

**ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION
ASSESSMENT &
REGISTRATION**

Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

**Assessment of Education
in places other than Recognised Schools**

**Independent School
Review Assessment Report**

Name of School

ALFA Steiner Secondary School

Address

Raheen Road,
Tuamgraney,
Co Clare.

Telephone

061 640798

Name of Principal/Director

Mr. Alan Dickey

Name of Assessor/s

Jane Merriman
Richard Coughlan

Date of Assessment

6th December 2022

Date of Final Report

2nd October 2023

Contents

Section 1	Background Information.....	3
1.1.	School Hours.....	3
1.2.	Name(s) of principal and/or other teacher(s) interviewed.....	3
1.3.	Sources of evidence on which report is based.....	3
Section 2	General Information and School Context	4
Section 3	The Principal and Staff	6
Section 4	Time Devoted to Education	6
Section 5	The Learning Environment.....	6
Section 6	The Educational Activities	7
6.1.	General information	7
6.2.	Language and literacy skills	10
6.3.	Numeracy	11
6.4.	Irish	12
6.5.	Other areas of learning	13
6.6.	Special educational needs	15
Section 7	Assessment and Record Keeping	16
Section 8	Other Relevant Information	16
Section 9	Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations	17
Section 10	Discussion of Finding of Report with Principal	18
Section 11	Outcome	18

Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	09:30		
Closing time:	15:30		
Main breaks during the day:	11:15	to	11:45
	13:15	to	13:45

Is school in operation for more than five years?

Yes

If no, please give date on which school commenced operation

00/00/0000

1.2. Name(s) of principal and/or other teacher(s) interviewed

(Normally interview should take place with the principal)

Alan Dickey, School Administrator (Principal)
The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Coordinator/learning support

1.3. Sources of evidence on which report is based

This assessment report is based on the following sources of evidence:

- Information furnished in the R2 Annual Update Form 2022-23 completed by the school's administrator
- Comprehensive information provided by the administrator prior to the onsite visit, outlining details of arrangements for the provision including, governance structure, finance report, programme planning and curriculum outline, and strategic development plans.
- Information available on the school website
- An interview with the administrator remotely on the 05 December 2022 and onsite on the 06 December 2023
- An interview with the Special Educational Needs (SEN) coordinator
- Discussion with staff during the classroom visits
- Classroom visits and conversation and interactions with students
- Observation of a sample of learning tasks completed by the students
- Observation of educational materials in use.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

ALFA (Active Learning For Adolescents) Steiner Secondary School in East Clare, (formally Raheen Wood Steiner Secondary), provides a full time, co-educational, progressive education programme. The programme is available to and aimed at 13–17-year-olds who, with the support of their families, are actively seeking a new way of learning. The school's programme content and delivery are grounded in the internationally acknowledged principles of Steiner Waldorf education. ALFA has introduced accreditation of the Steiner education it delivers through the Crossfields *Diploma & Certificate in Integrated Education*. A consortium of Steiner schools in Norway, Denmark, United Kingdom (UK), Finland, and Ireland have created the programme that the school follows. The Crossfields Institute is the awarding body. ALFA school was the first school to take up the Crossfields Institute certificate and diploma.

The school was founded in 2001 by a group of parents seeking an alternative approach to mainstream secondary education for their children, some of whom had attended the local Steiner Primary School. The Steiner National Primary School was set up in 1988 and in 1994 moved to its present site, currently shared with ALFA Secondary School. Since 2010, the ALFA Steiner Secondary School and Raheen Wood Steiner National School have maintained a partnership to ensure a strong foundation exists for the Steiner Secondary Education.

Ard Aoibhinn Community Initiatives CLG takes responsibility for regulatory requirements for ALFA Secondary School. Its directors provide returns annually to the Companies Registration Office and the Charities Regulator and ensure compliance with the Charities Governance Code.

