

Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

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

Independent School Review Assessment Report



Name of School

Dublin Steiner School

Address

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Telephone

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Name of Principal/Director

Jayne Enright

Name of Assessor/s

Richard Coughlan, Jane Merriman

Date of Assessment

15th May 2023

Date of Final Report

29th May 2023

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	09:00		
Closing time:	14:40		
Main breaks during the day:	11:00	to	11:30
	13:00	to	13:15

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)

Jayne Enright

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
- Preliminary report 5 November 2018
- 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
- The school website.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Dublin Steiner School is a fee-paying, co-educational, school, founded in 2017. Its approach to teaching and learning draws on the Steiner approach to educating young people, based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. The school curriculum is strongly influenced by the seasons. The school endeavours to develop its pupils' intellectual, artistic, and practical skills through providing an education that is integrated and holistic.

The school grew out of a Steiner kindergarten, which was established in one room of the current school building. The parents of the children in the kindergarten wanted their children's education to continue in the Steiner tradition. A small group of the kindergarten parents began the school with a group of children in first class. At the time of the assessment, the enrolment of Dublin Steiner School is 48 pupils, 16 of whom are in junior and senior infants, called the bridge class. 38 pupils in the school are over the age of six. When the current principal took up her present role in 2019, there were 7 pupils enrolled. The school is rapidly approaching the accommodation limits of its building. However, it has hopes of addressing this by increasing its accommodation through the acquisition of an adjoining site.

The school is thriving and is part of a national network of Steiner-Waldorf schools. It has ambitions to become a Department of Education recognised school, as are some other Steiner primary schools. The school has applied to the Department of Education for recognition but considers its future to be secure even without recognition.

The school is governed by a board of trustees. The principal and the school administrator, who is also a trained teacher, are members of the board. The other board members are parents. The school has a parents' council that helps out in a range of school activities. It has a fundraising committee and a facilities and buildings committee that both include parents.

It is the school's plan that its class sizes should be capped at 20 pupils as its enrolment increases. As its class sizes gradually increase in size the school is becoming more self-supporting.

The school has policies that address aspects of its operation. It has a policy on child safeguarding. The school has appointed a designated liaison person. There is no reference in the available school data to the appointment of a deputy designated liaison person. The school has carried out a risk assessment and has listed the risks to children's safety together with the school's procedures for addressing the risks. All staff have received training in the implementation of the school's child safeguarding statement. All staff have been Garda vetted.

The school's behaviour policy promotes positive pupil behaviour. Where difficulties arise among pupils, these are dealt with through restorative questioning. This way of resolving conflict is based on a problem-solving approach.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

The school ensures in hiring its teachers that they are qualified to teach in a mainstream school. Teachers receive additional training in the philosophy of Steiner education and on the development of literacy and numeracy. They are being continually upskilled in Steiner methodologies. The school is a training site for Steiner education. All of the teachers have mainstream primary teaching qualifications.

Pupils are grouped into four classrooms. These are first class, second and third class, fourth class, and fifth and sixth class. Currently there are no pupils in fourth class. There are four teachers, including the principal. Where two classes are together, each class follows a separate programme. The school has part-time teachers for Irish, French, and music.

The college of teachers holds a staff meeting each month. During these meetings, teachers' practice is examined. Teachers also reflect on how the school's teachers present themselves in classes. There is a whole-school staff meeting of the primary and the kindergarten school each half term.

Teachers in the school have annual summer training that supports them in their work. The school participates in SWIM (Steiner Waldorf in our Midst) CPD on Steiner education.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school runs from 09:00 to 14:40 each day. It follows the national primary school calendar. It has a school year of 182 days.

There is a one-hour designated time each day, called garden time, where the pupils can play outside in the well-equipped play area, regardless of the weather. This is considered to be an important part of their education. They are suitably dressed for this.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

Dublin Steiner School has almost outgrown its accommodation, which was formerly two houses and was gifted to the school by the Quakers in 2018. It is urgently seeking new accommodation. The school's building requires a lot of maintenance. An adjacent building, which the school is seeking to obtain, is the most feasible solution. The building is an old schoolhouse with just four walls remaining that border on the school's playground. The Dublin Archdiocese is at present reviewing the future of this building.

In the classroom for the bridge class, the pupils sit on cushions on the floor and have small tables. The classroom converts easily to a play area. As in the other classrooms, each of the pupils has space for storage of their belongings. They each have a work basket. In these classes play is the pupils' schoolwork; all of their activities and learning are based on play. They are expected to play.

In the first-class classroom many teaching and learning resources and books were on display. First class, as with the other classes in the school have their core subjects in three-week long blocks. These blocks are called main lessons. They are pre-planned for the year, including their timing. They take up two hours each morning.

In the second and third class classroom a class contract was posted on the wall. Pupil work baskets were again to be seen. The pupils had the previous week walked down to Henrietta Street to see the former tenement buildings. They have also gone to visit the Irish Museum of Modern Art and other places of interest not far from the school.

During the assessment visit, pupils were having their daily garden time hour outside. The outdoor activity area is large and includes many interesting locations and structures for play. The pupils played in small groups. The ground was covered in wood chippings. There was a small vegetable garden, where some were growing plants. Just off the playground was a room that is used for woodwork and crochet.

