inclusive society.

enhance their problem-solving and analytical skills.
Draw on their knowledge and skills in addressing challenges and empower them to take action to promote a more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable present and future.

enrich their cultural awareness.
Develop an understanding of various traditions, cultures, religions, beliefs, worldviews and heritage, including those of the Traveller community, in different times, places and circumstances.

foster their geographical awareness.
Foster an understanding of the Earth's physical, social and cultural characteristics, including the relationships and interconnectedness between people, places and the environment.

foster their historical awareness.
Explore societies, cultures and worldviews across different historical periods, cultivating an appreciation of the intricacies of human and non-human history.

promote Irish, European and global citizenship.
Foster a sense of interrelatedness with the world through exploration of diverse cultures, environments and local, regional, national, European and global issues.

4. Strands and Elements

Strands

Strands outline the main categories of children's learning in *Social and Environmental Education* (*SEE*). The three strands are:

- My locality
- The island of Ireland
- Europe and the wider world

Strand units

Within each strand in *SEE* is a set of common strand units. The strand units are:

- Identity and heritage
- Environment and sustainable living
- People and places

Although the division of the curriculum into strands and strand units provides a convenient format in which to present the Learning Outcomes, it should be noted that the strands and strand units are interdependent and not discrete sections.

Elements

Elements describe the processes children engage in as they learn in *SEE*. These elements support our understanding of how children learn. The three elements in *SEE* are:

- Inquiring
- Communicating
- Understanding and connecting

Table 2: Elements in the *Social and Environmental Education* specification

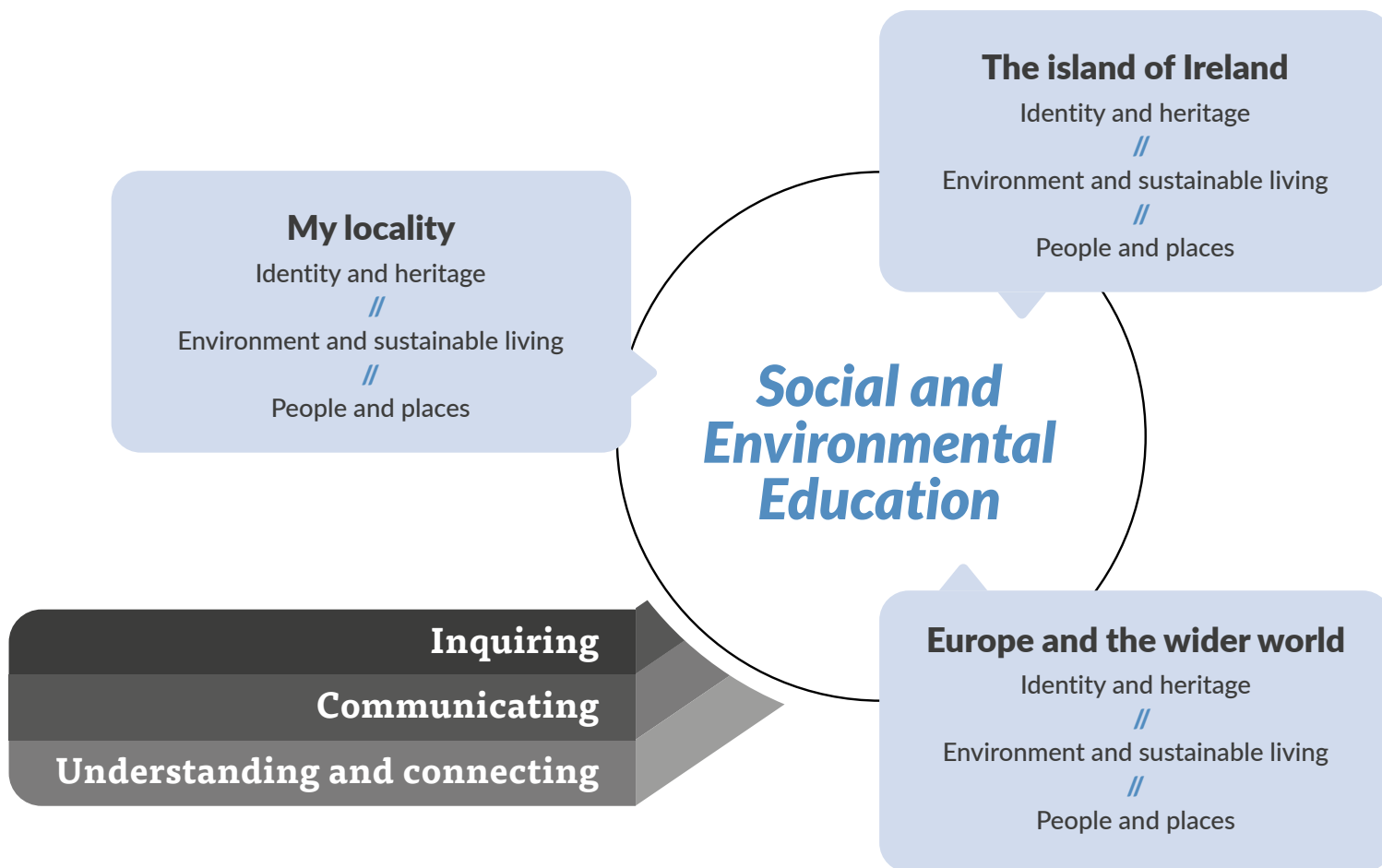| Element	Description
Inquiring	Children working as historians and as geographers in *SEE* engage in inquiry as an essential element. Through the element of inquiring, children engage with a range of evidence, generate questions, make inferences, seek clarification and investigate curriculum-based topics in depth.
	Learning through inquiring in *SEE* taps into children's innate sense of wonder and awe, encouraging them to ask questions about and reflect on the world around them. As children progress through school, their engagement with sources deepens and they begin to examine evidence with a critical lens, evaluating its reliability, relevance and potential bias.
	Inquiry also introduces children to diverse viewpoints, cultures and contexts, fostering empathy, cultural understanding and appreciation for human diversity. Children explore the causes and consequences of historical events and examine the complexities of geographical patterns.
Communicating	Children working as historians and as geographers in *SEE* engage in communication as an essential element. As children engage in exploration and investigation, they share thoughts, ideas and findings with their peers, their teachers and the broader school community through various forms of communication.
	Children build and maintain caring relationships within the school community and beyond, which supports two-way communication. This gives them opportunities to listen to and respond to others' stories and perspectives.
	Purposeful engagement and communication with historians and geographers and others with relevant knowledge and experience can positively impact on children's engagement, motivation and learning.
Understanding and connecting	Children working as historians and as geographers in *SEE* focus on connections between people and places – locally, nationally, at European level and globally – as well as between the past and present. The process of understanding and connecting encourages children to question, think critically and reflect.
	Building on learning experiences from preschool and home, playful and engaging learning in school allows children to connect their understanding to real-life, familiar contexts. This approach enables them to make sense of events, systems and processes in the world.
	Direct experiences with the natural environment through outdoor learning can foster a deeper connection with nature. This helps children develop an understanding and awareness of their roles and responsibilities in enhancing and protecting the natural world.

My locality
Identity and heritage
//
Environment and sustainable living
//
People and places

The island of Ireland
Identity and heritage
//
Environment and sustainable living
//
People and places

Social and Environmental Education

Europe and the wider world
Identity and heritage
//
Environment and sustainable living
//
People and places

Inquiring

Communicating

Understanding and connecting

Figure 2: The strands and elements in the *Social and Environmental Education* specification

5. Learning Outcomes

Central to nurturing every child's potential is the clear articulation of Learning Outcomes. This chapter presents the Learning Outcomes for *Social and Environmental Education* (*SEE*). Learning Outcomes describe the expected learning and development for all children at the end of a two-year stage, when due account is taken of individual abilities and varying circumstances. They focus on children's understanding, which develops through the acquisition and gradual building of knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values in *SEE*.

Reflecting the principles and pedagogical approaches in the *Primary Curriculum Framework*, the 'stem' '*Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences*' is used to introduce Learning Outcomes across all stages. This stem aims to foster a learning environment that facilitates rich learning experiences, as outlined in Chapter 6, 'The *Social and Environmental Education* Curriculum in Practice'.

Children learn and teachers teach in a variety of contexts. Learning Outcomes in *SEE* are broad and balanced in nature to facilitate teacher agency and flexibility in schools. Given their broad nature, when working with Learning Outcomes, teachers can focus on specific aspects of learning, taking account of the context and prior learning of the children. When preparing for learning and teaching experiences, teachers can focus on particular aspects of a Learning Outcome or, at times, on aspects of multiple Learning Outcomes. Learning Outcomes for Stages 1 and 2 are fully integrated, recognising younger children's ages and stages of development and providing important foundations for more subject-specific learning in Stages 3 and 4. Building on Stages 1 and 2, Learning Outcomes for Stages 3 and 4 outline specific historical and geographical knowledge, concepts, skills, dispositions, attitudes and values. They reflect children's growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising the world, while continuing to provide important opportunities for learning, teaching and assessment in an integrated way.