The School Management Group takes responsibility for the financial and legal aspects of the school. It includes current/former parents, and staff. The management group provide oversight for programmes, including their funding, and take responsibility for *regulatory matters and the long-term stability and development of the school*. They meet formally at least once every half-term, or more frequently as required.

The College of Teachers take responsibility for teaching and learning and has a role in managing and developing the school's programmes. The College of Teachers meet weekly during term time, and periodically outside term time. Two members of this group are also members of The Management Group.

The current Strategic Plan 2022-2025 for ALFA Secondary School records the impressive work and programme progression achieved to date, along with identifying an ambitious plan outlining the intended future developments. The Strategic Report captures the context of the successful growth of the current provision following the implementation of ALFA's first Strategic Plan (2018-2022). Student numbers, teaching groups, programme duration, and learning spaces have all been increased. These measurable indicators of growth are further supported by corresponding developments and improvements in staffing provision, student qualifications, certification offered, and the increased annual budget available. Improvements and development are noteworthy within the context of the impact and challenges of Covid-19.

ALFA meets with parents and young people when they have exhausted options to progress through mainstream education. The current Strategic Plan states that more than 50% of students came from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, and over half of the student cohort can be identified

as having diagnosed learning disabilities and social and emotional challenges. The concept of Active Learning at ALFA is rooted in the principles of Steiner Waldorf education.

Potential students have an opportunity to experience trial days in Spring/Summer prior to deciding to commit to enrolment.

As a Steiner school, the provision of the school, is structured around the delivery of *Main Lessons* and *Subject Lessons*. Main lessons are active learning projects delivered over three/four weeks requiring intensive, engaged exploration of a broad range of preidentified curricular themes.

Three programmes of learning are contained within the educational provision at ALFA Steiner Secondary School;

- The Junior Programme
- The Senior Programme
- The Transition Programme

The Junior Programme is equivalent to a combined first and second year in mainstream secondary school. There are currently 17 students in the Junior Group.

The Senior Programme is the equivalent of a combined third and fourth/transition year in mainstream secondary school. There are currently 19 students in the Senior Group, 3 of whom are overseas visitors.

The Transition Programme has been developed for Learners aged 16+ years, generally participants will have completed the ALFA Senior Programme

There are currently 41 students enrolled at ALFA, with the intention to build capacity to accommodate 58 students. In September 2022 ALFA celebrated its 21st Birthday.

The school staff meet with parents as a group in the autumn and individually in the spring. Incoming students come to ALFA for a day in spring or summer to try out the school.

The school has been involved in a European Erasmus project for three years. There are ten countries involved. They have two or three meetings each year. The school has chosen music as its current theme for the project.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

ALFA Steiner Secondary School has a school administrator, who carries out a role similar to school principal. As with Steiner Waldorf Schools worldwide, the task of leadership decisions rests with the collegial consensus of the school's core teaching staff along with the school administrator.

ALFA has four core class teachers, who along with the administrator make up the College of Teachers. This staff group take responsibility for managing teaching and learning and development of programmes. There are a further ten teachers along with the Assistant Administrator who make up the Faculty of Teachers. There are three guest teachers delivering lessons in Human Biology, Filmmaking, and Rowing. There are three auxiliary staff, who complete the staff team. Information was provided at the time of the assessment, outlining details of staff qualifications and roles.

ALFA has a Child Safeguarding Statement, and all staff have been trained in its implementation. All staff have been Garda vetted in accordance with Part 3 Article 12 National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

A copy of the school's calendar for the current school year was provided with the R2 Annual Update Information Form 2022-23. Term dates and school holidays are available on the ALFA Steiner Secondary School website.

ALFA Steiner School observes school holidays in line with mainstream secondary schools. The school is in operation for 164 days during the academic year 2022-23, commencing on the 31st of August 2022 and ending on the 5th of June 2023.

