

EDUCATION (WELFARE) ACT, 2000

ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATION IN PLACES OTHER THAN RECOGNISED SCHOOLS

UNDER SECTION 14 OF THE ACT



INDEPENDENT SCHOOL REVIEW ASSESSMENT REPORT

NAME OF SCHOOL	Headfort School
ADDRESS	Headfort, Kells, County Meath.
NAME OF PRINCIPAL	Mr. James Philip Mc Cormick
NAME OF ASSESSOR	Paula Callaghan
DATE OF ASSESSMENT	04/10/2022

DATE OF PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT	Assessment Type: Preliminary Assessment Date: 05.02.2016 Assessors Billy Lawlor and PJ McNamara
DATE OF DRAFT REVIEW ASSESSMENT REPORT	21/11/2022
DATE OF FINAL REPORT	31/05/2023

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

<i>Name of school</i>		<i>Date of assessment</i>	
Headfort School		04/10/2022	
<i>Address</i>			
Headfort School, Headfort, Kells, County Meath			
<i>Telephone</i>		<i>E-mail</i>	
0469271116		mccormickp@headfortschool.com	
<i>School hours</i>	<i>Main breaks during the day lunch 12.20 to 13.20 for Junior Classes, 13.00 to 13.30 Senior Classes.</i>		<i>Is school in operation for more than five years?</i>
<i>Opening time:</i>	08:30	<i>From</i> 11:00 <i>to</i> 11:30	Yes
<i>Closing time:</i>	18:00 (15:00 for Junior Classes)	<i>From</i> 12.20 to 13.20 Senior classes Recreation exercise snack 14:00 – 15:45	
<i>Name of principal and/or other teacher(s) interviewed (normally interview should take place with the principal)</i>			
Headmaster Philip Mc Cormick and Head of Education Tracey Maree			

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, and teacher Tracey Maree
- Classroom visits
- Observation of a sample of learning tasks completed by the pupils
- Observation of the educational materials in use.
- Visits to and observation of the facilities throughout the school.
- Observation of the 60-acre grounds in which the school is set, and the recreational facilities it offers to the pupils, including a topiary garden and horse-riding track.

SECTION 2: GENERAL INFORMATION AND SCHOOL CONTEXT

Headfort School is a fee-paying co-educational and non-denominational day and boarding primary school. There are currently 114 pupils enrolled in the school, of whom 98 are aged six years and over. Pupils attending the school are from various backgrounds, from Ireland and from abroad. Pupils and their families who choose the day school option, attend school from 08:30, with junior pupils finishing at 15:00, while Senior pupils, in Forms 3 to Senior 1 attend until 18:00. Pupils who are boarding at the school have various options open to them, including a five-day, seven-day, or specific nights during any week to suit family situations.

The school was established 70 years ago, in 1949 and was located in the Pavilion at Headfort House. Headfort School is now located in Headfort House. In 2020 the school was reincarnated under the management of The Headfort School Trust Limited, with Mr Philip Mc Cormick taking over as Head Teacher in September 2021.

SECTION 3: THE PRINCIPAL AND STAFF

Staffing at the school consists of an administrative Principal, Mr Philip Mc Cormick, a Form Teacher for each class group, and specialist teachers for Science, Music, Latin, Spanish, French, Choir, Art, and Physical Education and games such as Rugby, Tennis, and Hockey. Ms Mary Maher is the Admissions Officer and School Secretary. In addition, the Headfort Trust employs staff in catering, cleaning, gardening, and generally to ensure maintenance of the school to a high standard.

Teachers are provided with an Employee Handbook. Peninsula Business Services Limited are employed for Headfort School financial accounting, and the creation of the school's Handbook. The firm subcontracts to inform the drafting of school policies and plans.

A Daily Bulletin is shared online by staff, and the Headmaster maintains bulletin files of in-depth information and for reference purposes. Staff meet regularly to assess and to review teaching and learning, and to share ideas, concerns, and successes. Reports are issued to parents at the ends of Term 1 and Term 3, with a progress report issued during Term 2, providing for support, intervention, or remediation when required.

The active voice of the child is nurtured. There is a Student Representative Council, and elections are held annually.

