

**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

Weston Primary Montessori School

Address

Barnhall, Leixlip, County Kildare. W23 E8HW

Name of Principal/Director

Co-Managers: Gail Hartigan
Amber Masterson

Name of Assessor/s

Lisa Duffy and Paula Callaghan

Date of Assessment

29th November 2022

Date of Final Report

15th June 2023

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:45		
Closing time:	14:30 (14:00 on Fridays)		
Main breaks during the day:	11:00	to	11:20
	13:00	to	13:30

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)

Interview with primary school co-managers Ms Gail Hartigan and Ms Amber Masterson

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 primary school co-managers
- Interview with the co-managers
- Classroom visits on 29/11/22
- Observation of a sample of learning tasks completed by the pupils on 29/11/22
- Observation of the educational facilities in the school and the educational materials in use on 29/11/22
- The school website.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Weston Primary Montessori School is an independent, co-educational, multi-denominational, fee-paying school. It is located within the grounds of the local rugby club and enjoys access to the club facilities. The school was established in 2016 through the cooperation of teachers and parents, with the aim of replacing the former Glebe Montessori School, which closed without notice, in the same year.

For the purposes of assessment and registration there are currently twenty-five pupils enrolled in the two primary classes over the age of six years. Pupils from Junior Infants to Second Class are taught in the junior room while pupils from Third to Sixth class are taught in the senior room. Pupils of all ability levels are welcomed. It is hoped that the enrolment numbers will continue to grow and that the school will eventually become a three-teacher school.

Staff meetings and planning take place at the beginning and end of the school year and on Friday afternoons, as required.

Ms Gail Hartigan and two members of the parent body make up the Board of Directors.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing at Weston Primary Montessori School consists of four teachers. The junior and senior room teachers also function as primary school co-managers. There is a preschool manager, and a preschool class teacher. In addition, a part time resource and Spanish teacher is employed. She attends the school twice a week to support pupils with additional needs. She also teaches Spanish to each class for half an hour once per week. The co-managers work in close collaboration with each other leading and managing all aspects of the education provision and school development.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school is in operation for 182 school days annually, in line with Department of Education and Skills requirements for primary schools. The Weston campus opens its doors to receive children from 08.45 and closes at 14.30. The school day, with formal education, commences at 09.00 and finishes at 14.30 on Monday to Thursday and closes at 14.00 on Friday to facilitate staff meetings. Morning break is from 11.00-11.20 while lunch break is from 13.00-13.30.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

There are two primary school classrooms, two preschool classrooms, as well as a resource room in the prefabricated building. Classrooms are large, bright, airy and are well equipped with a wide range of educational resources. There is plenty of storage space. Hallways are well maintained and are decorated with pupils' artwork and projects. There are safe outdoor play areas for use by students at breaktime. Pupils have access to facilities of Barnhall Rugby Football Club and nearby Castletown Woods is utilised for Forest School activities. The school operates a low pupil teacher ratio and there are currently twenty-seven pupils enrolled in the school.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

Teaching and learning are guided by the Primary School Curriculum and implemented through a predominantly Montessori approach, combined with a range of additional teaching approaches, activity books and materials.

Lessons are taught on a themed basis, with a particular emphasis on active learning, with each pupil learning at his or her own pace. Progress is guided by the pupil's readiness to acquire a skill before moving on to another skill. There is a strong emphasis on the development of confidence and independence through practical life skills. Meaningful integration of subjects takes place, as is integral to the Montessori philosophy. The Aistear Programme is used in the junior room to promote child led learning through play.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The programme for language and literacy is comprehensive and aims to develop oral, reading and writing skills through meaningful integration with other areas of learning. Learning in the senior room follows a structured timetable to ensure that all aspects of literacy are covered. *Jolly Phonics* is utilised throughout the whole school, with a particular focus on phonics and blends in the junior room. Oral presentations are an integral part of the curriculum and a lovely area, complete with a couch, is used to conduct presentations in both rooms. Theme-based play is conducted through the Aistear framework with activities in construction, socio-dramatic roleplay, and 'small world' activities. Pupils read a wide array of authors, experience a variety of writing genres, and are exposed to a diverse collection of poetry.

Grammar, punctuation and parts of speech are taught, in a hands-on and active manner, using Montessori materials and methods.

6.3. Numeracy

Pupils have access to a wide range of mathematical equipment and an environment rich in mathematics is provided for them. All strands of the *Primary School Curriculum* are covered, with the programme and activities tailored to each individual's specific needs. Pupils use concrete materials to develop an understanding of mathematical concepts and gradually move from concrete to abstract. *Planet Maths* (Folens) and *Brainteasers* (CJ Fallon) are used to support and guide learning. *Maths Boxes (Prim Ed)* are available to link with areas being covered or to revise concepts if necessary.

Emphasis is placed on the early identification of needs through teacher observation, regular revision and termly and yearly assessments. Plans are then put in place to try a different approach or offer support as deemed necessary

6.4. Irish

Irish is taught in both the junior and senior classrooms and content is guided by the Primary School Curriculum. Almost all pupils learn Irish. A very small number of pupils are officially exempt from Irish.

Bun go Barr, *Cearltliriú* and aspects of *Ceim ar Chéim* (C.J. Fallon) are used to support learning. There is an emphasis on oral language development in the junior class, and on activity-based learning. Montessori materials and methodologies are used to enhance language learning across the strands of the *Primary School Curriculum*.

