

**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

John Scottus Primary at Old Conna

Address

Old Conna, Ferndale Road, Rathmichael,
Co. Dublin, A98 FN12.

Telephone

353 (1)6680828

Name of Principal/Director

Dr. Orla Kelly

Name of Assessor/s

Lisa Duffy
Jane Merriman

Date of Assessment

13th November 2024

Date of Final Report

28th February 2025

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:00		
Closing time:	14:30 (13:30 for younger pupils)		
Main breaks during the day:	09:50	to	10:30
	12:00	to	13:00

Is school in operation for more than five years?

No

If no, please give date on which school commenced operation

05/09/2019

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

(Normally interview should take place with the principal)

Dr. Orla Kelly

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.
- Review of the school's website www.johnscottus.ie/old-conna-primary/
- Relevant school documentation as referenced in the report and including:
 - Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment
 - Health and Safety Statement
 - Fire Safety Policy

Section 2 General Information and School Context

John Scottus Primary School is an independent, co-educational, fee-paying school, located near the seaside town of Bray. It shares a campus and facilities with John Scottus secondary school. The school has expanded from one to three class groupings since it opened its doors in 2019, and currently has an enrolment of forty-one pupils. For the purpose of this assessment, thirty-six pupils aged six and over are enrolled in the school. The school serves children from a diverse range of backgrounds, with information about the school mainly spread via word of mouth. The school has currently engaged the services of a marketing advisor, to conduct a digital audit of the school, and to help make school information more accessible to prospective families.

The aims and ethos of John Scottus education are to help pupils to flourish academically, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. The school has deep spirituality at the centre of every aspect of school life and is unique in that its ethos is based on the John Scottus philosophical principles. These principles influence all aspects of school life. The virtues of kindness, courtesy, confidence, perseverance, gratitude and fearlessness are explicitly taught and explored through story, discussion, games, art and craft. The staff value building and maintaining strong relationships and connections with the pupils. This is constantly promoted, especially during morning greetings and shared meals at break time.

The school operates under the patronage of the John Scottus Educational Trust. The Board of Management, consisting of a chairperson, trustee nominee, principal, teacher nominee, community nominee, treasurer, and two parents' nominees, meet monthly. Currently there is no fixed term for membership of the Board of Management.

Parents have an important role to play at John Scottus Primary Old Conna. Education is viewed as a collaborative process between parents and the school. Parents are invited to the school to actively participate and engage in the school community, supporting their child's education in the process. Class representatives serve as a vital link between home and school.

Class sizes are capped at 22 pupils. The school has a target of increasing the enrolment to 60 pupils. A five-year development plan is currently being developed for the school.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing at the school consists of a teaching principal and two class teachers. The principal teaches the senior room four days per week and takes a principal release day to work on the administrative side of her job one day per week. The senior class is taught by the school's regular substitute teacher on this day, under the guidance of the principal. Sanskrit is taught for two periods each week. Physical Education (PE) is taught by external teachers. The Catering Assistant, who has a Montessori qualification, assists with yard duty, as well as carrying out her catering role. A part time cleaner is also employed in the school. It is hoped that the school will be in a position to hire a school secretary in the future.

Staff meetings take place every Tuesday morning before school. All staff are invited to attend, but meetings are primarily attended by class teachers. Every second week, the staff meeting takes the format of a philosophy meeting. The principal, or an external speaker, facilitate staff development and training.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school opens its doors to receive pupils at 08:00 daily. Pupils are supervised in their classrooms while they enjoy free time with their peers. The school day officially begins at 08:20 with assembly. School finishes at 13:30 for younger children, and at 14:30 for children in the middle and senior room. An optional after school service is available from 14:30 until 15:30. Pupils receive a forty-minute morning break, and a one-hour lunch break each day. The school is in operation for 171 days during the academic year 2024/ 2025 and attendance is generally very good. A copy of the school's calendar for the current school year, and class timetables were provided with the R2 application.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The John Scottus campus is located in a rural and scenic location near the town of Bray. The primary school is located adjacent to the secondary school, in a separate wooden building. Students have access to a large outdoor space, consisting of fourteen acres of forest, green fields and grasslands, playing pitches, an Astro pitch, a playground area and outdoor picnic benches. Pupils are taught in mixed class groupings. Currently, there are three class groupings, with one classroom assigned to junior pupils, a second classroom assigned to first, second and third class pupils and the final classroom is assigned to fourth, fifth and sixth class pupils. The school library is located in the secondary school building.