Key competencies

The primary curriculum has seven key competencies which overlap and combine to support the curriculum's vision. As outlined in the *Primary Curriculum Framework*, the competencies build on the capabilities children acquire through their early childhood education experiences with *Aistear* and are further strengthened in post-primary school through learning experiences shaped by the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. As children work towards the Learning Outcomes in the *SEE* specification and engage in rich learning experiences, they simultaneously build and develop these key competencies.
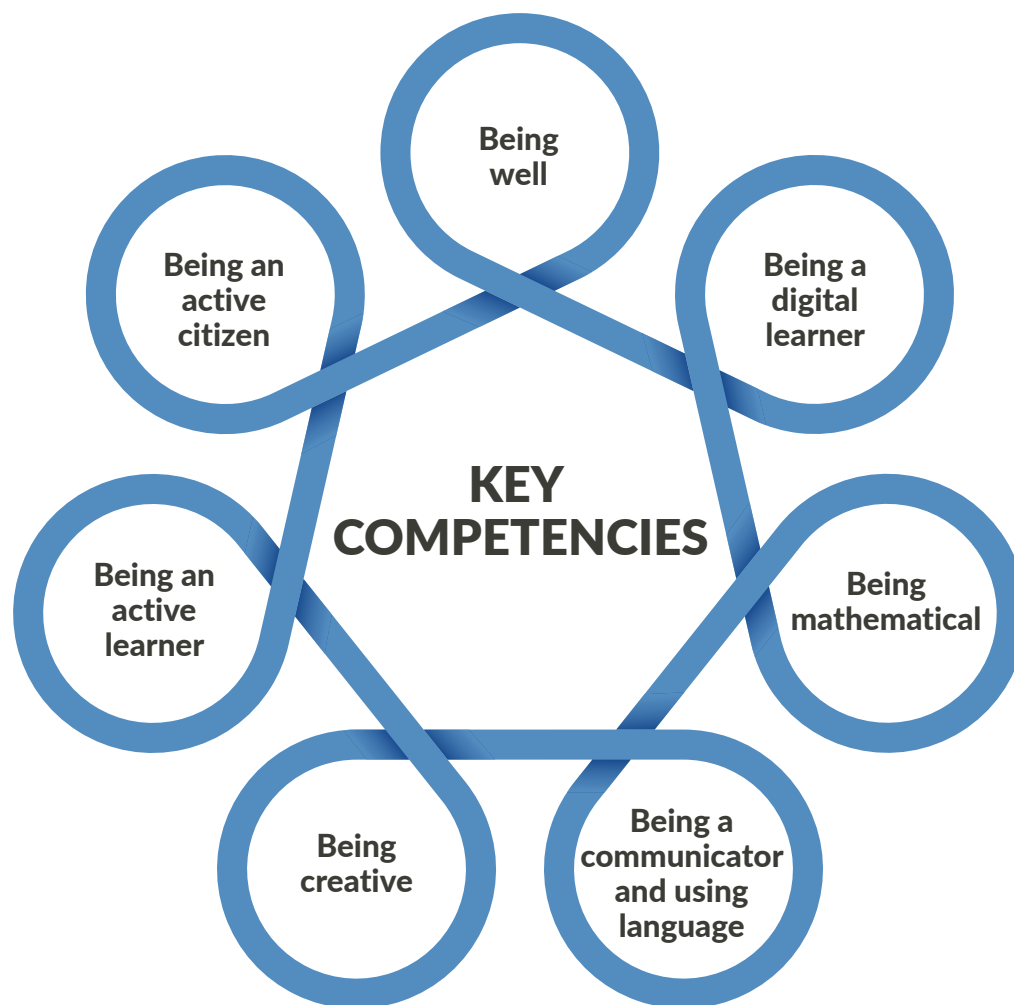

Figure 3: Key competencies

Table 3: Examples of attributes of each key competency developed through learning in the *Social and Environmental Education* specification

Key competency	Examples of attributes developed through learning in the *Social and Environmental Education* specification
Being an active citizen	• Engaging in inquiry to analyse and evaluate evidence, promoting critical understanding of the world we live in • Contributing to informed decision-making to address specific issues and/or opportunities in their community, empowering children to actively contribute to positive change at local, regional, national, European and global levels
Being an active learner	• Taking action as custodians of this planet to fulfil responsibilities of caring for the environment and conserving the natural world • Demonstrating an awareness of various cultures, beliefs, religions, traditions and worldviews, both past and present, promoting inclusivity and respect in interactions with others
Being a communicator and using language	• Engaging in storytelling, listening to others' stories of events and experiences over time • Reading and interpreting materials such as historical texts, maps or cultural artefacts, drawing connections between different sources and presenting findings in a range of formats
Being creative	• Examining sources critically and with curiosity, from multiple perspectives, tapping into children's innate sense of wonder and awe • Engaging in participative and playful learning experiences, responding creatively to stories about historical events and geographical discoveries
Being a digital learner	• Using a range of digital technologies to engage with evidence and data which provide insights into past and current events • Incorporating multimedia resources (such as videos, documentaries, interactive maps, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and Virtual /Augmented Reality) into learning experiences and producing visual/audio/virtual content relating to historical and geographical inquiry
Being mathematical	• Sequencing and recording important milestones in their own lives and key historical events • Interpreting, processing and evaluating information and data from a variety of evidence sources and maps and applying spatial awareness in engagement with fieldwork (e.g., measuring distances covered and identifying patterns and trends, etc.)
Being well	• Spending meaningful time outdoors, appreciating the beauty of the natural world and showing care towards people, places and spaces in their environment • Articulating views and sharing stories and examples of customs and traditions in a safe space

To assist teachers in identifying the key competencies that have been embedded within the Learning Outcomes, initials are placed beside each Learning Outcome, as explained in Table 4. In each instance, up to three key competencies are identified. It should be noted that in many instances other key competencies, outside of the three identified, are also embedded in the Learning Outcomes.

Table 4: Key competency legend

Initials	Key competency
AC	Being an active citizen
AL	Being an active learner
CL	Being a communicator and using language
C	Being creative
DL	Being a digital learner
M	Being mathematical
W	Being well

Concepts and skills

The concepts and skills of 'Working as a geographer' and 'Working as a historian' are the essential building blocks for SEE. Similar to the key competencies, they play a vital role in underpinning the Learning Outcomes across all stages of the curriculum. The concepts and skills may provide useful entry and reference points in relation to preparation, teaching and assessment. They can also remind teachers of important knowledge and understanding at each stage.

Table 5 identifies the concepts and Table 6 identifies the skills of 'Working as a geographer' and 'Working as a historian' which are described in greater detail in Appendix A.

Table 5: SEE concepts

Concepts	
Common historical and geographical	
Empathy	Fostering children's empathy, understanding and respect for different perspectives, enabling meaningful contributions in a diverse society
Multi-perspectivity	Considering different viewpoints, opinions or perspectives when analysing specific events, themes and topics
Historical	
Cause and effect	Developing an understanding that events in the past can have multiple causes and effects
Change and continuity	Examining and comparing similarities and differences between the past and present, exploring patterns and trends
Time and chronology	Understanding a sequence of events (past, present and future) and how they relate to each other over time
Geographical	
Sense of environment and sustainability	Understanding the interactions between people and the natural environment to promote responsible stewardship for the future
Sense of place	Understanding of a location's unique identity and essential character which are shaped by people and natural processes
Sense of space	Developing an awareness of how places are connected, organised and located in relation to each other

Table 6: *SEE* skills

Skills	
Common historical and geographical	
Questioning	Ability to seek information, clarify ideas and explore deeper understanding through inquiry
Investigating	Ability to systematically explore and gather information to understand a topic or solve a problem
Using evidence and sources	Ability to select, evaluate and apply reliable information to support ideas or arguments
Interpreting and analysing	Examining information critically and drawing meaningful conclusions
Evaluating and decision-making	Assessing information, from a variety of sources, to make informed choices and to justify conclusions
Communicating	Conveying information, ideas and interpretations related to investigations and inquiries using a variety of media
Historical	
Chronological thinking	Understanding and organising events in the order they happened, recognising how time influences change and continuity in the past
Historical thinking	Examining and interpreting evidence from the past to understand, question and create historical narratives
Geographical	
Mapping / Graphicacy	Engaging in mapmaking and map-reading, applying the fundamentals of mapping – location, scale, symbols, perspective and direction
Visual interpretation and communication	Exploring, creating and responding to visual and virtual representations of places and environments using various media

Strand Unit	Stage 1 Junior and senior infants	Stage 2 First and second classes	Stage 3 Third and fourth classes	Stage 4 Fifth and sixth classes
	Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences, children should be able to:			
Identity and heritage	identify and describe important events and milestones in their own life and those of other important people in their life. C, CL, AL	examine and reflect on aspects of their local heritage and how they preserve connections to the past. AL, C, DL	**History** research aspects of the story of their locality and the island of Ireland, including significant events, people, customs and the origins of place names. AL, CL, W	**History** investigate the history of their school within the broader context of educational developments in Ireland. AL, CL, W
	listen and respond to stories about people in their locality – their different religions, beliefs and associated traditions and practices. AL, AC, CL	develop an awareness of religions, beliefs and worldviews in their locality, engaging with a range of sources and stories. AL, AC, CL	**History** identify specific patterns of change or continuity in how different generations in the locality live and work. AL, C, CL	**History** identify and discuss the similarities and differences in the lives of people in their locality, both past and present. AL, C, CL
Environment and sustainable living	connect with and explore nature and the outdoors, observing living things and physical features of the local area. AC, C, W	identify, connect with and describe physical features of the local natural environment, looking at changes that happen over time. C, W, CL	**Geography** investigate, name and describe physical features of the local, natural environment such as rivers, mountains, lakes, seas, islands, biodiversity, etc., identifying opportunities to become involved in enhancing and protecting them. AC, AL, CL	**Geography** examine sustainable practices (social, environmental, economic) in the local community and actions people can take to promote sustainable living. AC, AL, W
	monitor and record changes that occur in the local natural environment throughout the seasons. AL, C, M	begin to recognise the value and importance of protecting biodiversity, such as flora and fauna, in the locality for a sustainable future. AC, C, W	**Geography** analyse how resources such as water, land, food and transport are used and managed in the locality. AC, AL, CL	**Geography** investigate and evaluate ways to sustainably manage resources such as water, land, food and transport in the locality. AC, AL, CL

Key competencies:

AC = Being an active citizen   AL = Being an active learner   CL = Being a communicator and using language
C = Being creative   DL = Being a digital learner   M = Being mathematical   W = Being well

