

SLIGO SUDBURY SCHOOL

ANNUAL REPORT
2018 - 2019



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chairperson's Statement

General Information

- Our Vision
- Year in Review
- Future Goals and Challenges

Impacts and Accomplishments

- Testimonials

Funding

- Acknowledgements of donors and benefactors

Sligo Sudbury School Community

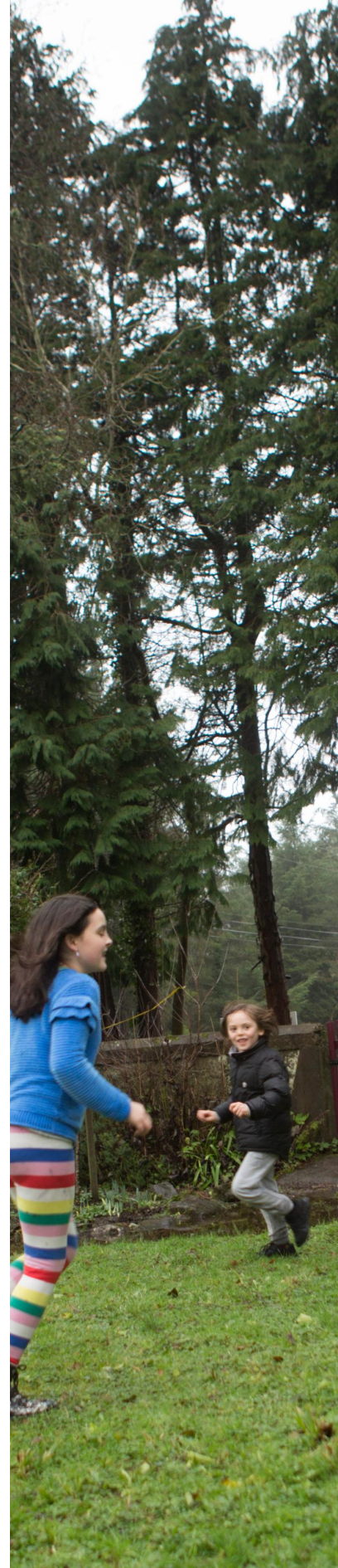
- Organisational Structure
- Equal Opportunities & Compliance

Financial Review and Financial Report

Year in progress

Vision for the Future

How you can help



CHAIRPERSON'S STATEMENT

This year has seen Sligo Sudbury School firmly established as a prominent and viable educational option for families in the North West of Ireland and beyond. We established ourselves as a strong voice for the Self-Directed Education movement in Ireland, co-founding a national umbrella group to promote our mission and to support the eight other start-up schools countrywide. We engaged with TUSLA to address discrepancies in government policy around the defined status of Independent School.

We put our stated company objectives into practice and saw our vision of setting up a living democratic environment come to life. The early part of the year was focused on creating a stable culture of respect, consideration and careful deliberation. Our students and staff directly experienced dynamic self-governance, decision making processes and developing a fair, just code of behaviour which respects and values the voice of each individual member.

We developed our provision of support and designed flexible structures, helping to empower students to safely pursue their learning goals and access resources necessary to meet their self-expressed needs. We watched our students flourish as their innate capacity to direct their own learning, in terms of both content and style, was realised.

We facilitated integration with the wider community through cooperation in teaching, learning, modelling and other experiences with local professionals, third level colleges and cultural institutions, as well as at national conferences on Philosophy and Biodiversity.

CHAIRPERSON'S STATEMENT

A vital and powerful element of our impact has been our work in challenging the status quo. Through our regular, well attended Open Houses, media interviews, meetings with local politicians and presentation at the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) conference on Change in Education we have invited parents, educators, policy makers, politicians and the wider community to think about the true meaning of education and to rethink the wisdom of persevering with a one size fits all system that was designed during the Industrial Age.

