

**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

Mount Anville Montessori Junior School

Address

Mount Anville Road, Goatstown, Dublin 14

Telephone

01- 2885313

Name of Principal/Director

Dr Elizabeth Kavanagh

Name of Assessor/s

Richard Coughlan

Date of Assessment

28th September 2022

Date of Final Report

15th June 2023

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:35		
Closing time:	14:45 (Infants: 12:15)		
Main breaks during the day:	10:30	to	10:45
	12:50	to	13:30

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)

Dr Elizabeth Kavanagh, Principal; the Deputy Principal

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
- Review report of 2017
- An interview with the principal and the deputy principal
- Classroom visits
- Observation of a sample of learning tasks completed by the pupils
- Observation of the educational materials in use
- School website
- School documentation:
 - Calendar
 - Timetable
 - Child safeguarding statement
 - Code of behaviour
 - Anti-bullying policy
 - Safety statement

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Mount Anville Montessori Junior School (MAMJS) is a private fee-paying Montessori and junior school that welcomes diversity. Inclusivity is a core value that permeates all of its activities. The school, founded by the Society of the Sacred Heart, has a board of management that is appointed by its Board of Trustees. The school is Catholic in its ethos. It seeks to educate the whole person as a responsible member of society, confident of their personal worth. It promotes, among the pupils, an awareness of other traditions as well as their own. The school's enrolment of 450 is all girls. A number of boys up to age 5 years are enrolled in the Early Years Montessori.

Teaching and learning are influenced by the philosophy of Dr Maria Montessori. The school's four Montessori classes, which are for pupils from 2.5 to 4 years including boys, are not a subject of this report. The curriculum of the other classes is the *Primary School Curriculum* (PSC), with a Montessori influence. There are two classes at each year level, with three preparatory classes.

The five goals of the Society of the Sacred Heart for their schools are faith, social awareness, community, character, and intellect. These themes permeate the work of the school. The overarching goal for this year is community, which the school applies in its daily activities. Pupils of all faiths and backgrounds are welcomed into MAMJS. All pupils remain in class for religion. The school has new pupils each year in every class and through its "buddy" system pupils help the new pupils as they settle in.

The Board of Trustees has responsibility for Mount Anville Secondary School on the same campus as well as MAMJS. Finance for both schools is managed by the finance, facilities, and operations office.

There is a close and supportive involvement of parents with the school. It has a parents' council with representatives for every class level. Parents are sent the attractively produced school newsletter each Friday. At the time of the assessment, school management had completed two weeks of welcome meetings for parents. During these, parents were briefed on what their daughters would be learning. The school administration programme *Aladdin* is used to maintain home-school contact, such as sharing pupils' homework with their parents. The school has two evening parent-teacher meetings each year.

The school's code of behaviour is based on the promotion of positive behaviour and self-discipline. It sets out the expectations of pupils, parents, and staff. The school's anti-bullying policy is set in the context of a positive school culture that welcomes diversity and it is based on inclusivity. A review and development of the school's code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy is ongoing.

At the time of the assessment, the school was in a post-pandemic phase. As well as impacting on pupils' education, the pandemic had spurred innovation. For example, teachers can now meet parents in the school yard each morning as their children arrive for school. The prolonged disruption to pupils' education, even with online learning, has had consequences for pupils that the school is continuing to address.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

MAMJS has 37 staff members including 19 class teachers and 8 classroom assistants. The principal is in that role since 2012. The school has 4 Montessori teachers. It also has a Welcome Officer and an Administration and Communication Officer. There are specialist teachers for music, drama, French, physical education (PE), and information and communications technology (ICT) and three learning-support teachers.

MAMJS is a well-managed school. School management has led the development of a wide range of organisational policies that support the smooth running of the school. The members of the school's senior management team work closely together in planning for school activities and responding to the needs of pupils. The team consists of the principal and the deputy principal, who is a teacher of first class. The school is beginning to build a middle management team; they already have one assistant principal and a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) coordinator. The principal, deputy principal and the assistant principal have a weekly formal management meeting.

The smooth running of the school is facilitated by the co-operation and support which is given by staff members in helping generally and in supporting school initiatives. All staff members are Garda vetted. Specialist subjects are timetabled within school hours for all classes.

