

**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

Georgian Montessori Primary School

Address

40 Belvedere Place, Dublin 1, DO1 V4F5.

Telephone

01 5674988

Name of Principal/Director

Suzie O Neill

Name of Assessor/s

Lisa Duffy
Jane Merriman

Date of Assessment

19th December 2023

Date of Final Report

20th June 2024

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	09:30		
Closing time:	03:00		
Main breaks during the day:	11:30	to	12:00 (lunch)
	12:00	to	12:45 (outdoor time)

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)

Suzie O Neill

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.
- Documents submitted alongside the R2.
- 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 provided on the school website www.thegeorgianmontessori.com.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

The Georgian Montessori Primary School is a fee-paying school which was established in 2017 through the cooperation of teachers and parents, with the aim of replacing the former Montessori Education Centre, which closed in the same year. It is housed in a Georgian building which is rented by the school. The school caters for pupils from junior infants to sixth class and implements the Primary School curriculum using Montessori methods and materials. Younger children are catered for through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) provision. The school offers a Social Diversity Compassionate Programme, to ensure that children of diverse social backgrounds can benefit from a Montessori education. Decisions relating to this programme are determined by the Board of Management and are subject to the school's financial review, on an annual basis.

For the purposes of this review assessment there are 27 pupils, aged 6 years and over, enrolled at The Georgian Montessori Primary School. The capacity of the school is capped at 50. The school is fully inclusive, welcoming pupils of all nationalities and denominations. Links have been established with The Church of St Francis Xavier on Gardiner Street and sacramental preparation is provided for pupils if parents so desire.

The school receives the active support of its parent body. It is set up as a non-profit company, limited by guarantee, and run by parents. Parents are involved in policy making, regularly attend school events and support the school by assisting with fundraising, maintenance or administrative duties, if they have the skillset to do so.

The Board of Management consisting of a chairperson, three directors and three parents' representatives, govern the school. Formal meetings take place monthly. Parents are invited to attend an annual general meeting, where plans for the following academic year are discussed and Board of Management members are elected.

The school prides itself on the caring, homely and family like atmosphere which it offers to pupils.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing at the school consists of a principal, Suzie O'Neill, and five class teachers. Two staff members oversee pupils aged 3-6 and daycare. Three teachers oversee children from age 6 upwards, with an additional teacher assisting with this age group, if so required. Jenny Boden is employed on a part time basis to teach Irish, and to function as a substitute teacher when necessary. In line with the Montessori philosophy, where possible, a three-year cycle operates regarding class allocation. The staff also have the support of a part-time secretary.

Extra-curricular activities, including athletics, speech and drama, swimming, music, and French are taught by external staff.

Formal staff meetings are held regularly, and supportive one to one supervision meetings take place between the principal and staff members approximately once per month. Informal meetings take place on a regular basis.

Ongoing professional development is key to growth and development at The Georgian Montessori Primary School, with every teacher attending courses run by a Montessori consultant, and tailored to the school's unique context, several times per year. Webinars, which are deemed relevant, are also undertaken by the staff.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school opens its doors to receive children for daycare from 08:00. Pupils not attending daycare, are welcomed from 09:00. Classes begin at 09:30 and cease at 14:30 for pupils in the 6-9 age grouping and 15:00 for pupils in the 9-12 age grouping. Pupils receive a lunch break and garden time. There is an option for children to attend after school care until 18:00 every day.

The school academic year is similar to the mainstream academic year. Timetables for each class were submitted with the application. Attendance levels are described as excellent, and a record is kept of all absences.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The school is housed in a Georgian building, close to Dublin city centre. The learning environment is welcoming and has been carefully created to support the developmental and educational needs of the pupils. There are three primary school classrooms and two ECCE classrooms, as well as a dining area which is used for pupils who attend daycare. Classrooms are bright, airy and well equipped with a wide range of educational resources. Free flow between learning areas is encouraged within the class groupings. The learning environment has been carefully designed to create a sense of order and to enable teachers to support and guide pupils in their learning activities, using the appropriate structured concrete materials. Montessori materials are stored in a specific place, with each classroom having a designated numeracy, literacy and culture area.

A library area is created in each classroom where children are encouraged to sit and read either on their own or as part of a group. Children are taught to respect the Montessori material and learning environment, taking ownership of chores within their class. Examples of pupils' work is on display in the classroom and in the hallways.