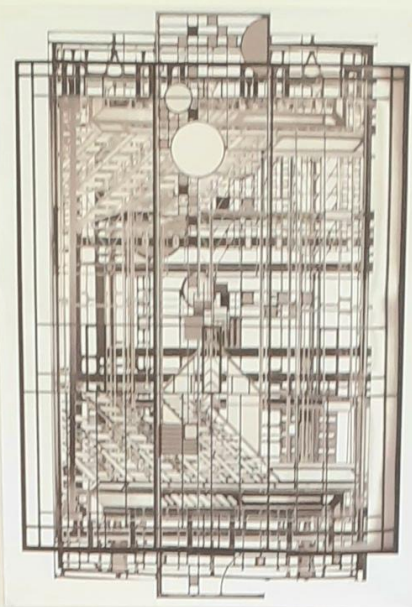
We have directly addressed cultural conditioning around educational provision, the lack of choice available, the lack of acknowledgement of diversity in learning methods and how all of this is impacting our youth and the health and resilience of our society as a whole.

Our student numbers have doubled and our finances remain buoyant with strong projections for coming years. We met our social inclusion aims, with 20% of our students paying reduced membership dues, thus ensuring access to those on all income levels. We have increased our payroll commitment from two to nine part-time staff during the period. We estimate that our financial impact on the local economy through house rentals, services and consumables is in the region of €300,000 and growing, with some of our parents establishing new businesses and providing specialist services in the area.

Engaged, resilient, happy young people and families, satisfying and long-term employment, bolstering the local economy and property market, revitalisation of a much loved community-based school, and putting Sligo on the map for initiative and innovation Education are achievements we are very proud of and look forward to building on in the coming year.

GAYLE NAGLE

Chairperson, Board of Trustees



GENERAL INFORMATION

Name: North West Democratic School

Address: Faughts, Dunally, Co. Sligo. F91 DR13

Phone: 071 9138810

Email: info@sligosudburyschool.com

Web: www.sligosudburyschool.com

Company Type: Company Limited by Guarantee

Company Number: 614393

Charitable Reg Number: 20200314

CHY Number: CHY 22181

Names of Trustees:

Gayle Nagle

Maura Duignan

Cath Stanley

Peter Symonds

Nigel Coen

Alannah Dawson

Jenny Deane

Solicitors: O'Hare O' Dwyer Solicitors,

Greenfield Road,

Sutton, Dublin 13

Bankers: Allied Irish Bank, Stephen St. Sligo

OUR VISION

At Sligo Sudbury School we believe in providing children with the individual freedom needed to flourish, and a real say in decisions affecting their lives.

We have worked hard to cultivate an educational environment that offers children Trust, Freedom, and Respect, supports them in their choices, and guides them in the collaborative process of democratic governance.

TRUST

We Trust that children's innate curiosity leads them to learn what they need to know. Children are trusted to make decisions affecting their lives, to solve problems, show personal responsibility, and to respect the views of others

FREEDOM

We believe that everyone is entitled to Freedom. Children have the opportunity to make choices about their learning without coercion or externally imposed expectations. Adults act as role models, nurture learning, give feedback, and teach values.

RESPONSIBILITY

With freedom and rights comes Responsibility for one's actions. Autonomy means being responsible for one's choices, for their failure or success, and their impact on the wider community. Setting one's own goals and disciplining oneself.



YEAR IN REVIEW

Our first year of operations brought unique challenges; not only as a new business but as a pioneer in the world of children's education. Being the first democratic school to be successfully assessed for registration as an Independent School was a major achievement, allowing parents to register their children with the Educational Welfare Service of Túsla, the Child and Family Agency through our school.

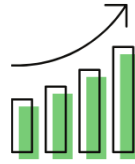
It has given us great pleasure to contribute to the wider community by enhancing and enriching our natural and built heritage, and ensuring that future generations will continue to value and protect it.

Sligo is one of Ireland's best places for creating a great work/ life balance. As a smaller city it offers jobs and skilled employment together with an affordable lifestyle for people of all ages, particularly young modern families. An increasing number of parents value alternative models of education, where autonomy and self-direction are emphasized. The availability of a democratic school enhances the appeal of Sligo for these families as is demonstrated by the trend in enrolments since opening.