The school hours have been amended since the last review assessment and are currently 09:20 to 15:30 Monday to Friday. There is a 30-minute mid-morning break at 11:15 and a 30-minute break for lunch at 13:15.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The ALFA Secondary School is located in East Clare, near the villages of Tuamgraney and Scarriff. The school is adjacent to the Raheen Wood Community National School, a Department of Education recognised Steiner primary school. The first ALFA building was constructed on the woodland site in 2013.

There are two main buildings that house the two main multipurpose classrooms, as well as the office/administration space. A third prefab is currently in use and has been made into a comfortable learning environment for the senior group students. At the time of the assessment the larger of the two main classrooms was visited for a Maths class in the morning and a Textile class in the afternoon.

Significant to observe was how the space was utilised effectively by each teacher for the required purpose of the specific subject.

At the time of the last review assessment the construction of a Geodesic Dome was underway. This accommodation has since been completed. The Dome provides an excellent opportunity for multiple school activities. It was acknowledged that it was particularly valuable as a space over the duration of the pandemic, as it is naturally a ventilated space. The Geodesic Dome contains several woodwork benches positioned around the inside parameter. A woodwork/woodcarving class was observed at the time of the assessment.

The outdoor space gives students access to the surrounding woodland area, a playing field, a basketball court, football area, and includes some outdoor gym equipment. There is a fire pit area which provides a space where staff and students can meet for discussion and reflection.

The school has plans for improved accommodation to meet the programme and student needs, details of which are outlined in Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan 2022-25.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The curriculum at ALFA is based upon *The Tasks and Content of the Steiner-Waldorf Curriculum* (ed. Avison and Rawson, Floris Books, 2014). The curriculum at the school is described as *a flexible set of pedagogical guidelines, founded on Steiner's principles that take account of the whole child. It gives equal attention to the physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural and spiritual needs of each pupil and is designed to work in harmony with the different phases of the child's development.* Steiner education is a child-centered education that *seeks to nurture 'the hand, the head and the heart'* of every child. Whole class, mixed ability teaching is the approach used to deliver the curriculum through the identified programmes at the school.

The Steiner education provision is structured around the delivery of Main Lessons and Subject Lessons. Main Lessons are active learning projects delivered over three/four weeks requiring intensive, engaged exploration of a broad range of preidentified curricular themes. Following the morning Main Lesson, Subject Lessons are delivered across the week with timetabled lessons in English, Mathematics, Irish, French, Art, Crafts, Physical Education (PE), Drama and Music. Teachers of subject lessons are aware of the themes and focus of main lessons and where appropriate will take an integrated approach to teaching lessons to support current themes. In addition to these lessons, the timetabled provision includes a Wellbeing and PE programme.

There are three programmes of learning at ALFA Steiner Secondary School - The Junior Programme, The Senior Programme, and The Transition Programme.

The Junior Programme is equivalent to a combined first and second year in mainstream secondary school, there are currently 17 students in the Junior Group.

Information provided to parents identifies this as a programme designed to introduce students to the routines and protocols of Active Learning, and to discover each student's particular emerging interests, talents, and challenges. The programme is designed with reference to key adolescent archetypes and developmental needs identified in Steiner Waldorf pedagogy. Main Lesson themes at Junior Level were provided and include: Evolution of Mathematical Understanding; The Chemistry of Combustion; The Secrets of the Skeleton; Physics of Light; European Cities as Centres of Culture; The Geography of Climate and Rivers; Creative Writing.

