

**Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000**

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

**Independent School  
Preliminary Assessment Report**

**Name of School**

Saol Christian School

**Address**

First Floor, Island Church Dundalk, Long Walk, Dundalk,  
Co. Louth, A91 Y433.

**Telephone**

**Name of Principal/Director**

Sharon Reilly

**Name of Assessor/s**

Lisa Duffy  
Jane Merriman

**Date of Assessment**

7<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**Date of Final Report**

20<sup>th</sup> June 2024

# Contents

Section 1	Background Information .....	3
1.1.	School Hours .....	3
1.2.	Name(s) of principal and/or other teacher(s) interviewed .....	3
1.3.	Sources of evidence on which report is based.....	3
Section 2	General Information and School Context .....	4
Section 3	The Principal and Staff .....	4
Section 4	Time Devoted to Education .....	5
Section 5	The Learning Environment.....	5
Section 6	The Educational Activities .....	6
6.1.	General information .....	6
6.2.	Language and literacy skills .....	7
6.3.	Numeracy .....	7
6.4.	Irish .....	8
6.5.	Other areas of learning .....	8
6.6.	Special educational needs .....	9
Section 7	Assessment and Record Keeping .....	9
Section 8	Other Relevant Information .....	10
Section 9	Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations .....	10
Section 10	Discussion of Finding of Report with Principal .....	11
Section 11	Outcome .....	11

## 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?

No

If no, please give date on which school commenced operation

04/09/2023

### 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 preliminary 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](http://www.saolchristianschool.com) [www.christian.education/ace](http://www.christian.education/ace)

## **Section 2    General Information and School Context**

Saol Christian School is a fee-paying Christian school, located in a retail area of Dundalk, Co. Louth. The school is situated on the first floor of Island Church and currently caters for pupils at primary level, although there is also capacity to enrol post-primary students.

A need for a Christian school was identified when the former Grasta Christian School ceased operating in recent years. The principal, Sharon Reilly, who also runs a Christian school in Drogheda, decided to open a similar school in Dundalk to meet the needs of the local and wider Christian community. Saol Christian School, Dundalk, opened its doors for pupils in September 2023. It is a co-educational, independent day school. Parents pay annual fees for their children and understand that the ethos of the school is based on Christian principles. All are welcome to attend the school, with the Admission Policy of Saol Christian School clearly 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 clearly 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 10 pupils, age 6 and over, enrolled in the school. Younger children are also catered for through the kindergarten programme and the ABC curriculum. The school has capacity to enrol more pupils and there are plans to expand to offer schooling up to the Advanced Certificate level.

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 principal, Sharon Reilly, and one other staff member, who functions as a supervisor in the senior classroom. As indicated on the R2 application form, all staff are vetted prior to commencing employment in the school. Formal, minuted, staff meetings are held remotely once per month, incorporating staff from both Saol Christian School, Dundalk and Saol Christian School, Drogheda. Informal staff meetings take place on a regular basis. Ukulele lessons are taught by an external teacher.

## **Section 4 Time Devoted to Education**

A copy of the school's calendar for the current academic year was provided with the application. The academic year is similar to the mainstream academic year. The school will operate for 182 school days during the current school year, with the school year ending with an Awards Day on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 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, with dismissal of junior pupils taking place at 14:30. Staff members dismiss children directly to the parents 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 strives to create an environment which values the uniqueness of each child before God. The school is located on the first floor of Island Church, close to Dundalk town centre. A staff member greets students at the entrance door each morning. The principal confirmed that signage, indicating the entrance to the school, has been erected. The school building remains locked throughout the school day. A lift is available, making the school accessible to all.

The learning environment is welcoming and has been carefully created to appropriately support the developmental and educational needs of the pupils. The school consists of two classrooms with colourful educational posters on display in both rooms. 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 and Bibles. 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 within the classroom.

Each classroom, and the hall, is fitted with a Smart television. Pupils have access to Chromebooks 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. A seated library area, complete with road map play mat, is available in the junior room. Pupils earn merits for good work and positive behaviour. These merits can be swapped in the merit shop for prizes.

A spacious hall is equipped for use at break times. It has a dining area, as well as a play area, which is used by pupils. Pupils have access to a secure outdoor playing area within the church grounds. The main church is used by the pupils for weekly chapel time.

The school operates a low pupil teacher ratio and there are currently 10 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 by the staff. Positive behaviour, as well as academic progress, is celebrated and rewarded.

## **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. 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. Student files are kept in a lockable filing cabinet onsite.

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 unofficial 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. Show and tell or oral presentations are timetabled for pupils from ABC's onwards. Pupils prepare and make an oral presentation, often using aids to enhance the presentation. 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. Pupils 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 class. Pupils engage in games on [www.chesskid.com](http://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](http://www.duolingo.com) to support their learning in this area. Post primary students complete levels 1 and 2 on [www.rosettastone.com](http://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](http://www.education.ie) and/or the State Examinations Commission [www.examinations.ie](http://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 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](http://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](http://www.curriculumonline.ie) as a guide for learning. Pupils have access to a large room upstairs which can be used for floor exercises or in inclement weather. The school is situated near Ice House Hill Park. The facilities of this public park are availed of by the school's students.

**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](http://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. Guest speakers, such as pastors and ministry leaders, are invited to give talks to the children. Parents are encouraged to discuss relationships and sexuality education at home with their own child. The school can advise parents about suitable resources, in keeping with their Christian ethos.

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

## 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 and the children are trained in how to score their own work. Supervisors score the PACE tests. 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. One staff member has 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 (DDLDP) are prominently displayed in the entrance hall. The Child Safeguarding Statement is up to date and is on display.

## Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

Pupils attending Saol Christian School 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 shared 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 pupils 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 the pupils of Saol Christian School Dundalk 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 Preliminary Assessment, the Registration Panel decided that children attending Saol Christian School Dundalk will be placed 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**