Sligo Sudbury School was the 2nd democratic school in Ireland, preceded by Wicklow Sudbury School in 2017. The first Democratic Education Conference is scheduled to be held in late 2019.

SLIGO SUDBURY SCHOOL

2018 - 2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



DOUBLED ENROLMENTS

We opened in September 2018 with 15 students from 11 families. Over the course of our first year we more than doubled our enrolment numbers, increasing to 32 students from 22 families in August 2019.

HERITAGE RESTORATION

We undertook extensive restoration of a heritage listed schoolhouse (1870) which had fallen into disrepair, and restored it to its original use. This has brought much pleasure to the local community. We have had much positive feedback in this regard from past pupils of the school.



BIODIVERSITY EDUCATION

With the support of the Community Foundation for Ireland's Environment Fund 2018, we implemented measures to enhance and protect our valuable habitats. The environment is a very important asset to education where the children learn about biodiversity and how to monitor it.

ENRICHED ECONOMY

Approximately 30% of our families enrolled in 2018 and 2019 relocated to Sligo specifically to avail of this model of education. Sligo benefits from the financial and cultural capital these families bring to Sligo, contributing significantly to the local economy and sharing skills and talents locally.



TUSLA REGISTRATION

Sligo Sudbury School was assessed and registered by Túsla as an Independent School in October 2018. Children who attend Independent Schools must be registered with the Educational Welfare Service of Túsla, the Child and Family Agency by their parents.

DEMOCRATIC ED IRELAND

Since the founding of Sligo Sudbury School there has been an upsurge in founding groups across Ireland, demonstrating the public appetite for a different educational model. We are part of this fledgling national movement.



OUR GOAL IS TO MAKE DEMOCRATIC, SELF-DIRECTED EDUCATION ACCESSIBLE TO ALL CHILDREN.

FUTURE GOALS & CHALLENGES

- Make Democratic education a viable, affordable option for all children in our area
- Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth of Sligo Sudbury School.
- Provide full and productive employment and decent work opportunities.
- Provide a safe, stimulating educational environment for all ages and interests.
- Develop school site to include wilderness play areas and spacious sports areas.
- Clarify role of the State and the status of Independent Schools in regard to equal access to funds in light of Article 42, point 4 of the Irish Constitution.

"The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation."





IMPACT & ACHIEVEMENTS

Our main accomplishment in this first year of operations has been to establish ourselves as a strong voice for Independent Self Directed Education in Ireland

The impact on the families and children who have enrolled with us in this year and future years has been significant in terms of their happiness, wellbeing, and the opportunity of having an educational option in keeping with their values.

The creation of a new, successful small business in the Sligo region has contributed 9 part-time jobs, in addition to an estimated €300,000 influx into the local economy directly from families who have relocated to this region to avail of our school.

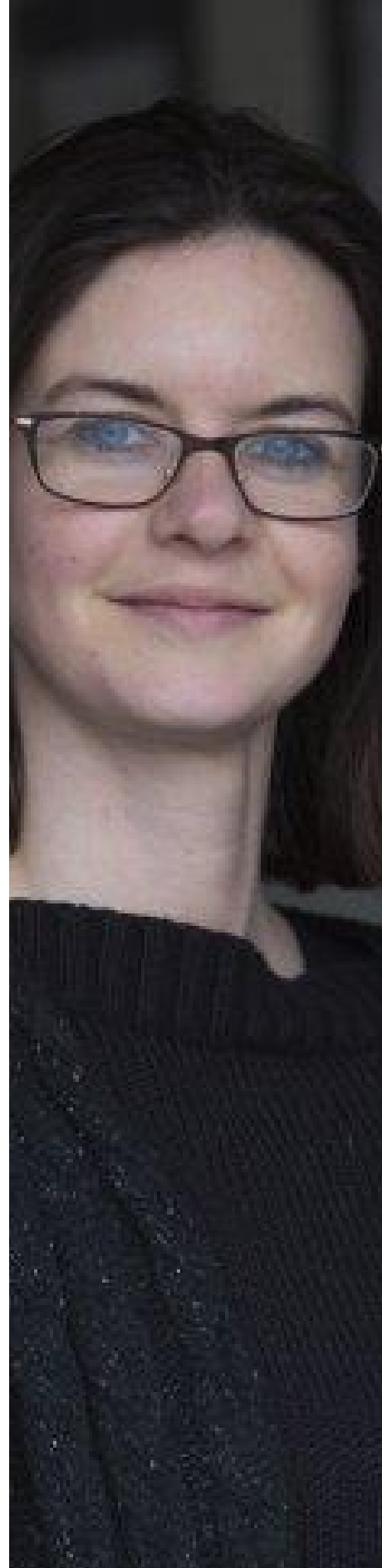
Happy children, satisfying and long-term employment, a restored heritage building, revitalising of a community, and bringing a new opportunity to Sligo are accomplishments and impacts we are very proud of and look forward to building on.