Subjects lessons are taught for the duration of the school year. Main Lessons, a fundamental component of the Steiner-Waldorf approach, are delivered in blocks of 3-4 weeks within a 2-hour morning session. The Main Lessons allow for a deeper exploration of an identified subject matter which enables teaching and learning across a variety of 'skills, senses, and abilities'. Each day's lesson is '*viewed as an integrated whole to the wider curriculum. Purposeful connections are made across subjects and between main lesson themes*'. Subjects include, Arts and Crafts, Drama, Music, Maths, English, French, Irish, PE, and Wellbeing. The current academic years' Main Lessons for the Junior Group are:

- Chemistry of the Four Elements
- History: Reformation
- Music of the European Union
- Maths: The pyramids of Giza
- English: Wish, Wonder, Surprise
- European Culture - Cities as Centres of Culture
- Drama Production: Nellie Bly, Hot off the Press!
- Geography: Climate and Rivers
- Physics of Light
- Human Biology

The Senior Programme is the equivalent of a combined third and fourth/Transition year in mainstream secondary school, there are currently 19 students in the Senior Group, 3 of whom are overseas visitors. The Senior Programme aims for an increasingly integrated approach to the Senior Curriculum, with teachers making conscious links between Main Lessons, and the Subject lessons.

Students of the school may wish to take Leaving Certificate Examinations as external candidates when they have finished the senior cycle at ALFA secondary school. The school states that the level students acquire at ALFA in English and Maths will equip them to prepare at a future stage for Leaving Certificate Examinations at higher level in these subjects. In the delivery of Irish, ALFA identifies the level of attainment graduates have on completion of senior cycle will enable them to prepare for Ordinary Level Leaving Certificate.

Examples of Main Lesson themes at Senior Level: Clay & Ceramics; The Chemistry of Food; European Culture; Geology and Plate Tectonics. Work produced by Senior Students over the two-year programme duration is assessed for accreditation through the ten-module based qualification – *The Crossfields Diploma & Certificate in Integrated Education*. This qualification sits on the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ) at QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) level 4, which is equivalent to a pass Leaving Certificate qualification.

Students on the Senior Programme complete the *Crossfields Diploma* which provides relevant skills to support students to access higher education and employment. The Crossfields Institute Group is an

awarding organisation based in the England and it is regulated by the regulator of qualifications and examinations in England. The Crossfields Institute is an *Ofqual* (The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) regulated awarding organisation offering a range of certification services to education providers in the UK and abroad. The qualification, which is completed in ALFA across 10 modules, is for 14–16-year-olds. Subjects lessons for the Senior Group include Arts & Craft, Diploma Studies, English, French, Gaeilge, Maths, Music, Physical Education, and Wellbeing.

Main Lessons for the Senior Group 2022-2023 are:

- Ceramics
- Physics of Materials and Mechanics
- European Culture
- Chemistry of Food
- Maths: Platonic Solids
- Geography & Geology
- Language Arts and Drama
- History
- Biology: DNA, Genetics

The Transitions Programme has been developed for Learners aged 16+ years, generally participants will have completed the ALFA Senior Programme. There are six Main Lessons, one for each half term, along with termly projects.

Identified as *at the heart of the one-year programme* is a partnership with the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) and delivery of its Certificate in Transition to Higher Education. This accreditation entitles students to direct access to the TUS campuses in Thurles and Clonmel. This link provides an option for an alternative educational progression route for young people following completion of programmes at ALFA, without the necessity to complete State Examinations at Leaving Certificate level. This programme provides a mix of projects and activities including, work experience, drama and filmmaking, art and historical research, and a voluntary service overseas project in India.

In addition to the curriculum and subjects outlined, the school also offers its students the skills of a variety of artisans and specialist who tutor in practical workshops, such as woodcarving, jewellery making, painting, sculpture, ceramics, furniture-making, stained glass, bookbinding, woodcarving, wool felting, and drama.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

Opportunities for the development of language and literacy skills are integrated across multiple areas of all ALFA programmes.

English classes for the Junior and Senior groups are timetabled for three 45-minute classes per week. These classes provide teaching and learning in reading, writing, and oral language development across multiple genres and purposes. There are two designated teachers to deliver this subject matter, one at junior level and one at senior level. Skills lessons allow for targeted learning in areas such as grammar. Both the Junior and Senior Group have a Main Lesson in this area scheduled for the academic year. The Junior group's Main Lesson in English, *Wish, Wonder, Surprise* focuses on creative writing and the Senior Group will engage in a Main Lesson of *Language Arts and Drama*.

