

**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

Drumnigh Montessori Primary School

Address

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Telephone

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email

Name of Principal/Director

Ms. Frances Moloney

Name of Assessor/s

Paula Callaghan

Date of Assessment

22nd November 2022

Date of Final Report

15th June 2023

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:30		
Closing time:	14:00		
Main breaks during the day:	10:00	to	10:15
	12:00	to	13:00

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)

Ms. Frances Moloney

1.3. Sources of evidence on which report is based

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

- Information furnished in form R2 completed by the principal
- An interview with the principal
- Classroom visits
- Observation of a sample of learning tasks completed by the pupils
- Observation of the educational materials in use.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Drumnigh Montessori Primary School is a small private primary Montessori school, which is non-denominational and co-educational. The school is committed to delivering education through Montessori methodologies and materials, to children from 3 to 12 years of age, from Junior Infants to sixth class. Younger children are catered for through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) provision. There are fifty pupils enrolled at Drumnigh School, of whom, for the purposes of this Review Assessment of the provision, twenty-three are aged 6 years and over. The school has been in existence for sixty years, and a 60th celebration, involving the whole community took place during the summer of 2022. Letters and messages from the pupils are displayed in the senior classroom.

The school is located within the grounds of Ard Scoil La Salle Secondary School in Raheny, Dublin 5. This is the school's third year at the current location, and the move is viewed by both schools as very positive. The new site provides a safe environment, with a designated playground and garden, protected by fencing. Drumnigh school has been warmly welcomed by Ard Scoil La Salle, and the primary pupils enjoy access to La Salle's large school hall for weekly physical education lessons.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing of the primary school classes consists of 2 lead teachers and a classroom assistant. An additional classroom assistant is provided to support junior infant pupils. A teacher of Irish is employed on a part time basis. The principal is a teaching principal, with responsibility for classes from 1st to 6th. All staff members have training in First Aid, all have been Garda vetted, and have been fully trained in Children First Child Safeguarding guidelines and implementation.

Formal staff meetings with minutes are held monthly during which areas including curriculum planning, school business, and medical matters are discussed. Daily informal meetings also take place, and daily exchanges with parents, when required, are facilitated. Teachers take part in three whole-school planning days each year. Teachers draw up their individual classroom plans and assessments separate to these days.

Strong links with parents are fostered. Parents can speak with a teacher or the principal after school on any day. Teachers also use this opportunity to share concerns and successes with parents. A parent rota is in place, whereby each parent in turn sources fruit and snacks for the pupils' daily breaks. The Board of Management is composed of parents. The principal meets monthly with the board to keep members informed on educational and other relevant issues.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school operates a five-day week, Monday to Friday, throughout the school year. School begins at 08.30 each morning and finishes for all pupils at 14.00. The school is in operation for one hundred and eighty-two days each year in line with requirements for ECCE and complying with Department of Education and Skills regulations for primary schools. There is a short morning break at 10.00 each morning. The main break comprises 30 minutes for lunch, and 30 minutes for play.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The school provides an environment that appropriately supports the education of its pupils. The area in which the two primary school classrooms are based provides a secure and safe environment for learning and work. One classroom is assigned to junior and senior infant pupils. A second classroom is assigned to children in first to sixth classes. Both classrooms are excellently equipped with Montessori learning materials. The materials, across all subject areas enable the provision of independent and stimulating learning experiences for the pupils. Graded equipment is displayed on very carefully designed shelving, making it fully accessible to pupils. Montessori equipment includes concrete materials for literacy, numeracy, Science and Geography. The materials are designed to lead pupils from the concrete to abstraction seamlessly, as they play and learn. The classrooms accommodate an extensive library of graded reading books, reference books, and novels and stories.