SECTION 4: TIME DEVOTED TO EDUCATION

Headfort school operates for 163 days per year, following the Primary School calendar in relation to terms, breaks, and holidays. The Headfort school day is very comprehensive, extending from the arrival of pupils at 08:30, until the school day finishes at 18.00 for senior pupils, with pupils in the junior classes finishing at 15.00. Therefore, as explained by the Headmaster, while their school year consists of fewer days than the average primary school, pupil contact hours exceed an average of pupil-teacher contact hours.

Following admission each morning, pupils walk in the Topiary garden for 15 minutes before lessons begin. Appropriate breaks are taken throughout the school day, during which pupils are encouraged to

enjoy the natural environment, and to participate in structured play times, games, and a wide variety of physical extra-curricular activities.

All pupils are provided with lunch, prepared, and cooked onsite. An optional Breakfast Club is available, and fruit and healthy snacks are generously provided, and accessible to pupils and staff throughout the day. Classes begin at 9am. Lesson periods are interspersed by snack breaks at 11am and 15.30, lunch at 13.00, during which a cooked lunch with a varied menu is provided for all.

There is a recreational break in the afternoon, during which pupils partake in a choice of team sports, including walking, running, and horse-riding. Day pupils finish at 18.00. Boarding pupils are provided with their evening meal, and a full agenda of activities and relaxation opportunities.

SECTION 5: THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The school was founded in 1949, and was located at Headfort House Pavilion. Headfort School is now located in Headfort House. The historic school building, which is a protected structure, is beautifully and sensitively preserved. It is situated within sixty acres of parkland, with a topiary garden, playing fields, wooded areas, stables, and horse-riding tracks. The main ballroom, with its carefully restored decorative ceilings is used for assemblies, and to host events throughout the year. Classrooms are spacious and are very well equipped and resourced. Each classroom presented as attractive and busy learning hubs. Headfort school has a dedicated science room, a designated well equipped art room, a music room, a reading library, and a computer room.

Evidence of topics across all of the subject areas covered, and of the pupils' work, are prominently displayed within the classrooms, and on noticeboards in corridors and shared spaces. Samples of artwork, using different materials and techniques are abundant, and attractively displayed. Full use is made of the grounds in which they school is situated. Pupils have daily morning walk in the Topiary Garden, there are tennis courts, and pitches for team sports including rugby and cricket. Pupils are permitted to stable their own horses at the school stables, and many pupils use the horse-riding tracks to ride out each day.

SECTION 6: THE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The school follows the Department of Education (DE) issued guidelines and regulations. Core learning is guided by the Primary School Curriculum subject areas and strands for Irish, English, Maths, History, Geography, Science, Visual Arts, Music, and Physical Education. There is provision for English as an Additional Language (EAL), for pupils whose first language is other than English. All pupils from Junior Infants to Second Form study French. Pupils from 3rd Form upwards choose between French or Spanish.

The school places great emphasis on its Virtues Project Programme, which teaches an understanding of 52 values, and provides for practice of them in school at in the home. Many additional learning opportunities are provided to pupils including: Positive Psychology, piano and drum lessons, Music Theory, Latin for non-Irish pupils from 6th Form to Senior 1, and carpentry and cookery for boarders. Electives on Friday afternoons include choices of any two of the following: choir, chess, neuroscience, book club, newspapers, board games, and Green School Project.

6.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

The Primary School Curriculum, and reforms within the curriculum, are already being implemented in the school. The *Looking at Our Schools* document is utilised to motivate progressive teaching and learning. Headfort school is mindful of the child development process and concentrates on a concrete operational approach to teaching and learning. Visuals and manipulatives are used. Books play a central role, and a healthy mind and body approach is part of every school day. The goal is to offer a child-centred comprehensive education programme, and to foster each pupil's natural desire to learn. Teaching is guided by the philosophy that character-building, cooperation, and process are important, and that performance is not the only valued building block of the education process.

6.2 LANGUAGE AND LITERACY SKILLS

Language and Literacy are guided by the Primary School Curriculum and encompass the components of a comprehensive programme: oral language development, reading, writing, and poetry.

Language development and competence in oral language and communication are actively developed using a spiral curriculum approach to progression. Strategies were visible in classrooms, including word of the week noticeboards, antonyms, homophones, and spellings. Pupils learn to read using a balanced blend of 'Bottom Up' phonemic awareness and phonic skills development, based on the Jolly Phonics Programme, with reading for fluency, information, and pleasure, using a variety of factual and fiction books. Each classroom has an appropriately stocked Library Corner. Pupils enjoy reading and composing their own poems. Older pupils can participate in a book club, they have opportunities to read and discuss newspapers, and to write and present their own stories and projects. Pupils learn to spell as they write. Writing copies were well-presented.