Plans are currently being put in place to involve a parent in the teaching of Irish. She has devised a child friendly programme, complete with puppets, which aims to further improve pupils' engagement with Irish.

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

Pupils are provided with a full and varied curriculum in Weston Primary Montessori School.

Music, Visual Arts, and Drama are taught by the class teachers within the classroom. The arts are skilfully integrated into other learning areas, seasonal activities, and themes. Pupils partake in song singing and listen and respond to music. A Christmas concert takes place annually. There are plans to engage an external teacher to aid with the teaching of music in the near future.

In visual arts, pupils work with a wide range of materials, including paint, clay, fabric and fibre etc. Pupils study selected artists and techniques such as how to create texture. They then produce admirable work based on what they have learned. Junior pupils partake in junk art. Artwork was visible throughout the school and enhanced the learning environment.

Physical education for pupils comprises of a variety of outdoor activities. Activities that build teamwork, develop skills, increase fitness levels and are designed to be inclusive of special needs are included in the weekly provision. An external coach is engaged to teach ball skills through rugby. Pupils also frequently walk to Castletown Woods.

Weaving Well Being, *Walk Tall and Stay Safe* are used to support pupils in their social, emotional and moral development. *Mindful Matters* (CJ Fallon) is also used in the Junior room. *Busy Bodies* is taught in sixth class if there are more than three pupils. Otherwise, links to websites and relevant information is sent to parents. External speakers have been engaged to speak to parents and pupils on aspects of cyber safety and this area is reinforced within the classroom using the *Stay Safe* programme. Lots of talk and discussion takes place to promote respect for each other, acceptance of diversity, building of resilience etc and helps develop pupils moral understanding.

Spanish classes are undertaken by all children for half an hour each week.

A meaningful integrated, thematic approach is used to support learning in Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE). The *Small World Series* (CJ Fallon) is used as a support in this learning area. Pupils learn through the use of Montessori materials and resources, exploration of the prepared environment, and through individual and group projects. Teamwork is used to highlight individuals' strengths and positive attributes and to facilitate peer to peer learning. Timelines are regularly used to help children understand and sequence events. Forest School activities are undertaken, and the school is very fortunate to have a parent who is trained in forest school methodologies. During winter/spring pupils experience this child-led learning methodology, which focuses on all the senses. They have the opportunity to climb trees, build huts, learn about plants and animals, experience the changing seasons in their local environment while developing a respect for nature and the environment.

Many hands-on science experiments were undertaken during recent Science Week. These help develop the skills of observation, questioning, predicting, and recording, while linking appropriately with procedural writing. Lots of talk and discussion around the experiments takes place prior to pupils presenting their findings and learnings to the class.

Junior pupils maintain a record of learning in their culture hardback copies.

6.6. Special educational needs

In Montessori education a nurturing, supportive environment is provided for children of all abilities and learning styles. Weston Montessori Primary School is fully inclusive and offers learning support for pupils with additional learning needs. This may take the form of either in class support or withdrawal as the amount, and type of support is based on individual requirements. A part time support teacher currently attends the school on Monday and Tuesday and provides additional support for pupils in each room. A bright, spacious and well-resourced room is available for her to use, as required. If a child requires the support of a special needs assistant (SNA), his/her parents privately fund this.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are drawn up as needed. Pupils learning needs are also met by differentiation of content, learning process, environment or outcomes.

Combined with the above, due to the low pupil teacher ratio, and frequent communication with parents, gaps are easily identified, communicated in a timely manner, and interventions put in place to fully support a child on his or her educational journey.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

A comprehensive system for assessment is in place in the school. Standardised tests in English (Micra-T) and Mathematics (Sigma-T) are administered to all pupils from first class to sixth class. The Belfield Infant Assessment Profile (BIAP) and Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST) are also administered. Teacher-based assessment and observation are a regular feature of the assessment programme. Mathematics termly assessments and weekly spelling tests are undertaken. Parent/teacher meetings take place annually in February and an annual progress report is provided for the parents.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

Home-school links are very well developed as positive links with parents are valued and deemed to be a key part of the school ethos. The co-managers operate an open-door policy. The active parents' association organise three or four activities per annum. Communication is through a dedicated WhatsApp group and Class Dojo. Parents can also meet the teacher, as required, as they drop or collect their children.

All staff members have been Garda vetted and have been trained in the implementation of Children First. There is an appointed Designated Liaison person (DLP) and Deputy Liaison Person (DDL), and notices, with photographs, have been prominently displayed as required.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

In my opinion students/pupils attending Weston Montessori Primary School are in receipt of *a certain minimum education*, intellectual, physical, moral, and social. I recommend that children attending Weston Montessori Primary School can continue to be included on the register for the education of pupils in places other than recognised schools.

- Aspects of the provision that are successful include:
- The quality of the information provided by the co-managers during the review assessment.
- The suitability of the curriculum provided in relation to the ages, abilities and interests of individual pupils.
- The availability and range of resources to support learning in each classroom.
- The commitment of the co-managers to providing a full curriculum to their pupils.
- The efforts made to help each pupil develop confidence as an independent learner.

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 co-manager at the conclusion of the visit on the 29th November 2022. It was stated that the recommendation would be to register the pupils of Weston Montessori Primary School, Barnhall, Leixlip, Co. Kildare on the register.

I confirmed that the decision with regard to the registration of pupils of Weston Montessori School would be the responsibility of the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS) - Tusla Registration Panel.

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 Weston Primary Montessori 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