Drumnigh Montessori Primary School has its own secure playground and garden area within the Ard Scoil La Salle complex. The school avails of the sports hall at Ard Scoil La Salle for weekly physical education (PE) lessons.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

Drumnigh Montessori Primary School follows the Montessori Curriculum, implemented using Montessori materials, and using Montessori teaching and learning methodologies. A full range of Montessori materials is available across the various areas of learning. The teachers support and guide their pupils in their learning activities, using the appropriate structured concrete materials. Learning activities are matched to the pupils' interests, needs, and developmental levels. Pupils move gradually over time from the concrete to the abstract at their own pace and levels.

Books are highly valued at Drumnigh Montessori Primary School. A wide range of books is available for reading practice and research. Novels and factual books provide a rich source of material for reading for pleasure and for information.

The learning environment has been carefully created to support all the developmental and pedagogical needs of the pupils. The classrooms are equipped to enable the provision of full and stimulating learning experiences for the pupils. A full range of Montessori learning aids, graded reading books, and class libraries aid the implementation of a child-centred Montessori Curriculum. Outdoor spaces are secured so that pupils can play safely.

School facilities are supplemented with trips to the local library and other local amenities. Very close and supportive links have been forged between Drumnigh Montessori and Ard Scoil La Salle, to the mutual benefit of pupils attending both schools. For the first time ever, five pupils from the primary school will transition to the secondary school in September 2023. Visits have taken place to familiarise the primary pupils with their intended new surroundings and modus operandi.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The Montessori Curriculum, materials, and the learning environment created in the school fully supports pupils in learning to read and to write, to understand sentence structures and parts of speech, to enjoy reading for knowledge and pleasure, and to think clearly and speak with confidence.

Young pupils start off with sandpaper letters to familiarise themselves with the sounds of each letter, and to learn correct letter formation. The phonemic programme moves from initial letter sounds to word endings, middle vowel sounds, and consonant blending, and then to phonetically decoding and encoding words. As younger pupils begin the writing process, they practise correct letter formation and write words and sentences phonetically.

Reading is developed using staged reading packs. As literacy skills progress pupils are exposed to a very wide range of books, with the aim of inculcating a love of the written word. Pupils learn sentence structures and parts of speech using carefully graded materials. Spellings are learned and tested weekly. Pupils write news, which is read and discussed with the class. Pupils engage in story writing and poetry composition. Recently, pupils in the senior class studied limericks and acrostic poetry.

Linking learning to real life is fostered. Pupils have written and posted letters in the local post-box. They have written persuasive letters, for example, to encourage the school to provide something they wanted. Different writing styles are studied. Pupils notice writing forms and patterns. They write across the genres, using the different writing styles. They engage in project work, which links literacy with other areas of learning.

Pupils enjoy discussion and debate. They are involved in selecting a non-religious topic for their Christmas Show. This year they plan to stage Camelot.

6.3. Numeracy

The school follows the Montessori Curriculum, with the addition of the *Busy at Maths* series (C.J. Fallon) to guide and to provide practice and consolidation for pupils. Drumnigh Montessori School prides itself on the effectiveness of its numeracy programme. Based on Montessori methodologies, and utilising a comprehensive range of Montessori concrete materials, pupils are guided to progress seamlessly through the stages of each strand of the comprehensive numeracy syllabus through individualised, graded learning activities.

Base lines of learning are established for each pupil, and this is the starting point from which tasks can be assigned and progress can be accurately assessed. The pupils work independently, guided and facilitated by the teacher. Pupils manipulate the concrete materials, coming to a clear understanding of mathematical rules and concepts embodied in the materials. Concepts are consolidated using their textbooks. Learning progresses in very small steps, towards leaving the materials behind and working independently without supports.

Pupils study the history of number, and numerical systems of different civilisations. In the junior class all work is supported with the Montessori materials. In the senior class, the pupils learn the four mathematical operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. They are led to understand square roots, 2 and 3 D shape, measurement, circumference, pi, fractions, decimals, and data. They use the materials, and gradually work towards abstraction, having developed a good understanding of the concept.