The school has a safety statement that is updated annually. The school's child safeguarding statement is being implemented. A designated liaison person and a deputy designated liaison person have been appointed. A child protection risk assessment has been prepared by the school that includes procedures to be observed to ensure, as far as practicable, that pupils are safe from harm.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

Mount Anville Montessori Junior School is in operation for 170 days each year. It closes each June immediately before the State examinations. This closure is necessitated by the proximity of Mount Anville secondary school. Pupils are present for 167 days each year.

The beginning of lessons is at 08:35. There are two breaks during the school day - from 10:30 to 10:45, and from about 12:50 to 13:30. School finishes for the two infant classes at 12:15 and at 14:45 for all classes. The school caters for pupils who stay back after school and has a homework club.

The lower number of school days for which the school is open during the year is balanced through having an additional 30 minutes of lessons each day. The teachers return a day early each year following the summer break for school-based continuous professional development (CPD).

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The primary part of the Mount Anville Montessori Junior School is housed in a three-storey building that also houses the secondary school. The school has access to playing fields and to a chapel on the campus.

The school has very good accommodation and resources for its learning activities. It has a large general-purpose room. There are facilities for choirs and for music classes. During the assessment we had the pleasure of listening to one of the school's choirs. The staffroom includes a staff resource area that is used for staff meetings. It also accommodates teaching resources.

The pandemic has been the spur to rapidly increase the rate of adoption of ICT. ICT is in widespread use. The use of ICT was initially piloted by the management with teachers then adopting it. The school has been integrating ICT further in support of learning and teaching. Each pupil has an email address. Pupils from first to sixth classes have access to laptops. The pupils use *Microsoft OneDrive* for storing their files. Each classroom has a desktop computer linked to a digital display screen. Each teacher has a *Surface Pro* laptop. The school's information technology (IT) hub has a green screen that allows for including digital effects when shooting pictures or movies.

The school has a quiet room, called the Butterfly Room. Pupils are taken there in groups from time to time for reflection. The school's STEAM hub is a science room that is also used for art.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The classrooms were lively, busy places. Pupils' work was on display in the classrooms and in the corridors. Pupils observed were purposeful in their work. Since the pandemic, more pupil activity is taking place outdoors.

Most classrooms were visited during the assessment. A high level of pupil engagement was noted in each classroom visited. The topics of the classes ranged from the use of capital letters and report writing to the life cycle of the ladybird. One of the senior classes was away on an ecology field trip. In another classroom, a group of pupils was being prepared for a school musical. Another class was being taught about the history of the school's chapel, while another was working on mathematics. The use of ICT was evident in almost all lessons seen.

The school's curriculum is the *Primary School Curriculum*. Teaching and learning in all classes are based on it. The school used National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) guidelines in monitoring pupils' progress.

Planning is built into each aspect of the school's activities. Each member of staff remains in the school for an additional hour each Wednesday afternoon. This hour is used on alternate weeks for a staff meeting and for whole-school collaborative planning. The two class teachers for each year plan together for teaching the curriculum to ensure that the delivery of the curriculum is consistent. The school has a librarian and a library from which pupils can borrow two books each week.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The development and encouragement of its pupils' reading skills is a core task for the school. The language-experience approach is used in developing pupils' literacy skills. This promotes reading and writing using pupils' personal experiences, and oral language. Teachers help pupils in first and second class to learn reading and comprehension. Comprehension is emphasised so that pupils understand what they are reading. The teachers use milestones and standards to keep track of their progress.

In developing students' spelling ability, individualised assessment is used so that pupils' learning can be differentiated. The school uses an Irish-developed online spelling programme, *Spellings for me*, that allows parents to check on their children's progress.

The language-based subjects have been more affected in terms of pupil learning by the interruption of pupils' learning due to the pandemic. The school is addressing this. Where necessary it is bringing in additional resources to support pupils' learning. The learning-support teachers are generating initiatives to support pupils in learning reading. Among these are making up plays and shows about things that they have read. The school's drama teacher supports this. Third class have put on a play that they had written. Debating for senior classes is used to encourage pupils with reading and learning. Other initiatives include spelling bees, readathons, and pupils presenting achievements at their assembly.

6.3. Numeracy

Teachers are continually assessing pupils' progress in mathematics. They compare the results of the assessments with what pupils would be expected to achieve.

The school gives special attention to teaching the fifth-class mathematics curriculum as it considers it to be a big change in what pupils have been used to up to that. Special support is given to ensure that pupils achieve.