Oral language skills are further enhanced through the inclusion of drama on the curriculum at ALFA, which is a traditional element of Steiner Education. Drama productions are a key part of the academic year, at the time of the assessment the administrator outlined details of the production of *Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream* for which rehearsals were underway. The plans to perform this play were particularly welcome following the suspension of drama over the duration of Covid. In 2021 the Junior Group performed a comedy *Howl! Spooktacular*. The Senior Group performed *Playing for Time* which was written by an ALFA teacher for the students and was based on Shakespeare's haunting by characters from his works.

The Crossfield Programme module in Language and Literacy, which is delivered to the Senior Group aims to develop; independent language use for thinking, self-expression, reflection, analysis and social interaction; skills for listening, speaking, reading and writing in a variety of contexts; critical and creative capacity for creating and analysing narrative texts; lifelong interest and engagement in language and literature.

6.3. Numeracy

Opportunity for the development of numeracy skills is also integrated across areas of the three ALFA programmes. Junior Maths and Senior Maths are timetabled for three 45-minute periods per week. The school's approach to learning in the area of maths and numeracy is to use a main lesson to introduce themes and build learning activities from this foundation. Main Lessons in Maths are scheduled within the academic year, allowing for the deeper delve into the subject matter, which is a fundamental component of the Steiner model. The subject and main lessons are considered an integrated whole to support the delivery of the programme curriculum. Therefore, staff delivering Subject and Main lessons in the area of numeracy development are aware of lesson content, crossover, and integration. This supports the Steiner approach of making 'purposeful connections across subject and main lesson themes.

The Junior Group Main Lesson in Maths for the academic year 2022-23 is *Evolution of Mathematical Understanding*. The Senior Group Maths Main Lesson is *Platonic Solids*. ALFA has identified that an aim for the Senior Group is to build on an increasing integrated approach to the Senior Curriculum.

Information was provided for the course content of The Crossfield Integrated Education Diploma programme mathematics module. The aim of this module is for the study of mathematics to engage and educate students with skills in problem-solving, both creatively and logically. To train students to recognise relationships and patterns, it requires mobility in thinking, whilst equally requiring rigour and attention to process.

At the time of the assessment, we visited one of the main classrooms where the maths teacher was engaging the senior group in a Subject Lesson in Geometry. The assessors observed the lesson, spoke with the subject teacher, and interacted with the students. It was noted during the classroom observation that the teacher displayed curiosity in their own learning, as researched material was disseminated and explored as part of the teaching and learning exchange. The learning environment was stimulating and well resourced. There were a number of visually accessible learning aids, which supported the class content delivery and recognised student learning. There were multiple subject specific books and printouts, sourced by the teacher. Each student had a designated working space which was resourced with the materials they required. Students were fully engaged in the task at hand as they explored, experimented, and recorded learning relating to the subject matter.

6.4. Irish

Irish is an area that the administrator identified as a subject that he believes could benefit from more focus within the curriculum. A new designated Irish teacher started at ALFA at the beginning of the academic year. The group is mixed ability. Some students are proficient, other students would fit the criteria for an exemption in Irish (which they may seek in the future if engaging in certain academic studies).

The focus in ALFA has been on the oral use of the Irish language and on conversational ability, and the administrator was conscious that this approach may result in less emphasis on grammar and written work. All students take part in the Irish class. There are two periods timetabled per week for each group.

ALFA identify in their information for parents document that *in Irish we aim for a level that enables students to engage Ordinary Level Leaving Certificate*, if students wish to sit state examinations as external candidates following their studies at ALFA Secondary School

Children attending an Independent School should be afforded opportunity for the study of Irish, however the study of Irish is not a requirement for registration under Section 14 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. Where Irish is included in the provision, an Independent School may identify students attending that they consider would qualify for an exemption from the study of Irish. Independent Schools can make decisions in consultation with parents regarding arrangements for these children. Any arrangements made in relation to the study of Irish does not entitle students to an exemption from the study of Irish in the event of a subsequent enrolment at a Department of Education recognised school.