The classrooms are filled with light and each classroom has direct access to the outdoor areas, which are used judiciously to play an important role in the pupils' education. It is believed at John Scottus Primary School that natural settings help focus children and enhance learning and that the multi-sensory experience outdoors helps children to retain knowledge more effectively. There is minimal exposure to technology in the learning environment. Vegetarian food is provided for all pupils.

Staff aim to create a calm learning environment, as a calm and focused mind is deemed to be important for helping a child to unlock their inherent potential. As stated by the principal on www.johnscottus.ie, *we strive to create a supportive and inclusive school environment where every child feels valued and happy.*

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The staff at John Scottus Primary School aim to nurture the whole child, mind, body, and spirit, in an environment which strives to be free from pressure and places the well-being of the child at the centre of all activities. Mindfulness activities and meditation are used daily to encourage pupils to pause, reflect and reset during transitions between activities. As stated on the school website www.johnscottus.ie *stillness, attention, enquiry and unity* are at the heart of John Scottus education. Children learn to harness the power of attention and to connect with the present moment. They are encouraged to 'let their light shine', to always do their best. Children are supported in discovering and connecting with their true self, their inner light.

Pupils join in with daily chanting of universal Sanskrit prayers. They are given daily opportunity to spend time playing in the natural outdoor environment. The virtues are explicitly experienced and taught from a young age. Children are encouraged to '*meet the need*'. Fostering connections and building positive relationships are central to the John Scottus philosophy of education. The school follows the *Primary School Curriculum* but offers additional lessons in Sanskrit, mindfulness and philosophy. Middle and senior room pupils gather together for assemblies on Monday and Friday. School policies are available for viewing on the school's website www.johnscottus.ie.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The *Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS)* programme, combined with the *Let's Talk Literacy* series, are implemented in the school to support the provision for the development of language and literacy skills. Using these programmes children acquire phonics skills, are exposed to a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts and learn comprehension strategies. The study of poetry is included in the provision. Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) and paired reading are used as strategies to promote reading in the school. Writing skills are developed as children progress through the school. Pupils learn to write across the genres, and to express themselves using a variety of writing styles. The development of grammatical and spelling skills is given due regard. Cursive writing is introduced in 3rd class.

Oral language skills are developed through play-based activities, reading, general talk and discussion, in-class presentations and participation in drama. A *Literacy Week* takes place annually in the school.

6.3. Numeracy

The school is implementing the new *Primary School Curriculum* and is using the textbook *Operation Maths* to support and guide learning across the strands and strand units of the curriculum. The principal informed us that there is a strong emphasis on the use of concrete materials and manipulatives to teach mathematical concepts, and to help pupils reach a deeper level of understanding. In line with the new *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* pupils are given opportunities to express their mathematical ideas, share their thinking and logic, listen to others and engage in lots of

maths talk and playful learning. Regular testing, combined with teacher observation, is used to monitor and assess progress. Pupils partake in *Maths Week* activities.

6.4. Irish

Irish is taught in the junior room by the class teacher. The emphasis here is on the development of oral language skills. The middle and senior classes are taught by the principal. Whenever practicable she enhances Irish classes by using the outdoor learning environment. Oral language, reading and writing skills are developed using the textbook *Bua na Cainte*. The software to support this series is also utilised on the interactive whiteboard (IWB) in middle and senior classes. Pupils partake in *Seachtain na Gaeilge* events which are organised in the 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

A strong emphasis is placed on pupil well-being, spirituality, and exploration and practise of the virtues of kindness, courtesy, confidence, perseverance, fearlessness and gratitude. Pupils practice pausing to reflect, and mindfulness, to help manage transitions, and to assist in developing the skill of full attention. Philosophy classes explore the concepts of truth, courage, justice, love and a sense of ourselves. Aspects of the *Stay Safe* programme, as well as the *Relationships and Sexuality* programme, are taught in the school. A review of the social, personal and health education provision took place recently, identifying key areas of the curriculum which required more attention. Due regard has now been given to these identified areas.

