

**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

Scoil Mhuire Junior School

Address

20, Patrick's Place, Wellington Road, Cork T23 KX31

Telephone

021 4501844

Name of Principal/Director

Ms Ka Lingwood

Name of Assessor/s

Billy Lawlor

Date of Assessment

16th October 2023

Date of Final Report

24th June 2024

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:45		
Closing time:	14:30		
Main breaks during the day:	10:40	to	11:05
	12:50	to	13:20

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)

Ms Ka Lingwood

1.3. Sources of evidence on which report is based

This assessment report is based on the following sources of evidence:

- Information furnished in the annual update form R2 completed by the principal
- An interview with the principal
- Classroom visits and interaction with classroom teachers
- Examination of a sample of learning tasks completed by the pupils
- Observation of the educational materials in use.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Scoil Mhuire Junior School is an independent, fee-charging preparatory school for girls, located in Cork city centre. It was founded in 1954 as a feeder school for Scoil Mhuire Secondary School. The school adheres to and promotes a strong Catholic ethos and offers a broad general education in which the arts, music and modern languages are promoted. The school currently has an enrolment of 117 pupils and caters for pupils who come from the local area and around Cork city. There are also some overseas pupils attending the school and these are mainly the children of parents involved in the technological sector. A board of management governs both the secondary and junior schools. The principal of Scoil Mhuire Junior School reports to the chairperson of the board on a regular basis. The school provides an education to the full range of primary classes from junior infants to sixth class. The school enjoys the support of a very active parents' council. The council comprises of two parents from each class. Regular online meetings are held, and fundraising events are regularly organised.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing at the school consists of a teaching principal and seven other class teachers. The school also employs a teacher of Italian and Drama. Support staff consists of a special needs assistant (SNA) and a classroom assistant. The SNA is also used in a support role in all classes in the school. Staff meetings take place every Tuesday morning and term meetings are also held. While there is no formal in-school management structure in place, the principal receives significant support in the discharge of her duties from her senior staff member. Scoil Mhuire Junior School has a prominently displayed child safeguarding statement in place. All staff members have been Garda vetted. Long-term and short-term planning are a feature of overall curriculum planning in the school and records are maintained of work completed. A curriculum development meeting is held every year and staff members attend in-service days when these opportunities are available.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school day commences at 08.45 and ends at 14.30. There is a 15-minute mid-morning break for recreation and a 30-minute lunch and recreation break. A copy of the school's timetable for the current school year was provided with the school's application. The school observes regular school holiday periods. The school will operate for approximately 166 school days during the current school year.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The school is located just off the city centre in Cork. Its building dates from the late 18th or early 19th century. There are eight designated classrooms which are located on three floor levels. The classrooms are bright and pleasant to visit and are fitted with interactive whiteboards. All contain attractive displays of educational charts and pupils' work. Corridors and stairwells have also been made attractive using colourful displays of art and craft creations. The school has an assembly hall which is used for physical education classes for junior and senior infants and music rehearsals including choir and drama activities. Glen Resource Centre is used by classes one to four for physical education and the senior class have access to the parochial hall for basketball lessons. Each classroom has its own library.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

Scoil Mhuire Junior School teaches all aspects of the *Primary School Curriculum*. This curriculum is enhanced by additional subjects available to the pupils within the school day. Classes have access to lessons in Italian and a teacher visits the school twice a week to give piano and violin lessons. All pupils from 1st to 6th classes are timetabled for choir training weekly.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The principal outlined the importance of developing oral language skills among the pupils at all levels in the school. Provision is made for debates to take place, and all pupils are encouraged to present their own projects. Oral language development is also fostered in additional drama classes provided weekly. There is a strong reading culture in the school. Each class has its own library, and pupils are encouraged to read extensively from a range of books. Pupils are also encouraged to visit Cork city library. In the infant and junior classes, the *Jolly Phonics* programme is used to enhance pupil understanding of phonics in developing word recognition skills. The Oxford Reading Tree series of books is very popular through the classes, and comprehension exercises are done based on these stories. The *Rainbow* reading scheme is used from second class up. Pupils participate in writing activities that cover all genres of writing. A handwriting scheme that promotes the development of cursive writing is used throughout.

