

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 Secondary School

Address

Rathargid, Gormanstown, Dunlavin, Co Kildare, W91 CR24

Name of Principal/Director

Fiona Walshe

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

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:30		
Closing time:	15:30		
Main breaks during the day:	10:45	to	11:15
	13:00	to	13:30

Is school in operation for more than five years?

No

If no, please give date on which school commenced operation

01/09/2019

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

(Normally interview should take place with the principal)

Fiona Walshe, Principal

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 Fiona Walshe
- Classroom visits
- Observation of a sample of learning tasks completed by the students
- Observation of the educational materials in use
- School calendar
- Class timetables
- 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 Secondary School (KSSS) commenced with a class of seven in September 2019. The school, which is dependent on fees and donations, is situated near the Kildare-Wicklow border. 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 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 secondary school is overseen by the college of teachers, which meets once each week.

KSSS is situated in countryside on land that was gifted by a local landowner on condition that it be used for educational purposes. It caters for students from sixth class to third year, with a current enrolment of 13 students. The school is a member of the association of Steiner schools in Ireland.

Not all students completing their Steiner primary education come to the Steiner secondary school, as parents can be under pressure from their children to attend second-level school with their peers. A number of the students entering the school do so following a spell in mainstream school, during which they may have had difficulties coping. A student applying to attend the school and who has not attended the Steiner primary school, and their parents, are interviewed by the principal teacher and the school administrator. They are given a general assessment and then come to the school for a two-week trial period. Following this, the student is generally admitted. Students, following their Steiner secondary education, move to a mainstream second-level school for the remainder of their secondary education. For this reason, the school ensures that the education it provides to its students dovetails with the national system.

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 also meet school staff each day when they are delivering and collecting their children.

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. They also help out on school trips.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

The school has one fulltime teacher, two part-time teachers and a part-time administrator, which it shares with the other schools. All staff members are Garda vetted. Each of the groups in the secondary school is taught by two part-time teachers. It also has teachers for art, woodwork, and other subjects.

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 Steiner education. A feature of the 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 teachers. They also have a weekly meeting.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school opens at 08:30 each morning and classes begin at 09:00 and finish at 15:30. The school's academic year runs from September to the end of May. Midterm and holiday breaks are broadly in line with mainstream schools.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The school is housed in a building that has two classrooms as well as the administrative offices. There is also a storage area. The building was originally the primary school building. One of the classrooms is used by the junior group (sixth class and first year) and the other is used by the senior group (second and third year). Students' work is on display on the walls of both rooms. Both classrooms are well laid out and there was evidence of effective use of the blackboard in each.

The school is well equipped with outdoor play areas, catering, and toilet facilities. The school has a basketball court.

The school has a good collection of books including textbooks.

The large site on which the school is situated 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. There are treehouses and some newly planted saplings in the grounds.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The school prepares its students for entry into mainstream secondary school for their senior cycle education. 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. There is a main lesson of about 1.5 hours each morning and the timetable includes French, Irish, English, Art, music, mathematics, PE, cooking, and woodwork. The school uses Steiner methodology for all subjects. It uses the Steiner curriculum for all of the subjects other than French and mathematics. For French and mathematics, students use mainstream textbooks.

The main lessons being used at the time of the assessment were biology in the senior group, and chemistry in the junior group. Students' main lesson records were viewed and were very well presented.

There are six students in the junior group and seven in the senior group. The current capacity of the school is 22 students. The senior group has two teachers who share the teaching, and the other group has a single teacher. The teacher of the senior group is new to Steiner education and is receiving training in Steiner education as well as being mentored by the other teachers.

The school adheres to Steiner education policy in that there is no use of IT as the students are under 16 years of age.

The school is conscious of and considers the mainstream curriculum so that its students can, without difficulty, join mainstream education when they leave.

Teachers have a cyclical approach to curriculum planning. They plan the curriculum in the context of their students.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The Steiner English curriculum is taught.

6.3. Numeracy

The teaching of mathematics in the school follows textbook approaches similar to those used in mainstream school.

6.4. Irish

Irish is mostly taught orally, and parents are made aware of this so that they can make supplementary provision should they choose to do so.

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 upper-second-level education in a mainstream school. The other subjects on the curriculum are French, history, geography, PE, art, music, woodwork, cooking.

The art teacher is currently teaching the history of art with the senior group. Students' work in this area was on display.

As part of their PE curriculum, students play basketball. They go to a local gymnasium each Thursday afternoon, and parents supervise this.

There is a music programme each year for each class with a dedicated music teacher. The school also has a drumming teacher.

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 consults with the parents before making decisions and giving advice. Unfortunately, for resource reasons, the school is not in a position to do more than this.

The school has found that students who have anxiety or a small degree of autism have done well there.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

Each year, on the last day of the school year, each teacher provides their students with a report that they can read, and which is positive with regard to areas for development as it looks back on the year. It gives an account of what the student has achieved during the year.

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 Secondary 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 school has one parent-teacher meeting each year
- The school makes available to its students a broad curriculum
- The school prepares its students for entry to mainstream upper second-level education.
- The school follows the national mathematics programme

Recommendations

The school's main policies should be included on its website.

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.

Section 10 Discussion of Finding of Report with Principal

The finding of the report was discussed with Fiona Walshe 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 Secondary 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 Secondary 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