

Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

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

**Independent School
Review Assessment Report**



Name of School

Willow Park Junior School

Address

Rock Road
Blackrock, Co. Dublin, A94 TW98

Telephone

01 2881651

Name of Principal/Director

Mr. James Docherty

Name of Assessor/s

Billy Lawlor

Date of Assessment

17th May 2023

Date of Final Report

20th March 2024

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:50		
Closing time:	15:00		
Main breaks during the day:	10:55	to	11:10
	13:00	to	13:30

Is school in operation for more than five years?

Yes	
00/00/0000	

If no, please give date on which school commenced operation

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

(Normally interview should take place with the principal)

Mr. James Docherty (principal) and the deputy principal

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 and the deputy principal
- Classroom visits
- Examination of a sample of learning tasks completed by the pupils
- Observation of the educational materials in use
- Documentation provided by the principal including a commissioned school evaluation report
- A reading of the school's website.

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Willow Park Junior School is an independent fee-paying boys' school whose Spiritan ethos is central to curriculum provision. The school operates under the trusteeship of the Spiritan Congregation and the overall patronage of the Spiritan Education Trust. Pupils of all faiths and those of no affiliation are welcomed. At the time of the assessment, the school had an enrolment of 673 pupils. Most pupils come from the Blackrock, South Dublin area. The school also has approximately 100 international pupils enrolled. Classes range from junior infants to sixth, organised into 25 form groups. The pupils attending the school are highly motivated to learn and a positive work ethic is nurtured throughout. Pupil attendance is very good. The board of management has overall responsibility for the management of the school. The board consists of a chairperson, two trustee and two parent representatives, one staff representative, and the principal, who acts as recording secretary. Meetings are held monthly, and child protection is listed on each month's agenda. The principal is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school, and delegates appropriate responsibilities to various staff members.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing at the school consists of an administrative principal, an administrative deputy principal, 25 form teachers, four full-time and two job-sharing learning support teachers, six special needs assistants, three physical education teachers, one extra-curricular Irish teacher, one full-time and one part-time music teachers, one part-time information and communication technology (ICT) teacher and one lay chaplain. There is appropriate secretarial and maintenance support available. A registrar manages applications and enrolments for the schools on the campus.

Seven of the class teachers form part of the middle management team and hold the title of dean. The principal teacher executes his duties in a highly professional manner. He is cognisant of ensuring high standards of teaching and learning across the school and views the pupils and their needs as his main priority. He receives the full support of his deputy principal in the discharge of his duties. The principal and deputy principal oversee the school's curricular and organisational policies, which influence teaching and learning and the general organisation of the school. Whole staff meetings are held bi-monthly and provide a forum for discussion, for sharing of information and for the dissemination of school-related information. Form group meetings take place every fortnight. Staff members and any person who has contact with the pupils have secured Garda vetting clearance. The child safeguarding statement is updated annually. The health and safety statement is audited every three years. Each staff member and all board of management members have completed Tusla's *Introduction to Children First* programme. All staff members engage in continuous professional development courses.

The school enjoys the support of a very active parents' association. Parents are actively involved in and support many school activities including Science Week, Arts Week, the Rugby Festival, and the Book Fair. They are also involved in the publication of the weekly newsletter.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

Formal teaching begins at 08.50 each morning and concludes from 14.20 to 15.00 each afternoon. The school is in operation for 169 days each year. School holidays normally replicate those taken under the standardised school year guidelines. Pupil attendance levels are commendable.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The school is set in expansive and well-maintained grounds, and the buildings are bright and spacious. The pupils have access to an indoor swimming pool, along with a wide range of both indoor and outdoor playing and sports facilities. Classrooms and corridors are print-rich and welcoming, providing the school with a purposeful, focused learning environment. Artwork and projects adorn the walls, and each classroom has an ample supply of pertinent resources. Other facilities available include a central information technology (IT) hub, a music centre, a general purposes room and a library.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