STAFF EXPERIENCE

With a degree in Geology, a love of the outdoors and exploring, and a desire to live and work in my native area, finding the right job was always going to be challenging. Being part of my local community is important for me, and I enjoy volunteering for local sporting events and beach cleans in the area.

I was lucky enough to find a placement with Sligo Sudbury School through the Tús programme. It has been a wonderful experience for me, both personally and professionally. Becoming a staff member at Sligo Sudbury School has given me the opportunity to gain invaluable experience with the children in a democratic school, which I can apply in the future. I can see many benefits to the model used in the Sligo Sudbury School, where the children grow from their organic experiences with one another in a self directed learning environment, with compassion and respect.

FREE
to develop

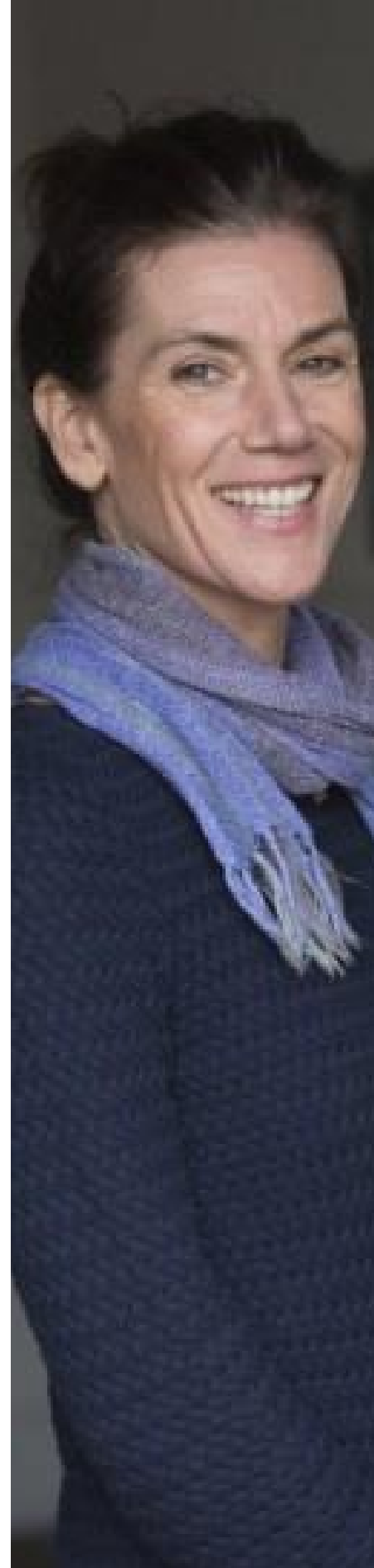


STAFF EXPERIENCE

FREE

to help

Being part of Sligo Sudbury School's birth and early journey has been a privilege and a pleasure. Having successfully come through the traditional educational routes I had never questioned the validity of school. It was only when my own children were of school age that the question of what it means to be educated seriously arose for me. It seemed to me that the focus on standard academic skills was getting in the way of children exploring for themselves and developing their own passions and interests. Homeschooling really proved for us that children absorb knowledge and develop skills continuously as they engage with the world around them. Their boundless enthusiasm for life and experiences naturally result in all kinds of learning. As the boys got older their educational and social needs changed with them. Meeting others with similar ideas through the Home Education Network provided the spark and the synergy needed to take it one step further. Helping children of all ages, with differing interests, abilities, and personality types grow and learn together each day is very rewarding. Watching them play together, work through difficulties, stand up for what they believe, help each other, and challenge each other is an inspiration.