Learning Outcomes for Strand: **My locality**

Strand Unit	Stage 1 Junior and senior infants	Stage 2 First and second classes	Stage 3 Third and fourth classes	Stage 4 Fifth and sixth classes
	Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences, children should be able to:			
People and places	identify the natural and built features of the local environment, demonstrating an awareness of location. AL, C, M	identify, explore and describe significant natural and built features in the local environment. AL, C, M	**History** investigate a range of homes in the region and reflect on how they have changed over time, including comparing and contrasting styles, examining domestic artefacts and the age of buildings. AL, CL, M	**History** listen to, reflect on and document the stories of influential men, women and children, past or present, who have contributed to local or national life. AL, C, CL
	become aware of the diversity of people who live and work in the local community. AC, AL, W	investigate why sites of interest or sacred spaces in the locality hold significance for people from different religious or cultural traditions. AL, C, DL	**Geography** examine the common economic activities of people in the locality, such as food and farming, forestry, fishing, industry, services, tourism, recreation, etc., exploring how these have changed over time. AL, C, CL	**Geography** identify and develop an understanding of the services in the community for which the local government and community groups are responsible. AC, AL, CL

Learning Outcomes for Strand: **The island of Ireland**

Strand Unit	Stage 1 Junior and senior infants	Stage 2 First and second classes	Stage 3 Third and fourth classes	Stage 4 Fifth and sixth classes
Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences, children should be able to:				
Identity and heritage	listen and respond to stories, myths and legends. C, CL, AL	listen, respond to, reflect on and retell a range of stories, myths and legends. C, CL, AL	**History** gather, record and share examples of national folklore, sports, arts and pastimes that reflect and celebrate Irish identity over time. AL, C, CL	**History** investigate and critically reflect on an important event(s) in the history of their county. AC, AL, CL
			History/Geography **Religions, Beliefs and Worldviews** acknowledge and describe how beliefs, values and traditions shape people's personal and social identity in Ireland. AL, CL, W	**History** explore significant developments and/or conflicts in different eras of Irish history such as during the Neolithic Period, Bronze and Iron Ages, the Early Christian Period, Medieval Period, Early Modern Period and Modern Ireland. AC, AL, C
Environment and sustainable living	observe and record the influences weather conditions and seasonal changes have on people, animals and plants. AL, AC, M	observe and explore a variety of weather conditions and how they impact people's everyday lives in areas such as farming, fishing, travel, sport, events, education, etc. AL, AC, CL	**Geography** investigate how people have responded to the opportunities and challenges of the natural environment in Ireland in different ways. AC, AL, CL	**Geography** describe some physical processes that create or alter features of the natural environment in Ireland, such as weathering, erosion, volcanic, tectonic, flooding, deposition, tidal influences, etc. AC, AL, DL
		identify, investigate and recognise the importance of some physical features of the natural environment in Ireland such as rivers, mountains, lakes, seas, islands, etc. AL, C, CL		**Geography** explore how limited resource availability impacts trade and economic activities, such as food and farming, forestry, fishing, industry, services, tourism, recreation, etc., in Ireland. AC, AL, DL

Key competencies:

AC = Being an active citizen	AL = Being an active learner	CL = Being a communicator and using language
C = Being creative	DL = Being a digital learner	M = Being mathematical W = Being well

Learning Outcomes for Strand: **The island of Ireland**

Strand Unit	Stage 1 Junior and senior infants	Stage 2 First and second classes	Stage 3 Third and fourth classes	Stage 4 Fifth and sixth classes
	Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences, children should be able to:			
People and places	explore traditions associated with a range of festivals and <u>rituals</u> in Ireland including ceremonies, stories, poetry, music and/or dance. AL, C, CL	reflect on the roles of people in the community and at national level, describing how their ways of working have changed over time. AL, CL, W	**History** investigate the lifestyles of people from a particular period(s) of time in Ireland's past exploring aspects such as food, clothing, communications, work, education, etc. AC, AL, CL	**History** demonstrate an understanding of Ireland's political system, for example the Houses of the Oireachtas – Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, the role of the President, how elections work and the role of Teachtaí Dála and/or the Irish Constitution. AC, AL, CL
		begin to identify the borders of places, developing an awareness of the location and names of other areas. AL, AC, C	**Geography** identify and describe major infrastructural features of the built <u>environment</u> in Ireland, such as transportation, communications, housing, water, recreational, etc. AL, CL, M	**Geography** develop an awareness of the motivation for people's <u>migration</u> to and from Ireland over time and the impact of these movements. AC, AL, CL

Learning Outcomes for Strand: **Europe and the wider world**

Strand Unit	Stage 1 Junior and senior infants	Stage 2 First and second classes	Stage 3 Third and fourth classes	Stage 4 Fifth and sixth classes
	Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences, children should be able to:			
Identity and heritage	listen to and respond to stories from the lives of people and about events beyond the island of Ireland. AL, C, CL	listen to, respond to, retell and reflect on a wider range of stories, myths and legends from other countries associated with diverse cultures and heritages. AL, C, CL	**History** listen to and discuss a range of stories from various cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds about people who lived in other countries. AL, CL, W	**History** explore stories that highlight how the lives of men, women and children from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds have changed or remained the same over time. AL, C, CL
		identify, explore and describe social and cultural customs and traditions in other countries. AC, AL, CL		**History/Geography Religions, Beliefs and Worldviews** demonstrate an understanding of the attitudes, beliefs and practices of different groups of people and communities in the past, and their impact on the world today. AC, AL, CL
Environment and sustainable living	recognise that Earth is a planet and explore other parts of the solar system including the sun, moon and planets. Connect the movements of the Earth and sun with the seasons of the year. AC, AL, C	explore how the sun and the moon influence Earth and how they impact tidal patterns and temperatures in different parts of the world, both past and present. AC, AL, C	**Geography** investigate the importance of the sun and moon for life on Earth in aspects such as food production, climate, weather patterns, sleep patterns, etc. AL, CL, DL	**Geography** examine aspects of the interrelationship between Earth and other bodies in the solar system. AC, AL, CL
		observe and record weather patterns, comparing and contrasting the climate in Ireland with that of other countries. AC, M, DL	**Geography** identify, describe and compare some of the major physical features of the natural environment in Ireland, Europe and the wider world, such as rivers, lakes, mountains, seas, islands, biodiversity, etc. AL, CL, M	**Geography** investigate examples of changes in the natural environments of Europe and the wider world caused by physical processes and human activity, such as agriculture, conservation, deforestation, overfishing, pollution, restoration, tourism, etc. AL, C, CL

Key competencies:

AC = Being an active citizen	AL = Being an active learner	CL = Being a communicator and using language
C = Being creative	DL = Being a digital learner	M = Being mathematical W = Being well

Learning Outcomes for Strand: **Europe and the wider world**

Strand Unit	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
	Junior and senior infants	First and second classes	Third and fourth classes	Fifth and sixth classes
	Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences, children should be able to:			
People and places	explore aspects of the lives of children in other countries such as clothes, food, pastimes, religious celebrations, festivals, etc. AL, DL, W	deepen their awareness of the social and cultural backgrounds of children from other countries. AC, AL, CL	**History/Geography Religions, Beliefs and Worldviews** explore the ethnic and religious backgrounds of children and young people from other countries. AL, C, CL	**History/Geography Religions, Beliefs and Worldviews** investigate and reflect on the ethnic and religious traditions and practices of different groups of people. AL, CL, W
		examine how technological changes over several generations have shaped aspects of people's lives such as communications, work, health, education, travel, homes, etc. AL, CL, DL	**Geography** develop an understanding of the borders of places, demonstrating a familiarity with the location, names and significant landmarks of areas in Ireland, Europe and the wider world. AL, CL, M	**Geography** examine evidence and draw conclusions about social, economic, political and/or environmental issues. AC, AL, CL
			History explore and become familiar with the ways of life in ancient societies. AL, C, CL	**History** examine evidence and deepen awareness about the lives of people and the ways of life in ancient societies. AL, C, CL

6. The *Social and Environmental Education* Curriculum in Practice

The curriculum comes to life through learning, teaching and assessment, moving beyond the printed page to engage, inspire and empower children in their learning. *Social and Environmental Education (SEE)* is underpinned by the vision, principles, key competencies and statements on learning, teaching and assessment in the *Primary Curriculum Framework.*

Every child deserves the opportunity to thrive and flourish in a supportive and engaging learning environment. The relationship between child and teacher is key to enabling this. The child is at the centre of the learning process and so an understanding of their prior learning, interests, experiences and knowledge is crucial for creating inclusive and appropriately challenging learning experiences. Learning in *SEE* is improved by clearly identifying the focus of new learning, recognising ways for children to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding and designing a variety of learning experiences drawing on a range of pedagogical approaches.
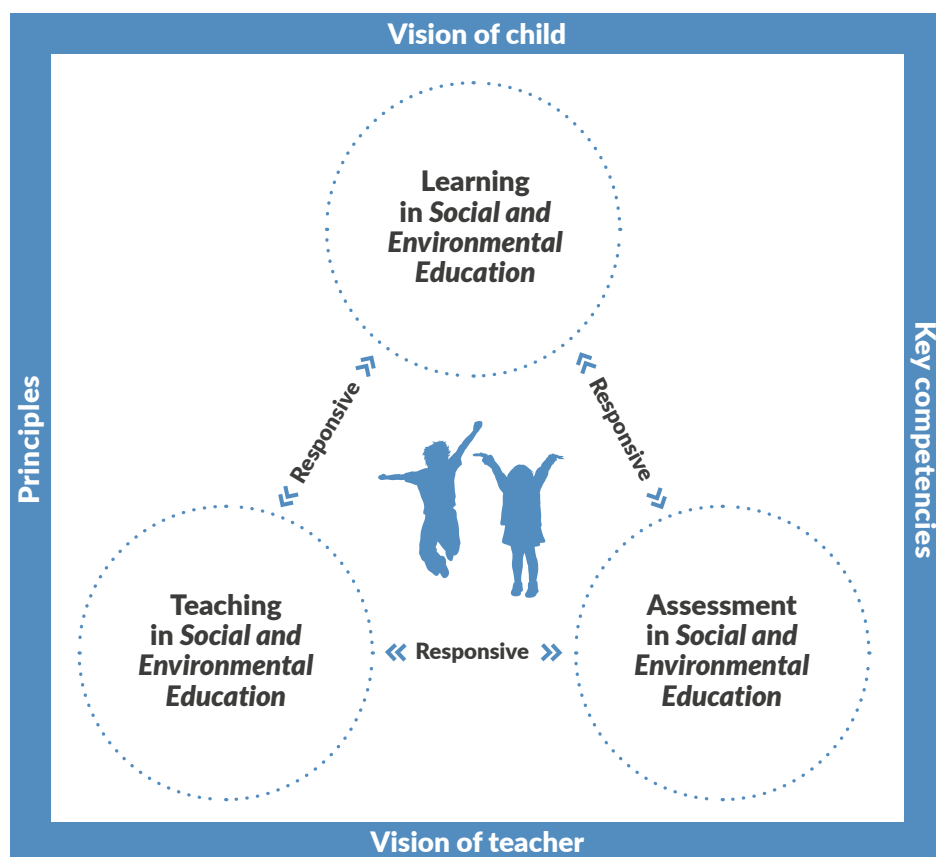

Figure 4: The *Social and Environmental Education* curriculum in practice

The remainder of this chapter outlines the main features of children's learning in *SEE*, the pedagogical approaches that support and enhance it and guidance in assessing children's learning and progression.

