

Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

Assessment of Education in places other than Recognised Schools

Independent School Review Assessment Report



Name of School

St. Gerard's Junior School

Address

Thornhill Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow

Telephone

01-2393445

Name of Principal/Director

Dr. Deirdre Farrell

Name of Assessor/s

Billy Lawlor

Date of Assessment

7th December 2023

Date of Final Report

21st June 2024

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:30		
Closing time:	14:30		
Main breaks during the day:	10:10	to	10:25
	12:00	to	12:40

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. Deirdre Farrell

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
- A reading of the range of information available on the school website.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

St. Gerard's Junior School is a lay, Catholic, co-educational school which has a current enrolment of 254 pupils. A strong Catholic ethos is promoted in the school and all school activities are informed by this ethos. Pupils attending the school come from a wide variety of backgrounds and all are educated with a view to participating positively in the academic, cultural, and social life of the wider community. The school is owned by St. Gerard's School Trust board of directors and overall responsibility for the management of the school rests with the members of the board. They divest responsibility for the day-to-day running of the junior school to the Junior School Board of Education. The principal and deputy principal are ex-officio members of the committee and two staff members are also elected to the Junior School Board of Education. The Junior School Board of Education is active and thorough in the discharge of its duties.

Parents play an active role in supporting the school and are a key component of the caring environment that is nurtured throughout the school. They are involved in the supervision of the library, and the work of a very active Parents' Association and inhouse Social Committee.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing at the school consists of an administrative principal teacher, ten class teachers, two fulltime learning support teachers, two part-time learning support teachers, a fulltime physical education and games teacher and part-time specialist teachers in Music, Drama and French. The in-school management team is comprised of the principal teacher, a deputy principal teacher and two assistant principal teachers. The school management team and staff members work in a collaborative manner and there is a continuous focus on the development of competent teaching and learning strategies to support the delivery of the curriculum. Working groups engage in collaborative sessions on developing a range of best educational practices for implementation in the school. This practice ensures that staff members continually update their knowledge and skills in a relevant and active manner.

All staff members have received vetting clearance from the National Vetting Bureau. Child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and are reflected in the school's policies, procedures, practices and activities.

Staff members plan professionally for their work. Planning takes place on both an individual and a collaborative basis and subject reviews are carried out each year. All teachers complete a yearly plan, a term or monthly plan and a weekly plan with staff endeavouring to plan within designated class groups.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school operates each day from 08:30 until 14:30. Appropriate breaks are taken during the school day. Vacation times generally coincide with the post-primary school calendar.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The school is situated on a large site that hosts a range of facilities for the pupils. In addition to the school building there is a sports hall, an arts zone, astro-turf pitches, floodlit tennis courts and rugby and soccer pitches. The facilities are fully utilised to ensure that maximum benefit is derived by the pupils from their usage. A new extension to the school has been built since the last school report was furnished in 2018. Work included the provision of a new library room, an art zone, a multisensory room and an area designated for science and collaborative work. A new playground was also created. All classrooms and the general school environment are presented in an exemplary manner. The displays of pupil work around the school are commended.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The content and subject divisions of the *Primary School Curriculum* inform all aspects of teaching and learning in the school. The school is also in the process of implementing the new *NCCA Primary Curriculum Framework* as the various subjects come on stream. Lessons in French are also taught in each class from third class to sixth class. Information and communication technology (ICT) is promoted in every class in the school. The curriculum is offered as an integrated one and subject areas overlap to form a holistic learning experience for the pupil. Each classroom has access to the *Google Classroom* platform which facilitates the sharing of files between pupils and teachers.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The content of the language and literacy programme is based on the strands and strand units for English in the *Primary School Curriculum* and the new *Primary Language Curriculum*. Pupils are encouraged to express themselves fluently and confidently. This is done through the delivery of a range of discrete lessons in oral language and oral discussion based on topics being covered at curricular level. Debating skills are actively developed from third class to sixth class. Due care is given to the development of reading and comprehension skills among the pupils. The development of phonics skills is promoted from junior infants to second class as is the development of a comprehensive sight vocabulary. Pupils are encouraged to read extensively. The *Accelerated Reading* programme is used to allow pupils develop reading skills at their own pace. Pupils have access to a well-stocked library which is administered by a classroom assistant and pupils who are junior librarians. Pupils are exposed to a developmental range of writing activities including writing in different genres. The school principal is actively involved by reading book reviews submitted to her by the pupils.

