

**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	Hedley Park Montessori School
Address	67 Merrion Square South, Dublin 2
Telephone	01 6612388
Name of Principal/Director	Ms. Ashley Scanlon
Name of Assessor/s	Lisa Duffy Jane Merriman
Date of Assessment	21 st May 2024
Date of Final Report	28 th February 2025

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	4
Section 4	Time Devoted to Education	4
Section 5	The Learning Environment.....	5
Section 6	The Educational Activities	5
6.1.	General information	5
6.2.	Language and literacy skills	6
6.3.	Numeracy	6
6.4.	Irish	7
6.5.	Other areas of learning	7
6.6.	Special educational needs	8
Section 7	Assessment and Record Keeping	8
Section 8	Other Relevant Information.....	9
Section 9	Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations	9
Section 10	Discussion of Finding of Report with Principal	10
Section 11	Outcome.....	10

Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	09:00		
Closing time:	15:30		
Main breaks during the day:	10:30	to	11:00
	12:15	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. Ashley Scanlon

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 provided on the school website www.hedleyparkmontessorischool.com

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Hedley Park Montessori School is a private, co-educational, multi denominational school located in the heart of Georgian Dublin. The school consists of a nursery/preschool, and a preparatory school, catering for children from two and a half years old up to twelve years of age. The preparatory school implements the *Primary School Curriculum* using Montessori methods and materials, educating the pupils in a structured and stimulating environment. For the purposes of registration, there are 31 pupils, age 6 and over enrolled in the school at the time of the assessment. Enrolment levels are stable, and the capacity of the school is capped at 44. The low pupil teacher ratio ensures that all children receive an education tailored to their own individual needs.

The school is owned and managed by Ms Ashley Scanlon, and there is no Board of Management in place in the school. For the purposes of governance and reporting, consideration should be given to the establishment of a formal Board of Management.

The school prides itself on the family like atmosphere which is cultivated within the school. The parent body are very involved in school life and parents fully support their children in all areas of their education. Throughout the year, events and social occasions are organised for the wider school community. Teachers maintain regular contact with the parent body via WhatsApp.

The school makes use of the many amenities, including parks, galleries and museums which are right on its doorstep. Facilities from the wider community, including Herbert Park Tennis Courts and the sporting facilities at SportsCo, are also used to enhance the provision.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing at the school consists of a teaching principal, Ms Ashley Scanlon, and six other fully qualified teachers. The staff also have the support of a part-time secretary. It is clear from the high rate of staff retention that teachers are fully invested in the school and its pupils. They work collaboratively and partake in informal meetings daily. Formal meetings are held at the beginning of the academic year and at the end of each term. A weekly staff meeting also takes place between the principal and vice principal. Staff partake in regular ongoing professional development.

Specialist teachers teach Mandarin, French, drama, karate, sport, ballet, chess, robotics, tennis, yoga and mindfulness. The school also employs a teacher on a part time basis to teach Irish.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school opens its doors to receive children from 08:00, with Montessori time commencing from 09:00. The school day ends at 15:30 for those children not attending after school care. Pupils receive a 30-minute mid-morning break and a 45-minute lunch break. After school care is offered at the school until 17:45 every day. The school is in operation for 181 days per academic year. Outside of this, the school also offers an optional six-week summer programme to pupils who attend the school. Attendance levels are described as excellent, and a record is kept of all absences.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The school is housed in the basement of a Georgian house, on Merrion Square in Dublin, with appropriate signage indicating the presence of the school. The school consists of two primary school classrooms along with a nursery/preschool room. Classrooms are attractive, spacious and well maintained, with examples of pupils' work on display within these rooms. Each classroom is well stocked with a wide range of Montessori materials, appropriate to the stage of development of the children, and these resources are added to annually. Each classroom is equipped with an interactive whiteboard, and pupils have access to iPads and laptops, which are used for supervised and monitored research. The school library, as well as individual classroom libraries, are well stocked. The outdoor space is small and consists of a roof terrace, and an enclosed outdoor area at the entrance to the school. A giant outdoor chessboard, mud kitchen and outdoor seating space are available for pupil use. The entrance to the school is attractively laid out and houses a scooter parking area and a buggy cubby. The facilities of nearby Merrion Square Park are used daily.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