The strands and strand units of the *Primary School Curriculum* inform teaching and learning in each classroom. Classes also take place in Inquiry Based Learning (IBL) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and are enhanced by the availability of specialist teacher support. The day is organised into eight blocks of 40 minutes duration. The core subjects of Irish, English and Mathematics are taught every day to each class. The *Aistear* programme is implemented in the junior infant and senior infant classes for one hour each day. Teachers organise termly and weekly plans which the principal and deputy principal view online. Monthly progress reports, which are reflective of the work completed in each teacher's weekly plans, are kept on file centrally. The principal and deputy principal randomly check pupils' written work at each class level. Methodologies used include hands-on, experiential activities, along with group and pair work.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The pupils' capacity to express themselves confidently and fluently is developed through discrete oral language lessons. Debating classes are encouraged and pupils take lead roles in promoting charity events and orientation days. The *Jolly Phonics* programme is used in the infant classes to enhance provision for the development of reading and writing skills. Reading is taught through the prescribed textbooks. Each class has a weekly twenty-minute slot in the school's well-stocked library and pupils are encouraged to bring books home for leisure reading. Spellings and phonics are given due regard. A thematic approach is used for the teaching of poetry. The pupils are introduced to cursive writing as early as is practicable in their school life. Due consideration is given to the process of writing, and pupils learn to write in different genres and for different audiences from a young age. Pupils are proud to display and discuss their work. They enjoy contributing to the school's weekly newsletter.

6.3. Numeracy

Special attention is given to the teaching of Mathematics in the school. The timetables for each class provided for this assessment indicate that the subject is given sufficient time allocation to ensure that the pupils derive maximum benefit from the class teacher's input. Emphasis is placed on the application of Mathematics to the real environment, and this builds the pupil's confidence in approaching problem-solving activities. Pupils in each class engage in extensive extension work and activities are set that are appropriately differentiated both to interest and challenge all ability levels. Each class has a dedicated Mathematics area.

6.4. Irish

Teachers plan for and target specific language objectives in Irish. The school also employs a specialist external teacher to teach Irish lessons in some classes. This ensures that adequate provision is made for delivery of a balanced and meaningful programme throughout the school. A range of resources is available to support learning in this area including the use of the *Bun Go Barr* programme. It is planned to review all resources used at the end of the year. The use of Irish, both formally and informally is encouraged and there is a strong emphasis placed on the cultural importance of the language. Pupils in third, fourth, fifth and sixth form have access to an Irish Cumann. This informal setting allows pupils with a particular interest in the Irish language to communicate with each other through that medium and to explore Irish culture.

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 school has recently been awarded the travel flag and pupils are encouraged to cycle to school. Projects were on display in each class area. The sensory garden is a valuable school resource in the management of the sensory needs of pupils who are challenged in this area. The pupils are exposed to a range of activities in the Arts. The programme comprises Visual Arts, Drama and Music. Specialist tuition in music is available to the pupils. 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 golf. A comprehensive programme is delivered in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The *Stay Safe* programme is taught and the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) element of the SPHE curriculum is given by individual class teachers. Positive behaviour among pupils is promoted in a variety of ways. The *Weaving Well-Being* programme is aimed at enhancing pupils' mental health. Staff members are encouraged to use Circle Time once a fortnight as a means of incentivising pupils to improve their behaviour and learning. The school places a big emphasis on providing pastoral support for the pupils. A school counsellor is employed to oversee this aspect of the everyday life of the school. The development of positive self-esteem and the cultivation of pupil health and wellbeing are the focus of the support offered to the pupils.

6.6. Special educational needs

The staff in the learning support department ensure that there is a co-ordinated and continuous response to the special needs of individual pupils who have been identified as requiring additional support. Six learning support teachers and six special needs assistants are attached to this department. Two of these teachers work with special pupils and four operate in a floating capacity through the school.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

The school uses a wide range of assessment tools. All pupils are closely monitored regarding general development and progress, beginning at the junior infant level in the school. Formative assessment takes place throughout the school day at each class level. Summative assessment consists of end of term tests held at the end of the Christmas and Summer terms. Reports are issued to parents at the end of these terms. Standardised tests are administered in English and Mathematics from first class to sixth class and tests for screening purposes also take place in the senior infant class.

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
- Annual update form
- A school safety statement
- Child Safeguarding statement as required by Child Care Act 2015
- Fire safety compliance certificate
- School Insurance arrangements

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

In my opinion, the education provided to the pupils in Willow Park Junior School I 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 deputy principal
- The range and variety of curricular provision available to the pupils
- The management of pupils at classroom level and the positive relations that are fostered in the school community
- The commitment to curricular planning and preparation and to continuous professional development among staff members
- Provision of learning support to pupils with learning needs
- A 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 provision of well-resourced and stimulating learning environments for the pupils in each class.

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 and deputy principal and it was stated that the recommendation would be to retain the pupils of Willow Park 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 Willow Park 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