Parents of children attending an Independent School should be informed of and acquaint themselves with implications of not taking Irish and/or having a second language. Parents seeking information should consult with the Department of Education www.education.ie and/or the State Examinations Commission www.examinations.ie with regard to the requirement for Irish and/or an additional language..

6.5. Other areas of learning

A broad range of subjects and subject matter are delivered as part of the curriculum at ALFA Steiner School through the subject lessons and the main lessons. Subject Lessons in other areas of learning timetabled for both the Junior and Senior Groups includes Art, Craft, French, Music, and Drama. These areas of study can also be integrated and included in the Main Lessons to enhance and support learning.

There is a designated art teacher and more recently a textile teacher has joined the staff team. In the area of Art and Crafts a Main Lesson includes currach boat building. The boats once completed are used for rowing activity that is being included in the physical education aspect of the provision. The Senior Group are engaging in a clay and ceramics main lesson for the current academic year. The environment in ALFA is visually rich with multiple examples of the students' creative work on display.

At the time of the assessment, we visited the Geodesic Dome where a woodwork class was in process. Students were working on individual projects making Owl boxes using both woodwork and woodcraft skills. We visited a wool felt class where the senior group were working collaboratively to produce an impressive wall hanging with an environmental theme. The classroom approach allowed for each individual student to contribute their own skills, to learn from their fellow students as well as the skilled teaching practitioner, and to support each other by working as a team towards an end goal. The classroom which the assessors visited that morning for a maths class, was unrecognisable as the same space. The learning space had been transformed in its configuration and visual stimuli specific to the activity the students were undertaking.

Drama, as referred to in the language and literacy section of this report is an integral part of the Steiner provision. Drama productions are an annual event at junior and senior level, all students participate. Drama is scheduled as a main lesson at both Junior and Senior levels. Productions are held in the Feakle community hall and gives the school an opportunity to contribute to the local community, as well as showcasing the students' work and building on existing ties.

A part-time French teacher is employed by the school. There are two 45-minute weekly classes scheduled at junior and senior level. Reading is used to develop oral, aural, and written skills, while focusing on pronunciation and grammar. Students start with basic conversation and the aim is for them to progress onto a more advanced level depending on individual capacities. The designated French teacher also delivers a main lesson to both groups in European Culture. History and Geography studies are delivered as Main Lessons. Themes for the Junior Group for the current academic year include *The Age of Revolutions* and *The Geography of Rivers and North & South America*. The Senior group have a Main Lesson theme of *Geology and Plate Tectonics*. Similarly, Science subjects are delivered to all groups as themes within the main lesson. Two of the core teaching staff belonging to the college of teachers deliver lessons in the areas of Chemistry and Physics. A teacher belonging to the faculty is employed to teach Biology. In addition, one of the three identified guest teachers at ALFA assists in the area of Human Biology.

Steiner education considers physical movement paramount to learning. In addition to the physical education programme at ALFA, movement is integrated into the programme at the beginning of each lesson. The specific activity is selected by the lesson teacher with consideration for their own strengths and preferences and with reference to the particular student group assigned. Movement activities vary and have included Irish dancing and knife throwing. Two 45-minute PE classes are

timetabled weekly in the afternoon for each programme group. There is a designated Steiner PE teacher who is part of the Faculty of Teachers. The administrator identified a limitation of facilities and space onsite, however within constraints students engage in Basketball, Football, and Athletics, including Javelin and Shotput. He also explained that for the PE programme the focus is on student engagement, with the aim of development of cardio fitness, strength, and teamwork. All students have participated in a curragh rowing programme in curraghs that students have made as part of the programme.