Pupils have tables tests on each Friday. The Micra T test is used to monitor progress and to identify any gaps or difficulties in learning.

6.4. Irish

A part time teacher of Irish is employed to assist with the teaching of Irish. Learning content is guided by the Primary School Curriculum. The textbook *Abair Liom* (Folens) is used to guide learning in the junior classroom. The *Bun go Barr* series (C.J. Fallon) is used to support learning in the senior class. There is an emphasis on oral language development in the junior class, and on activity-based learning. The syllabus expands to include all of the strands of the Primary School Curriculum – Irish in the senior class. The Primary School Curriculum content and methodologies are blended with Montessori materials and methodologies to enhance learning.

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

Other areas of learning include a variety of curricular and practical learning experiences, in line with the Montessori Curriculum. Meaningful integration of subjects is integral to the Montessori philosophy, and where possible, learning is linked with the life experiences of the pupils through outings and practical tasks. Pupils learn through the use of Montessori equipment, exploration of the environment, and through individual and group projects.

PE is taught weekly by the class teachers. Pupils have access to, and are timetabled, to use the hall in Ardscoil La Salle for a weekly PE class. Lessons usually begin with a student led warm up activity. Dodge Ball is popular among pupils, as is basketball, volleyball, rounders, skipping and circuit training during these lessons. Pupils partake in a wide variety of additional sports and activities. Coaches from nearby Naomh Baróg Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) club have recently commenced coaching in the school. Pupils have access to a safe outdoor play area. The daily mile is a sociable event which increases physical activity among the pupils. An annual Sports Day takes place, and a medal is awarded to each participant.

Music, Visual Arts, and Drama are taught by the class teachers within the classroom. The arts are skilfully integrated into other learning areas, seasonal activities, and themes. The pupils partake in song singing, listening and responding to music, and using tone bars to aid composing and performing. A Christmas concert takes place annually. Effective links are forged with the local community and parental support aids and enhances the Christmas production. Pupils work with a wide range of art materials, including paint, clay, fabric and fibre, and salt dough. Pupils study selected genres such as pointillism, and then produce admirable work based on what they have learned. They also study art history. Pupils' work is displayed and celebrated in classrooms.

Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) is integrated with literacy and other areas of learning. Pupils work both individually and collaboratively to research topics and complete a variety of projects. The *Small World* series (CJ Fallon) is used to support learning. Linking learning to life experiences is central to the Montessori philosophy. To this end field trips are organised regularly with the aim of linking learning to the pupils' lives. Pupils' work, previous projects and photos of educational trips are displayed on noticeboards in the classrooms.

In History, human environments and people from other places are regularly discussed with the children, effectively linking history with Geography. Historical timelines are frequently used to help children identify and understand sequences of events, and placement of historical events and human development within in context. Map work and work relating to our natural environments is undertaken in Geography. Pupils were busily making jigsaws of maps of Ireland and Australia during classroom visits. Impressive 3-dimensional salt dough maps, complete with a key, were displayed in the senior room.

Experimentation is intrinsic to the Science programme, and experiments in progress were displayed in the classrooms. Many hands-on science experiments, which help develop the skills of observation, questioning and predicting, were undertaken during recent Science Week. Plans to dissect a fish and explore organs and life systems are in place. Outside a bug hotel had been developed. In the garden, tubs and planters are used for gardening and the study of plant life.

Drumnigh Montessori School is an inclusive school. Teachers aim to develop pupil self-confidence and self-awareness. Shy pupils do not go unnoticed. They are led towards confidence, and to quietly mix and quietly lead.

Social, emotional and moral development is embedded in the school ethos of good moral behaviour, and individual and group responsibility to contribute to each other, and to society. Pupils learn respect and acceptance through their daily interactions with each other and with the staff. A positive relationship exists between staff, the pupils and the school community. A culture of openness is encouraged. Lots of talk and discussion takes place around diversity, inclusion, courtesy, and respect for difference and recognition of commonalities. External speakers are brought in to teach aspects of growing and change. Online safety and stranger danger are also taught.