MADDIE

The Sudbury model of education is important to us as we feel that play is the key to meaningful learning. We have trust in our daughter that she will direct her own education and learning. Our daughter is learning through play every day and Sligo Sudbury School extends this ability in a very different way to mainstream schools. She is learning through participation about; democracy, community and leadership and how to overcome difficult situations through talking. It is this aspect of emotional literacy that we feel cannot be taught but rather it is an environment that can be provided in which it can grow and develop as there is the space and time for students and staff to talk to each other with the adults and students both actively valuing and practicing the ability to understand, express and talk about feelings in order to manage them. It is these skills and the freedom that comes with this type of education that we value as being some of the most important aspects for our daughter and her happiness in a world that is rapidly changing with a future that is largely unknown.

V.S. Parent of M.S. age 6

FREE
to play



SEAN

Sligo Sudbury School is great, compared to both mainstream school and homeschooling. It is almost the same as homeschooling but there are more kids here so it is much more fun. I have learned a lot about myself and my character since joining this school. I was elected Chair of the School Meeting at the start of the year and this has been a brilliant experience for me.

S.B. Student age 12

FREE

to think for myself



LARA

The move to the Sudbury School has been profound for my daughter. She is happier and more confident and no longer lost in a system that didn't suit her style of learning or recognise her as an individual. We are so lucky the school opened in Sligo. To be honest I'm not sure what we would have done if it hadn't.

E.M.S Parent of L.M.S. age 10

FREE

to discover my
strengths



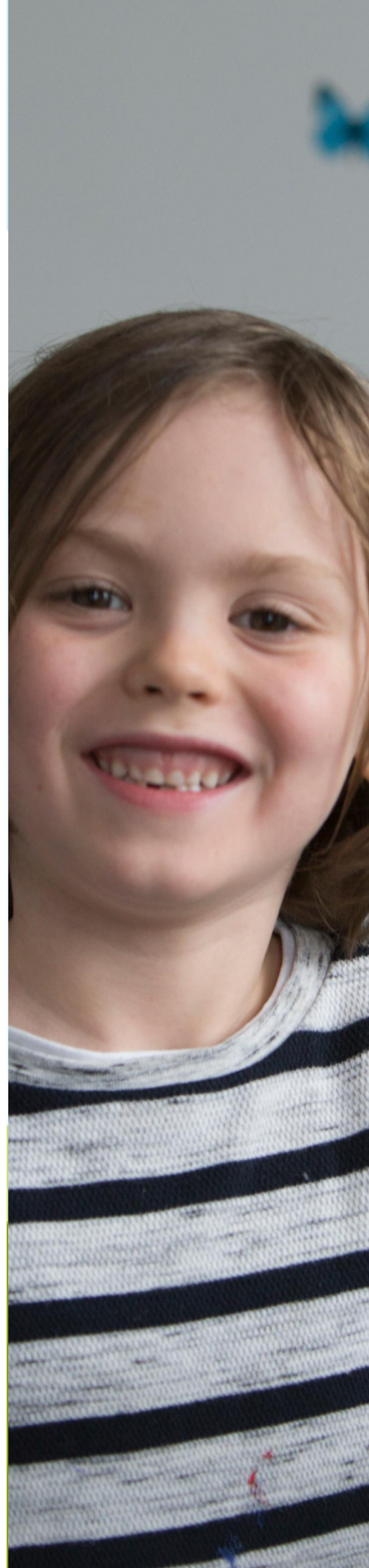
ELI

As the first year of school comes to a close, we'd like to acknowledge our gratitude that a place as special as Sligo Sudbury School exists. From the first day our son arrived at the school, watching the way the staff lovingly supported and nurtured his uncertainty, we knew that he was in the right place. We have watched him grow in confidence, deepen his awareness of himself and others, thrive socially and emotionally, learn an abundance of new skills and have a whole lot of fun along the way. It's like watching a flower bloom and for that, we owe so much thanks to the beautiful Sudbury community. The environment, the people, ethos, the support, the whole way that the school operates is just gorgeous, truly something unique and special. Deep, heartfelt thanks for all you do and all you have created, we are lucky to be a part of it.