History, geography and science are explored using the *Explore with Me* and *Window on the World* series of textbooks. Pupils work both individually and collaboratively to research topics and complete a variety of projects. Projects on the topic of *the 1916 Rising* were observed during the assessment. Experimentation is intrinsic to the science programme, and experiments in progress were viewed during the assessment. Whenever possible, learning is connected to the outdoors and pupils regularly partake in activities relating to environmental awareness and care in the impressive school grounds. Educational trips which link learning to the pupils' lives, are also used to support and enhance pupils' learning experience.

Sanskrit the foundation language of all Indo-European languages, is taught in the school. Middle and senior pupils also learn Spanish.

Music, visual arts, and drama are taught by the class teachers, who work collaboratively to plan and implement the arts curriculum. The arts are integrated into seasonal activities, as well as other areas of learning. In music, the pupils partake in song singing, listening and responding to music, and performing. www.dabbledoo.com and *Let's Talk Music* are used to support and enhance learning in this area. A Christmas gathering takes place annually, with members of the school community coming together to sing songs and carols. In visual arts, pupils work with a range of art materials. Drama is timetabled for all classes. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was recently performed by senior pupils.

The outdoor astro pitch, spacious grounds and play areas provide ample space in which children can partake in physical activity. PE lessons cover games, dance, athletics and the development of gross motor skills. An annual sports day takes place in the school.

6.6. Special educational needs

Each child's needs are considered on a case-by-case basis to determine whether the school can cater for the child and meet their individual needs. Parents are asked to supply all relevant documentation and share any information about their child's special educational needs at the enrolment stage. The school is open to prospective pupils availing of trial days to determine the suitability of the school. Currently, there is no special education teacher employed in the school. However, due to the favourable pupil teacher ratio, purposeful differentiation within the classroom and the policy of meeting each child where he or she is at, the individual needs of the children can often be met within the classroom. Student support plans, drawn up in consultation with the parents, are used if deemed necessary and beneficial to help the school support children who require additional support.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

A range of assessment methods are used including teacher observation, self-assessment and reflection, peer assessment, end of topic assessments, parental feedback and teacher-designed tasks and tests. Parent-teacher meetings are held twice per year in October and March and written reports are issued once per year in June. The school has an open-door policy, and parents are welcome to contact teachers to make an appointment to discuss their child's progress. Standardised tests in English and mathematics were recently introduced into the school and were administered to pupils from senior infants onwards.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

Policies as requested by Tusla under the R2 Annual Update Form were provided, including the Child Safeguarding Statement, the Fire Safety Policy and the Health and Safety Statement. Three staff members have up to date first aid training. 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), and details are included in the Child Safeguarding Statement, which is prominently displayed as required.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

In my opinion, pupils attending John Scottus Primary at Old Conna are in receipt of an education, intellectual, physical, moral, and social that meets requirements for Section 14 Registration for pupils attending the school.

As the school is still developing, I recommend a review assessment is carried out within 12 months of the issuing of the final assessment report.

Aspects of the provision that are successful include:

- The principal displayed a strong sense of commitment to the school, and to the John Scottus philosophy, during the assessment.
- The inclusion of Sanskrit and philosophy lessons in the education provision.
- The explicit teaching of the virtues of kindness, courtesy, confidence, perseverance, gratitude and fearlessness.
- The commitment to developing strong connections and close relationships with the pupils and parents.
- The strong emphasis on using the outdoor environment to support and enhance learning.
- The attention given to pupil well-being, and the inclusion of activities designed to develop the skill of full attention.
- The provision is guided by the *Primary School Curriculum*.

Recommendations regarding provision:

- It is recommended that additional educational resources, which further support and enhance children's learning, should be budgeted and planned for.
- It is recommended that an in-school management team is developed, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- It is recommended that a dedicated primary school phone number is installed as a matter of priority.
- The employment of a designated school secretary should be considered when funding allows for this.

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 13th November 2024. We discussed the procedures that would follow. It was stated that the recommendation would be to include the pupils of John Scottus Primary at Old Conna 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 John Scottus Primary at Old Conna 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