

Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

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

**Independent School
Preliminary Assessment Report**

Name of School

Stella Maris Primary School

Address

Assumpta House
Windmill Street
Limerick City

email

info@stellamarisprimaryschool.com

Name of Principal/Director

Richard Casey

Name of Assessor/s

Richard Coughlan and Jane Merriman

Date of Assessment

30 November 2022

Date of Final Report

15 June 2023

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	5
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	6
6.3.	Numeracy	6
6.4.	Irish	7
6.5.	Other areas of learning	7
6.6.	Special educational needs	8
Section 7	Assessment and Record Keeping	8
Section 8	Other Relevant Information	8
Section 9	Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations.....	9
Section 10	Discussion of Finding of Report with Principal.....	9
Section 11	Outcome	10

Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:55		
Closing time:	14:35		
Main breaks during the day:	10:45	to	10:55
	12:30	to	13:00

Is school in operation for more than five years?

No

If no, please give date on which school commenced operation

01/09/2022

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

(Normally interview should take place with the principal)

Richard Casey

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 visit
- Observation of a sample of learning tasks completed by the pupils
- Observation of the educational materials in use
- School website
- School documentation:
- School calendar
- Timetable
- Child safeguarding statement and risk assessment
- Code of behaviour
- Anti-bullying policy
- Safety statement.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Stella Maris Primary School opened its doors on 1 September 2022. It was set up by the principal and one other person as a response to the increasing secularization of society. The school aims to give its pupils a Catholic classical education that instils virtue and wisdom. The education is focused on developing the character of the pupils. The stages of the education of a young person in the classical model are grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Primary education encompasses the grammar stage and is the education provided in Stella Maris Primary School. The grammar stage is concerned with the acquisition of facts and information. This includes the structure of language, spelling, and handwriting. The school has a strongly Catholic ethos. It is not under the patronage of any diocese.

The school has a board of management which, in the future, may include a parents' representative.

The school is supported through voluntary contributions from parents and donations from people with an interest in the school. It also fundraises. Parents are supportive in other ways. For example, they help with cleaning and general maintenance.

There are close links between the school and children's homes. Parents are met informally each day as their children come to and from school. The school will have a parent-teacher meeting in February 2023. Parents will receive a school report each year.

The school has ten pupils. They are organised in two groups; six in the younger group (senior infants and junior infants) and four in the other group (two in second class, one in third class, and one in fifth class). Five pupils were present on the day of the assessment.

The school has children from six families and remains open for enrolments. The upper limit for the present is sixteen pupils. The school has had enquiries from more than ten families. It hopes to appoint a second fulltime teacher within two years.

The school has an appropriate range of policies. They are included on its website. They include the school's code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy. The school has a safety statement and a Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS). It has a designated liaison person and a deputy designated liaison person. The requirement for the CSS to be displayed in a prominent position was confirmed with the principal. The CSS which will include details of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLDP) will be displayed prominently in the school following the assessment. Following the assessment evidence that the CSS is displayed in a prominent position at the internal school entrance hallway was provided.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

The principal is the sole full-time member of staff. There are others who teach on a part-time basis under the supervision of the principal. Others help with the children. All staff members are Garda vetted.

The principal is a qualified teacher, who was working as a special education teacher before commencing the role. He has a graduate diploma in educational leadership. He teaches all of the subjects either directly or through working with the part-time teachers. A former primary teacher takes pupils for mathematics and English so that the two class-groups can be taught separately for these subjects. The school has an art and French teacher and a catechist instructor. A former secondary teacher comes in each Friday for Irish and mathematics.

Almost all classroom planning is carried out by the principal. He has devised schemes of work for each subject and each class. He makes plans each day for each class. He briefs the teachers on the material to be taught by them and, where necessary, he models the teaching. The other teachers work from the plans that he has prepared.

The French teacher oversees French in liaison with the principal. It is expected that in the next term children will have Irish dancing classes. The school is also looking to the inclusion of athletics and gymnastics on its curriculum.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school is open for 172 days each year. The school day commences at 08:25. During the morning there are breaks from 10:45 to 10:55 and from 12:30 to 13:00. School finishes each day at 14:35.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The school is based in a rented house in Limerick City centre. The school uses the downstairs rooms as a classroom and an office. There is a small plot to the rear of the school that serves as a play area. The principal takes the children for PE to the Limerick People's Park which is close to the school.

The school's classroom is used by two classes. They are mainly taught together and are separated for mathematics and English.

There is sufficient room in the school for gymnastics. There is a large space on the upper floor of the house, which is not yet being used by the school.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The curriculum of Stella Maris Primary School is based on the *Primary School Curriculum* (PSC). All the subjects of the PSC are taught. In the case of social personal and health education (SPHE), it is taught as a part of the religious education (RE) curriculum rather than as a separate subject. French and Latin are included in the school's curriculum.

