

Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

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

**Independent School
Review Assessment Report**

Name of School

Rathdown Junior School

Address

Upper Glenageary Road, Glenageary, County Dublin.

Telephone

01- 2853133

Name of Principal/Director

Mr. Dermot Dix

Name of Assessor/s

Paula Callaghan

Date of Assessment

25th October 2022

Date of Final Report

15th June 2023

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:45		
Closing time:	15:00 (16.00 on 2 days per week for senior classes)		
Main breaks during the day:	10:45	to	11:00 or
	11:00		11.15
	12:30	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

00/00/0000

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

(Normally interview should take place with the principal)

Dermot Dix (Principal), the Deputy Principal, the Head of Learning Support, and the ICT and STEM Coordinator.

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, deputy principal, heads of departments, and with other members of staff
- 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
- Documentation and other written information provided on policies, planning and assessment, digital learning and STEM programmes, Learning Support, and the school's Sports Programme.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Rathdown Junior School is an independent, fee-paying primary school, which was founded in 1973. The junior school is located on a shared campus with Rathdown Secondary School in south county Dublin. Both schools are situated on a large green sixteen-acre site, encompassing the school buildings, playing fields and playgrounds. For almost fifty years the junior school catered for girls. In September of this year, 2022, the school opened its doors to boys, and welcomed seventy additional new pupils, both boys and girls.

Currently there are two hundred and four pupils enrolled at Rathdown Junior School, of whom, for the purposes of this review, one hundred and eighty-one are aged 6 years and over. Pupils attending the school come from local communities in Dublin and from abroad. While the ethos of the school is Protestant, pupils of all faiths and those without affiliations are welcomed. Pupils study religions of the world as part of the taught curriculum.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing at the school consists of the administrative Principal, and a form teacher for each of the ten class groups. Specialist teachers are employed to teach Physical Education (PE) and to coach a range of team games, including Hockey, Football, Basketball, and Badminton. Specialist teachers teach Science and Computer Skills. STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) planning, implementation, and development is undertaken by a facilitator. There are, in addition, specialist teachers for French and Music, and there is a Learning Support team of three teachers. The School Secretary and Human Resources Manager, facilitates the smooth running of the school. Ancillary staff provide a cooked lunch for all pupils. They maintain a clean and attractive school environment. In association with Rathdown Secondary School additional staff members are employed to maintain the school grounds to a high standard.

The principal and staff implement a child-centred philosophy of education. The leadership style at Rathdown School is consultative. Staff meetings are held every 2-3 weeks, the agenda is shared, and all items are discussed. Final decisions are made by the principal in consultation with staff, whose shared priority is to provide what is best for the pupils. Regular and frequent mini staff meetings are also held, and educational supports are freely shared between staff members. Planning is on a shared system, with teachers completing long-term and short-term plans, and monthly summaries of achievements. The student voice is respected and encouraged. Discussion and pupil questions are important elements of every lesson, and pupil input regularly spurs further class research and extended lesson development.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school follows the Primary School calendar in relation to school terms, breaks, and holidays, and operates a five-day week, Monday to Friday. While school begins at 08.45 each morning, pupils are admitted to the school campus from 08.00 daily. Some activities are provided at this time, including optional Choir Club, which takes place at 08.30 on some days. Classes finish at 15.00, with 5th and 6th classes staying one extra hour on two days per week for extra games and sporting activities. Breaks are slightly staggered. A fifteen-minute mid-morning break takes place at 10.45 until 11.00 for younger pupils, and 11.00 until 11.15 for senior pupils. Lunch is of one hour duration, during which pupils are provided with the option of a cooked meal, and opportunities to play outside or to partake in sporting and a range of other extra-curricular activities.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

Rathdown Junior school provides a rich and welcoming environment that appropriately supports the education of its pupils. The building in which the junior school is based provides an attractive, secure and safe learning space. Classrooms are large and bright. Each is well-equipped to enable the provision of full and stimulating learning experiences for the pupils. In addition, there is a dedicated computer room and a Science room, which are equipped with a wide variety of technology and scientific equipment and materials. Pupils have access to an attractive and well-equipped Gymnasium, an outdoor playground, sports facilities, sports pitches, and green spaces.

Pupils' writing, artwork, and project work, and samples of work across all of the subject areas are prominently displayed within the classrooms, and on noticeboards in corridors and shared spaces. A celebration of school life through photographs adorns display boards throughout the school. Evidence of topics across all of the subject areas, samples of academic achievements, Science and computer projects, and photographs of school trips and physical activities which have taken place abound. All are beautifully displayed, and the presentations are updated and renewed regularly. Throughout the school, samples of artwork, using different materials and techniques are abundant, and attractively displayed. During the Review visit the school was preparing for Halloween. Pumpkin displays, created by the pupils, were stunning.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

Teaching staff comply with Department of Education regulations in relation to curriculum content, planning, and assessment. Core learning is guided by the Primary School Curriculum, which is held in very high regard at Rathdown Junior School. All Curriculum subject areas and strands are taught in Irish, English, Maths, History, Geography, Science, Visual Arts, Music and Physical Education. Textbooks from a selection of recognised publishers are used to guide the syllabus. There is provision for learning support and for English as an Additional Language support (EAL), for pupils whose first language is other than English. All pupils also study French. Computer studies including coding is provided in the Computer room. Additional Science lessons are also provided. Sports and games are enjoyed during twice weekly periods, and after school. Display boards showcase subject areas, interesting topics, and special projects: these include individual Computer projects, Scientific investigations and Science Foundation Ireland themes, History and Geography field trips, STEM projects, and work undertaken in Maths, Literacy, Irish, and the arts.

