

**POLISH LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND AFFAIRS  
TRUSTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT  
2023-2024**

**NIC107785**

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## **1.Introduction**

Polish Language, Culture, and Affairs (POLCA) is a constituted organisation created by Polish emigrants. We are registered Charity (NIC107785) and company limited by guarantee registered at Companies House nr NI645874. We run Polish Saturday school for children from Polish and mixed-Polish families. Our school provides an additional Polish education: Polish language, history, geography of Poland, art, and culture. We have a team of teachers, classroom assistants and several volunteers. Polish Saturday school started in 2017 and is our principal activity. POLCA also works to support Polish community in Northern Ireland. We cooperate with the number local organisations to combat discrimination and promote integration and good relations across Northern Ireland.

## **2. Year 2022-2023**

We have started a new school season in September 2022 with 170 pupils and 22 teachers. The number of our young participants was changing during a year, as some of our pupils were leaving school for different reasons-moving area, or leaving UK for Poland.

The usual number of activities has been provided during a year, with a few new events. In October 2022 we have restarted POLCA Sport Club Programme, as a promotion of the physical activity is one of our priorities. Again, we had several of the young (mostly teenagers) volunteers, who have been allocated to all classes.

In March 2023 POLCA has been granted a membership by the Education Authority in Northern Ireland, as we have met criteria of Youth Club requested by EA.

## **3. Year 2023-2024**

School year 2023-24 started in September 2023, with 170 students, 24 teachers and classroom assistants. The number of participants, at 170 is the maximum number we can accept, as capacity of rented facilities is restricted to this number. We have faced a number of cost increases this financial year, most notably the rental for school premises has increased, and also staff costs increased as a consequence of the increase in the national minimum wage.

The school continues to be popular with firm demand for places, raising the questions of whether we should increase capacity with, perhaps an additional Polish education unit. Meanwhile, the number of Poles in the UK gradually decreases because of covid 19, Brexit, the Ukraine war and fluctuations of the European and Polish economy. In a challenging environment of rising costs we remain determined to keep our school fees at the level that is inclusive and affordable as to as many children as possible in the Northern Irish Polish community.

Since 2017 the POLCA financial year ran from June to May but this does not coincide with the school year and created avoidable challenges and accruals when compiling our accounts at year end. The board decided this year to change the financial year to run to 31 July , to coincide with the school year. Over this transition 23/24 year the accounts span a 14 month period from June 23 to July 24 and this naturally inflates this year's numbers when compared to previous years' financial reports.

In addition to our regular curriculum, we set up some new projects this year to include an art class led by Anna O'Neill, and, following a request of Polish Consulate in Belfast we also set up a Polish GCSE which is run by Agata Kleczek. This year also saw a number of joint projects in cooperation. We have a number of requests from other organisations with other Polish organisations including the Polish Sisterhood, "Young Storks" youth dance club, Polish school in Newry and the Polish School in Dungannon. In response to feedback from the parents of the oldest students at our school we started preparations to open a new group for teenagers- the Polish Youth Club to start in September 2024.

#### **4. Events and celebrations**

##### **The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity – 28/01/2025**

This is a great all Poland event organised by Jerzy Owsiak- with a number of concerts and activities across all country and among the Poles abroad. This is the biggest non-governmental, non-profit charity action raising money for the pediatric and elderly care. Our school took a part of this event- we have been visited by the volunteers from the "Belfast Orchestra Headquarters" and we have raised money among our students and parents to support children with cancer.

##### **Carnival Party- "Akademia Pana Kleksa" – 05/02/2024**

Usual party organised for our pupils with a number of activities including sport and dance- this year based on the Polish children's movie "Akademia Pana Kleksa"

##### **St Patrick's Parade – 17/03/2024**

This year our school participate in a Belfast St Patrick's Parade with the other Polish organisations to commemorate a 20 years anniversary of Polish Community in Northern Ireland.

##### **Celebration of the 3th May Constitution- 04/05/2024**

POLCA celebrated an anniversary of the first Polish Constitution created in 1791. We celebrated this day with Polish Consulate and Polish Society Belfast, who prepared a special exhibition for our children to show the history of the Polish Constitution and the Polish patriots fighting against the foreign powers in XVIII century.

**Visit of Lord Mayor of Belfast- 11/05/2024**

We have been honoured by Lord Mayor of Belfast and Polish Consul General in Belfast, who visited our school. This was a great opportunity to present our school's activities, Polish traditions, culture and art.

**Children's Day-Summer Fair- 25/05/2024**

An event with a number of sport, art and fun activities for the children, parents and other members of our community and our guests, organised with the help of Malone Rugby Club.

**End of the school year – 22/06/2024**

We have celebrated an end of the school year 2023/2024 and on this occasion our pupils prepared a performance for their parents. After the show our pupils were awarded by the Principal for their hard all year work.

**Bilingualism and the Book Day- 19/10/2024**

An event related to the Bilingualism matters with the number of workshops and competitions for the students and parents. This was especially important event, as all children with Polish background in Northern Ireland are using two or more languages and they are existing in two or more cultures.