6.3. Numeracy

The programme in Mathematics targets the understanding of concepts in number and measure, the development of mathematical skills and the use of these skills to develop the pupils' problem-solving abilities. All work is supplemented by the use of standard commercial textbooks. The *Cracking Maths* series is used as is *Mental Maths* in various classes. There is also a generous availability of concrete materials and other mathematical equipment to support lesson delivery. The classes visited all had evidence in their displays of the importance that is attached to this subject.

6.4. Irish

Some teacher rotation takes place among the third, fourth, fifth and sixth class staff to accommodate the effective teaching of Irish. *Bua na Cainte* is the commercial scheme used in the school and this scheme gives structure and content to the work in progress. The school encourages the use of Irish used informally during the school day and pupils showed a willingness to speak Irish during a classroom visit. Each year *Seachtain na Gaeilge* is organised. Irish dancing is taught, and a specialist Irish dancing teacher visits the school each week. This enables pupils to understand the cultural context of the language. It is also noted that the school's homework journal contains valuable aids to encourage pupils to practise and remember key vocabulary and useful questions and phrases.

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

Due care and attention are given to all other aspects of the *Primary School Curriculum* by the class teachers. The pupils in fourth, fifth and sixth class have been participating in *The Heritage Project*. Local historical areas of interest are visited. Pupils will visit the Titanic Experience in Cobh and the Nano Nagle Centre will also be visited. The programme for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is taught throughout the school. The class teachers take responsibility for the delivery of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme to the pupils. Both the *Walk Tall* and *Stay Safe* elements are taught in the school. Art lessons take place each week. The school classrooms and corridor areas contain stimulating displays of pupil output in both art and crafts. Pupils also participate in photographic competitions. Music lessons provide for the development of choral skills. Some classes also receive instruction in recorder playing. An external teacher also teaches piano and violin in the school twice a week. All pupils are exposed to a wide range of activities during lessons in Physical Education.

6.6. Special educational needs

Two pupils in the school have been assessed as being dyslexic. While the school does not have a dedicated learning support teacher, provision is made for supporting these pupils. The support is provided by the junior infant teacher who assumes responsibility for learning support during afternoon classes. A special needs assistant (SNA) also provides in-class support to these pupils and to other pupils in various classes as part of her responsibilities.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

The class teachers administer Schonell reading and spelling tests to their pupils. These tests give an accurate measure of pupils' reading and spelling ability. Records are kept of results and information is shared with the respective parents. Micra-T and Sigma-T standardised tests are administered to all pupils from first class onwards. The results of these tests are used to monitor pupil progress and to inform classroom planning in English and Mathematics. All class teachers carry out weekly classroom tests in English and Irish spelling and tables.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

The school's application also provided a range of policy and certification documents. The following is a summary of documents provided:

- School calendar and timetables
- Health and Safety Risk Assessment statement
- Child Protection Statement
- Child Safeguarding statement as required by Children's First Act 2015
- Fire safety compliance certificate
- Insurance arrangements
- Annual update form

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

In my opinion, the education provided to the pupils in Scoil Mhuire Junior School can be characterised as *"a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social"*. The reasons I have formed this opinion of the educational provision in the school are as follows:

- The quality of leadership and management offered by the principal teacher
- The range and variety of curricular provision available to the pupils
- The caring and positive relationships fostered by the staff
- The commitment to curriculum planning and preparation
- The provision of a well-resourced learning environment for the pupils
- The principal's role in promoting school improvement practice.

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 Ms Ka Lingwood, principal, and it was stated that the recommendation would be to retain the pupils of Scoil Mhuire Junior School on the register. The final decision regarding registration will be made by the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service 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 Scoil Mhuire 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