

Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

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

**Independent School
Review Assessment Report**

Name of School

Kildare Steiner Primary School

Address

Rathargid, Gormanstown, Dunlavin, Co Kildare, W91 CR24.

Name of Principal/Director

Michelle Frost

Name of Assessor/s

Richard Coughlan

Follow up visit
Jane Merriman and Lisa Duffy

Date of Assessment

20th February 2024
Follow up visit
12th December 2024

Date of Final Report

14th July 2025

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:30		
Closing time:	15:00		
Main breaks during the day:	11:00	to	11:30
	13:00	to	13:30

Is school in operation for more than five years?

Yes	
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If no, please give date on which school commenced operation

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

(Normally interview should take place with the principal)

Michelle Frost, principal teacher

At the time of the assessment on the 20th of February 2024 evidence of child safeguarding procedures, as required and identified on the Child Safeguarding Statement, were not available to the assessors.

A follow up meeting was carried out onsite by Jane Merriman and Lisa Duffy with the school administrator and a representative of the board.

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 Michelle Frost
- Classroom visits
- Observation of a sample of learning tasks completed by the students
- Observation of the educational materials in use
- School calendar
- Class timetables
- Main lesson blocks for Classes 3 to 5
- School website and *Facebook* page
- An interview with the school administrator and a representative of the Board of Management regarding Child Safeguarding practice and policy.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Kildare Steiner Primary School (KSPS) was founded about thirty years ago, based initially in Dublin. The school, which is dependent on fees and donations, has occupied its current site on the Kildare-Wicklow border for twenty years, having moved there in 2004. The approach to teaching and learning is based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. The school is interdenominational with a Christian ethos. The school's curriculum is based on the *Primary School Curriculum* and teaching is strongly influenced by the seasons. The school's aim is to develop its students' intellectual, artistic, and practical skills through providing an education that is integrated and holistic and focused on educating the whole child. There is a strong emphasis on skills such as independent thinking, self-confidence, resourcefulness, and creativity.

The school's building and grounds are owned by a PLC that is a registered charity. The school is governed by a board of directors, which is elected at an AGM attended by teachers and parents. The board has six members, five of whom are parents. It manages the three Steiner schools that share the campus: the kindergarten, the primary school, and the secondary school. The board meets when it considers it necessary. The day-to-day running of the primary school is overseen by the college of teachers, which meets once each week.

KSPS is situated in countryside on land that was gifted by a local landowner on condition that it be used for educational purposes. KSPS caters for students from first to fifth class, with a current enrolment of 19 students and a capacity of 36 students. The school is a member of the association of Steiner schools in Ireland.

Students attending the school come from Dublin, Kildare, and Wicklow. A student applying to attend the school, and their parents, are interviewed by the principal teacher and the school administrator. They are given a general assessment and then attend the school for a two-week trial period. The student is generally admitted into the school, especially when coming from another Steiner school. Most students, following their Steiner primary education, move to a mainstream school for their secondary education. Some remain on in Steiner education, through attending the Kildare Steiner Secondary School on the same campus.

The school values the role of parents. There is a meeting of parents each term at which they are briefed on the school and the most recent developments. Parent-teacher meetings take place in February or March each year. Parents meet school staff each day when they are delivering and collecting their children.

However, the parents' role in the school extends beyond this. The board of directors, consisting almost entirely of parents, has several sub-groups that take responsibility for such activities as fundraising, care of the school grounds, marketing, and school open days. Parents are responsible for the cleaning of the school building through a rota.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

The school has two fulltime teachers, a part-time administrator, and part-time teachers for Irish, music, woodwork, and handwork. All staff members are Garda vetted.

Teaching staff are recruited by the board of directors and new teachers undergo an induction process. Following taking up their posts, they receive additional training in the philosophy of Steiner education and on the development of literacy and numeracy. A feature of this school and other Steiner schools is that teachers are being continually upskilled in Steiner teaching methodologies.

The senior teacher, who takes the role of school principal, makes the necessary decisions in the day-to-day running of the school but there is ongoing informal contact between the two fulltime teachers.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school opens at 08:30 each morning and the senior class group finishes at 15:00 and the junior group at 13:00. The school's academic year runs from September to late June. Midterm and holiday breaks are broadly in line with mainstream primary schools.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The Kildare Steiner Primary school is housed in a building with two classrooms. The classrooms are well laid out and attractively presented and the walls are decorated with children's artwork. One classroom is used by the senior classes (3, 4, and 5) and the other is used by the junior classes (1 and 2).

The school is well equipped with outdoor play areas, catering, and toilet facilities.

The large site on which the school is situated school is bounded by trees at the rear. Plants, including vegetables, are grown in raised beds. A large polytunnel in the grounds serves also as a woodwork room. During the assessment, the woodwork teacher was working there with some first-class students. There are treehouses and some newly planted saplings in the grounds.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The school follows the primary curriculum for English and mathematics and uses the Steiner curriculum for the other subjects. The Steiner-Waldorf method of teaching gives freedom to teachers as to how subjects are taught, with the curriculum designed to be responsive to the various phases of children's development. As with all Steiner schools, the principal learning activities of the day revolve around the main lesson. The timetable for each class is made up of main lessons and individual subject lessons. Within each room, while the classes follow distinct programmes, some elements of the programmes are taken in common.

