

**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

Woodlands Academy

Address

Wingfield House, Kilcroney, Bray, Co Wicklow, A98 FK10

Telephone

01 2866323

Name of Principal/Director

Cecilia Azcunaga (Executive Director)

Name of Assessor/s

Jane Merriman
 Paul Sloan

Date of Assessment

10th December 2024

Date of Final Report

31st March 2025

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	08:45		
Closing time:	17:00		
Main breaks during the day:	11:15	to	12:20
	13:30	to	14:15

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)

Cecilia Azcunaga - Executive Director
General Manager
Academic Manager

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 school
- An interview with the Executive Director, General Manager and Head of Academics
- An examination of information available on the school website
- A visit to the working environment of the school
- Discussions with teaching staff and students

Section 2 General Information and School Context

Woodlands Academy is an international private boarding school located in County Wicklow. The school provides a supportive and nurturing environment, with state-of-the-art facilities, comprehensive programs, and dedicated staff, all aimed at fostering the integral development of young women as Christian leaders.

Woodlands Academy is part of the OAK International network of schools, which directs educational programs focused on the holistic formation of young people. The school's ethos is rooted in the values of Regnum Christi and the Legionaries of Christ.

The academy serves young women who are non-English speakers, primarily from Mexico. Students attend the school for one academic year before returning to their home country to continue their education. During their time at Woodlands Academy, students are fully immersed in English to enhance their proficiency in the language. The school strives to equip each student with practical techniques and academic knowledge to support their personal and professional growth.

The school is guided by the educational and spiritual principles of the Legionaries of Christ and Regnum Christi. Currently, the school has an enrolment of 112 students with a maximum capacity for 120.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

The staffing structure at Woodlands Academy includes an Executive Director, a General Manager, a Principal/Academic Manager. There are eleven full-time teachers, and four part-time teachers shared between two campuses (Oak Academy and Woodlands Academy). In addition, there are five part time teachers in Woodlands Academy that also assume other responsibilities in the Academy. The school also employs a full-time nurse. All teaching staff hold relevant primary and post-primary degrees and qualifications in teaching English as a second language. Staff members have undergone Garda vetting, and the majority are registered with the Teaching Council.

In total, the school has 96 staff members, including ancillary staff and volunteers. A comprehensive range of policies has been developed, including an anti-bullying policy, a child protection policy, and a code of behaviour. All staff members have completed relevant child protection training, and the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Child Safeguarding Officer are well-versed in their responsibilities.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

Classes at Woodlands Academy begin at 08:45 and conclude at 17:00 daily, with two breaks scheduled during the school day. The academic calendar consists of 154 days per year. Additionally, students take part in supervised trips, contributing an extra 31 days of student contact time. Attendance registers are maintained.

A typical weekday at Woodlands Academy begins with wake-up at 06:40, followed by Mass at 07:30. After breakfast at 08:05, students prepare for the day before classes begin at 08:45 and run until break at 11:45. English class starts at 12:00, followed by lunch at 13:15. The afternoon session continues from 14:00 to 17:00. Assembly takes place on Mondays. After class, students enjoy free time until 17:30, when extracurricular activities take place. Dinner is served at 18:50, followed by night talk sessions. The evening ends with preparation time, bedroom curfew at 21:30, and lights out at 21:45.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

Woodlands Academy is in a country house with an extended modern building to the rear of the main house. It is set within expansive grounds. The main building includes seven classrooms, a science lab and an art room, a general-purpose area is used for assemblies and indoor activities. The classrooms are spacious and contemporary and provide a stimulating learning environment for the students. The school also possesses extensive outdoor space. The property's expansive lawns, elegant gardens, and natural pond, walled garden and roaming deer as wildlife provide Woodlands Academy students with picturesque natural surroundings.

The academy is extremely well-equipped, with a range of resource materials available in each classroom. A dedicated computer room offers students access to a variety of personal computers, while iPads are also in use throughout the school. iPad/Projector: All classrooms are equipped with projectors and Apple televisions, alongside iPad docking stations for students. The school enforces a strict policy on general internet use.

Woodlands Academy offers state-of-the-art facilities for its students, including:

Purpose-Built Multi-Sports Complex: Adjacent to the school, this complex includes a custom-built gymnasium, dance, and aerobic studios, all equipped with surround sound and purpose-built areas for each sport -Basketball, Tennis, and Futsal Courts

A nurse facility, fully equipped with medical equipment.

A gym with treadmills, cross trainers, and exercise bicycles.

Art Room: A spacious and bright art room.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

Woodlands Academy follow in the main a Junior Cycle Curriculum with allowances made for cultural differences and language needs and shortened timeframes. Students attend the school for one academic year, so they suitably condense and modify the Junior Cycle curriculum. The Woodland cohort attends for only one year, they do not partake in state examinations.

Academic Subjects Offered

Woodlands Academy provides a broad range of subjects tailored to meet students' academic and personal development goals, including:

English to Speakers of Other Languages

English Literature

French

History

Mathematics

Geography

Home Economics

Science

Catholic Formation

Art and Textiles (students have one period of Textiles and two periods of Art per week)

Students attend Woodlands Academy to immerse themselves in English language learning during their year in residence. All communication within the school is conducted in English, and all subjects are taught through the medium of English. Students are actively encouraged to always use English to enhance their fluency and confidence.