We observed a lesson in progress and spoke to some pupils. The classroom rules were prominently displayed. Pupils' work was regularly checked as part of the lesson. Some of the pupils were working on fractions. Pupils in the junior class were learning letters. One of the pupils said that she read Michael Morpurgo books.

There was a happy warm atmosphere evident. Learning materials were displayed on the classroom wall.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The school is following the *Primary School Curriculum* for English.

The school addresses the development of pupils' language and literacy skills from junior infants on. The younger children learn the sounds of words using *Jolly Phonics*. They are at present learning letter formation.

The school emphasises the teaching of English grammar as part of its classical approach. During the class visited, a pupil from the senior group was analysing sentences using the grammar book.

The senior group is timetabled for grammar and punctuation for two lessons each week. They also work on composition, vocabulary, and comprehension. They have a weekly spelling test. They are using United States Catholic readers.

Overall, there is a big emphasis on memorisation in teaching and learning poetry, literature, and tables. Memorisation applies in other subjects also.

6.3. Numeracy

The school is following the *Primary School Curriculum* for mathematics.

Classes are using the *Busy at Maths* textbooks. The younger group are learning about numbers and counting. There is an emphasis on learning tables and doing mental mathematics.

6.4. Irish

The principal, along with two other teachers, takes pupils for Irish. He emphasises reading and oral language. He ensures that there is consistency in their learning experience. The older children use the *Bun go Barr* textbook. The infant classes are using the *Saolta* programme.

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 curriculum emphasises religious education. A priest comes from the Franciscan Friars community in Moyross for catechesis on four days each week. Pupils attend mass in the local church every second Thursday.

Social, personal, and health education is included in the curriculum as part of religious education. The pupils have begun elementary Latin and French through learning sentences, developing a vocabulary, and playing games using the languages. It is planned that they will advance to Latin grammar and that this will support them in learning English grammar. The older pupils are beginning to learn their prayers in Latin.

The principal teaches history and geography. He is using a 50-year-old textbook for history with the older pupils. His teaching of geography is supported by atlases and the website *educate.ie*. Pupils' study of geography progresses from their city surroundings, through Irish geography, to European geography.

Science is included in the school's curriculum; the younger children take nature walks and look at autumn leaves.

Music in the school involves much singing of songs; learning of songs by heart is considered to be part of a classical education. Next term, the school is hoping to teach Gregorian chant. This will link together Latin and music. There are plans to incorporate the tin whistle and perhaps the bodhrán in time.

Drama is a part of the curriculum and through it the children also learn Irish and music.

6.6. Special educational needs

The school is in its early days, with few pupils. Planning of lessons takes account of the different learning styles and abilities of pupils, for example through differentiation of classwork where necessary.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

The principal considers that ongoing assessment of pupils' learning is essential to teaching and learning. Assessment takes place on a weekly basis and at the end of term for Irish, English, mathematics, and the other subjects. In the case of Irish and English, pupils will have an oral and a grammar test at the end of the term. In addition to a weekly spelling test, the older children will be tested on fluency and comprehension. Pupils have a weekly test in mental mathematics and on tables. The tests from the *Busy at Mathematics* textbook are also used.

The school keeps parents well-informed on what their children are learning and on how they are achieving. This is done verbally and through giving them printed information.

The range of homework tasks assigned to children includes spellings and tables. History and geography material is learned by heart. Homework is assessed during lessons.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

The following policies and documentation were made available:

- School calendar
- Timetable
- Child safeguarding statement and risk assessment
- Code of behaviour
- Anti-bullying policy
- Safety statement

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

The education provided to the pupils of Stella Maris Primary School can be characterised as “*a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual, and social*”.

The reasons that that this judgement has been made in respect of the educational provision in the school are the following:

- The effective leadership by the school principal.
- The school has prepared a range of policies that are available to all through the school’s website.
- The school is implementing the *Primary School Curriculum*.
- Planning takes place for teaching and learning.
- There is a good understanding of the role of pupil assessment in teaching and learning.
- The school gives due attention to the care and wellbeing of its 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.

Any conclusions in Section 9 are not a guarantee of registration of children attending the school

Section 10 Discussion of Finding of Report with Principal

The finding of the report was discussed with the principal Richard Casey at the conclusion of the visit on 30 November 2022. It was stated that the recommendation would be to include the pupils of Stella Maris Primary School, Assumpta House, Windmill Street, Limerick 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 Preliminary Assessment, the Registration Panel decided that children attending Stella Maris Primary 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.

The registration is subject to a periodic review by the Child and Family Agency.