6a. Learning in *Social and Environmental Education*

Working as a geographer

Within *SEE*, the concept of '*Working as a geographer*' provides children with opportunities to acquire, develop and apply geographical knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions and values through the process of geographical inquiry. When '*Working as a geographer*,' children actively explore diverse environments, pose questions, interpret, analyse and reflect on a wide range of evidence in various formats. They regularly engage in investigations of their local area and the wider world. Building on prior knowledge and active exploration anchored in their locality, children develop environmental awareness, a sense of place, space and scale. They go on to identify connections between people, places and the natural world in their local area, other communities and the wider world.

Working as a historian

Within *SEE*, the concept of '*Working as a historian*' provides children with opportunities to acquire, develop and apply historical knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions and values. They study the lives of people in the past through the process of historical inquiry. When '*Working as a historian*', children engage in historical thinking, pose questions about historical concepts and encounter a range of sources. They analyse and interpret historical evidence from multiple perspectives to deconstruct and reconstruct historical narratives about the past. When working as historians, children are enabled to explore and reflect on the past in an active, participative way. They develop an understanding of cause and effect, continuity and change, and time and chronology.

Elements

In providing for playful and engaging learning experiences, it is essential to offer opportunities for children to engage with the elements of the *SEE* specification.

Element	Examples within the *SEE* specification
Inquiring	• Posing questions rooted in real-life contexts • Gathering and organising evidence and data both independently and collaboratively • Engaging in research and interpreting a wide range of evidence in a variety of formats • Exploring and investigating in their local area • Critically examining, synthesising and reflecting on data gathered in investigations • Collaborating with others to gain a range of perspectives
Communicating	• Expressing and sharing ideas with others • Presenting their conclusions coherently for a variety of audiences • Collaborating meaningfully when solving problems • Listening to others' ideas, thoughts and views • Using the appropriate means of communication to convey their thinking • Justifying their thinking with reference to evidence
Understanding and connecting	• Evaluating information, evidence and data and drawing conclusions • Identifying commonalities with other topics and themes • Applying their knowledge and understanding to diverse contexts • Forging links between their immediate environment and the wider world • Identifying links between past and present • Developing an understanding and awareness of cause and effect

Supporting children's learning in *Social and Environmental Education*

Each child is an individual with a unique set of strengths that need to be nurtured. Learning Outcomes provide the opportunity for all children to learn through multiple pathways supporting individualised and inclusive learning experiences. This is particularly important for children who have special educational needs.[1]

Additional Support Pathways outline different ways that children might engage with or demonstrate progression towards Learning Outcomes in *SEE*. Using the pathways, teachers can consider the learning experience in greater detail and identify appropriate levels of challenge for children. In the course of their learning, children can be experiencing, attending, responding, initiating, acquiring, becoming fluent and generalising.

Although the pathways are listed sequentially, it is important to note that children may be engaging in each pathway at different times or simultaneously, depending on their diverse learning needs.

The following table describes seven pathways that may be useful for teachers to consider in preparing and providing for equitable opportunities for children to engage with and demonstrate progression in their learning in *SEE*. For each pathway, an example is offered, however, examples are illustrative and represent just one of many possible ways children might engage with and demonstrate their learning.

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[1] The language used to describe educational needs and disabilities is evolving. For the purpose of clarity and to align with current policy and legislation, the term 'special educational needs' is used here.

Table 7: Examples of the Additional Support Pathways in *Social and Environmental Education*

Additional support pathway		Example in *Social and Environmental Education*
Experiencing	The child is present during a learning activity. They are exposed to and/or aware of the learning environment. They are beginning to acclimatise to aspects of the learning environment such as objects, people, sounds and other sensory experiences.	The child develops an awareness of time and chronology through direct and intentional activities. These include handling, sequencing and comparing primary objects from their own past, their family's history and their local community, including the outdoors. By using concrete and pictorial timelines, the child can notice what has changed and what has remained the same.
Attending	The child becomes attentive to and/or engaged with the learning activities presented by changing gesture, posture, vocalisation, eye gaze, movement, etc. They are acclimatised to the learning environment.	The child is aware of and attentive to the built and natural features of the school, home environment and other familiar places. This may occur through regular, active observation and sensory interaction with common elements of the environment (e.g., slopes, flat places, water in puddles, etc).
Responding	The child demonstrates capacity to actively or purposefully take an interest in the learning environment. They begin to indicate likes, dislikes or preferences. They actively respond to a learning activity with or without support.	The child responds to stories, with the teacher using props and picture books to support active responses. Children can respond through their preferred method of communication.
Initiating	The child shows curiosity about the learning environment. They actively and independently seek opportunities to engage with and/or influence that environment.	The child demonstrates initiative, imagination and spontaneity while engaging directly with the natural world through their preferred sensory approaches. The child may select flora and fauna to explore their characteristics through active investigation.
Acquiring	The child demonstrates that knowledge, a skill or a concept is being learned. They explore and participate in the learning.	The child contributes to creating a collaborative piece of group work such as a freeze-frame, role-play or mural. The child expresses their understanding and shares observations about people and places.
Becoming fluent	The child moves towards fluency and accuracy in familiar learning contexts. They independently and consistently demonstrate recall mastery of the knowledge, skill or concept learned.	The child records their experiences of place-based learning through their preferred method of expression (e.g., through drawings, orally or digitally, etc.)
Generalising	The child transfers and applies learned knowledge, skills or concepts to familiar and unfamiliar contexts.	The child applies previously acquired skills to navigate a historical site or when recognising familiar features in the environment. To scaffold the transition from familiar to less familiar contexts, the child can use visual and tactile aids, digital maps or augmented reality tools.

6b. Teaching in *Social and Environmental Education*

'How' children learn is as important as 'what' they learn in *SEE*. Aligned with the principles of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* and reflecting the seven key competencies, this section outlines pedagogical approaches that are essential in the provision of playful and engaging learning experiences for all children. Taken together, they emphasise the importance of adapting teaching to the unique learning contexts in classrooms and schools. High-quality teaching values the diverse backgrounds, abilities, interests, strengths and needs children bring to the classroom. It aims to foster an inclusive, culturally responsive and engaging environment where every child feels safe, seen and valued. Positive relationships between children and teachers are essential, where children's voices are listened to and acted upon, fostering a sense of ownership in their learning. By maintaining high expectations for all children and providing appropriately challenging learning experiences, teachers can inspire confidence and enable each child to reach their potential.

The following pedagogical approaches are essential to the provision of meaningful learning experiences in *SEE*.
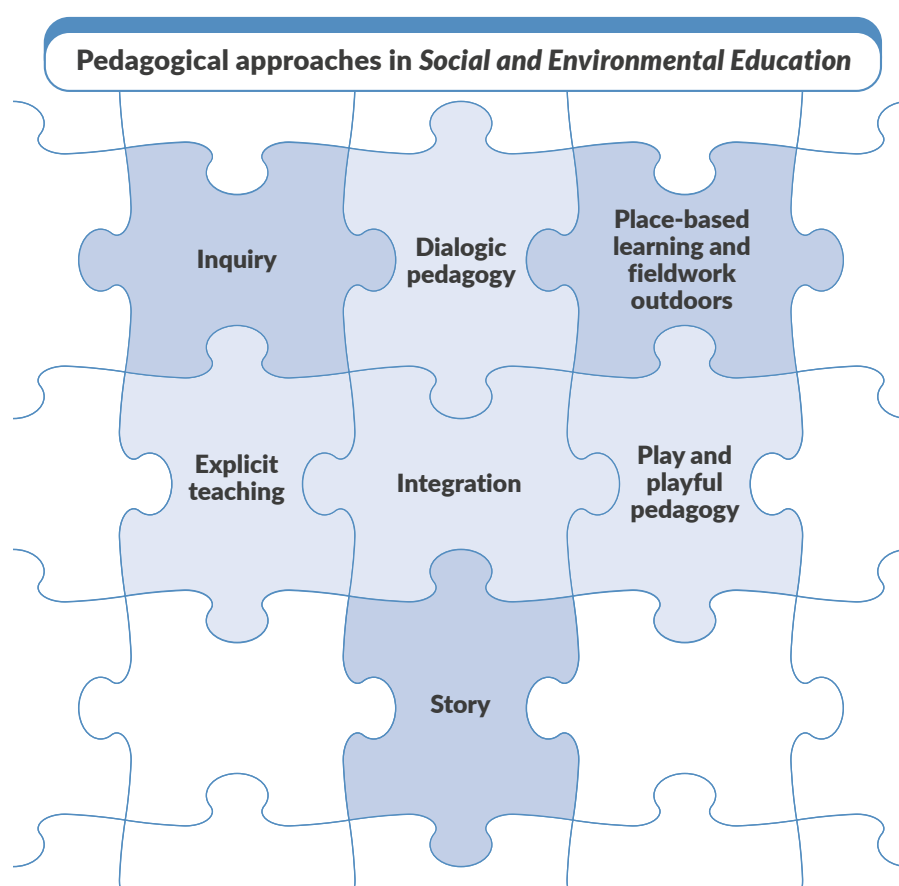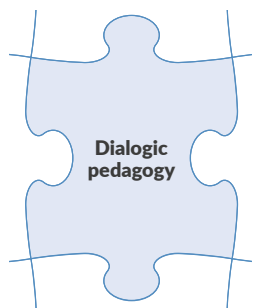
Pedagogical approaches in *Social and Environmental Education*

Inquiry

Dialogic pedagogy

Place-based learning and fieldwork outdoors

Explicit teaching

Integration

Play and playful pedagogy

Story

**Figure 5:** Teaching in *Social and Environmental Education*

Dialogic pedagogy

Children learn through dialogue and interaction. Dialogic pedagogy is a collaborative approach where children and teachers address learning together, expressing and developing ideas and thinking. It involves all forms of communication between children and/or between child and teacher, fostering an inclusive environment where every child's voice is heard and valued. This reciprocal dialogue encourages exploration of complex ideas, critical thinking and informed decision-making, fostering a sense of agency.