6.3. Numeracy

Special attention is given to the teaching of Mathematics in the school. This subject is timetabled for 45 minutes each day in the infant, junior and middle classes. Senior classes are timetabled for an hour and a half tuition each day. A differentiated approach is used in a way that ensures maximum benefit is derived from the class teacher's input. The *Mathletics* online learning programme is also used to build each pupil's mathematical skills. Pupils in each class engage in extensive extension work and activities are set that challenge all ability levels. All classroom work is supported by the use of standard textbooks.

6.4. Irish

A communicative, task-based approach informs the teaching of the Irish language programme. Topics covered during lessons are based on the interests of the pupils. The programme in Irish is supported in each class by the use of the Caint is Comhrá series. Léigh sa Bhaile is used as a textbook to introduce pupils from second class onwards to Irish reading. Pupils are encouraged to speak the language during activities such as games, incidental conversations, role playing and drama. The Coiste na Gaeilge has been particularly successful in encouraging pupils to use incidental Irish during the school day. Pupils are therefore encouraged to use Irish as a natural means of communication during daily life in the school.

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* at each class level. Pupil awareness of important environmental issues is promoted through the school's participation in the *Green School* initiative. This participation is a core element of the programme offered in Social, Environmental and Science Education (SESE). The pupils enjoy participation in the science programme. Opportunities are provided to develop an interest in horticulture through use of the school's gardening resources. Project work based on a visit to the zoo by the pupils was informative and well presented. The pupils are exposed to a range of activities in the Arts. The programme comprises Visual Arts, Drama and Music. Part-time specialist teachers are employed to

deliver the music and drama elements of the programme including school choir, orchestra and annual drama productions for all classes. Visuals based on the Great Famine were observed during the visit. The school promotes the importance of enjoyment when participating in sports events. Hockey and rugby are the main school sports, but pupils have access to a range of other sports including rounders, tennis, cricket, swimming, athletics and soccer. Pupils are also encouraged to play an active part in the life of the school through participation in the students' council. The council meets regularly to discuss ideas brought up by the student body in the school. The programme in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) makes full provision for the social and emotional development of each pupil. The *Flourish* programme and the HSE Busy Bodies programme are used as a resource in the delivery of lessons in Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). The programme is also supported by inputs from external counsellors from Accord.

A specialist teacher is employed to give French lessons from third class to sixth class.

6.6. Special educational needs

The school operates a robust system of identification and support in relation to special educational needs pupils. Referral is based on an early intervention model from infants to first class and on using standardised test scores as an indicator in subsequent years. Two full-time learning support teachers are employed, and they are supported in their work by two part-time teachers. The model of delivery in this area is a combination of in-class support and withdrawal from class for support in a dedicated classroom. The new multi-sensory room offers a therapeutic space for pupils with autism and other special educational needs.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

The school uses a range of diagnostic, summative and formative testing techniques to monitor pupil progress. Assessment portfolios are maintained in each class. Parents are informed of their child's progress during parent-teacher meetings. Two of these meetings are held each year. Two reports are also issued to parents during the course of the school year.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

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

- School calendar and timetables
- Health and Safety policy statement
- Safeguarding and Welfare: all staff vetted by National Vetting Bureau
- Child Safeguarding Statement in accordance with the requirements of the relevant legislation.
- Fire safety compliance certificate.
- Insurance arrangements
- Food preparation.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

In my opinion, the education provided to the pupils in St. Gerard's 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 and her management team
- The range and variety of curricular provision available to the pupils
- The positive relations that are fostered among the members of the school community
- The emphasis on curricular planning and preparation, as well as regular reporting to parents on pupils' learning progress
- The provision of appropriate learning support to pupils with learning needs
- The rich variety of resources available to enhance teaching and learning, both within classrooms and in the school's campus facilities
- Displays throughout the school which highlight and celebrate the pupils' achievements.

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 Dr. Deirdre Farrell, principal, and it was stated that the recommendation would be to retain the pupils of St. Gerard's 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 St. Gerard's 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