

Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

Assessment of Education in places other than Recognised Schools

Independent School Review Assessment Report



Name of School

Dunmore East Christian School

Address

Kilmaquague, Dunmore East, Co. Waterford, X91 VCF3.

Name of Principal/Director

Mr. Josiah Zook

Name of Assessor/s

Lisa Duffy
Jane Merriman

Date of Assessment

13th December 2023

Date of Final Report

20th June 2024

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	09:00		
Closing time:	15:00		
Main breaks during the day:	09:40	to	09:50
	12:00 13:45	to	12:25 14:10

Is school in operation for more than five years?

No

If no, please give date on which school commenced operation

01/09/2001

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

(Normally interview should take place with the principal)

Mr. Josiah Zook

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
- Information furnished in Dunmore East Christian School Handbook

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Dunmore East Christian School is a fee-paying school, which offers a Christian education to primary and secondary school pupils from the Amish/Mennonite community. Children from a variety of countries are welcomed and fully included in school life and school culture. Admission procedures are clearly laid out in the school handbook. Members of the school administration meet with parents in advance of enrolment and parents support the school's purpose to deliver an education that demonstrates the centrality of Jesus Christ in all of life and learning.

The number of pupils enrolled in the school has steadily increased since the original school was formed. Currently sixteen pupils are enrolled, with twelve pupils attending the primary section of the school, and four students enrolled in the secondary school. Students are currently divided into three class groupings. The capacity of the school is capped at twenty-three pupils.

A Board of Directors, appointed by Dunmore East Christian Fellowship, manage the school. They meet six times per academic year. The Missions Interest Committee provides funding and general oversight to the Board of Directors. Funding is available to subsidise fees for families who require financial assistance.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing in the school consists of four teachers, including a teaching principal and a full-time teacher for pupils with additional needs. As indicated on the R2 application form, all staff are vetted prior to commencing employment in the school. Formal staff meetings take place every Wednesday and strong communication between staff is a key feature of the school. Teachers engage in professional development, with most staff members attending Teachers' Week, an educational programme organised by Faith Builders, on an annual basis. Staff members have also recently undertaken first aid training.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

A copy of the school's calendar for the current academic year was provided with the application, as well as class timetables for each grouping. The school day commences at 09:00 each morning and finishes at 15:00, every day except Friday, when classes cease at 13:00. There is a ten-minute mid-morning break, a twenty-five-minute lunch break and a twenty-five-minute afternoon break. The school will be in operation for 177 days during the current academic year. School attendance is very good with little absenteeism. An attendance record is maintained in the school.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

Dunmore East Christian School strives to create an environment which values the character of each individual child, with their holistic development at the centre of the provision.

The school is situated in a rural location, in the grounds of the Dunmore East Christian Fellowship. This purpose-built facility was completed in 2002, with two classrooms added in a separate building in October 2022. The school consists of three classrooms and a learning support room. Each classroom is warm and comfortable. Attractive reading corners and well stocked libraries are evident in the classrooms. Pupils have access to a shared desktop, laptop and 3D printer. The senior classroom is equipped with a projector and a drop-down screen. Students in this room work in individual private workstations. The sanctuary and canteen area are also available for use by the staff and pupils. Rules relating to showing respect for the learning environment are clearly articulated in the school handbook.

Pupils' work, and previous projects, are displayed on noticeboards throughout the school. Students and staff have access to a kitchen and dining area, where pupils gather to eat their lunch. The sound of chirping birds that are kept in this area add to the ambience of the school. Outdoors, there is a large play area, complete with child friendly playground equipment, and picnic benches.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

As stated in the Dunmore East Christian School handbook, "The purpose of the school is to provide a Biblically sound education to assist in the spiritual, mental, moral, social and physical development of the child." The school aims to give students opportunities for self-learning and self-discovery. There is a focus on preparing students for life outside of school, teaching and utilising the practical skills that the school community values. The ultimate aim, on completion of the school cycle, is to produce followers of Jesus, who live out His teachings as the community interprets them.

At primary and Junior Certificate level, an array of American and Irish publications are utilised to offer a broad and balanced curriculum. Senior cycle pupils largely follow the Department of Education guidelines, with students afforded the opportunity to sit state exams in a nearby examination centre. This curriculum is supplemented with courses from America in music, Bible and English grammar and mechanics.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

Christian Light publications form the basis of the early reading programme, with Mennonite beliefs reflected throughout much of this curriculum. Initially, pupils begin with ten Learning to Read Light Units. After completing these, pupils progress on to language arts, which covers key areas such as phonics, grammar, punctuation, writing, spelling, and penmanship. Pupils progress through this structured curriculum as they move up through the school, developing grammatical, spelling, communication, reading and writing skills as they do so. The Institute for Excellence in Writing programme is introduced in the secondary school, focusing on teaching the stylistic techniques of writing. The study of poetry is also included in the language and literacy provision. Oral language development takes place through participation in group conversations, and through the presentation of prepared speeches on a given topic. Critical thinking is deemed to be an important skill and is developed through these conversations and discussions.

Senior secondary pupils largely follow the senior cycle curriculum, supplemented with additional material from Christian Light Education, with the aim of sitting the Leaving Certificate Examination.