The school has a well-being programme and a relationships programme. The school's relationship programmes are aimed at supporting healthy attitudes to relationships. Social, personal and health education (SPHE) is supported and integrated in an ongoing manner by means of the ethos and approach of ALFA. The programme places an emphasis on positive relationships, including restorative justice for conflict resolution. ALFA runs a mentor programme which ensures that students and staff have opportunity to identify, discuss, and resolve any issues arising. This approach extends to involving parents as required. In most cases, students are included in any discussion with parents unless it is deemed not in their best interests. SPHE themes are covered and addressed within group meetings with staff and students. Wellbeing class is scheduled each week for Junior and Senior Groups.

At the time of the last assessment Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) was not formally delivered in the school and the administrator committed to exploring the option to introduce it as a timetabled subject. RSE is now formally delivered as an element of the Wellbeing programmes, a weekly lesson for both groups. The ALFA Wellbeing programme can respond to the needs of its students and address any identified issues that may present. Following Covid, staff identified a need to address gender specific issues. It was decided to separate groups into male and female students for a period of time, following which they will bring them back together. A drugs education programme was delivered over 6 weeks in the spring term in the previous academic year.

6.6. Special educational needs

At the time of the assessment, it was identified that over a third of the students may present to ALFA with a special educational need (SEN).

There is a designated staff member responsible for Learning Support at ALFA, she works in conjunction with all other staff. The introduction of a staff member specifically assigned to Learning Support was introduced at ALFA in 2021, this is the third academic year that this support is in place. Prior to that learning support was operated on a voluntary basis. The administrator has observed the benefits of having a designated Learning Support teacher.

Students present with a variety of SEN, such as, dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The approach to addressing challenges for students with a Special Educational Need is that of a neuro-physical approach. Neuro-Developmental Education, in line with Steiner Education uses targeted physical activities to support classroom engagement and learning. For students that arrive to ALFA with a diagnosis and those with a suspected diagnosis, a period of observation is carried out over several weeks. Following this phase, an individual assessment is carried out to develop a plan and intervention to target the needs of the individual student. Resources in use were viewed during the assessment. The learning support teacher explained that she is currently working with 9 students in regulating physical dominance in an identified area, such as the eye, ear, hand, leg. Students that require support are divided into groups or individually based on needs. A timetable is devised for weekly practical activities to be implemented. Parents are kept informed of the learning support plan in place.

Regular neuro-physical work was reported to improve students' emotional receptiveness to learning and self-regulation. Learning support takes place both in the classroom and outside the classroom. The learning support regularly joins the Junior Maths class to support the teacher with student learning as required.

Learning supports for identified students are discussed at weekly staff meetings and specific exercises and approaches are shared with teachers for implementation of methodologies within the classroom to support learning and development.

The learning support staff member acts as the mentor for the SEN students that are assigned to her. This allows for best opportunity for her to keep strong links with other staff, the student and their parents regarding their learning and progress.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

Assessment and monitoring of progress is carried out on an ongoing basis. The class guardians for the senior group and the junior group monitor students' progress. Students keep a main lesson book in which they record their learning. Observation and verbal feedback in the classroom are ongoing. Written feedback is provided by teachers, with particular focus on written feedback at the end of the main lesson block. Feedback given to students on the reports for their main lessons was viewed by an assessor. It was noted that the feedback provided was supportive of learning and progress.

Students are encouraged to give their own feedback on the main lessons. Teachers discuss their feedback and individual students' progress in weekly and termly staff meetings. Staff delivering main lessons exchange information regarding student learning, strengths and challenges with teachers delivering the subject lessons. Mentors are well placed to provide an overview of programme progress to each student they are assigned to. Self-evaluation is encouraged by means of reflection on learning and work produced. Students have opportunity to discuss their evaluation and self-assessment with teachers and to provide feedback to teachers regarding their subjects.

