

Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

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

**Independent School
Review Assessment Report**

Name of School

Saol Christian School

Address

27 North Strand, Drogheda, Co Louth, A92 H348.

Name of Principal/Director

Sharon Reilly

Name of Assessor/s

Lisa Duffy
Jane Merriman

Date of Assessment

7th February 2024

Date of Final Report

20th June 2024

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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:	10:40	to	11:00
	12:30	to	13:10

Is school in operation for more than five years?

Yes	
00/00/0000	

If no, please give date on which school commenced operation

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

(Normally interview should take place with the principal)

Sharon Reilly

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
- The school website: www.saolchristianschool.com
- www.christian.education/ace

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Saol Christian School is a co-educational, fee-paying school, which offers a Christian education to primary and secondary school pupils. It was established by Sharon Reilly in September 2018 to meet the educational needs of the local and wider Christian community. Parents pay annual fees for their children and understand that the ethos of the school is based on Christian principles. Admission procedures are clearly laid out on the school website. All are welcome to attend the school, with the Admission Policy stating that it *“will not discriminate in its admission of a student to the school on the grounds of gender, civil status, family status, religion, race, disability or special needs.”*

The Board of Management, consisting of the principal, a member of staff, two parents’ representatives, and two financial contributors, function in an advisory role. Formal, minuted meetings take place twice per year. Regular, informal meetings take place, with board members routinely praying together. The board is appointed for a period of four years.

Children’s learning in the school is provided mainly through the international Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum. This is a Bible based curriculum which strives to integrate Godly character-building lessons into academic content. The children are taught to take responsibility for their own learning and are trained in the skills necessary to take the initiative and achieve their full potential. The Vision Statement states that *“It is our vision to see all of our students succeed academically within the ACE system while developing strong Godly character so that as they walk out the path that their Heavenly Father has set before them it will bring glory to His name.”*

For the purposes of registration there are currently 7 pupils, age 6 and over, enrolled in the school. The school has the capacity to cater for younger children through the kindergarten and ABC programmes, although there are currently no children enrolled at this level. The school is in the process of extending the physical environment and there is capacity to increase the enrolment in the school over the coming years.

The school is registered as a company, with Sharon Reilly named as the company’s director.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing at the school currently consists of a teaching deputy principal, and one other staff member. Another staff member functions as a monitor and assists the deputy principal in her supervisory role. The principal, Ms Sharon Reilly, who is currently based in Saol Christian School, Dundalk, liaises with the deputy principal daily. The deputy principal deputises as the principal when Ms Reilly is not onsite. As indicated on the R2 Initial Information Form, all staff are garda vetted prior to commencing employment in the school. Both staff members present onsite have undertaken first aid training. Formal, minuted staff meetings are held remotely once per month. Staff from Saol Christian School Drogheda, and Saol Christian School Dundalk, attend these meetings. Informal staff meetings take place on a regular basis.

An external teacher visits weekly to provide Ukulele lessons.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

A copy of the school's calendar for the current academic year was provided with the application, as well as class timetables for each grouping. The academic year is similar to the mainstream academic year. The school will operate for 182 school days during the current academic year, ending with an Awards Day on the 28th of June 2024. Supervision is offered to pupils from 08:30, with formal lessons starting at 08:45 and ending at 15:00. Any parent who requires supervision for their child prior to 08.30, must send a request to the school 48 hours in advance, and if a staff member is available to supervise, the request is granted.

Morning break is from 10:40-11:00 while lunch break is from 12:30- 13:10. Pupils receive mini stretch breaks throughout the day. School officially ends at 15:00. Staff members dismiss children at the rear of the school at the end of the school day. Timetables for each class were submitted with the application. The principal reported that attendance is very good, and a record of attendance is maintained in the school.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

Saol Christian School Drogheda strives to create an environment which values the uniqueness of each child before God. The school is located in rented accommodation near Drogheda Port and close to Drogheda town centre. The building shares a front entrance with tenants who rent apartments upstairs. This area is separated from the rest of the school by a locked door and pupils do not have access to this area. Following the assessment and a discussion regarding signage, the principal confirmed that signage directing visitors to the school to the rear entrance of the building has been erected.

The school environment is spacious and consists of a primary/post primary learning centre, an office, storage and kitchen area and an extra classroom. Classrooms are bright, airy and equipped with a range of educational resources, including a supply of books for children's course work, dictionaries, library books, a smart television and Bibles. Pupils have access to Chromebooks and laptops to support their studies. The school's internet access is filtered through their internet service provider, which ensures that the students do not encounter inappropriate content. Individual, personal workstations, which pupils are free to personalise and individualise, are assigned to each pupil. These are designed to minimise distractions, giving pupils complete privacy to set personal academic goals and to work independently. There are also separate scoring and testing areas, where children evaluate and correct their work prior to the supervised scoring of tests. The school is in the process of expanding its premises and a large area, consisting of several rooms is currently being refurbished and upgraded. A small outdoor recreation area is available to pupils, with supervision in place. The school operates a low pupil teacher ratio and there are currently 7 pupils, aged 6 and over, enrolled in the school. The low enrolment, combined with the individual nature of the educational programmes ensure that all aspects of pupil development are closely monitored.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The Mission Statement, which is available on the school website, states *“It is our mission to partner with parents to prepare and develop the whole student: mind, body and spirit, through academic training, ministry and worship.”*