**Children of Plock visit- 27/10/2024**

A great performance with the number of activities created by the Youth Dance group from Poland. The "Children of Plock" prepared also a number of polish folk music and Irish dance workshops for our pupils and Polish Community. Some of the workshops were organised in cooperation with local dance groups.

**Polish Independence Day 11 November – 12/11/2023 \***

A celebration in memory of the Independence of Poland, regained on 11/11/ 1918, after 123 years of Russian, Prussian, and Austrian occupation. This day is one of more important for our community. A variety of different activities were provided, including poetry tournament, history workshops and art competitions. This year the oldest group of students visited an old RAF Ballyhalbert base, where during war stationed Polish units, St Joseph's church and cemetery, where are placed Polish military men graves and also Newtownards to visit a monument dedicated Polish Military Men. This was organised in cooperation with RAF Association, RAF Cadets and For Your Freedom and Ours.

### **3 Years Old Admission Ceremony - 16/11/2024**

An official ceremony of "acceptance" dedicated to the youngest group in presence of their parents. This ceremony is usually organised once a year in October, to create a bond between the school and new pupils.

### **Christmas in POLCA - 21/12/2024 \***

A celebration known also as "Jaselka" – one of the Polish traditions celebrated with Christmas songs and performances created by our pupils, with – of course – Santa's visit! An event took place in Harding Memorial IPS

\*Similar events were organised in the past seasons

## **5. POLCA current Board**

**Chairman** – rev David Samuel Armstrong

Reappointed for further term at the Annual General Meeting on 08/02/2025.

**Secretary** – Aleksander Paprocki

Reappointed for further term at the AGM on 08/02/2025.

**Trustee** - Mateusz Gawlik

Reappointed for further term at the Annual General Meeting on 08/02/2025.

**Trustee** – John Cieslik

Reappointed for further term at the AGM on 08/02/2024.

Former Trustees:

**Trustee** – Jacek Kocoń – passed away on 18/08/2022.

**Trustee** – Przemyslaw Straus – temporary member from 25/08/2022 to 19/08/2022.

## **6.Supporting Organizations**

During financial year 2023-2024, POLCA was supported by:

**Aid the Poles in the East Foundation**

Polish Foundation supporting Polish community abroad in cooperation with Polish government.

**Armenian Foundation**

An organisation of Polish Armenians- a community settled in Poland since XVI century-bonded with Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Republic of Poland

**ORPEG- Institute for Development of Polish Education Abroad**

A Polish government body supporting Polish Education abroad

**Youth Action**

This body usually provides access NI checks for POLCA, as our organisation has YA membership

**Education Authority Northern Ireland**

POLCA is a member of Youth EA as a body meeting criteria of EA Youth Club

**Polish Consulate in Belfast**

Polish Consulate in Belfast supporting various projects dedicated to development of Polish community in Northern Ireland in cooperation with Polish Authorities.

**For Your Freedom & Ours**

An organisation promoting Polish Military Men, fighting during II World War based in UK.

**Halifax Foundation**

Halifax bank related organisation supporting various charities in UK

**Polish Sisterhood**

Belfast based organisation for women with Polish background

In the past POLCA was also supported by: Wspolnota Polska Foundation, Belfast City Council, Volunteer Now, Black Asian Minority Ethnic.

**7. Future plans and projects**

As mentioned before, the most important problem recognised by the POLCA board and school management is lack of financial sources. Growing operating costs and uncertain future are the reasons, why POLCA is forced to make some changes within our strategy and predictions. No doubt the Saturday school will be the most important project in the future. Any other project carried out by the organisation must have separate and certain source of funding.

The Board members are also concerned about structural situation within organisation. For the last 7 years POLCA had only 4 full members, with right to vote at the Annual General Meeting. The Board members believe that the number of members should be extended. As a charity and community organisation POLCA should have more members truly representing Polish community in Northern Ireland. Therefore changes within POLCA structure are crucial and necessary for the future development of our organisation.

## 8.Finances (01/06/2023 – 31/07/2024)

As briefly explained in paragraph 3 above, the financial year 23/24 saw a number of large and unexpected costs increases that could not have been budgeted for, such as increased rent for school premises and staff costs. As a result of these extraordinary cost increases the school made a loss over the year of £7,577, funded by Directors' loans.

The board introduced a number of initiatives to offset increased costs without disturbing agreed fee-levels. For example, payroll software costs were removed and replaced by free accounting software supplied by Ulster Bank. The mailbox rental was discontinued. POLCA also set up a gift-aid scheme to encourage parents to make voluntary contributions in the most tax-efficient way.

Total incomes: £78,298

Total expenses: £85,875

Net profit/loss: (£7,577)

Details of the above figures can be found in POLCA Accounts for period ending 31/07/2024.

This report was created by the secretary of the Board.

Aleksander Paprocki

On behalf of the Board