6.3. Numeracy

A comprehensive maths curriculum, offering all the strands and strand units of the primary and secondary school curriculum is offered to students. Busy at Maths is used in the primary school, while Active Maths is utilised in the secondary school. Pupils with additional needs use the Math U See curriculum. Revision assignments and termly assessments, help monitor pupils progress.

6.4. Irish

Irish is not currently studied by pupils in Dunmore East Christian 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

Social Studies: In the primary school, *Living History Threads* and *Living History Weavings* are used to deliver the Social Studies curriculum. Pupils study aspects of American and world history, including Anabaptist and church history. Biographies introduce famous people from different eras. Timeline activities aid the development of chronological awareness, with several examples of these learning aids on display in the school. People and places from around the world are introduced, and the development of mapping skills is included in the curriculum. At secondary level, junior cycle students are studying world history using the *Across the Ages* textbook as an aid. At Leaving Certificate level, pupils study the state curriculum.

Science: Pupils have the opportunity to study science and regularly partake in hands on science experiments. Pupils at primary level use the *Abeka* programme and post primary students use *Apologia General Science* up to Junior Certificate level. At the Leaving Certificate level biology, chemistry and physics are offered as electives, with pupils following the state curriculum or choosing a science elective from the Apologia curriculum.

Physical Education (PE): The aim of the PE curriculum, as stated in the school handbook, is “to develop motivation, discretion and skills in wholesome physical and mental recreation.” The development of skills through the playing of games is an important aspect of the PE curriculum. Younger children use the recreational areas for free play and directed play.

The Arts: Pupils can develop their creative skills in Dunmore East Christian School, and the learning experience is enriched through engagement with the arts. A comprehensive music programme is offered in the school. Hymn singing is an integral part of the music programme, with pupils partaking in singing at school every day. Music can be taken as an elective by senior pupils if they wish to pursue writing music. Classes for senior pupils are supplemented using *Draw Near* by Shenandoah Christian Music Camp.

The art programme aims to develop the creative skills of the students, as well as promoting an appreciation of art. In the primary school pupils partake in drawing, painting, leather work, and craft activities. Pupils have access to a 3D printer, with primary pupils recently designing and printing their own cookie cutters. Pupils in the secondary school explore the use of a variety of media, including clay, chalk, acrylics, sea glass and graphite pencils. The practical skills of woodworking and sewing are also taught and are highly valued within the wider community.

Drama is used as a methodology to help children connect with other areas of learning. A Christmas play is performed by pupils for pupils.

Social, emotional and moral development: Dunmore East Christian School is a faith-based school and pupils’ social, emotional and moral development is taught in this context. Devotions is timetabled for pupils and offers time to grow spiritually, reflect, and nurture ones’ faith and values. Bible memory, chapel, prayer, hymn singing, and Bible studies are important aspects of the religion programme in the school. Social, personal and health education (SPHE) is taught, with a particular emphasis on personal safety and staying safe. Parents are encouraged to talk to their children about issues relating to personal safety.

The school organises various social events throughout the year. Parents, and members of the wider school community, are welcome to attend annual social events, including the Back to School Bash, the Christmas Carol Service and Apple Day.

6.6. Special educational needs

Pupils with additional needs are integrated into the mainstream setting for most lessons. A full-time special needs teacher is employed in the school, offering one-on-one support to pupils who require it. An attractive and spacious resource room is available, and extra tuition, targeted at a child's individual needs, takes place in this room.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

Formal parent/teacher conferences are held once per quarter, with informal meetings facilitated as necessary. Report cards are issued once per quarter. The California achievement test (CAT) 1970 is used annually to assess reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and composition, spelling, and mathematical skills. Thinkwave, an electronic grade management system, is used by the school to store pupils' grades.

Pupils at post-primary level have the option of sitting state examinations through a partnership arrangement with a provider in Waterford.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

Policies and statements as requested by Tusla under the R2 application form were provided, including the Child Safeguarding Statement, the Safety Statement and the Fire Safety Policy. As declared on the R2 form, staff members have been as Garda vetted and have been trained in the implementation of Children First. All staff have completed training on the implementation of the Child Safeguarding Statement. The Child Safeguarding Statement, together with the names of the appointed Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLDP) are displayed in the hallway.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

In my opinion, pupils attending Dunmore East Christian School are in receipt of an education, intellectual, physical, moral, and social that meets requirements for Section 14 Registration for pupils attending the school.

Aspects of the provision that are successful include:

- The commitment of the principal and staff to delivering a Christian based education.
- The close collaborative practices between the school, staff, Board of Directors, parents and the wider community of Dunmore East Christian Fellowship.
- The learning environment, which consists of comfortable and bright classrooms, and an outdoor play area.
- The curriculum is supplemented as deemed necessary and opportunities are provided for non-academic learning experiences.
- Staff encourage and support pupils on their educational journey.
- The positive relationship with parents and the regular reporting on their child's progress.
- The availability of consistent one on one support for pupils with additional needs.

Assessor Recommendation

In my opinion, consideration should be given to the addition of a gate at the entrance to the grounds in order to secure the site.

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 preliminary 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 as outlined in this assessment report were discussed with the principal, Mr Josiah Zook, at the conclusion of the visit on the 13th December 2023. We discussed the procedures that would follow. It was stated that the recommendation would be to register and retain on the register the pupils of Dunmore East Christian 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 Assessment, the Registration Panel decided that children attending Dunmore East Christian 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