By utilising the ACE curriculum, a complete curriculum is offered to pupils, which focuses on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural welfare, as well as their academic advancement, based on Biblical principles. The ACE curriculum is highly structured and individualised. The morning begins with opening exercises. During this time, children recite a passage from scripture, pray for special intentions, sing, worship, and celebrate achievements and milestones. The children then commence working on their Packets of Accelerated Christian Education (PACEs), with each child working individually at their own private workstation. Each subject consists of twelve PACEs per level. Completion of a PACE usually takes between two and three weeks. Pupils work in blocks to complete their PACE work and receive mini stretch breaks throughout the day. Core subjects in this curriculum are English, Mathematics, Word Building, Science, Social Studies, Literature and Creative Writing. The aim of the core curriculum is to provide students with academic learning, skill building, reading practice, character and wisdom training, and knowledge of God and His Word. Students also study a range of other subjects including art, music, drama, information technology (IT), chess, physical education (PE) and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The ACE curriculum can be followed through to the end of secondary school, where pupils can achieve the International Certificate of Christian Education (ICCE), which is a recognised qualification for entry into third level education.

Prior to commencing at the school, pupils are assessed with a diagnostic test to ascertain their level and are prescribed a tailored level for each subject according to their current ability level. Pupils begin their PACE work by noting their goals, the concepts that they will learn, a Bible verse, and a corresponding character trait. Due to the structured nature of the PACEs, pupils know what is expected and assume the responsibility for their own learning. Each PACE contains several check-ups, which are quizzes covering a section of the PACE. If proficiency in an area is not achieved, the check-up reveals the weak area. Pupils can then review the concept before proceeding to the next section. Upon completion of the activities and check-ups, pupils prepare to take the Self-Test. When the Self-Test is successfully completed, pupils take the PACE test. The PACE test objectively measures knowledge of the material covered. Every pupil is likely to complete seventy-two PACEs per academic year. The detailed results of these assessments are meticulously recorded and retained. Students generally do not receive homework. Homework is only assigned to pupils if they have not succeeded in achieving their goals on a given day.

Prior to enrolling in the school, parents complete an enrolment form. They are then invited to attend an initial interview with the principal. At this meeting parents are introduced to the instructional methodologies employed by the ACE curriculum and become familiar with their child's daily schedule. An appointment is arranged for diagnostic testing to take place. A decision on enrolment is made by the Board of Management and is based on compatibility and the school's ability to meet the needs of the child.

The development of good, clear, and open relationships between people at all levels of school life is stated as a core value in the school. Parents understand that the ethos of the school is based on Christian principles and support the work of the school. An informal parents' association exists, serving the needs of both Saol Christian School, Drogheda and Saol Christian School, Dundalk. It is envisaged that this parents' association will take on a more formal role in the future. Parent teacher

meetings take place twice per academic year and parents also have access to an online portal in which they can view their child's academic progress. The school has an open-door policy and parents can meet with supervisors, by prior appointment, if they have any concerns relating to their child. A newsletter is issued at least once per term, keeping parents updated on school events, and parents also have access to a school WhatsApp group.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

Language and literacy development is integrated throughout all areas of learning. The programme for language and literacy encompasses a full range of activities to develop oral, reading and writing skills. Early reading skills are taught at the foundation stage, using a multi-sensory, phonetic reading programme which prepares the child for future PACE work. Later, grammar is introduced and reading and writing skills are further developed. Written comprehension challenges are undertaken, and pupils begin creative writing. Pupils are exposed to a variety of writing genres through their PACE work, developing their writing skills as they progress through the levels.

Spelling is taught through the core subject of word building and is practiced and reinforced throughout each unit of work. Oral language is also developed through this subject, as the pupil's vocabulary base is expanded through the study of parts of speech. Throughout the curriculum, the introduction of new vocabulary is controlled so that no new word is used without the student first learning its meaning and pronunciation. These words are then repeated in context to ensure mastery. Oral presentations are timetabled, with pupils preparing and making oral presentations to their peers. During devotions pupils engage in peer led discussions around the character traits of Jesus.

Pupils have opportunities to read for pleasure and to read for a purpose. They study prescribed texts in literature and all pupils are exposed to poetry.

Pupils are exposed to cursive writing from approximately age seven. Pupils are exposed to a variety of writing genres through their PACE work, developing their writing and grammatical skills as they progress through the levels. Essay writing is an integral part of the curriculum.

6.3. Numeracy

The numeracy programme is structured and highly individualised, with all pupils working at their own level and pace. The curriculum encompasses all key areas of numeracy and is presented in a sequential and structured manner. Pupils must master one concept before moving on to the next. Mathematical skills are developed through daily activities and practice.