M.H. Parent of E.O.B. age 6

FREE

to be accepted
and respected for
who I am.



FUNDING

Current funding

Our principal source of funding is from membership dues and private donations. Additional funds have been raised through small fundraising events and one grant award for Biodiversity.

Challenges

Our biggest challenge is funding. As we receive no funding from the state or local government, we are completely reliant on private funding sources and membership contributions.

One difficulty with securing grants or other funding seems to be the lack of clarity around the status of Independent Schools. As a "school" we are often disqualified from applying for community group funding opportunities, and on the other hand as we are not a Dept.of Education and Skills funded school we are often disqualified from applying for funding for schools and education. Although Túsla is the body which oversees independent schools, there is no provision for financial support for the education of children who choose to be educated outside of a recognised DES school.

Funding plan

Fundraising initiatives over the year have included Table Quiz, Christmas Markets, and Summer Camps.

Many potential opportunities for grants were unsuccessful due to lack of clarity about the status of Independent Schools.

GRATITUDE TO DONORS

We have been extremely fortunate to have the support of some very special groups and individuals. We would like to express our gratitude to the following; without whom none of this would be possible.

The Community Foundation for Ireland

Beaconsfield Properties

Liam Scollan

LEADER Tús Programme

Sinead Maguire

Our Members

Donor Pamela Barnes

Donor Niamh Manly

All who contributed through our fundraising events

All who enrolled in our summer camps

All who donated time, effort, resources, tools, books and equipment.

SLIGO SUDBURY SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Our members are the lifeblood of our organisation, providing inspiration, energy, commitment, and support to each other and to the wider community. These are the pioneers, the courageous few willing to go out on a limb, challenge ideas of what education for the 21st century should look like, and show that education can mean so much more.

Being part of this community is a chance for children to shine in their chosen way, to find their passion, and develop the confidence to realise their full potential. The only authority here is that granted by the governed, which means the children learn the power and responsibility of their voice and of exercising their right to choose.

Freedom, Trust, Respect, and Responsibility.

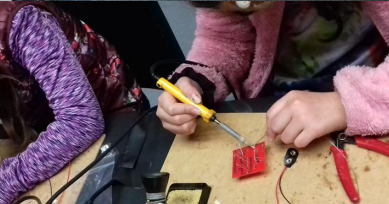




WE BELIEVE THAT EVERY CHILD SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO LEARNING, AND FREEDOM TO MAKE CHOICES ABOUT THEIR LEARNING WITHOUT COERCION.



WE PROVIDE AN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT WHICH RESPECTS AND SUPPORTS EACH CHILD'S INDIVIDUAL LEARNING CHOICES.



ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

A democratic school often refers to a school in which students are valued as capable decision makers and given a forum to exercise their voice and authority. At the Sligo Sudbury School, democratic process exists on a number of levels, each outlined below.