The junior class group timetable includes a main lesson for 1.25 hours each morning and the senior class group timetable allows 1.5 hours for main lesson each day. Individual class periods are allocated for English spelling, mental mathematics, reading, mathematics, crafts, handwriting, English grammar, and for a spelling and mathematics test each Friday. This year's programme of main lessons for Classes 3-5 includes the Old Testament, animals and humans, humans and the earth, mathematics, Viking and Norse myths, Celtic mythology, and the performance of a class play.

Students' main lesson records were viewed and were very well presented.

In the senior class visited, third-class students were learning cursive handwriting, and fourth-class students were learning about fractions.

The junior class group was being taught mathematics.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The development of students' language and literacy skills is a key part of the school's approach in its junior class group. The teaching of reading and writing in the school follows the approach of the primary curriculum.

This is done through the use of phonics, practicing the writing of letters, and then three-letter words.

Students are taught grammar and comprehension, and their written work progresses to include essay writing.

6.3. Numeracy

The teaching of mathematics in the school follows the primary curriculum.

In the junior class group visited, the first-class part of the group was being taught a range of numeracy skills, including basic number concepts, addition, and multiplication. In second class, students'

mathematics skills were being further developed through a more in-depth approach that included the teaching of subtraction.

6.4. Irish

The school has an external part-time teacher who takes students for Irish for about 1.5 hours each week.

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

The aim of the school's curriculum is to provide students with a Steiner education that will prepare them for second-level education in a mainstream or Steiner context.

SPHE is included as part of circle time each morning.

History and geography are taught as part of the main lesson and science in the school concentrates on the study of plants and animals.

Form drawing is included in the curriculum. The subject includes the repetitive drawing of symbols and shapes, both linear and lateral.

Other subjects in the school's curriculum are gardening, singing, music, painting, and forest play.

Students' weekly art lesson is an important part of the school's curriculum.

Woodwork and handwork are taught by visiting part-time teachers. The handwork classes cover such areas as sewing, knitting, crochet and other hand crafts.

The annual class play is a big focus in the school.

Students have games for an hour each week on a Thursday afternoon. The games played are non-competitive.

6.6. Special educational needs

The school's approach to catering for students with special educational needs is to liaise closely with parents. Where a difficulty arises regarding a student, the school communicates with parents. Unfortunately, for resource reasons, the school is not in a position to do more than this.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

Each year, on the last day of the school year, each teacher provides each student with an extremely detailed report that runs to between eight and ten pages. The report gives an account of what the student has achieved during the year. It also includes the teacher's observations on the student's progress and achievements. While the reports are written for the students, their parents see it also.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

At the time of the assessment in February 2024 child safeguarding policies as required under the Children's First Act 2015 and as identified on the Child Safeguarding Statement were unavailable for review. This required a follow onsite visit to review this aspect of the provision.

On the 12th of December 2024 a follow up meeting was carried out onsite by Jane Merriman and Lisa Duffy with the school administrator and a representative of the board. At the meeting the following actions were agreed with actions to be implemented to ensure all requirements relating to

- The Child Safeguarding Statement should be submitted to the AEARS with the current Relevant Person identified.
- The Child Safeguarding Statement is displayed in a prominent position with the current Relevant Person, the Designated Liaison Person and the Deputy Designated Liaison clearly identified.
- Documentary evidence to be in place for the six named procedures for child safeguarding on the CSS confirmed as in place (on the statement and the R2 Annual Update Form submitted).
 - A procedure for the management of allegations of abuse against staff.
 - A procedure for the safe recruitment and selection of staff.
 - A procedure for safeguarding training and information.
 - A procedure for reporting child protection and welfare concerns to Tusla.
 - A procedure for maintaining a list of mandated persons.
 - A procedure for appointing a relevant person for the purpose of the CSS

At the time of this follow up to the assessment to review the Child Safeguarding procedures at the school, all procedures and requirements were discussed, with particular emphasis on the procedures

for reporting. It was recommended that hard copies of all procedures relating to child safeguarding should be kept in a centralised location in the main office, as well as in a digital form. All staff must be trained in the implementation of the CSS and have access to procedures in place at the school.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

The education provided to the pupils of Kildare Steiner Primary 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 values the role of parents
- The teachers are being continually upskilled in Steiner teaching methodologies
- The classrooms are well laid out and attractively presented and the walls are decorated with children’s artwork
- The school has one parent-teacher meeting each year
- The school’s curriculum is based on the *Primary School Curriculum*
- The development of language skills is an important part of schoolwork in the earlier classes as students learn to read and write
- The school follows the national primary school mathematics programme

Recommendations

It is recommended that the school’s policies should be included on its website.

Recommendations were made at the time of the assessment in relation to the requirements under the Children’s First Act 2015, as outlined in Section 8 of this report.

Further to the issuing of the draft report with recommendations and information included in Section 8.

The Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service corresponded with Kildare Steiner School regarding the identified actions to be implemented to ensure that child safeguarding procedures and requirements are in place. The AEARS confirmed a referral to the Tusla Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCUS) and the Children First Information and Advisory Service (CFIAS). The AEARS and the CFIAS will engage with the Kildare Steiner School to provide additional support and agree an action plan to ensure that required procedures are evidenced and in place.

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 Michelle Frost at the conclusion of the visit on 20 February 2024. It was stated that the recommendation would be to retain the pupils of Kildare Steiner Primary School, Rathargid, Gormanstown, Dunlavin, Co Kildare, on the register. The final decision regarding registration will be made by the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Panel - 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 Kildare Steiner 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