On Positivity Walls displayed in some classrooms, pupils can leave positive written messages for each other. Pupils are taught to write in different genres, and for different audiences, and samples of their work are visible in classrooms and throughout the school. In one class visited, pupils were learning 'Explanation' writing. Following redrafting, the plan was to type the written pieces in the computer room and showcase the finished product as a presentation.

A customised *Reading Recovery* intervention is provided for pupils in need of additional reading support, identified by the school as their own reading recovery style intervention. Literacy is further supported through parental partnership in the Junior classes with the Mystery Reader Programme. Parents volunteer to read to the classes on a weekly basis. EAL support is provided for pupils who require language support, and for those for whom English is not their first language.

6.3 NUMERACY

The Numeracy programme is guided by the Primary School Curriculum and encompasses the components of a comprehensive Mathematics programme across all of the curriculum strands and strand units. Teachers utilise a concrete operational approach, and support learning with visuals and manipulatives, and with practice towards full understanding and automaticity. In some classrooms visited pupils were working on topics from Planet Maths (Folens) using dice and Maths mats, while in two other classes pupils were using a kinaesthetic approach to work through the multiplication process. Peer learning is fostered. Pupils are encouraged to work in pairs and groups and to cooperate with each other.

Pupils clearly explained concepts, and capably demonstrated what they were doing in all classes visited. Prodigy Maths, an adaptive online maths game is used in classes to scaffold, challenge, and practice Maths skills. Teachers explained that the Dashboard element helped them to assess and monitor individual progress.

6.4 IRISH

All pupils study Irish in line with Department of Education and Skills regulations and DES Guidelines. Grounds for an exemption from the study of Irish are provided under very strict criteria, and a pupil with an exemption remains in the classroom during Irish lessons. Pupils from other countries, who are not required to study Irish can learn Spanish or Latin. In classrooms, notice boards and copies evidenced topics and vocabulary studied by the pupils. In some classes pupils were using Abair Liom (Folens) to support spoken Irish and Irish reading and comprehension. Pupils sang Irish songs, and we were treated to a sample of Irish dancing during the visit.

6.5 OTHER AREAS OF LEARNING

The syllabus at Headfort School is wide and varied. Pupils study all of the subjects of the Primary School Curriculum. Teaching moments are recognised and seized throughout the day, so that within the curriculum and beyond, the school can be confident that pupils' needs are being met.

Pupils study History and Geography in their classrooms. In one classroom pupils were working on the Roman and Greek empires, and in another the pupils were beginning an investigative project on 'Our Expanding Universe'. Pupils' work and previous projects were displayed on noticeboards.

Music is taught as part of the class curriculum, while lessons on Music theory and learning to play instruments such as piano or drums are offered. Membership of the school choir is optional.

The Virtues Project Programme is taught and practised throughout the school. This programme aims to inspire the understanding, internalising, and practice of 52 'virtues' in everyday life, virtues such as respect, kindness, and cooperation. It was clear that this programme was being taught and lived, and pupils could explain the virtues and how they can live by them.

Pastoral Care is prioritised. Interventions are prompted by teacher observation or overt need. A full Social Personal Health Education programme is taught, in line with the requirements of the Department of Education guidelines and regulations. Pupils also study Positive Psychology. The weekly class aims to develop self-confidence, self-awareness and a realistic 'can do' attitude to learning and to life. Positive psychology and pastoral care interventions and supports were reported to be having very encouraging effects on the children.

Art is taught by a specialist Art teacher in the dedicated Art room. The enjoyment pupils got from working on their optical illusion art pieces and talking about the execution of their individual pieces was apparent.

All classes enjoy weekly Science lessons.

The Senior Science Classes are taught by a designated Science teacher in a very well-equipped Science room. Pupils study Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, one subject during each of the three school terms.

Junior Infants to Second Form are taught French in class. Spanish is offered as an optional extra. From 3rd Form upwards pupils choose between French or Spanish. Latin is taught to non-Irish pupils from 6th Form to Senior 1.

Physical Education, games, sports, and physical activity is a highly prioritised area of learning, and every pupil will exercise, participate in daily games, and experience the outdoors every day, on a number of

occasions. A very wide variety of outdoor physical activities is offered, including Rugby, cricket, tennis, and horse-riding.