When visiting classrooms, we saw *Isak9* cubes being used to explain mathematical concepts in sixth class. Making use of these has helped to develop pupils' problem solving and reasoning skills and their fluency in mathematics. Their use also develops teamwork skills and resilience among pupils. The methodology, which is primarily aimed at fourth and fifth class pupils, is also used in second and third classes. It facilitates differentiated learning.

The school has taken part in the *Maths Eyes* competition. This is a photographic competition that looks at mathematical themes in everyday life.

The school uses *Manga High* for mathematics. It is an online challenge for 5 to 16-year-olds that brings life into mathematics learning through quizzes, games, and social competitions. The level of challenge varies with the ability of the pupils.

The school takes part in *Maths Week Ireland* each year.

6.4. Irish

Irish is included in the school's curriculum. I had a conversation in Irish with one of the teachers. Irish is used on notices and directions around the school.

The school has *Seachtain na Gaeilge* each year.

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 other subjects on the school's curriculum are physical education, music and choirs, religion, social, personal and health education (SPHE), art, French, drama, and science. On display were certificates from Science Foundation Ireland for science and technology achievement. The schools each year organises a STEAM term, which takes place after Christmas until the end of February.

Classes have two PE classes each week. In the first two weeks of the year, pupils are taught games for the schoolyard.

The school has two assemblies each week, - one for pupils up to second class, and the second for the senior classes. Each Friday there is a whole-school assembly on *Zoom*.

Included in the school's curriculum is *Wilderness*, an outdoor learning module over six weeks that uses the expansive grounds of the school.

The school has a junior choir, a senior choir, and an orchestra.

Cycling lessons for pupils have been organised by a parent. Pupils organised an event to raise money for Charlie Bird's charities.

The school's religion programme is based on *Grow in Love*.

The school uses the *Stay Safe* programme and included parents in the discussion prior to doing so. Preparatory to sixth class use a school booklet that has been adapted from the *Stay Safe* book. The school has developed its RSE (relationships and sexuality education) programme, using the Department of Education objectives and a range of relevant literature. It takes five to six lessons. Parents were contacted beforehand, and Health Service Executive (HSE) materials were used. The principal delivers the programme along with the class teacher in each class. The school's Catholic ethos is taken into account.

6.6. Special educational needs

The school sets a high value on fostering the talents of all its pupils. This is also the context for the support of students with special educational needs. The school identifies the strengths of its teachers including the support teachers and it builds on them.

The school has two principal ways of giving learning support. The school has three specialist support teachers, who use in-class support as well as withdrawal. The support teachers and class teachers use team teaching for literacy as a way of minimizing pupil withdrawal.

The school supports its very able pupils. It consistently monitors the progress of pupils and addresses any deficits in their learning.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

A variety of forms of assessment is used to gain information on pupils' progress. The school has a consistent approach to pupil assessment. It includes the use of standardised tests and class-based tests. The results of the tests are monitored by support teachers, and they help identify pupils needing support. Teachers, in assessing pupils' work, give positive feedback as well as identifying mistakes in that work. Teacher observation, for example of pupils' reading, is another assessment methodology.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

All policies and school documentation were made available, including:

- School calendar
- Timetables
- Child safeguarding statement and risk assessment
- Code of behaviour
- Anti-bullying policy
- Safety statement

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

The education provided to the pupils of Mount Anville Montessori Junior 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 effective leadership by the school principal in all areas of school activity, especially in relation to managing the ongoing after-effects of the pandemic
- The close and supportive involvement of parents with the school
- The school's code of behaviour is based on the promotion of positive behaviour and self-discipline and includes expectations of pupils, parents, and staff
- The school is well-managed; management with the co-operation and support of staff members has led the development of organisational policies that support its smooth running
- The school has very good accommodation and resources for its learning activities
- The school teaches the *Primary School Curriculum*
- ICT is in widespread use
- There is an emphasis on STEAM. The STEAM hub is a science room that is also used for art, and the school has a STEAM co-ordinator
- The classrooms observed were lively busy places, pupils' work was on display, and pupils were purposeful in their work
- The development and encouragement of pupils' reading skills is seen as a core task of the school
- The school has a consistent approach to pupil assessment. Pupil assessment is built into the teaching of each subject
- Fostering the talents of its pupils is the context for the support of students with special educational needs

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 the principal and deputy at the conclusion of the visit on 28th September 2022. It was stated that the recommendation would be to retain the pupils of Mount Anville Montessori Junior School, Mount Anville Road, Goatstown, Dublin 14 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 Mount Anville Montessori Junior 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