When using dialogic pedagogy, the focus of learning must be clear to guide the dialogue. Children's thoughts build on each other, leading to new understandings. In the classroom, children feel empowered to contribute and have a say in their learning. A balance between teacher-guided and child-led dialogue enables deep engagement, facilitated by effective questioning, active listening and purposeful responses.

In *SEE*, teachers can use dialogic pedagogy by:

- providing children with opportunities to present and share their project work, engaging in peer questioning while respectfully challenging ideas
- carefully selecting appropriate stories, texts, artefacts, visual images, audio and videos to stimulate listening, thinking and discussion on various topics
- integrating reflective journalling or personal narrative assignments where children can explore their own views and think in different ways
- emphasising the importance of listening to, understanding and expressing different opinions in a compassionate and empathetic manner framed through the Global Learning Themes (Section 6d).
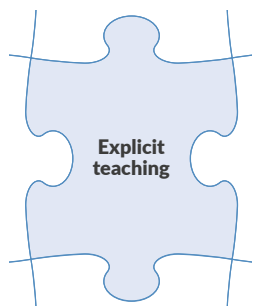
Explicit teaching

Explicit teaching enables the teacher to clearly share new knowledge, skills, concepts and language while modelling positive dispositions in a structured way. It should be considerate of children's developmental stages, their prior learning, abilities and needs. Through explicit teaching, the teacher demonstrates tasks or concepts by carefully modelling and scaffolding their own thinking, making the learning process transparent. Clear explanations, examples and demonstrations help support children's understanding. High levels of teacher-child interaction foster engagement, with questioning encouraging children to elaborate on their learning while staying interested, connected and motivated.

Guided and independent practice are crucial. Initially, children practise with teacher support and feedback, then gradually transition to independent activities to consolidate learning. The teacher ensures meaningful interaction and engagement for all children.

Timely, developmental feedback addresses misunderstandings and reinforces prior learning, guiding children towards new learning. This approach builds confidence and competence, ensuring active participation in learning.

In *SEE*, teachers can use explicit teaching by:

- beginning a unit of inquiry by revisiting prior knowledge, tracking children's progress and expanding their understanding of previously explored topics
- using a range of questions, teacher talk and modelling of skills to introduce and explore artefacts, maps or stories and explain their main features
- demonstrating how to use new words and phrases associated with the theme/topic of historical and/or geographical inquiry in context, providing opportunities for guided practice
- familiarising themselves with reference material about people, places and events, past and present, within the locality of the school, utilising high-quality teaching materials and sources.
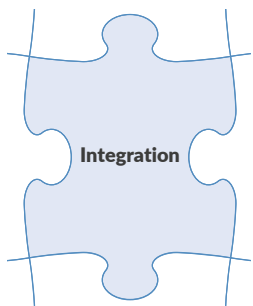
Integration

Integration reflects the interconnected nature of the world children experience daily. It provides opportunities to make connections within and across curriculum areas. Collaborating with children to identify ways to connect their learning to their lives fosters relevance and supports deeper understanding.

Integration dissolves traditional curriculum boundaries, creating cohesive learning experiences. For example, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) combines subject knowledge and language acquisition in meaningful, real-world contexts.

Teachers should purposefully anchor integration within the curriculum through the key competencies and Learning Outcomes, emphasising deeper understanding, innovation, critical thinking and engagement. Children's interests, cross-cutting themes, interdisciplinary skills, big ideas and real-world problems can provide effective starting points.

Integration explores topics from multiple perspectives, considering how key competencies contribute to holistic understanding and appreciation, and reflecting on how integration enhances and deepens these competencies.

In *SEE*, integrated learning provides opportunities for children to develop an awareness and understanding of the Global Learning Themes (Section 6d) through the exploration of big ideas and concepts.

In *SEE*, teachers can use integration by:

- incorporating the lens of the Global Learning Themes into learning experiences across the five curriculum areas, encouraging children to think critically about their own and others' roles locally, nationally, at a European level and globally
- incorporating real world topics, themes or current issues for investigation with a focus on inquiring, communicating, and understanding and connecting
- collaborating with the children to identify a concept, big idea or statement with an *SEE* focus and connecting it with other curriculum areas to develop and complete a unit of work
- supporting children to use the inquiry process to investigate social, economic and environmental issues, their impact on society and the responses to these challenges across curriculum areas.
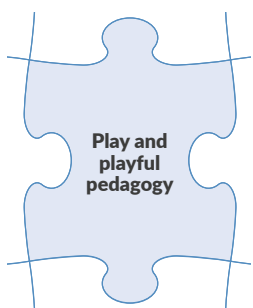
Play and playful pedagogy

Play is valuable throughout childhood, and children have both a right and desire to play. Play and playful pedagogies suit all stages within primary and special schools. Play encompasses a spectrum from child-led play to teacher-led playful activities and shared play where both teachers and children engage and develop the play together. This flexible approach allows for new learning opportunities.

Play promotes active and meaningful learning, connecting new information with existing knowledge. It supports holistic development, including physical, social, emotional, cognitive and spiritual growth, fostering skills like problem-solving, creativity and social interaction. Teachers should ensure that playful learning experiences are aligned with the Learning Outcomes of the curriculum, and with children's abilities, interests, strengths and needs.

A playful environment, indoors and outdoors, enhances learning by being interactive, engaging, inclusive and supportive, encouraging exploration, self-expression, choice and learning from mistakes.

In *SEE*, teachers can use play and playful pedagogy by:

- designing playful, hands-on activities, both indoors and outdoors (such as investigations, scavenger hunts and nature trails) mapping the journeys taken in these activities
- providing a wide range of tactile artefacts, materials and maps for children to explore, engage with and play with
- incorporating socio-dramatic play, role play and pretend play into storytelling through diverse approaches, embracing a sense of mystery and fun
- supporting adventurous play through the provision of opportunities to engage in physical play, expressive play and place-based exploration in the local area which involves an element of challenge and adventure.

Inquiry

Inquiry is a learning approach centred on asking and answering questions about a specific concept or big idea. As children engage with the cycle of inquiry, they pose questions, seek out information and evidence, critically evaluate, reflect and apply their knowledge. Inquiry fosters deep learning by helping children analyse relationships and patterns within communities and societies. This enables them to develop a richer understanding of the interconnected historical, geographical and societal dimensions of life, while also supporting their holistic development and preparation for future lifelong learning.

Working as geographers, children engage in geographical inquiry through collaborative investigations. They ask questions, generate ideas, collect data, develop understanding and draw conclusions about potential actions that may need to be taken. Similarly, working as historians involves engaging in historical inquiry. This requires children to pose authentic questions, select and examine historical evidence, appreciate historical context, evaluate diverse perspectives and reach evidence-based conclusions.

In *SEE*, teachers can use inquiry by:

- scaffolding children to pose open-ended questions that stimulate curiosity and encourage critical thinking about historical and geographical phenomena

- exposing children to a wide range of primary sources and promoting deep, sustained engagement and critical reflection with historical and geographical evidence from different perspectives

- using artefacts to explore and understand beliefs, rituals, guiding principles, rites of passage and practices

- facilitating project-based work that incorporates hands-on activities and offers opportunities to visit and explore sites of interest in and beyond the locality (e.g., museums and monuments), promoting the use of various resources, including digital technologies.

Inquiry
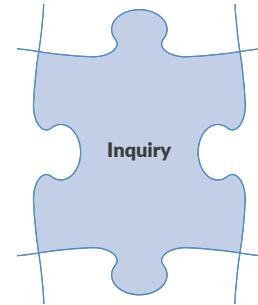
Place-based learning and fieldwork outdoors

Place-based learning is an approach to seeing, knowing and understanding the world. It emphasises the connection between local heritage, cultures and places, integrating these into school life by regularly taking learning outdoors, beyond the classroom. This approach allows children to engage directly with their surroundings, working as historians and geographers in real-life, meaningful contexts.

Fieldwork and active learning experiences in the locality provide authentic contexts that deepen children's engagement in historical and geographical thinking and inquiry. Through fieldwork, children can investigate living things, features, processes and infrastructure in the local outdoor environment. Essential components for historical and geographical learning include opportunities for children to gain emotional, material, physical and sensory experiences through recurring immersion in fieldwork outdoors. This includes first-hand exploration of local landmarks, heritage sites and places of interest.

In *SEE*, teachers can use place-based learning and fieldwork outdoors by:

- encouraging children to engage directly with nature through regular hands-on activities, noticing and investigating seasonal changes in the natural world and promoting the use of nature journals and/or portfolios to reflect on and record outdoor learning experiences

- coordinating outdoor trails which provide children with regular opportunities to apply historical and geographical concepts and skills in a real-life context

- using educational apps or other online/interactive resources to enhance outdoor learning experiences

- providing regular opportunities for children to engage in inquiry-based projects, conduct fieldwork outdoors and present their findings to the school and local community through showcases and exhibitions.

Place-based learning and fieldwork outdoors

Story

Listening to and recounting stories is a natural part of every child's development. Stories spark imagination and ignite curiosity and wonder. As children grow, they encounter a wider variety of stories and explore narratives in greater depth.