The school follows Department of Education (DE) guidelines and regulations for primary schools. A class teacher is assigned to each class group, and all subjects, and all subject strands of the Primary School Curriculum are taught by the class teacher. In addition, specialist subject teachers teach French, P.E., computer skills, STEM, and Music Theory. The school ethos is fully inclusive. Pupils study religions of the world, while specific religious instruction for Roman Catholic pupils is facilitated as an optional after-school provision.

A comprehensive PE syllabus is in place. Pupils enjoy two or three periods of PE each week and senior pupils have one extra PE lesson each week. Pupils participate in sports and team games, and they attend swimming lessons.

Individualised learning support, based on need, is provided for children who require additional support, and for those whose first language is other than English.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

Language and Literacy are guided by the Primary School Curriculum and encompass all of the components of a comprehensive literacy programme: oral language development, reading, writing, and poetry.

Receptive and expressive language skills are developed appropriately at each level to enable pupils to express their thoughts fluently, and with confidence. Oral language development is explicitly linked across all subject areas. Pupils are practised in preparing presentations and presenting their work. Pupils learn to read using a balanced blend of 'Bottom Up' phonemic awareness and phonic skills development, combined with reading comprehension and reading for fluency using The Rainbow Series of readers (CJ Fallon). Exposure to a variety of additional reading materials to encourage choice and reading for pleasure and for information is prioritised. Library readers are available to encourage struggling or reluctant readers to engage with reading for pleasure. Class libraries are constantly reviewed so that they are attractive and inviting for pupils. The new pupil cohort, which

includes boys, necessitates an expansion to include their specific interests, as well as all interest levels and topics.

Textbooks used to guide the programme include Sounds Make Words (Folens), Spellbound (CJ Fallon), New Wave English in Practice (Prim Ed), Just Handwriting (Educate.ie), and The Little Oxford Dictionary. Pupils write across the genres and for different audiences, and samples of their work are displayed in every classroom. Pupils enjoy reading and analysing poetry and compose their own poems for competitions and for pleasure.

The whole-school approach to the language and literacy programme is enhanced with participation in competitions, such as Story writing, Write a Book, Handwriting and poetry competitions, debating, and engagement in drama productions. Each year a work from Shakespeare is selected, and P6 pupils study and perform a Shakespeare play. In 2019 the school staged A Midsummer's Night's Dream, in which every pupil had a role. Covid interrupted the run of annual performances, but this annual event is due to resume during this current school year.

6.3. Numeracy

All strands and strand units of the Mathematics Primary School Curriculum are taught. Busy at Maths (C.J. Fallon) is used in the infant classes, while Planet Maths (Folens) is used in all other classes to guide learning content and provide for pupil practice. Concrete materials are used in all classes to enhance understanding of taught concepts, and to provide opportunities for active and interactive learning. Pupils in 5th and 6th classes use Chromebooks, provided by the school, for research and projects.

Rathdown Junior School places great emphasis on the practical application of mathematical concepts across all subject areas, and in real life situations. The development of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), in association with Science Foundation Ireland very effectively links and expands the mathematics curriculum programme with computer skills, and across the STEM disciplines. Pupils learn to code and to utilise coding and other technology skills to build individual computer projects. A number of impressive STEM projects have been undertaken by the pupils.

6.4. Irish

Pupils learn to listen, communicate, read and write following the Primary School Curriculum – Irish content and strand units. The commercial language scheme in use has been reviewed and is being replaced with Sin É (EdCo) with the aim of streamlining the Irish language content and promoting Irish as a living language experience in the school. In classrooms pupils were observed studying and exploring texts and performing Irish language songs and Irish dances. Display boards in the classes demonstrated Irish language lesson content covered, and provided prompts for pupils to rehearse, review and use their learned language skills.

All pupils study Irish at Rathdown Junior School unless they are exempt under Department of Education regulations.

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 *Small World* series (C.J. Fallon) is used to guide a comprehensive curriculum for History, Geography and Science. Science is taught within classrooms, with additional lessons in the dedicated Science room. The school is actively involved in Science Foundation Ireland initiatives, and a facilitator provides three lessons annually to pupils. Science week in November includes a Science Fair, during which groups of pupils carry out experiments and present their findings to other groups. Everyone receives a medal for participation.

Science is explicitly linked with the school's very comprehensive STEM programme. The school has a dedicated and very well- equipped computer room. Here pupils learn coding, presentation skills, video editing, and game design. Pupils use these impressive computer and coding to "build" their own houses at junior level, while senior classes learn to locate castles on Google Maps and to create their own three-dimensional castles on computer.