Written reports are compiled through the year. For junior programmes graded work is not a feature of assessment, but each individual teacher provides assessment through the written report of learning and progress in their identified lesson/s. Once teacher feedback is compiled, a comprehensive written assessment of learning and progress is provided to parents by means of an end of year written report.

The work of students on the senior and transition programmes is assessed and recorded through certified programmes, as outlined within this report.

Parent teacher meetings are held in the Spring term each year. These meetings are a key opportunity for staff to provide feedback on students work and progress and for students' work to be displayed.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

An R2 Annual Update Information Form was returned by ALFA to the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service for the academic year 2022-23. Policies and documentation included.

Health and Safety Policy

Certification of Insurance

Child Safeguarding Statement

Timetable 2022-23

Lesson Plans 2022-23.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

In my opinion, the education provided to the students of ALFA Steiner Secondary School can be characterised as “*a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social*”. The reasons I have formed that opinion of the educational provision in this school are as follows:

- The effective structures and governance evidenced to support the running of ALFA Secondary Steiner School, an alternative education provision that is child centred and focused on best outcomes for each individual student.
- The leadership and commitment of Alan Dickey as School Administrator, as part of a cohesive and vibrant educational community.
- A comprehensive and well thought out Strategic Plan 2022-25, to identify programme goals and achievable routes for continued success and improvements.
- The commitment, dedication, and passion of the school staff team to deliver quality programmes that are rich in content and utilise the experience expertise, knowledge, and skills of the teaching staff.
- Effective mechanisms are in place to support long term and short-term classroom and programme planning to ensure a coordinated programme of learning is in place for students.
- A focus on evaluation of teaching and learning, with effective structures for staff to exchange information on each student’s strengths, challenges for learning, and progress across short-, medium-, and long-term programme engagement.
- The use of a mentoring programme to support each student in their educational progression through the ALFA programmes and towards their future educational progression.
- The channels of communication between ALFA Steiner Secondary School and the parents of young people attending, to support improved outcomes for students.
- Mechanisms for evaluation and feedback between staff teams and teachers and students, providing opportunities for continuous curriculum and programme development and improvement.
- The addition of a designated Learning Support coordinator, to provide targeted interventions for SEN students that require additional support for their learning and progression.
- The utilisation of available resources within a natural and beautiful setting, resulting in a learning environment that is flexible, stimulating and calming, with student work front and centre.
- The addition of certification for students in the senior groups through *The Crossfields Diploma & Certificate in Integrated Education* and the *TUS (Technological University of the Shannon) Certificate in Transition to Higher Education*, which provide viable routes to further and higher education for students that complete programmes at ALFA Steiner Secondary School.

The findings of the assessment were discussed with the participants on the date of the assessment. The participants were advised that the decision regarding registration would be made by Tusla – the Child and Family Agency: Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS).

Following the assessment, a draft report is provided to the principal, along with a Factual Accuracy and Feedback Form, which may be submitted within a specified timeframe, in response to the content of the draft report. The report, along with any information provided on the feedback form for consideration, is brought to the AEARS Registration Panel. The Registration Panel make decisions regarding registration of children in receipt of the education at the Independent School.

Section 10 Discussion of Finding of Report with Principal

The findings of the assessment were discussed with the ALFA Steiner Secondary School administrator on the conclusion of the onsite visit. It was stated that the recommendation to the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Panel – Tusla would be to register and retain the students receiving an education at the school. The final decision regarding registration will be made by the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service Tusla, Child and Family Agency.

Section 11 Outcome

Outcome of Tusla Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service Panel Regarding Requirements for Section 14 Registration of Children Attending the School

Following the Review Assessment, the Registration Panel decided that children attending ALFA Steiner Secondary School will be registered and retained on the register of children receiving an education in a place other than a recognised school as required by Section 14 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.

The registration is subject to a periodic review by the Child and Family Agency.