The use of story in *SEE* supports children's development of historical knowledge by helping them understand historical events and the lives and experiences of people in the past. Working as historians, children analyse these events and stories to explore and deepen their understanding of the emotions, intentions, behaviours and motives of historical figures. Working as geographers, children develop a sense of place and a sense of space for their locality, while connecting their own experiences to those of people in different parts of the wider world. Engaging with these stories fosters empathy, allowing children to relate to others' experiences and perspectives.

In *SEE*, teachers can use story by:

- ensuring that children encounter a wide range of stories from multiple perspectives and diverse backgrounds including myths and legends from various cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds/worldviews

- encouraging children's retelling of stories and recounting of past events, encouraging creativity while ensuring that children's reconstructed narratives are grounded in historical evidence

- using local stories or folklore describing the geography of an area and connecting them to similar places around the world

- promoting the art of storytelling through facilitating visits from storytellers and local residents.

Story
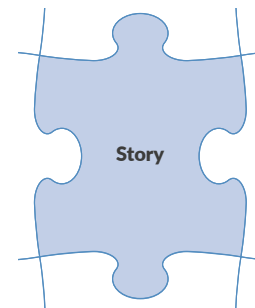
6c. Assessment in *Social and Environmental Education*

Every child has the potential to learn and thrive, and meaningful assessment is integral in nurturing this potential. As one of the eight overarching principles of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*, assessment is understood as a collaborative process, involving children, teachers, parents and, at times, other stakeholders. It involves an ongoing process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using and reporting information about a child's progress and achievement. Importantly, it provides an opportunity to gain insights into children's learning progress, to promote collaboration and self-reflection and to actively engage children in the assessment of their own learning.

Aligning assessment to the focus of learning

At the heart of education is the journey of each child's growth and capturing rich portraits of their learning and progression over time is essential to this journey. Generally, assessment should directly relate to the focus of learning that children are pursuing at any given time through the Learning Outcomes of the *Social and Environmental Education* specification. Assessment often involves focusing on specific aspects of a Learning Outcome, rather than the entire outcome, to provide more focused insights into what children know, understand, or are able to do throughout a learning experience.

In *SEE*, assessment information can be used to monitor and support children's progress in understanding historical and geographical concepts while developing their historical and geographical skills (outlined in Appendix A). It is important for the teacher to strike a balance between the assessment of children's geographical knowledge, concepts and skills and the assessment of children's historical knowledge, concepts and skills. Assessment information helps the teacher identify areas where children need further support or, conversely, need additional challenge when working as historians and geographers. It informs adjustments to pedagogical approaches and the learning environment. It guides preparation for future learning experiences that enhance and build on children's natural curiosity, wonder and critical thinking. Assessment information can also help children to identify the next steps in their own learning.

Opportunities for assessment in *Social and Environmental Education*

The curriculum supports a continuum of assessment ranging from 'intuitive' to 'planned interactions' to 'assessment events'. The three types of assessment are complementary and are necessary to gain a comprehensive picture of a child's progress and achievement in *SEE*.

Table 8: Types of assessment

Intuitive assessment	Planned interactions	Assessment events
...occurs naturally and on an ongoing basis during learning experiences. It is integrated into pedagogy, can be invisible, yet still intentional to the teacher and is a very real part of the process.	...are a little more explicit and include practices such as having conversations with children, questioning, asking children to construct concept maps and following up on intuitive assessments or assessment events.	...differ from other types of assessment in that (1) they are distinct events, (2) they almost always involve producing a record of the outcomes of the assessment and (3) children are aware they are being assessed.

Gathering assessment information in *Social and Environmental Education*

Children will demonstrate their learning in many ways and through the use of a broad range of methods, teachers can gather rich information about children's learning in *SEE*. Having a clear understanding of the information that is needed to build a picture of children's progress will support teachers to identify the most suitable methods to use. Below is a non-exhaustive list of methods likely to be useful in assessing children's progress in *SEE* as they learn through the elements of Inquiring, Communicating, and Understanding and connecting.

Conferencing

Through teacher/child, peer/peer and group interactions, teachers can gain insights into children's communication skills, conceptual understanding and overall learning. Conferencing can enable teachers to evaluate both the process and the final product of learning experiences, offering specific, targeted feedback tailored to individual needs. Importantly, it fosters a positive, supportive and collaborative learning environment, shaping future learning experiences.

Feedback

Feedback is an integral part of the learning process, involving timely, constructive and focused interactions between teachers and children. It encourages reflection, recognition of progress and identification of next steps in learning. Feedback helps children critically analyse their learning, celebrate achievements and address challenges, guiding their future learning experiences.

Observation

Observations involve teachers actively monitoring, listening to and engaging with children during learning experiences. This method provides valuable insights into children's knowledge and understanding, enjoyment, engagement and interactions. It enables teachers to respond to opportune learning situations and guide further learning effectively.

Peer- and self-assessment

Peer- and self-assessment involve children reflecting on, sharing and discussing their learning with teacher support as appropriate. This method fosters self-reflection, collaboration and intrinsic motivation within an open, respectful and supportive learning environment.

Portfolios

A portfolio is a collection of a child's work, chosen and curated by the child in collaboration with the teacher. It reflects their learning and development over time and supports reflection, goal setting and self-assessment. They can be digital or physical, including various artefacts like images, videos, recordings, projects and samples of learning. They demonstrate growth and progression in different curriculum areas.

Tasks

Meaningful and relevant tasks provide opportunities for children to demonstrate their understanding in various ways. They can support authentic assessment, offering insights into children's learning in real-time situations and different contexts such as indoors and outdoors.

Questioning

Questioning can involve posing well-crafted, open-ended and probing questions that support understanding, critical thinking and reflection. It encourages children to make connections, consider different perspectives and engage deeply with the learning process.

Project-based learning

Project-based learning offers a dynamic and effective approach to assessment, requiring children to apply their knowledge and understanding in real-life contexts. It encourages creativity, critical thinking, teamwork and sustained engagement. It provides a holistic evaluation of children's learning and development.

Teacher-designed tests

In conjunction with other forms of assessment, analysis of results from teacher-designed tests can provide an important source of detailed feedback on children's learning in *SEE*. Carefully-designed assessments enable teachers to identify children's historical and geographical content knowledge in a particular curriculum topic or area of inquiry.

Documenting a child's learning is important. Purposeful use of documentation arises out of the process of gathering evidence. Children and teachers can use different ways to document assessment information, such as notes, photographs, videos and learning stories. Portfolios, as well as being an assessment method, offer a meaningful way to compile, organise and showcase assessment information that reflects the child's authentic learning journey. Such documentation contributes to the rich, holistic picture of each child as they learn, progress and develop.

Using assessment information to inform next steps in children's learning

At the heart of effective learning is the meaningful use of assessment information. How assessment information is used will determine its overall effectiveness in supporting children's learning. Children's active involvement during assessment processes fosters a sense of ownership over their learning and can encourage self-reflection, critical thinking and growth. Effective feedback is crucial in the learning process, providing opportunities for children to reflect on their successes and progress.

A feature of high-quality teaching is the ability of teachers to respond to their unique classroom contexts by gathering, recording and analysing evidence to make informed judgements about children's progress and guide their learning and teaching decisions in *SEE*.

These decisions are informed and shaped by:

- knowledge of the children and their prior learning
- knowledge of the curriculum
- knowledge of pedagogy.

Knowledge of the children and their prior learning

Teachers are attuned to the backgrounds, strengths, interests and needs of children. They acknowledge the diverse ways that some children observe and interact with the world around them. Children's prior learning in *SEE* can be assessed through any activity that offers children opportunities to communicate their understanding, views and reasoning (such as concept-mapping, brainstorming, etc.).

Knowledge of the curriculum

Teachers' knowledge of the *Social and Environmental Education* specification, as well as links that can be made with other curriculum areas, enables them to prepare appropriate, authentic learning opportunities for historical and geographical inquiry. As children work towards Learning Outcomes through the three strands of *SEE*, they develop and deepen their engagement as geographers and historians. In addition, assessment provides useful insights and information about their progress.

Knowledge of pedagogy

Teachers draw on their professional judgement and reflection to refine and adjust both the pedagogical practices they choose and the learning environment they prepare. This results in an enriched learning experience for children in *SEE*. Professional conversations with colleagues, continuing professional development, use of the locality and access to rich indoor and outdoor learning environments also help to provide appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences.

6d. Global learning themes in *Social and Environmental Education*

Learning and teaching in *SEE* is framed by Global Learning Themes including human rights, democracy, equity, social and environmental justice and sustainable development. Collectively, they empower children to be informed and active citizens who can contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future.

The themes serve as a scaffold to support preparation and teaching using an integrated approach. This provides coherence to the big ideas underpinning *SEE*.
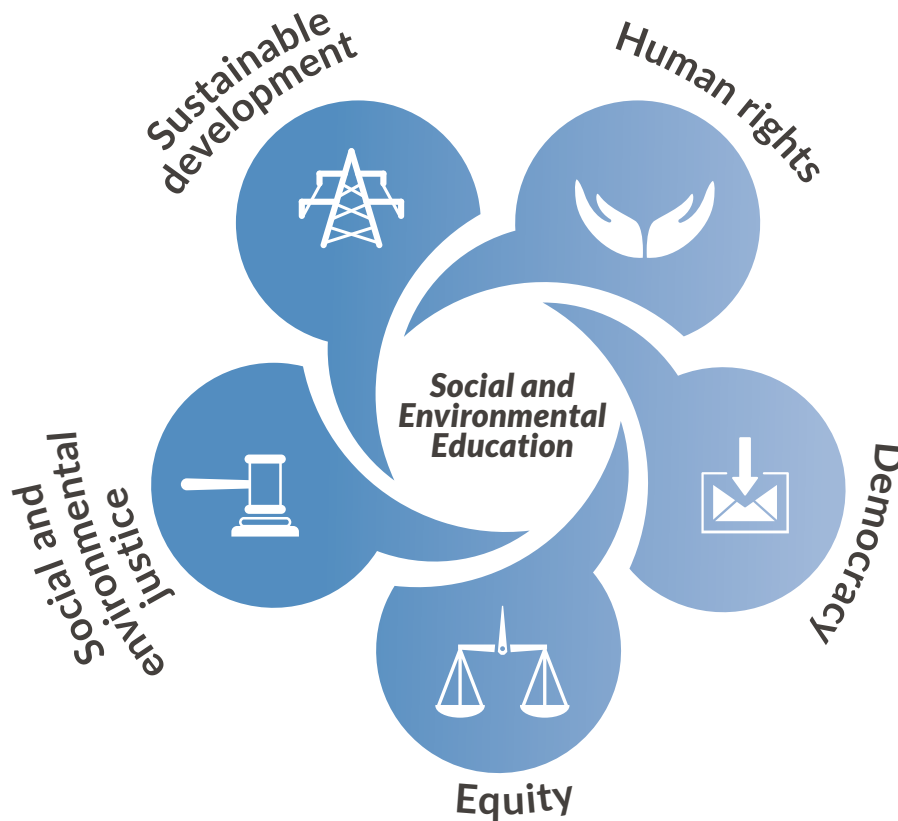

Figure 6: Global learning themes

Human rights

Learning in *SEE* supports the development of intercultural understanding as children explore the diversity of the world's places and peoples, cultural traditions, religions, beliefs and worldviews. They learn the importance of understanding their own and others' heritage, demonstrating respect for cultural diversity and the human rights of all people.