Friday afternoon electives include book club, newspapers and other periodicals, neuroscience, board games, chess, and school choir. These extra-curricular electives are designed to broaden pupils' educational experiences and interests, while sending them home calm yet excited at the end of the week.

6.6 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The principal meets each child who is seeking a place in the school, along with their parents. Decisions are made in relation to how, and whether the school can provide adequately for pupils presenting with special educational needs (SEN). Where a pupil with SEN is admitted, the school makes appropriate modifications, and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is drawn up for all pupils with special or additional educational needs. The school is not eligible for receipt of Department of Education SEN grants, so parents are required to contribute as appropriate to costs incurred in providing any additional supports for their child with SEN. In general, the school favours the approach of in-class support for pupils with SEN, rather than withdrawal of individuals for resource teaching. However, occasionally the withdrawal model for small group teaching is utilised as appropriate.

SECTION 7: ASSESSMENT AND RECORD KEEPING

The school maintains a comprehensive file through a shared online Daily Bulletin. The file is shared by staff with each other, and with the Headmaster. In-depth pupil progress, additional information, and references are thus immediately accessible and up to date. In addition, staff meet regularly to assess and to review teaching and learning, and to share ideas, concerns, and successes.

Assessment and progression are on-going. Continuous assessment for learning is the favoured mode of assessing pupil progress and achievement. The Drumcondra Literacy and Numeracy Tests are administered, and results are analysed and shared with staff and parents. Reports are issued to parents at the ends of Term 1 and Term 3, with a progress report issued during Term 2. This interim progress report informs any need for support, intervention, or remediation if required.

SECTION 8: OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

Information, as requested by the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service Tusla under the R2 form was provided, including relating to Child Safeguarding and Child Protection policies, Health and Safety, Fire Safety and Garda vetting.

All staff members have been Garda vetted and have been trained in the implementation of Children First. A fire safety policy is in place. All staff have completed the child safeguarding training. There is an appointed Designated Liaison person (DLP) and Deputy Designated Liaison Person. The Child Safeguarding Statement with notices of the DLP and DDLP are prominently displayed as required.

SECTION 9: EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATION PROVISION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In my opinion the education provided to the pupils of The Headfort School can be characterised as a “*certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social*” and pupils attending the school are in receipt of a of education, intellectual, physical, moral, and social that meets requirements for Section 14 Registration.

The reasons I have formed this opinion in respect of the educational provision in the school include the following:

- The information provided by the principal, Philip Mc Cormick, and Head of Education Tracey Maree during the interview provided a very comprehensive account of the school, the teachers, and pupil participation and achievement
- The passion of many staff members, and the numerous well-equipped and inviting classrooms and specialist rooms visited is admirable
- Descriptions and reports of school practices provided by the interviewees and on the R2 Form were evidenced throughout the school during the visit, and substantiated by the pupils themselves
- The education provision afforded to pupils is very balanced, providing many opportunities for good quality learning, physical and outdoor activity, social interaction and friendship, positive mental health psychology and practices, and a Virtues Programme, both studied and lived by the pupils
- The collaborative monitoring and assessment practices that are in place, are well-utilised
- The emphasis that the school places on pupils being active and cooperative learners, and on developing good communication skills
- The pupils’ themselves, who spoke openly and very enthusiastically about their learning, interests, and favourite things in school.

I recommend that children in receipt of an education at Headfort School continue to be included on the register for children educated *in places other than a recognised school*.

SECTION 10: DISCUSSION OF FINDING OF REPORT WITH PRINCIPAL

The findings of the assessment as contained in this report were discussed with the principal, Mr James Philip Mc Cormick, at the conclusion of the visit on the 04 October 2022. I explained the procedures that would follow.

I informed him that the decision regarding registration of pupils who are receiving an education in a place other than a recognised school is made by the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS), Tusla – the Child and Family Agency.

I advised Mr Mc Cormick that he would receive the draft report for factual verification and feedback, and in due course the final report and the decision of the AEARS panel.

**SECTION 11: OUTCOME OF TUSLA AEARS REGISTRATION PANEL REGARDING REQUIREMENTS FOR SECTION 14
REGISTRATION OF CHILDREN ATTENDING THE SCHOOL**

Following the Review Assessment, the Registration Panel decided that children attending the Headfort 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.