The outdoor space is secure, and pupils can play safely on the artificial grass area at the back of the school. Outdoor equipment is separated by age grouping and stored in suitable outdoor containers. Pupils also have access to the play facilities of nearby Mountjoy Square and these are used regularly for outdoor physical activity. All activities are carried out following Montessori principals where children are encouraged to use the natural environment, with the outdoor environment utilised as a natural extension of the classroom.

Students are grouped in three-year age groupings. The prepared environment supports the child's freedom to choose an activity and freedom to move between learning areas. Resources and activities are designed to facilitate the child in progressing from the concrete to the abstract. Children manipulate concrete materials, until they are confident to work with the concept in an abstract manner.

The school operates a low pupil teacher ratio and there are currently 27 pupils, aged 6 and over, enrolled in the school.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The teachers at The Georgian Montessori Primary School cover the Primary School curriculum. Educational activities are implemented using the Montessori approach and active learning methodologies. Interconnected and interrelated activities are planned, as is integral to the Montessori philosophy, with each pupil learning at his or her own pace. Progress is guided by the pupil's readiness to acquire a skill before moving on to another skill. There is a strong emphasis on the development of confidence and independence through practical life skills. Classes correspond to three-year mixed-age groupings, with teachers supporting and guiding the pupils within these groupings. A range of Montessori resources, as well as teacher designed materials, is readily available for pupil use. Pupils gradually progress over time from using concrete materials to abstract representation. A laptop is available for pupil use.

The curriculum aims to develop in children the qualities of self-confidence, self-direction, self-discipline and persistence. Pupils learn to interact with others with courtesy and to take responsibility for the order of the environment and for their own learning. A range of concrete materials, textbooks and class libraries support the implementation of the curriculum. Educational activities are supplemented with trips to the Hugh Lane Art Gallery, Phibsborough Library and Fighting Words. Effective links have been forged within the local community. The school supports nearby Hugh's House, by organising fundraising events. In addition to this, they were also able to support a family, by offering a school place to a child who found herself living there for an extended period.

Annual events, such as the Christmas performance, Parents' Open Day or Montessori evenings, are supported by the wider school community.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

Language and literacy development is integrated throughout all areas of learning. Initially children are introduced to the basic skills that underpin writing and reading. Sandpaper letters and the moveable alphabet are used to familiarise pupils with the sounds of each letter, and to learn correct letter formation. Later, pupils partake in a variety of activities that lead them to fluent reading and more advanced comprehension skills. Teachers aim to develop a love of books and a love for reading, with pupils recently partaking in a read-a-long fundraising event. Fun events, such as a Roald Dahl dress up day also promote a positive attitude towards reading. Each classroom has its own class library and important links have also been established with Phibsborough Library.

Grammatical skills are developed using concrete materials, as children become familiar with the technical terms for labelling the parts of language.

Oral language skills are developed through participation in speech and drama classes and examinations, public speaking and debating activities and through the presentation of personal projects.

Pupils write across the genres, using a variety of writing styles. They engage in creative writing, poetry composition, book reviews and recount writing. The writing provision is enhanced through participation in the Fighting Words workshops. Spellings are learned and evaluated using quizzes. Pupils also participate in Spelling Bee competitions. The textbooks *Word Wise* and *Spellbound* are used to support the development of core skills in literacy.

6.3. Numeracy

The school follows the Primary School Curriculum, using the series *Maths Matters* as a guide, and to provide practice and consolidation for pupils. Pupils are initially exposed to mathematical concepts through the manipulation of concrete materials, gradually progressing towards working independently using abstract representation without supports. Initially, pupils gain a strong understanding of numbers 1 to 10 through the use of Montessori materials such as spindle boxes and sandpaper numbers. In accordance with Montessori principles the school believes that each child's mind is mathematical and based on the order of perceptual awareness found in the development of the senses. The pupils work both independently and collaboratively, guided and facilitated by the teacher. Learning outcomes are assessed through quizzes.

6.4. Irish

Pupils engage in Irish language activities daily, with a specialist teacher of Irish employed three days per week. Learning content is guided by the Primary School Curriculum, with the textbook *Bun go Barr* used as a support for the development of Irish language skills. Montessori materials are also utilised to support pupils in their learning. There is an emphasis on the development of Comhrá, or oral language skills, during Friday's Irish lesson. Pupils partake in Seachtain na Gaeilge activities.