Every pupil partakes in two Physical Education classes each week, where they participate in physical exercise and skills development. Pupils in 5th and 6th classes enjoy an additional weekly PE class. There is a purpose-built gym, an athletics track, and sports pitches including two hockey pitches. Senior pupils are provided with after school sports twice weekly. Extracurricular team sports include

Hockey, Football, Basketball, Badminton, track and field, Rounders, and Cricket. A swimming rota provides seven weeks of swimming tuition for each pupil annually.

Weekly Music theory and appreciation lessons are taught by a specialist teacher, in addition to in-class music as part of the Primary School Curriculum. There is an annual musical performance, in association with the Secondary School. There is an option for pupils to join the school Choir Club. The junior school has access to eight music rooms. Orchestra recitals, for those pupils who are learning to play a musical instrument, take place in December.

Art and crafts are promoted, and pupils' works across all of the strands are celebrated and very attractively displayed throughout the school, both inside and outside. Throughout the school, and outside, samples of artwork, using different materials and techniques were abundant, and attractively displayed.

In addition to the full Primary School Curriculum all pupils study French, taught by a specialist teacher for this subject.

The social, emotional and moral development of the pupils is a priority shared by all staff. Rathdown Junior School aims to ensure that pupils know they are liked and valued by all staff members. There is a focus on promoting good behaviour and on kindness to each other. Restorative Practice is used to heal rifts, to forge good relationships, and to deepen understanding and empathy. The Weaving Well-Being programme to improve pupil self-esteem, and to promote positive mental health and well-being is taught in all classes. While the school's ethos is Christian, all religious philosophies, festivals, and traditions are explored to develop a deep understanding of similarities and differences.

6.6. Special educational needs

The school operates an inclusive policy and supports all of its pupils at appropriate individual levels. A team of three learning support teachers provide support as required, for pupils with learning difficulties, those who have fallen behind for any reason, and those whose first language is other than English. The Learning Support Co-ordinator is currently creating a central records system, to ensure that each pupil will be supported in a timely manner, in line with best practice.

All new pupils are assessed, and early intervention, once a need is identified, takes precedence. In addition, annual formative and diagnostic assessments are conducted. Timely identification of all pupils with special educational needs (SEN), those with gaps in their learning, and pupils with language difficulties is key to helping each child fulfil potential before a gap widens, and a difficulty becomes unnecessarily problematic. EAL pupils are taught according to their individual needs. Programmes include grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure, and subject specific support. Senior pupils are also carefully monitored to preclude learning gaps widening due to emerging comprehension or other difficulties. When pupils are identified for support their parents and class teachers are informed and educated on how each can help.

The preferred model of support is that of inclusive in-class support. However, additional specific strategies are in place when required, including individual and small group targeted teaching. There is also a specific reading strategies group to support pupils with dyslexia.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

A range of assessments and tests are used to evaluate learning standards, progress, and to identify any difficulties arising. Assessments are on-going. Both standardised and non-standardised tests are administered, and use is also made of teacher observation, class testing, and annual diagnostic testing. All are effectively used to measure pupil progress and to plan individual interventions. Information gathered also informs feedback to parents at parent-teacher meetings.

Drumcondra Literacy and Numeracy tests are administered to relevant classes. Testing also takes place from third to sixth classes across all subjects. Each pupil and their family receive 3 reports annually. An interim progress report is issued in April. This report informs parents of their child's progress and identifies any issues requiring attention or additional supports. June and December reports are summative. Parent-teacher meetings are held in November of each year.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

Policies as requested by Tusla under the R2 application form were provided, including Child Safeguarding and Child Protection policies, Health and Safety, Fire Safety, and Garda vetting.

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 Liaison Person, and notices are prominently displayed as required.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

Pupils attending Rathdown Junior School are in receipt of a standard of education, intellectual, physical, moral, and social that meets requirements for Section 14 Registration for pupils receiving their education in places other than recognised schools. I recommend that Rathdown Junior School continues to be included on the register for the education of pupils in places other than recognised schools.

Aspects of the provision that are successful include:

- The information provided by the principal during the interview supplied a very comprehensive account of the school, the teachers, and pupil participation and achievement across a very wide variety of learning experiences.
- Department of Education regulations are adhered to, and The Primary School Curriculum is fully implemented. Provision is augmented with French language lessons, computer skills development, and a special focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM),
- Careful attention to pupil well-being is prioritised.
- Quality whole school and individual teacher planning, assessment, communication with parents, and special education provision benefits the pupils.

- The well-equipped and inviting classrooms, common areas and corridors within the school building, school grounds, and play areas, extend learning experiences for the pupils.
- An atmosphere of care permeates Rathdown Junior School, which prides itself on its holistic support for pupils.

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 25th October 2022. We discussed the procedures that would follow. I informed him that the decision with regard to continuing with registration of Rathdown Junior School and its pupils who are receiving an education in a place other than a recognised school would be the responsibility of the Tusla registration panel. I told him he would receive the report for factual verification, and in due course, the final report together with the decision of the panel.

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 Rathdown 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