Chess is timetabled weekly for pupils at primary level. Pupils engage in games on www.chesskid.com and it is envisioned that students will partake in an annual chess tournament with children from other ACE schools.

6.4. Irish

Irish lessons are engaged in daily. Pupils use www.duolingo.com to support their learning in this area. Students at post primary level complete levels 1 and 2 on www.rosettastone.com.

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 Arts: The Arts are taught in the school. Pupils engage in weekly art projects. An external music teacher teaches ukulele lessons for 30 minutes per week. Pupils also learn the basics of music, including how to read music, using www.prodigies.com as an aid to their learning. Pupils partake in song singing, enhancing morning opening exercises with singing. The school recently staged a Christmas play, and it is envisioned that this will become an annual event.

Physical Education: PE is timetabled, with teachers using www.curriculumonline.ie as a guide for learning.

Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE): Science and social studies are core subjects in the ACE Curriculum. In science, aspects of biology, physics, chemistry and animal science are studied throughout the children's time at school. It is non evolutionary in approach and content and is based on the Biblical perspective of creation. Hands on collaborative experiments and STEM activities are undertaken, using subscription crates from www.kiwico.com.

The study of world history and geography, from the perspective of God as the designer, creator and controller of the universe, is included in the social studies PACEs. PACEs relating to Irish history and geography are currently being sourced by the school and more are expected to become available for student use in the future.

Social, emotional and moral development: Saol Christian School is a faith-based school and pupils' social, emotional and moral development is taught in this context. Mini assemblies take place every morning and Christian messages are included in these. Devotions classes are timetable to take place three times per week. Pupil study and discuss one character trait of Jesus per month. The whole school gathers for weekly worship during chapel time.

Parents are encouraged to discuss relationships and sexuality education at home with their own child. The school can advise parents on suitable resources, in keeping with their Christian ethos.

Information Technology (IT): IT lessons are timetabled, with pupils studying computer science on www.code.org. It is planned that pupils will progress on to studying the visual programming language of scratch. Google classroom is utilised in the school and ePACES are also available for pupil use from level 2 upwards. Internet safety is discussed with the pupils.

Languages: The option of learning a foreign language is given to post primary pupils. www.rosetastone.com is used as an aid to pupils' learning.

6.6. Special educational needs

Saol Christian School is inclusive and welcomes students with additional needs. The ACE programme is worked at each child's individual level, and the calm and quiet learning environment helps create a sensory friendly environment. Staff members are attuned to the individual needs of all pupils and adaptations may be made if deemed necessary. However, as stated in its admissions policy, it "is a small private school with limited resources compared to the public schools and other larger private schools. Public schools receive additional funding for students with special needs and hire specialised staff to serve their unique needs. Saol Christian School does admit students with special needs when we believe that we can truly serve and educate them. The needs of the child should always be prioritised."

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

Assessment exercises and record keeping are an integral part of the ACE curriculum. On enrolment in the school, diagnostic tests are used to determine the child's starting point in the curriculum. This is based on the child's own level of ability rather than their chronological age.

Testing is undertaken at the end of each lesson. The children are trained in how to score all the exercises throughout the PACE. Supervisors score the PACE Test. The class teacher acts as the moderator of the results. The mark required to pass each assignment is high and revision is required if the pupil does not make the required grade. Detailed records of the children's results are maintained in personal files and on an online portal which can be accessed by parents. Staff re-train in implementing the ACE curriculum every four years, ensuring that standards are maintained in the school.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

Policies as requested by AEARS Tusla under the R2 School Information Form were provided, including Child Safeguarding, Health and Safety and Fire Safety policies. As indicated on the R2 form, all staff members have been Garda vetted and have been trained in the implementation of Children First. All staff have completed training on the implementation of the Child Safeguarding Statement. Two staff members have up to date first aid training.

The principal confirmed that the names and photographs of the appointed Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDL) are prominently displayed in the entrance hall. The Child Safeguarding Statement is up to date and compliant. It is on display on entering the school.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

Pupils attending Saol Christian School, Drogheda, are in receipt of a standard of education, intellectual, physical, moral, and social that meets requirements for Section 14 Registration for pupils attending the school.

The aspects of the provision that are successful include:

- The individualised and structured nature of the ACE curriculum.
- The school environment, which consists of spacious and bright classrooms, a common area and a secure outdoor play area.
- Learning resources available in the school support the implementation of the ACE curriculum.
- Learning is assessed regularly to ensure that mastery is achieved prior to the introduction of new concepts.
- The availability of Chromebooks for pupil use.
- The positive relationship with parents and the regular reporting on their child's progress.
- The commitment of the principal and staff to delivering a Christian education.
- The emphasis on the development of positive character traits in the pupils and the affirmation and reinforcement of positive behaviours.
- Opportunities are provided for non-academic learning experiences.

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, Ms Sharon Reilly, at the conclusion of the visit on 07 February 2024. We discussed the procedures that would follow. It was stated that the recommendation would be to register and retain the pupils of Saol Christian School, Drogheda, 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 Review Assessment, the Registration Panel decided that children attending Saol Christian School, Drogheda 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