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. Pupils learn through the use of Montessori equipment, exploration of the prepared environment, and through both individual and collaborative group projects.

Culture: The culture curriculum incorporates a wide range of subjects. Music, visual arts, speech and drama and social, personal and health education (SPHE) are taught in the school. A specialised teacher, who is Montessori trained, facilitates music classes. Pupils learn music theory using the Kodaly music method and learn how to play the recorder. Advanced pupils have the opportunity to learn the flute. Pupils also partake in song singing and performing, including an annual Christmas performance, which is attended by parents.

Pupils work with a variety of art materials, including clay. Seasonal art activities are included in the provision. Pupils study art appreciation, and visits to nearby art galleries, including the Hugh Lane Gallery, enhance the provision. Examples of pupils' artwork are attractively displayed in the classrooms and hallways.

Speech and Drama classes are taught by a specialist teacher, and pupils are afforded the opportunity to undertake graded speech and drama examinations annually.

Golden rules, which are developed by the class, are on display in the classrooms. These rules are discussed and referred to regularly. Pupil input is valued and is deemed an essential component when these rules are formulated or reviewed. Pupils' unique positive traits are displayed in the classroom, reminding pupils of the good within us all. The Stay Safe programme, as well as health education, is taught in the school. Pupils learn about caring for their body, health and nutrition, and systems of the body. Whenever possible, linking learning to real life is endorsed.

Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE), which includes geography, history and scientific activities, are interrelated and begin with exposing the children to the 'big' picture. The use of timelines helps provide a chronological framework that assists pupils in ordering information learned in these areas of study. Through exposure to this curriculum, pupils learn how all living and non-living things are interconnected. Examples of project work based on the study of fish and birds were viewed during the assessment.

Physical Education (PE): Formal PE classes are timetabled weekly for all pupils. Students partake in athletics activities with a specialised teacher. They also avail of swimming lessons in nearby Belvedere College. Pupils have daily garden time, which provides opportunities for physical activity, utilising equipment suitable for the various stages of development of the child.

French: French is taught by a specialist teacher once per week.

6.6. Special educational needs

The principles of Montessori education support the education of pupils with additional needs and The Georgian Montessori Primary School welcomes pupils of all abilities. Due to the low pupil teacher ratio in the school, pupils receive individualised instruction and guidance. Pupils are free to choose their own work and can progress through the curriculum free from the pressures and anxieties which may be experienced in more rigid educational settings. Teacher plans are working documents and are adapted to meet the needs of the child. Daily routines, in a calm, structured learning environment, together with a hands-on approach to learning, ensures that all pupils can successfully access the curriculum at their own level. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is drawn up, if teachers deem it to be beneficial in meeting a child's needs. Montessori education recognises that each child learns differently and at their own pace. It respects each child's unique learning path.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

Careful observation is key to assessing each child's individual progress. Teachers keep a daily diary, noting each child's progress and needs. Charts, noting the children's engagement with materials, are kept for each child. Parent-teacher meetings are held each year, with follow up meetings facilitated as deemed necessary. Pupils from third class upwards engage in spelling, tables and poetry quizzes to assess and consolidate learning. Pupils partake in graded Speech and Drama examinations annually.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

Policies as requested by Tusla under the R2 application form were provided, including the Child Safeguarding Statement, Health and Safety Statement, Fire Safety Policy and Garda Vetting Policy. All 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 (DDL), with notices prominently displayed as required.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

Pupils attending The Georgian Montessori Primary School are in receipt of a standard of 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 leadership skills of the principal.
- The close collaborative practices between the principal, staff, Board of Management and parents.
- The learning environment, which consists of well-equipped and ordered classrooms and a secure outdoor play area.
- The effective links which have been established within the community.
- The caring and family like atmosphere which prevails in The Georgian Montessori Primary School.
- The Montessori curriculum offers all pupils the opportunity to work at their own level.
- The enthusiasm of the principal and staff for the Montessori curriculum and its methodologies.
- The information provided by the principal during the interview supplied a very comprehensive account of the school and the curriculum.

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 19th December 2023. It was stated that the recommendation would be to register the pupils of The Georgian Montessori Primary 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

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 The Georgian 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