Democracy

Learning in *SEE* provides opportunities to introduce the principles of democracy, including the importance of participation and representation.

Equity

Learning in *SEE* involves children's exploration of diverse voices, perspectives and experiences which represent a range of social, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Children develop an understanding of the importance of fairness. They recognise that some people require more help than others and show empathy towards them.

Social and environmental justice

Learning in *SEE* provides opportunities for children to explore and think critically about social and environmental justice issues from different perspectives. This broadens their understanding of the world and their role in it and encourages them to question and to critically examine any bias in sources.

Sustainable development

Learning in *SEE* enables children to consider long-term goals which prioritise sustainability over short-term gains. They are encouraged to strive for conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources, as well as the responsible production and consumption of resources.

7. Outline of the Online *Social and Environmental Education* Toolkit

The online *Social and Environmental Education* (*SEE*) Toolkit provides practical support for teachers in building rich learning experiences for children. The contents and components of the online toolkit evolve over time.

Examples of children's learning

Developed with teachers, these examples provide insights into how teachers work with Learning Outcomes to make decisions about what they teach, the types of activities, experiences and pedagogies they use and the information they gather on how well children are doing in their learning.

Support materials for teachers

The support materials include important resources and reference material to support teachers to enact the curriculum in a meaningful way. They have been developed and reviewed in response to research and the evolving needs of children, teachers and school communities.

Supports for progression

Children learn and develop at different rates and this can look different across the curriculum areas and subjects. In response to research and the diverse range of children attending our primary and special schools, a range of supports have been developed to ensure all children progress in their learning and development.

8. Glossary

Artefact	An artefact is a human-made article of historical interest often used as a source of evidence.
Beliefs	Beliefs are ideas and convictions that people hold to be true.
Biodiversity	Biodiversity is the variety of living things, such as plants and animals, and how they all work together in different habitats and larger ecosystems.
Ecosystem	An ecosystem is a community of living organisms, such as plants and animals, interacting with each other and their physical environment in a specific area.
Empathy	Empathy involves perspective taking, understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to and sometimes vicariously experiencing the emotions, feelings, thoughts and experiences of another.
Environment	**Human:** Areas which have been altered by the presence of people, for example, through farming activities, the extraction of resources, the provision of roads and other communication links and the construction of buildings. **Natural:** Formed largely through the interaction of the Earth's physical features and processes, its flora and fauna, e.g., a tropical rainforest, a peatland or a rocky seashore are examples of natural environments.
Environmental justice	Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people in the development and implementation of environmental laws, regulations and policies. It aims to ensure that everyone has equal access to a healthy and safe environment.
Geographical phenomena	Geographical phenomena are the natural or human-made events, features or processes that occur on the Earth's surface. These can be physical (such as earthquakes, rivers or mountains) or human-related (such as urbanisation, deforestation or migration).
Historical phenomena	Historical phenomena are the significant events, trends, or developments that occurred in the past and have shaped human societies, cultures or civilisations. They can include wars, revolutions, cultural movements and technological advancements.
Human rights	Human rights are the basic entitlements that protect the dignity, equality and freedoms of every person, regardless of cultural, social or political differences.
Learning environment	The learning environment is any space, indoor and outdoor, in which children learn or develop their understanding.
Locality	The locality is the local geographic area including people and places within the direct experiences of the child.
Migration	Migration is the movement of people from one place to another, either to or from a different country or within a country.
Multi-perspectivity	Multi-perspectivity is the consideration of various viewpoints, opinions or perspectives when analysing or discussing a topic.
Primary source	A primary source is an original, firsthand account or evidence of an event, idea or topic. It comes directly from the time it happened, created by someone who experienced or witnessed it. Examples include diaries, photographs, speeches, official documents, etc.
Rituals	Rituals are the traditions, habits and actions that are repeated in a family, community or society.

Social justice	Social justice is the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges within a society, ensuring that all individuals have equal access to basic needs and opportunities.
Sustainability	Sustainability is the responsible use and preservation of resources to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
Traveller	The Irish Traveller Community, also known as Travellers, Mincéir or Pavee, are an indigenous traditionally nomadic ethnic minority group originating in Ireland. Travellers were formally recognised by the state in 2017 as a distinct ethnic group in the Irish nation. As with all ethnic groups, the Traveller community is diverse and not homogeneous.
Worldviews	Worldviews are how one perceives and interprets the world and life experiences. Worldviews are coherent, historical and shared outlooks. They can be religious or non-religious and can change over time in response to experience.

9. References

Department of Education (2023). *Primary Curriculum Framework*. Dublin: Department of Education. Available at: **https://curriculumonline.ie/primary/the-primary-curriculum-framework**

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Government of Ireland (2024). *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Dublin: Government Publications. Available at: **https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood**

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Appendix A. Concepts, skills, dispositions and values in *Social and Environmental Education*

The following information on concepts, skills, dispositions and values provide additional guidance for teachers working with Learning Outcomes across Stages 1–4 (Junior Infants–Sixth Class). They provide useful entry and reference points in relation to preparation, teaching and assessment. While they are embedded within the Learning Outcomes, this additional information offers teachers more clarity in supporting their preparation and in their teaching and assessment of the *Social and Environmental Education* specification.

As children learn through the elements of Inquiring, Communicating and Understanding and connecting, the concepts, skills, dispositions and values identified below set out what the children will be able to know, understand, demonstrate and do.

Concepts

Concepts are overarching relevant and important ideas that are necessary for children to acquire and develop in building knowledge on a topic or curriculum area. They are an essential component in developing children's capacity in working as geographers and as historians. In Learning Outcomes, concepts refer to what children are expected to know or understand at the end of each stage. The concepts of *SEE* include:
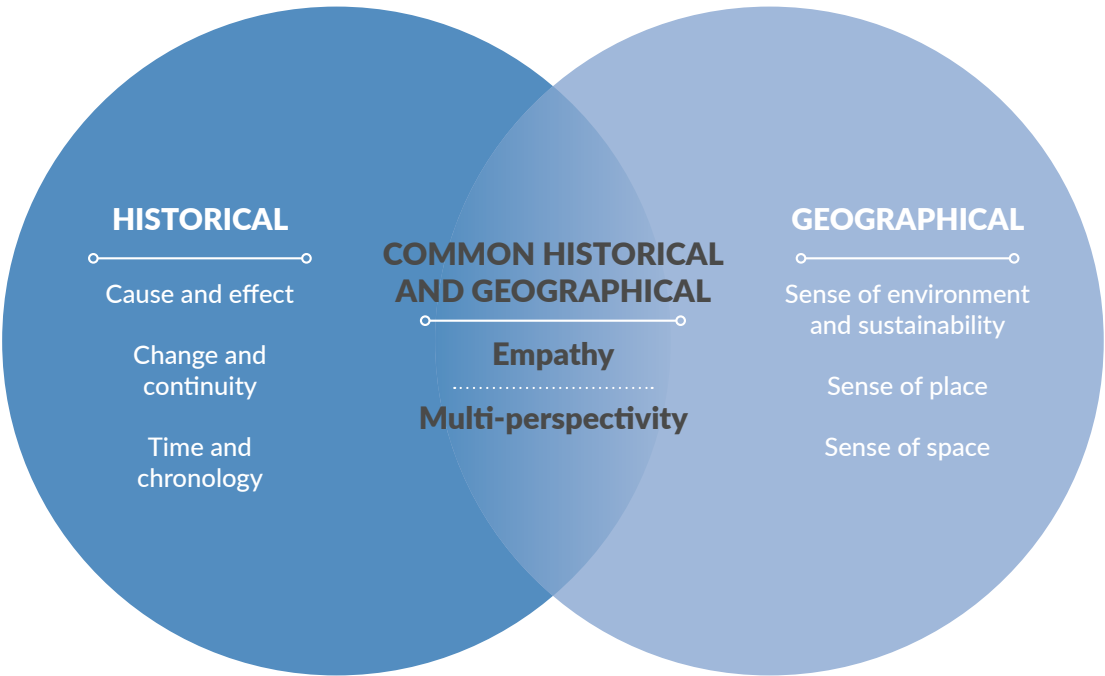

HISTORICAL

Cause and effect

Change and continuity

Time and chronology

COMMON HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL

Empathy

Multi-perspectivity

GEOGRAPHICAL

Sense of environment and sustainability

Sense of place

Sense of space

Figure A1: The concepts of the *Social and Environmental Education* specification