In addition to language learning, students gain exposure to Irish culture through weekly outings to places of historical and cultural significance. Special weekends are organised throughout the year for students in each Irish house to foster team spirit and strengthen friendships. To further enrich their European experience, students also have the opportunity to visit other European countries during their stay at Woodlands Academy.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

At Woodlands Academy, students are encouraged to communicate exclusively in English at all times. The "English Campaign" is designed to foster language immersion during both school hours and free time, ensuring students achieve excellent language proficiency.

Sanctions are in place to address instances of not speaking English, but students also have numerous opportunities to earn rewards for their efforts and achievements in English. Prizes include activities such as movie nights, extra internet time, day trips, pizza parties, baking sessions, and book vouchers. For those who maintain consistent use of English throughout the year without receiving any sanctions, a special overnight trip within Ireland is awarded as an additional incentive.

Students are grouped according to their English proficiency to prepare for Cambridge examinations. Instruction focuses on grammar, oral language development, writing, and comprehension skills. The curriculum offers diverse literary experiences, including the study of short stories, poetry, and novel excerpts. Students engage in various forms of writing, such as formal and informal letters, essays, reports, literary reviews, and even blogging.

Monthly academic and formation certificates recognise student effort, excellence, and participation. Academic awards include "Student of the Month," "English Excellence," and "English Effort," while formation awards are earned for punctuality, order, etiquette, conduct, personal presentation, and respect. Parents are regularly updated on awards received by their daughters, celebrating their achievements.

6.3. Numeracy

The mathematics programme at Woodlands Academy follows the Junior Cycle syllabus, which is typically studied at ordinary level. The curriculum is designed to develop students' understanding of mathematics in a systematic and structured manner, ensuring a solid foundation in key concepts, operations, and mathematical relations. Throughout the year, students engage in a variety of class activities and interactive lessons that enhance their comprehension and problem-solving abilities, allowing them to apply mathematical principles in real-life contexts.

In addition to the regular curriculum, Woodlands Academy celebrates Maths Week each year, an event that promotes enthusiasm for mathematics through fun, hands-on activities, competitions, and challenges. This week encourages students to explore mathematics in creative ways, further deepening their appreciation and understanding of the subject. The programme aims to equip students not only with the academic knowledge needed for further studies but also with the practical mathematical skills essential for daily life.

6.4. Irish

The Irish language is not part of the curriculum at Woodlands Academy. However, staff members are committed to promoting students' interest in Irish culture and heritage. This is achieved through educational trips to significant heritage sites, as well as exposure to Irish history, music, and dance. These activities offer students a rich understanding of Irish traditions and help foster an appreciation for the country they are residing in.

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 academic programme at Woodlands Academy offers a broad range of learning experiences across various subjects. Students are allocated four periods per week to study both written and oral French, enabling them to develop their language skills in a structured manner. Geography is taught using the *Geography Now* textbook, available in eBook format, which students access via their iPads. History is studied over four periods each week, with careful attention given to ensuring students develop a well-rounded understanding of historical events and concepts at each class level.

In science, the textbook *Exploring Science* supports instruction, providing a solid foundation in scientific principles. Artistic education is given particular emphasis in the curriculum, with students exploring creative opportunities in textiles through activities like knitting and sewing. They have created items such as aprons, teddy bears, and scarves, and are encouraged to use sewing machines in their projects.

The art programme allows students to explore sculpture and painting, particularly using oils and watercolours, nurturing their creativity through hands-on experiences.

Horse riding is also offered as part of the extracurricular activities. Each student can choose two elective courses per term, based on the programme they are following and the courses available that year. It is recommended that one of the electives be physical in nature.

6.6. Special educational needs

Students attending Woodlands Academy are generally of average to above-average ability and do not present with special educational needs at this time. Each student undergoes a thorough admissions process, during which their suitability for the school is assessed. Given the nature of the school, where students are away from their home environments for extended periods, careful consideration is given to ensure that each student is well-prepared for this unique experience. To support their well-being and emotional development, all students have access to psychological support provided by staff members throughout their time at the school.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

Regular progress tests are administered, with grades recorded to track student development. In addition to these ongoing assessments, students' progress is evaluated through formal school examinations, which take place five times throughout the academic year. Comprehensive reports are issued to parents, clearly outlining the grades achieved in each subject. To further assess their language proficiency, all students take a recognized Cambridge examination in June. At the time of the assessors' visit, the Christmas examinations were already underway.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

The school's mission is centred on the integral formation of its students, aligned with the educational philosophy of the Legionaries of Christ and Regnum Christi. This philosophy is grounded in a Christian understanding of the person and emphasises the holistic development of students across all dimensions: intellectual, human, spiritual, and apostolic. To support this mission, a double class period each week is dedicated to Catholic formation, which is led by the Consecrated members of the order. The Executive Director and a number of other staff are consecrated members.

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

In my opinion the education provided to the pupils of Woodlands Academy, Wingfield House, Kilcroney, Co. Wicklow can be characterised as *“a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social”*.

The successful aspects of the provision include:

- The effective leadership demonstrated by the principal, particularly in terms of instructional guidance.
- The positive and conducive learning environment observed during the visit.
- The suitability of the curriculum in relation to the ages, abilities, and interests of the students.
- The dedication of the staff to delivering an appropriate and engaging curriculum to the pupils.
- The availability and effective use of a range of resources to support lesson delivery.
- The continuous and ongoing improvements being made to the school environment.

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 Executive Director and General Manager at the conclusion of my visit on 10th December 2024. It was confirmed that the recommendation would be to retain the pupils of Woodlands Academy, Wingfield House, Kilcroney, on the register of children receiving an education in a place other than a recognised school. The final decision regarding registration will be made by Tusla - Child and Family Agency: Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service.

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 Woodlands Academy 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