Throughout the school the Montessori method of education is used and adapted, to deliver the *Primary School Curriculum* and to help each child reach their full potential. The provision is supported by the use of Montessori materials, which allow children to engage and experiment with advanced concepts from an early age. Textbooks and class libraries also support the implementation of the curriculum. Integrated learning, guided by the students' interest, is planned for, with students studying a topic in depth over several weeks. Each pupil learns at their own pace and progress is guided by the pupil's readiness to acquire a skill before moving on to another skill. Pupils manipulate concrete materials, until they are confident that they can work with the concept in an abstract manner.

There are two class groupings within the school: junior infants to first class and first class to sixth class, with two co-teachers supporting and guiding the pupils within these groupings. Educational activities are supplemented with trips to a variety of places that support the educational development of the children. Homework is assigned with due consideration to the child's ability and needs.

Hedley Park Montessori School embraces a holistic approach to learning. As well as pursuing high academic standards, pupils learn important leadership and social skills, as each child experiences opportunities to work both independently and collaboratively with their peers. There is flexibility of movement within the mixed age classrooms, with younger children learning through their interactions with the older children, and older children benefitting from mentoring their younger peers. Pupils are given freedom within the class, once a minimum requirement has been met, to pursue their interests and individual learning style and pace are respected and trusted. This personalised approach to learning facilitates the development of the skills necessary for self-directed learning.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

Language and literacy development is integrated throughout all areas of learning and considerable emphasis is placed on the development of reading skills in Hedley Park Montessori School. Teachers aim to develop a love of books and a love for reading in the children, with pupils reading a diverse mix of authors and genres. The content of the language and literacy programme is guided by the strands and strand units of the *Primary School Curriculum*. The learning environment is rich in print. As well as a separate school library, each room has its own well stocked classroom library. The language and literacy provision is enhanced through participation in literature festival events and World Book Day events.

Oral language skills are developed through participation in class activities and through the presentation of personal projects. Pupils write across the genres, with examples of various writing genres viewed during the assessment. A Writing Week takes place regularly throughout the year and helps further develop writing skills, as well as fostering a love of writing in the pupils. The *Starlight* reading scheme is used to support learning in the junior room and *Reading Zone* is used in the senior room. The *Spellbound* series is used to help develop spelling skills, with weekly spelling tests taking place from first class upwards. Grammar skills are developed using Montessori materials and classroom textbooks.

6.3. Numeracy

Pupils are initially exposed to mathematical concepts through the manipulation of concrete materials, gradually progressing towards working independently using abstract representation without supports. An impressive array of concrete equipment, which encourages hands on manipulation and experimentation, is available for pupil use. Textbooks such as *Master Your Maths*, *Figure It Out* and *Cracking Maths* are used to reinforce and consolidate learning. Pupils also regularly engage in problem solving, oral maths activities and weekly numeracy tests. Chess classes are taught weekly by Ireland's only chess grandmaster.

6.4. Irish

A specialist teacher of Irish is 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. The provision is enhanced through participation in Seachtain na Gaeilge events.

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 and balanced range of learning activities are on offer in Hedley Park Montessori School and children are encouraged to participate in a wide variety of learning areas.

French: French is taught to all pupils once per week by a specialist teacher from Alliance Francaise, with reading, writing and oral language skills developed in a sequential and child friendly manner.

Information Technology (IT): The supervised and monitored use of IT is integrated with all other areas of learning, and pupils have access to laptops and iPads. Robotics classes, taught by an external teacher from the STEAM Academy, have recently been introduced in the school.