Skills

Skills are the abilities that children develop to apply their knowledge effectively. Skills can be cognitive (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving), practical (e.g., technical) or social (e.g., communication, collaboration) in nature. In Learning Outcomes, skills refer to what children are expected to be able to do or demonstrate at the end of each stage. The skills of *SEE* include:
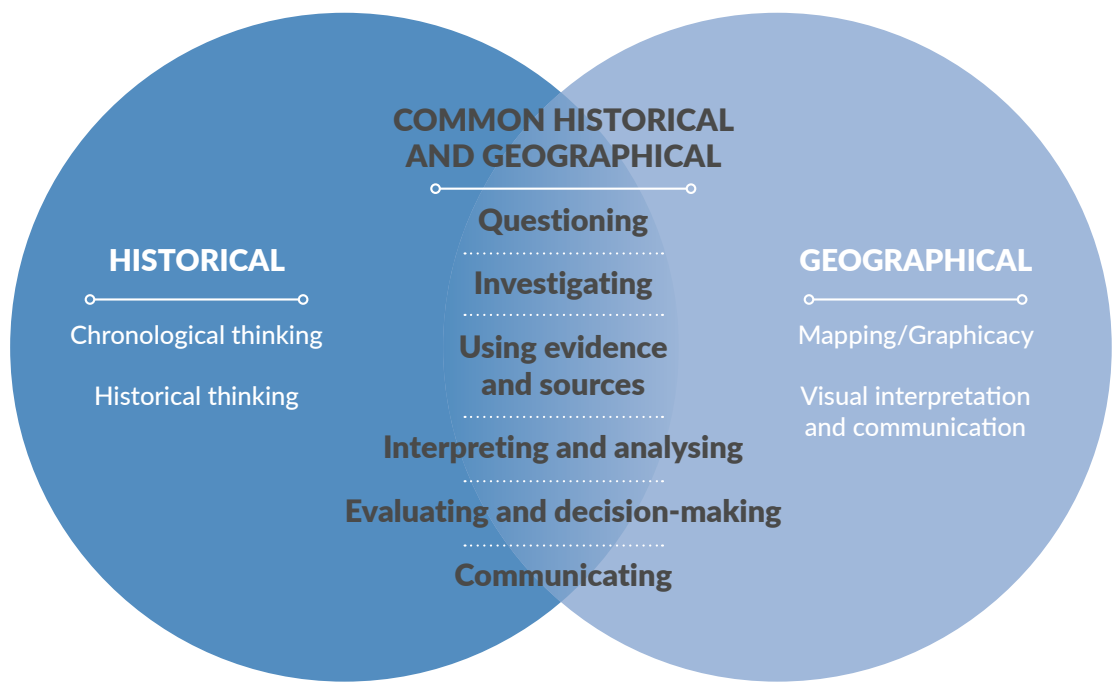

COMMON HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL

Questioning

Investigating

Using evidence and sources

Interpreting and analysing

Evaluating and decision-making

Communicating

HISTORICAL

Chronological thinking

Historical thinking

GEOGRAPHICAL

Mapping/Graphicacy

Visual interpretation and communication

Figure A2: The skills of the *Social and Environmental Education* specification

The following tables present a non-exhaustive set of examples of concepts and skills which children develop through their learning in *SEE*. These suggestions for children's learning are intended to support teachers as they work with the Learning Outcomes across all stages to prepare for and teach high-quality learning experiences.

Table A1: Concepts within Learning Outcomes

Common historical and geographical concepts
Stages 1–4
Junior Infants–Sixth Class

Empathy

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Becoming aware of the experiences, decisions and actions of people, past and present
- Showing an interest in and care about people, recognising and appreciating their emotions and connecting the experiences of other people to their own
- Becoming aware of personal attitudes and those of others and fostering mutual respect and tolerance
- Recognising that some historical and contemporary figures were motivated by their religion, belief or worldview

Multi-perspectivity

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Considering different viewpoints, opinions or perspectives when analysing specific events, themes and topics
- Developing an understanding of how people's perspectives can be shaped by their values, religions, beliefs, worldviews, culture, location and experiences

Historical concepts	Geographical concepts
Stages 1–4	**Stages 1–4**
Junior Infants–Sixth Class	Junior Infants–Sixth Class

Cause and effect

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Discussing the reasons for and the effect of some events and changes in the past
- Developing an understanding that events in the past can have multiple causes and effects
- Recognising that these causes and effects can be connected and that the consequences of these events can range from the immediate to short and long-term
- Acknowledging the role of religions, beliefs and worldviews in historical events

Sense of environment and sustainability

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Developing an awareness of the natural environments where humans and other living things interact
- Developing an understanding of the natural and human features in the environment and their interrelationships
- Exploring human and natural features and the interactions between them
- Developing an awareness of the environmental, social and economic aspects of life

Change and continuity

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Determining what has stayed the same and what has changed over a period of time
- Exploring instances of change and continuity in local, national and international contexts
- Comparing and contrasting similarities and differences between the past and the present and between different historical periods
- Examining how people's lives and circumstances change over time and in response to different situations

Sense of place

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Exploring and becoming familiar with some of the built and natural features of the locality
- Developing an awareness of the built and natural features of Ireland, Europe and the wider world
- Exploring and understanding the features of a place and how people and natural processes influence it, past, present and future
- Analysing the relationship between the human and natural environments in a particular place

Time and chronology

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Distinguishing between the past, present and future
- Developing an increasing understanding of time and chronology so as to place people, objects and events within a broad historical framework
- Becoming aware of the sequence of events in stories about the past using common words and phrases associated with time
- Exploring historical periods, moving beyond a knowledge of dates and period labels

Sense of space

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Becoming familiar with the location of human and natural features in the locality
- Recording simple journeys to and from places in the locality and beyond
- Estimating and measuring distances and establishing cardinal directions during exploration of the locality
- Recording location, size and orientation of features in the locality using drawings, plans, maps, globes, models and digital technology

Table A2: Skills within Learning Outcomes

Common historical and geographical skills

Stages 1–4
Junior Infants–Sixth Class

Questioning and investigating

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Posing questions and investigating evidence through inquiry
- Observing and describing artefacts asking questions about them
- Collaborating to make predictions and future solutions for local, national and global challenges
- Engaging in place-based learning and fieldwork to investigate the local area
- Recording, representing and debating findings from inquiries using a variety of formats and perspectives

Using evidence and sources

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Critically examining and selecting evidence, including artefacts
- Developing skills to locate and select valid and reliable evidence and sources
- Asking questions and making simple deductions from evidence and sources
- Comparing accounts of events or people across multiple sources
- Recognising that evidence may be biased, incomplete or open to interpretation

Interpreting and analysing

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Critically examining diverse sources and evidence
- Sorting, classifying, offering explanations and drawing conclusions using relevant criteria
- Considering multiple perspectives across sources
- Engaging with artefacts from the past and present
- Making connections between local, national, regional and global events

Evaluating and decision making

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Evaluating information and investigating evidence to draw and justify conclusions
- Challenging assumptions and making informed decisions through inquiry
- Gathering and responding to representations of a place (e.g., photographs, paintings, videos, drawings and maps)
- Engaging in dialogue, considering multiple perspectives, to offer explanations and draw conclusions
- Making reasoned judgements about public issues and topics after engaging in critical analysis of multiple sources

Historical skills
Stages 1–4
Junior Infants–Sixth Class

Chronological thinking

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Recognising the order of past events, placing people, periods and events within a broad historical sequence
- Developing an awareness of how specific events were influenced by what happened before and after
- Comparing the length of time between significant events and developments
- Situating religions, beliefs and worldviews in historical and contemporary contexts

Historical thinking

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Drawing on the concepts of cause and effect, continuity and change and historical significance to develop an understanding of the past
- Examining historical evidence to gain a deeper understanding of the past
- Observing patterns of continuity and change, as well as the intended and unintended effects over time
- Exploring the changing practices of religions, beliefs and worldviews over time

Geographical skills
Stages 1–4
Junior Infants–Sixth Class

Mapping / Graphicacy

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Recording places in the locality and places in stories using maps, models and other methods
- Making and reading simple maps and plans of home, classroom, school and locality
- Using maps to record routes and directions
- Applying the fundamentals of mapping – location, scale, symbols, perspective and direction – to understand size and scale of places and location of places, in both natural and built environments

Visual interpretation and communication

Suggestions for children's learning:

- Collecting and responding to pictorial and virtual representations of a place, such as photographs, videos, drawings and maps
- Creating visual representations of place features using drawings, maps, models and digital technologies
- Creating and responding to pictorial and virtual representations of different environments, such as photographs, videos, drawings, sketches, maps and Virtual /Augmented Reality applications
- Recording and presenting findings and conclusions using various methods, including oral, written, pictorial, photographic, diagrammatic and graphical forms

Dispositions

Dispositions are habits, behaviours and mindsets that influence children's learning and personal growth and affect their overall engagement and interest in *SEE*. In Learning Outcomes, dispositions refer to how children engage with their learning. Examples of dispositions within *SEE* are included in Table A3.

Table A3: Dispositions within Learning Outcomes

Dispositions	
Critical thinking	Analysing, evaluating and questioning information to make reasoned decisions
Curiosity	Desire to explore, question and seek deeper understanding
Open-mindedness	Willingness to consider diverse perspectives and rethink assumptions
Reflexivity	Critically reflecting on one's beliefs, actions and biases to deepen learning
Resilience	Adapting and persisting through challenges and setbacks

Values

Values are the beliefs that children hold about what is important, desirable and worthwhile, both for themselves and for society. In Learning Outcomes, values refer to the principles that guide and motivate children's behaviours, thoughts, decisions and ethical judgements. Values in *SEE* are reinforced through meaningful engagement with the Global Learning Themes (Section 6d). Examples of values within *SEE* are included in Table A4.

Table A4: Values within Learning Outcomes

Values	
Democratic participation and citizenship	Actively engaging in society with responsibility, respect and a commitment to the common good
Personal attachment to a place and a sense of belonging	A strong emotional bond, deep connection or sense of identity within a community or environment
Individual and collective agency	Capacity to act independently and collaboratively to create change
Appreciation for diversity	Recognising and respecting differences in people and perspectives
Appreciation for interconnection, interrelationships and interdependence	Recognising how human and natural environments, systems and resources are linked and impact one another