6.6. Special educational needs

The Montessori philosophy supports the education of pupils with special educational needs, and the school welcomes pupils with special educational needs or additional learning needs. Curricular content is individualised and based on the learning style of the pupil. Montessori methodologies and concrete materials are designed to allow each pupil to work at their own individual level. Where a pupil has a psychological report, the school makes every effort to take into consideration and to implement professional recommendations.

Among the current enrolment are some pupils who present with special educational needs, and an additional assistant teacher has been employed to provide extra support to the junior class group. All identified special or additional learning needs are adapted to, where possible. For example, a leaning board was provided for a pupil requiring this accommodation for reading and writing. There is a special programme in place for pupils with dyslexia. In the junior class the pupils were practising their Lámh signing. The whole school is engaging in learning the Lámh system of signing in association with language to support a pupil in the junior class who finds this system helpful in making himself understood.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

Testing is used appropriately to measure progress, and diagnostically, to identify any gaps in learning, or difficulties arising. Interventions can therefore be put in place in a timely manner. Accommodations are made for pupils with special and additional learning needs, and appropriate interventions are put in place, where possible.

The Sigma and Micra T tests are administered in every class from 1st to 6th class.

Spellings and tables are tested weekly.

Each pupil has a scrapbook, for each school year. Scrapbooks viewed during the assessment were beautifully presented. They provided a very clear record of learning and individual ability. Included were samples of daily news, sentence analysis, and story writing. Maths work samples and artwork samples were interspersed with photographs of the child using the Montessori materials, engaging in projects and going on outings. The scrapbooks provided a good record of each individual pupil, the brought the pupils' learning experiences to life for the viewer.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

Policies as requested by Tusla under the R2 information form were provided, including Child Safeguarding and Child Protection policies, Health and Safety, Fire Safety, and Garda vetting.

Staff members have been Garda vetted and have been trained in the implementation of Children First. All staff have completed the child safeguarding training. There is an appointed Designated Liaison person (DLP) and Deputy Designated Liaison Person, and notices are displayed as required.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

Pupils attending Drumnigh Montessori School are in receipt of an of education, intellectual, physical, moral, and social that can be characterised as *“a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social”* and meets requirements for Section 14 Registration for pupils attending the school.

Aspects of the provision that are successful include:

- Implementation of the Montessori Curriculum in theory and in practice is of a high standard, and pupils, as observed, were wholly involved in their learning tasks
- The comprehensive range of materials that support understanding and learning progress is used appropriately to develop pupils' understanding and competence
- Assessment practices are appropriately utilised to challenge, support, or to intervene as required
- Drumnigh Montessori Primary School prides itself on the effectiveness of its numeracy programme. Based on Montessori methodologies, and utilising a comprehensive range of Montessori concrete materials, pupils are guided to progress seamlessly through the stages of each numerical strand, developing understanding, towards abstraction
- The information provided by the principal during the interview provided a very comprehensive account of the aims and methodologies of the school, which were clearly evidenced during the assessment.
- The school is inclusive and celebrates difference. Identified special or additional learning needs are adapted to, where possible. Supports for pupils include a special programme for pupils with dyslexia, and in the junior class the pupils are learning Lámh signing in support of a pupil who requires it. Shy pupils do not go unnoticed. They are led towards confidence, and to quietly mix and quietly lead.

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 report was discussed with the principal at the conclusion of the visit on the 22nd November 2022. We discussed the procedures that would follow. I informed her that the decision with regard to continuing with registration for Drumnigh Montessori School and its pupils who are receiving an education in a place other than a recognised school would be the responsibility of the Tusla Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Panel. I told her that she would receive the report for factual verification, and in due course, the final report together with the decision of the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Panel.

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 Assessment, the Registration Panel decided that children attending Drumnigh Montessori Primary 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.

Registration is subject to a periodic review by the Child and Family Agency