The school staff have a shared computer drive. It is available to each teacher and contains teaching resources that have worked. Each teacher adds material to this and uses the material that is in it. This initiative started during the pandemic. It means that each staff member knows what digitally based resources are available to them.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The school's curriculum is the *Primary School Curriculum*. All of the subjects of the curriculum are taught. It uses the Steiner-Waldorf method of teaching, which gives freedom to teachers as to how subjects are taught. The curriculum is designed to be responsive to the various phases of a child's development. The core subjects may be in lesson blocks of two or more hours each day. Each block lasts between three and five weeks.

The teachers in Steiner schools all receive a similar training. This leads to similarities between Steiner schools in the way pupils are taught and how they learn. The school has a large number of resources, for example books. Class materials are frequently shared among teachers.

Pupils do not have any formal academic work until they are in first class. As their capacity for learning increases, their education builds through the years. In third class, pupils begin to have some homework.

Three pupils were to graduate from the school later in the current year. Following their completion of sixth class, they will progress to mainstream secondary schools.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

Pupils must be seven years old when coming into first class in the school. The development of their language skills is an important part of their work in the earlier classes as they learn to read and write. In their earlier years, the pupils engage with the curriculum through stories, including learning about letters and numbers. Fairytales are used as a focus for literacy development. The school has a large range of stories that help children in learning about letters and numbers.

At the same time as they are learning to read, pupils learn to write. Much time and space are allowed in first and second class to the development of their writing skills. They do cursive writing from first class. There were many examples of pupils' work on display in all of the classrooms of the school.

6.3. Numeracy

The school follows the mathematics programme of the primary school curriculum. In the early classes, pupils learn concept of number. In the fifth class visited, pupils were studying free-hand geometry.

6.4. Irish

Irish is included in the curriculum of all classes in the school. Classes have Irish lessons on three days each week. The teaching of Irish in the school incorporates song and movement.

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

All of the subjects of the primary school curriculum are taught in the school. Among the subject other than Irish, English and mathematics, are music, French, handwork, craft, science, history, geography, physical education (PE) and social, personal and health education (SPHE).

Each class has French on two days each week and music on one day each week. There is a very set curriculum in a Steiner school for music. It is taught in a manner that follows the child's development. Singing is an important part of it, especially in the earlier years. Pupils begin learning Irish and French through games and verse.

Soft and hard handcrafts are taught. SPHE is a very important part of the school's approach to educating its pupils.

Each classroom has a nature table that reflects the season and encourages the study of science.

6.6. Special educational needs

The school's approach to children with special educational needs begins during the enrolment process when the school is open and honest with parents about what it can do. The school helps pupils who need additional support. The school has interns from time to time who help here. However, it may not always be possible for the school to provide necessary additional support.

The school has an external person who evaluates the school's work each year, in particular how well it is performing at assessing its pupils. This person provides the school with recommendations for each pupil. The school has found this process to be helpful for some pupils with additional needs. The school also has other resources that help, along with the Waldorf-Steiner educational model as well. Where needed, there can be supportive interventions in the classroom.

The school has a five-year strategy that includes an aspiration to develop further its services to pupils with additional needs.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

The school has a policy of ongoing assessment in each subject and classroom. Feedback is given to pupils and their parents. The information from the assessments is used to support learning, especially with regard to literacy and numeracy.

It is the school's policy to have best practice in all aspects of its work including record keeping and the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress. The school keeps detailed records on each pupil's work and progress and there is a detailed annual handover session between teachers at the end of each year as classes change teachers. The teachers examine the records over two or more years to determine the progress that pupils are making.

The school has two parent-teacher meetings each year in the autumn and summer terms. They are detailed and take about 30 minutes for each pupil. During the meeting, all of a pupil's work is laid out and discussed with the parents. Pupils' end-of-term reports are eight pages in length.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

The education provided to the pupils of Dublin Steiner School can be characterised as “a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual, and social.”

The reasons that that this judgement has been made in respect of the educational provision in the school are the following.

- The school strives to ensure that each student has their educational and other needs met
- The school has a child safeguarding policy and has appointed a designated liaison person
- It is the school's policy to have best practice in all aspects of its work
- The school has two detailed parent-teacher meetings each year
- Where difficulties arise among pupils, these are dealt with through restorative questioning.
- The school ensures in hiring its teachers that they are qualified to teach in a mainstream school.
- The school's curriculum is *Primary School Curriculum*.
- The school staff have a shared computer drive that is available to each teacher and that enhances the resources available for teaching and learning
- The development of language skills is an important part of schoolwork in the earlier classes as pupils learn to read and write
- The school follows the mathematics programme of the primary school curriculum
- Each classroom has a nature table that reflects the season and encourages the study of science.
- The school has an external person who evaluates the performance of the school in assessing its pupils, leading to recommendations for each pupil

Recommendations

It is recommended that the school's pupil behaviour and anti-bullying policies should be included on its website. The name of the school's deputy designated liaison person should be included in school data.

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 finding of the report was discussed with Jayne Enright at the conclusion of the visit on 15th May 2023. It was stated that the recommendation would be to retain the pupils of Dublin Steiner School on the register. The final decision regarding registration will be made by the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service Tusla, Child and Family Agency.

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 Dublin Steiner 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