- **The School Meeting** is the most important decision making body at our school. The School Meeting is a forum in which community members take up challenges and problems, or make decisions regarding the daily life of the school. Students and staff members are given an equal vote, enabling every person affected by the outcome to have a say in how rules are formed and decisions made. The School Meeting uses a majority voting system, with two separate votes, allowing time for the minority to voice opinions and concerns before a final decision is made.
- **The Board of Trustees (BOT)** is made up of members of the school and wider community. They are legally responsible for the oversight of the school's financial and employment practices. The BOT plays an important role in holding the vision and ethos of the School, staff review, fundraising, accounts, sustaining the business into the future and adhering to laws relating to Charitable Trusts. Internally, the BOT ensures that Sligo Sudbury School practices and policies are in line with the bylaws, mission, and core principles of the school and are up to date with Government guidelines and the general Laws of the Land. They consult external advisors as necessary. The BOT makes decisions by consensus.
- **The Financial Management Committee (FMC)** is responsible for managing the school's finances, to monitor all financial transactions of the school, manage the school's funds, make payments as directed by the School Meeting, arrange and provide support for the annual filing of Accounts and to prepare the School Budget and make recommendations to the School Meeting and BOM. It is made up of the Principal, the Secretary of the BOM, the Treasurer of the BOM, and one staff member.
- **The Justice Committee** is responsible for taking care of disciplinary problems and infringements of the school's rules that require special consideration. It consists of at least two students and one staff member. It seeks to establish a fair and coherent system of justice which is supportive and respectful of all students. It occurs daily as required.
- **The Management Committee** of the Board are the Core Founders of the organisation and have been engaged in all matters relating to the establishment of Sligo Sudbury School since January 2017. They are authorised by the Board to deal with all day to day management matters of the Company. They consult the BOT and the School Meeting and share the workload and responsibilities with same.
- **Staff Members** also use democratic process in decision making during their weekly meetings. While the staff regularly consult the School Meeting regarding any policies or rules that affect the student body, they also have the power to enact necessary laws and policies related to emotional and physical safety. Staff members use a form of consensus to make decisions.
- **Clerkships and Committees** are established when the School Meeting wishes to delegate specific responsibilities to one or more particular individuals.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES STATEMENT

Sligo Sudbury School welcomes every student who wants to be here and can thrive in our community, and welcomes families of every composition. We do not discriminate on any of the nine grounds outlined in the Equal Status Act (2000-2015) in the administration of our educational policies, admissions policies, reduced fee application process, and other school-administered policies.

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

North West Democratic School (T/A Sligo Sudbury School) is fully compliant with all relevant codes and is registered with the Charities Regulator. The Financial Results for the period are set out in the Financial Report section.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Gayle Nagle, Chair

Maura Duignan, Company Secretary

Nigel Coen, Treasurer

Jenny Deane

Alannah Dawson

Cath Stanley

Peter Symmonds

STAFF MEMBERS

Gayle Nagle

Maura Duignan

Ciara Barrett

Isabel Kuroczka

Kim Kennedy

Nikky Millar

Caroline Jepson

Calum MacMillan

Peter Symmonds

John Docherty

FINANCIAL REPORT

North West Democratic School was funded entirely by charitable donations and grants, membership dues, and support from Beaconsfield Properties. We are a Company Limited by Guarantee without share capital and a Registered Charity.

The consolidated financial snapshot below shows the accounts of North West Democratic School (t/a Sligo Sudbury School) for the year ending August 31, 2019.

We welcome all kinds of support, including scholarships, in-kind donations, cash donations. Your generosity ensures the continuation of democratic choice for children in education.

Consolidated Statement of Activities

Period September 1, 2018 - August 31, 2019

Revenue and Support

Contributions and Grants	€	9,706.00
Membership Dues	€	68,106.00
Total Income	€	77,722.00

Expenses

Wages	€	32,165.44
Operating Expenses	€	27,056.97
Total Expenses	€	59,222.41

Change in Net Assets **€ 18,499.75**

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer's Statement

This statement is on the first full academic and financial year of Sligo Sudbury School and is therefore for the period 1st September 2018 to 31st August 2019. The 2018/19 year was a financial success, despite the daunting operational and financial challenges in opening a democratic school for the first time and relying so heavily on community membership fees, modest donations and fundraising, and the enormous generosity and support from benefactors, donors and our own community families to stretch our resources as far as possible.