Mandarin: Weekly Mandarin lessons are offered as an optional extra during the school day. The whole school celebrates the Chinese New Year annually by partaking in a day of Chinese culture.

Culture: The culture curriculum incorporates a wide range of subjects and planning for this learning area is influenced by the pupils' chosen areas of interest. Weekly drama classes are facilitated by a specialist teacher and all pupils partake in the annual school musical, which is attended by the wider school community. In visual arts, pupils work with a variety of art materials. Several examples of Viking inspired art were viewed during the assessment. Art appreciation, and visits to nearby art galleries, including the National Gallery of Ireland, support and enhance the provision. Pupils engage in song singing or listening to music while working or at break time.

All students are given the opportunity to work as historians, geographers and scientists, partaking in hands on activities, workshops and educational trips. Relevant skills are developed through exploration and investigation of the world we live in, teaching children about the interconnectedness of all life on earth. Exhibitions afford pupils the opportunity to showcase their work.

Values and respect are constantly modelled and reinforced in the school, and pupil input is valued when formulating rules around what appropriate behaviour looks like. Frequent discussions around valued traits and behaviours ensure that everyone feels respected. Senior pupils partake in leadership classes prior to moving on to secondary school. Online safety is taught in the school.

Physical Education (PE): The pupils at Hedley Park Montessori School partake in a wide variety of activities which promote an active lifestyle. The school has access to a nearby all weather sports facility, and this is used to offer a weekly sports programme to pupils. Weekly karate, ballet and yoga and mindfulness classes are taught by external teachers. Pupils enjoy the benefits of tennis lessons during the summer term. An annual Sports Day takes place with children, parents, teachers and family members joining in with the activities.

As well as a structured PE programme, all the children enjoy daily visits to nearby Merion Square Park, where they are encouraged to play together and engage in outdoor physical activity.

6.6. Special educational needs

The principles of Montessori education support the education of pupils with additional needs and all children are supported to reach their full potential within the school environment. Pupils have the freedom, within the structured school environment, to choose their own work, and progress through the curriculum at a pace which is suited to their individual needs and ability. If a child requires the support of a special needs assistant, this is funded privately by the child's parent. The Montessori approach, combined with the low pupil teacher ratio in Hedley Park Montessori School, ensures that all children are well supported on their educational journey.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

Careful observation is key to assessing each child's individual progress, with teachers informally assessing pupil progress on a daily basis. Spelling and maths tests are routinely undertaken. The *Drumcondra* curriculum-based standardised assessments in reading, spelling and mathematics are administered in second, fourth and sixth class. All children maintain a learning journal.

Parents are kept well informed of their child's progress. Parent/ teacher meetings take place annually and a written progress report is provided for the parents twice in the academic year. The school has an open-door policy, and parents are welcome to make an appointment to discuss any concerns which they may have.

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 and Fire Safety Policy. As indicated on the R2 form, all staff members have been Garda vetted and have received training in Children First guidelines and in the implementation of the Child Safeguarding Statement. There is an appointed Designated Liaison person (DLP) and Deputy Liaison Person (DDL), with notices on display in the entrance hallway.

Section 9 Evaluation Of the Education Provision and Recommendations

In my opinion, pupils attending Hedley Park Montessori 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 Montessori methodologies used in the school offers all pupils an education tailored to their own individual needs.
- The provision covers all subjects in the *Primary School Curriculum*.
- The positive relationship that is cultivated between the home and the school.
- The information provided by the principal during the review assessment.
- The commitment of the principal and staff to providing a broad and balanced education for their pupils.
- Students are encouraged to become increasingly independent learners, engaging in self-directed learning.
- The secure, attractive and well-equipped learning environment.

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 as outlined in this report were discussed with the principal, Ms Ashley Scanlon, at the conclusion of the visit on the 21st May 2024. It was stated that the recommendation would be to register the pupils of Hedley Park Montessori 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 Hedley Park Montessori 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