Income, Expenditure & Gross Profit

Total income in 2018/19 was €77,722, 89% of which comprised membership fees. This percentage is understandably high for a school that is entirely self-funded and reliant on fundraising and donations in order to increase revenue, however the ratio of fundraising-to-membership fee income is expected to increase as the School grows and more focus is afforded to public relations and community awareness. Staff wages were kept relatively low in 2018/19 as the School was able to secure the bulk of its staff in 2018/19 through the LEADER Tús Programme. This was a huge advantage to the School in getting up and running in the first year. Total staff wages of €32,165 were paid which resulted in a gross profit of €45,557. Unfortunately the opportunity to offer Tús work placements has since been made unavailable to the School due to the ill defined status of Independent Schools and current DEASP guidelines on qualifying businesses.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Overheads

Insurance was a significant overhead at €7,396 and this has been a challenge for the School in terms of a lack of market competitors offering insurance for this type of school. €4,251 was spent on Premises expenses and maintenance during the year. Events expenses cost €4,145 and reflected the need for the School to promote its vision and ethos in the wider community and to support fundraising efforts, which totalled €5,836 during the reporting period. All other overheads were within expectations. Total overheads were €27,056 resulting in a net profit of €18,500.

Fundraising challenges

Grant funding of all kinds have proved difficult to obtain due to the ill defined status of Independent Schools. As an Independent School, North West Democratic School is not recognised by the Dept of Education and Skills, and does not receive any funding from any government source. Our legal status is a Company Limited by Guarantee and we are a registered charity. Despite this, applications for funding from local community grant schemes have been rejected on the grounds that as a school we do not qualify for community funding. Community fundraising efforts locally provide some additional support. As our community is small and the concept of self-directed education for young people is relatively new in this country it will take some time to build a wider support base. We plan to develop our fundraising through social media to reach an international audience interested in promoting more choice in education.

YEAR IN PROGRESS

Now towards the end of our second year we are very encouraged by the feedback of our customers and the community. Retention of students is one of the strongest testimonials we could have, demonstrating a high degree of satisfaction and ongoing commitment to the model. 90% of enrolled students in 2018-2019 re-enrolled for 2019-2020. We started this second year with 32 students and anticipate rising to 45-50 students in 2021-2022.

The first Democratic Education Conference was held in late 2019 with the goal of starting a national conversation about education and democracy in the 21st century. It was attended by representatives from 10 schools and start-up groups across Ireland.

The Covid -19 pandemic restrictions have hit our community and business quite hard as they did many others. We are fortunate in the strength of our community and the commitment of families. We implemented virtual connection opportunities through web video conferencing, and have carried on in a reduced capacity to weather the storm.

2019 2020

YEAR IN PROGRESS

THIS YEAR,

32 YOUNG PEOPLE

continued growth of enrolment numbers for the 3rd year running.



NEW SCHOOLS

10

Democratic School Groups participated in the first Democratic Education Ireland Conference.



6 SOCIAL INCLUSION

partial scholarships were awarded and given to lower income families



STAFF JOBS

9

staff member roles created and hired by the school for the 2019 - 2020 school year.



START TO CHANGE A CHILD'S WORLD

Donate! Visit www.sligosudburyschool.com
email us at info@sligosudburyschool.com

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

We hold a vision of changing the shape and experience of education for children. We aim to transform the idea of education and show what an educational model with trust at its core would look like in Ireland. Our vision is all schools incorporating, more freedom and choice, more respect for children's natural intelligence and curiosity, and more trust in their abilities.

We aim to become a centre of excellence and a flagship school for Democratic Education in Ireland.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Your support can help us to make a big difference in young people's lives, providing a model for schools of the future to learn from.

There are many ways to learn and many kinds of learner. It makes sense there should be many kinds of school. We believe that our school can provide the freedom and support necessary for any child to thrive, to learn, and to become a purposeful member of their communities. We need your help to make it happen.

If you have been inspired by the concept of self-directed education in Ireland and would like to support our work we would love to hear from you.

There are many ways donors and sponsors can help; from starting a scholarship fund, sponsoring the development of our facilities, providing an area of learning that you feel passionate about such as music, art, science, technology, literature, or making a financial donation to assist with our general operating costs.

We also welcome volunteer expertise to inspire and inform, equipment and resources for learning, sports equipment and facilities.

We believe that all children have the right
to be treated as individuals and to be
agents in their own lives.

Self directed education gives children the
freedom to know themselves deeply so that
they can grow with integrity, and develop
the courage to engage with all of life's
opportunities and challenges



